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Research article

What's in a dance? *Dalkhai***: from a religious community ritual, to a pro-scenium performance**

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An educational international project, initiated by a Romanian organisation, comprising folk dances from around the world, has challenged me to go deeper into understanding one of the most popular dance forms of Western Odisha, *Dalkhai.* Traditionally a religion-based folk dance connected to the agrarian culture of local *Adivasi* communities, it has been gradually developed into a cultural pattern of Odisha, Eastern India. Considering folklore as intangible cultural heritage of humanity, according to UNESCO definition, I explore the expression of this ritual-dance, in connection to the *Adivasi* culture, as Dalkhai is considered the goddess of fertility, initially worshipped by the tribal people/*Adivasi* like *Mirdha, Kondha, Kuda, Gond, Binjhal,* etc., but also in its recent metamorphosis into a proscenium representation. The *Dalkhai* dance is becoming visible and recognised at state, national and even international form of dance, while in the *Adivasis* communities it is noted that the ritual becomes less and less performed. Consulting the UNESCO definitions and documents on Intangible Cultural Heritage is useful for understanding how to approach a choric ritual, involving a tradition, music and dance, enhancing the importance of safeguarding cultural diversity while confronting cultural globalization. Its approach, in accordance with 'universal cultural rights', emancipatory politics concerning world culture and multiculturalism, opposes the disappearances and destruction of local traditions, indigenous practices. Heritage concerns the whole community, conferring an identity feeling, and supporting the transmission to the next generations, sustainable development, often involving economic stakes, becoming essential for developing the territories (Chevalier, 2000).

Keywords: *Dalkhai,* folk dance, intangible cultural heritage, Eastern India, Western Odisha, *Adivasi* culture, goddess worship, India

Introduction

My research was triggered by the advent of an international project showcasing folk-dances all around the world, as means of youth education, promoting cultural diversity and international cooperation[i]. The marvelous sound of *Sambalpuri* and *Dalkhai* dances of the Odisha State in the Eastern part of India still reverberate in my memory, after three years spent there, so I decided to include this dance in the project, alongside with the more spectacular and visible *Kalbeliya* dance, belonging to Rajasthan. For *Kalbeliya*, a dance belonging to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the data collection was easy, due to the support of the international performer Aasha Sapera, while *Dalkhai* required a thorough collection of information, as well as a re-construction of the performance, not easy during the pandemics[ii].

During my stay in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, I have seen the dance performed on stage a few times, during the *Adivasi Mela* and other fairs where the tribal and folk culture is displayed. But working on data collection for the project made me understand that this dance description is not about the technical details (choreography, rhythm pattern, etc.), but about the cultural traditions of the *Adivasi* communities, *Shakti* worship, social dynamics of communities, kinship, and also its metamorphosis from a tribal ritual to a proscenium representation, to becoming a representative cultural trait of the eastern side of India. *Dalkhai,* a ritual involving singing and dancing, or *Bhai jiuntia* is the most significant and the most popular dance form in Western Odisha, initially belonging to the *Adivasi* (tribal) communities, performed by young girls of *Binjhal, Kuda, Mirdha, Sama* and several other tribes, mainly covering Bargarh, Sambalpur, Bolangir, Sonepur Kalahandi, Nuapada, Jharsuguda and Deogarh, Sundargarh and Boudh district (Naik, 2020), became a folk dance associated with the whole Sambalpur region and a cultural trait of the whole state of Odisha (Pasayat 2004: 58-59). Although *Dussehra (Dasahara)* is the main festival when *Dalkhai* is performed, its performance is extremely widespread on all other festivals such as *Bhaijauntia, Phagun Puni, Nuakhai* etc. At its origins, it was a worship ritual dedicated to Goddess Dalkhai, lately its religious aspect became secondary and fell into oblivion:

> "The rural girls of Western Orissa used to play and sing *Dalkhai* (Leaf Eater dance) associated with rituals. It was a sacred dance during *Aswina* (October). But now a days, the dance, music and song form is adopted by the educated women and this has become a popular medium of self-exposure to the wider world." (Mishra, 2013)

Lately, *Dalkhai* dance form has come out of its traditional form, becoming a pro-scenium representation, a metamorphosis which happened to many folk and tribal cultural forms, and has assimilated in it the taste of the modern viewers. While in the *Adivasis* communities, it is noted that the ritual becomes less and less performed, various cultural and recreational groups, clubs, government and non-government organizations started playing a vital role in promoting *Dalkhai* dance, in making it become visible and recognised at state, national and even international form of dance. The 'traditional' form receives modern expression, both in choreography, music, instruments, and clothes as

"The colourful modern costumes of Dalkhai and the uniqueness of the dance win over the heart of the spectators. The heart throbbing musical instruments are unmatching to the musical tools of other dances." (Behera, 2016: 15-18, Naik, 2020)

Dance as a form of art of folk(s) involves songs, music, and dramatic expression, but it is also a reflection of the socio-economic structure of the community which created it, as well as a cultural expression that binds people together through cultural tradition (Naik, 2020). Folklore is defined as the body of knowledge, mode of thought and kind of art (Ben-Amos, 1971), termed as oral art or expression, its existence being validated in its social context, as collective representation, collective creation and sharing in a group of people with common interest and common identity signify the importance of folklore. The research is an exploration of this ritual-dance form, enhancing its features as cultural heritage, its relevance to the indigenous communities and beyond, notes the sacred aspect of the performance, its connection to the cultural and religious community expression, as well as value transmission of local communities. The methodology involved open interviews and discussions with researchers from Western Odisha who have been long-time working on collecting data about this dance-ritual, and also participating in the virtual visual re-creation of the dance, for education purposes, so as to make it accessible to youth involved in an international project promoting dance as a form of multicultural communication and healthy lifestyle.

While reviewing the literature for and the *Dalkhai* ritual and dance, I understood the importance of this ritual dance to the local communities, the Odia culture, as well as its connection to local traditions and beliefs, nature, continuous metamorphosis of oral creations, and for the world today. *Dalkhai* and the folk dances of Odisha find their descriptions in the research of D. N. Patnaik, *Social significance of the folk-songs of Orissa* (1972), *Some Folk Dances of Orissa* (1979), Kapila Vatsayan, *Traditions of Indian Folk Dance* (1976), R. Naik, *Dalkhai: A popular folk Dance of Western Odisha* (2002); Lidia Guzy in her work *Marginalised Music, Religion and Politics from Western Odisha* (2013) makes thorough ethnographic descriptions of this ritual and its meanings; J. K. Behera included it in *Tribal and Traditional Folk Dances of Odisha* (2016), A. Mohapatra, *The Essence of Popular Folk Dances of Odisha* (2017) also mentions this dance.

Traditional folklore, cultural diversity and intangible heritage of humanity

Folklore creation is now considered a form of intangible cultural heritage of humanity, and should be addressed as such. The Dalkhai dance-ritual is relevant to a large community (initially of Western Odisha, but nowadays the entire Odisha State, and some other neighbouring states in Eastern India, like Bengal and Jharkand), it is connected to other arts and crafts (weaving tradition, silver ornaments crafting, musical instruments tradition), enhancing the link between human beings and nature, in a most respectful manner, communal participation, family ties, youth education, while its practice is endangered in the original communities due to modern time social and economic changes.

The idea of cultural diversity is given parallel prominence in the political agendas of both UNESCO and national cultural policies. This idea of cultural diversity was promoted in India after Independence (1947), the Indian Ministry of Culture established multiple autonomous bodies in support of cultural expressions, according to particular disciplines (creative arts, music, dance, theatre, literature, etc.). After India's Independence many traditional cultural forms were registered and classified into one of three categories: *classical*, *folk* and *tribal*, which became the official mark of India as a culturally rich and diverse nation (Erdman, 1996: 290-304, Iyer, 1997). In the 1950s *Akademi*s

were founded: the National Academy of Art (the *Lalit Kala Akademi*), the National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama (the *Sangeet Natak Akademi*), and the National Academy of Letters (*Sahitya Akademi*), focused mainly on the institutional support of classical art forms. *Zonal Cultural Centres* were established in the 1980's, in order to protect and support folk and tribal art forms, promoting 'national unity through cultural integration'[iii]. In Western Odisha, Sambalpur Kalaparishad is a pioneer institution established in 1956, working in the field of research and development of indigenous folk culture.

'Heritage' involves the idea of a transmission from our predecessors (*patrimonium* lat. means paternal heritage) (Davallon, 2002), for states and nations, transmitting the cultural heritage means the gift, from the ancestors, of the millennial memories, but also the reception of this gift in present-times, an act that involves the descendants (Babelon & Chastel, 1994). The meaning of 'cultural heritage' changed in time, partially due to the work tools elaborated by UNESCO - The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, a U.N. body with a mandate in cultural domain. Nowadays, cultural heritage is understood beyond monuments and objects (UNESCO 1972)[iv], it equally includes inherited alive traditions, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices on nature, traditional arts, etc. Furthermore, the Faro Convention of 2005 proposes and definition that includes local community as main reference factor, which changed the heritage management policies and strategies (Council of Europe, *European Landscape Convention and reference documents*, 2005), considering concepts like 'cultural meaning' and 'social value' (Gibson 2009: 73) of the heritage, and a shift of the attention towards intangible heritage.

At an institutional level, UNESCO adopted in 2003 the definition of intangible cultural heritage, referring to oral traditions and expression, rituals and festive events, knowledge about traditional arts and crafts, being defined and 'traditional, contemporary, alive, inclusive[v], recognised by the communities, has at the basis the identity and continuity feeling, contributes to the promotion of cultural diversity and human creativity, and is in accordance with Human Rights, promoting mutual understanding and sustainable development[vi].

The very concept of 'intangible heritage' is mentioned for the first time in 1982 (*Mondiacult*, Mexico)[vii], but it is connected to the 1972 *Convention for protection of world heritage, cultural and natural din 1972*[viii]. In 1973, a *Protocol* to the *Universal Convention regarding copyrights* is added, in order to protect the folklore, and in 1982 a *Committee of Experts for safeguarding folklore* was formed, inviting all member states to adopt measures in this respect[ix]. In 1999, during a conference organised by UNESCO and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington regarding traditional and popular traditional safeguarding, the 'intangible cultural heritage' became the new normative instrument instead of 'folklore' (Balázs 2003: 38). In 2001, the member states of UNESCO adopted the *Universal Declaration concerning Cultural Diversity*[x], to which followed the 2003 *Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention*, which aims at safeguarding living, traditional cultural heritage, by raising awareness and highlighting its importance. The 2005 Council of Europe *Faro Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (ratified in 2007) defines cultural heritage as follows:

> "Cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions."[xi]

India is a rich depositary of folklore creations, "its constant transformation and its use in the society has given a new challenge and new opportunity to the folklorists to rethink and redefine

folklore where the bridge of folk and non-folk need to be bridged for a stronger foundation in the socio-cultural development" (Mishra, 2013). India has already inscribed on the UNESCO the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, among others, the Tradition of Vedic chanting, in 2008, *Ramlila*, the traditional performance of the *Ramayana*, in 2008, *Ramman*, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India, in 2009, the *Chhau* dance in 2010, the *Kalbelia* folk songs and dances of Rajasthan in 2010, *Mudiyettu*, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala, in 2010[xii].

In the new context of post-modernity/hyper-modernity, the notion of 'heritage' became polysemic, reflecting the multiplication of objects, places and facts that can be included in this category, and an extension of the meaning as well, from public to private, sacred to ordinary, material to ideal, culture to nature (Mohen, 1999).

Western Odisha and the *Adivasi* traditions

Western Odisha is a land of mountains, green forests, rich *Adivasi* (tribal) culture, its districts (Kalahandi, Nuapada, Bolangir, Sonepur, Bargarh, Sambalpur, Debgarh, Jharsuguda, Sundergarh, Boudh) displaying their own socio-cultural diversity. The term 'Adivasi' (*adi* means 'beginning' and *vasi* 'dweller') refers to around one hundred million people in India and forming more than six hundred socio-culturally autochthonous Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian language and kinship groups in India administratively labeled as 'schedule tribes' (Pfeffer, 1997: 3–27) and designated as 'indigenous peoples' by United Nations definitions [xiii]. Western Odisha has a population of 10.420.491, out of which 30 % is included as Scheduled Tribes (3.083.015)[xiv].

The Odia people, and the tribal communities are emotionally linked to their religious performances and rituals, and this rich tradition of folklore, songs and dances, often has secular, religious and/or seasonal character:

> "As it preserves the tradition and culture of the people, Odia folk dances are a vessel for the individual to express their emotions through colourful presentations, music and movements. […] The folk dance contributed in integrating society as a unit cultural community." (Mohapatra, 2017: 29-32)

There are many folk dances in Odisha such as *Ghumura, Changu, Baagh Naach* or Tiger Dance, *Goti Pua, Nachni, Odissi, Ruk Mar Nacha* (*Chhau* Dance), *Dhap, Karma Naach, Dasakathia, Jhoomar, Chadya Dandanata, Ghanta Patua, Ghumara Sanchar, Kandhei, Kelakeluni, Sakhi Nata* etc. (Mohapatra 2017, 29-32; Naik 2020). Among tribal dances may be included the colourful spring time dance of the Santals with their musical instrument, *Madal* performed by the maidens, their pastoral dance during ripping of grain, the dance of the *Kolha* at the time of planting of the seeds in honour of their deity performed by men and women, the dances of the Gonds done in dedication to their deity Bhimsen, at harvesting festival time, marriage celebrations, accompanied by several musical instruments like the horned-drums, flutes and clarinets, the spring dance of the *Bhatra* with beautiful dresses, silver ornaments of women (Das, 2016).

Dalkhai is considered a socio-religious traditional folk dance linked to the agrarian rites, as many of the Odia folk dances are related to harvest and religious beliefs. Dalkhai Devi is considered 'the Goddess of Fertility', worshipped in the *Adivasi* communities, and the *Dalkhai* ritual is traditionally performed by tribes like *Mirdhas, Kuda, Kondhs, Gonds, Binjhals* etc.

"The early Odishan folk dances, like other forms of primitive art, were essentially ritual enactments of superstitious beliefs performed in the hope of a good harvest. Most of the folk dances that were developed during the ancient period reflected a superstitious belief that in making ritual sacrifices to the gods in appreciation of the harvest, one could persuade the gods to provide another bountiful harvest in the following year. Odishan folk dances reflect the peculiarities of a particular community's religious, cultural and historical narrative, as it were […] while the heritage of the folk dance was passed down the generations." (Mohapatra, 2020)

Dalkhai: Goddess worship, kinship rituals, festivals, local crafts, nature connection

The word 'Dalkhai' connotes a stem from the branch of a tree, the 'Dala' (branches), symbolically adored as *Devi* or *Shakti*. *Daalkhai* means 'leaf eating', as it is considered that this Devi is very much fond of eating *dal* (leaf). Usually, the worship place of a *Devi* is placed in the outskirt of the village or nearby to the forest, whoever passes on the way usually offers a small branch of leaf as a matter of respect, known as *Dalkhai Kuthi,* or called 'altar of the sixteen' (Naik, 2020). During Dalkhai ritual, *Dala* (branches) are symbolically planted:

"It is believed that, if the Goddess is satisfied then peace, prosperity and harmony will rule the world. In some districts, particularly in the tribal and forest areas, animal sacrifice is made to satisfy the Goddess. The place where the sacrifice is perpetuated is known as 'Dalkhai Gudi'. (Pasayat 2002)

The Śakti, Devi, Goddess worship/cult has been an important complex of the Indian civilization since time immemorial (Das, 1979: 91-98), and widespread in Odisha (Satpathy 2016: 57-71). Thus, 'Dalkhai' does not only designate the ritual dance and the local Goddess Dalkhai, but it may refer to other goddesses such as the pan Indian goddess Durga, the demon killing mother and the embodiment of power, *Śakti Devi*, the local forest-goddess *Bana Durga*, also to *Samalai* or *Sambaleswari*, the regional goddesses of the Sambalpur district (Behera, 2016: 18). As B. C. Pradhan noted, Śaktism in Orissa began with the cult of *Stambhesvari* and was ultimately synthesised in the assimilative character of the Jagannath Cult (1977: 130-137), while the presence of Bimala temple inside the Jagannath temple in Puri also indicates the importance of the Śakti cult in Orissa (Lal, 1992, 2001).

"Both the tribal and non-tribal people of Sambalpur worship the major regional tribal deity, *Samaleswari* Devi. She is believed to be the guardian of this area and regarded as the supreme deity. There are other

deities like *Pataneswari, Budhima, Mahamayi, Saramangala* and *Batamangala,* who receive offerings from the devotees. These deities are collectively called sat *Bahuni* (seven sisters). They are also feared as they may cause calamities when they are displeased. Significantly, the non-Brahmin priests worship her. The deity is worshipped in the form of a stone, was worshipped under a tree in the past, further enshrined in the temple, as a part of Sanskritisation. Most of her *Sevakas* are tribals in origin. […] Saying goes that it had been originally performed by the locals during Dussehra to appease the Goddess who would protect their corns from insects." (Naik, 2020, Das, 1977: 130-137)

The cult of worship of Goddess in India often implies a polysemic inclusion of diversified Goddess concepts: one goddess is regarded and venerated as an integral part of another. While displaying one personality she may simultaneously incorporate other manifestations of her divine identity (Naik, 2020). In the past, people used to worship some deity to protect them from the outrage of the wild animals and other misfortunes. In the course of time, the deity became synonymous with *Bana Durga* (Forest or Jungle Goddess) or Durga and people continued to worship Her age after age (id.). Other local goddesses are known as *Durga, Samalai, Dulari Devi, Chara Bahati, Maha Lakshma, Borul Ma, Adi Mata, Parvati, Ahalya Mata, Rohelia, Chanchala, Kosala/Bimali, Subrokeshi, Chandra Tara/Promila, Subratara, Bhima Goura* (Guzy, 2013). The number sixteen can also be found in a a local myth about the *Dalkhai* dance relates to stories of seven sisters and seven brothers venerated at *Dalkhai* or *Sula Kutti* (id.).

In order to give the idea of the 'Abode of the Goddess' and the 'Sixteen Gods and Goddesses' understood, Barsha Bohidar, Western Odisha, shared a painting, with *Saura-Italon-Ikon-Idital-Warli* patterns (Kossak 1997), in the form of a *yantra*, with sixteen compartments. As it is the creation of a school teacher, it made me understand how a visual art (painting) belonging traditionally to *Adivasi* communities, came to be adopted by other categories, addressing the new generations of Odisha. As Pr. Ashok Bohidar explains:

"It is an attempt to give a message about *Dalkhai* celebrated in the rural part of western Odisha, on the Ashtami Tithi of *Durgapuja.* This painting is named as *Sulha Kuthi, Abode of Maa Durga,* incarnated as *Dalkhai* Devi with associated Gods and Goddesses. Placement of some God and Goddesses may vary from locality to locality."

Fig. 1. *Sulha Kuthi, Abode of Maa Durga, as Dalkhai Devi, with associated gods and goddesses*, a drawing by Barsha Bohidar, Western Odisha.

Dalkhai as a festival is celebrated during the Ashtami Titthi of Durga Puja, *Dussehra*. It is observed on each Thursday of the Odia month *Aswina*, between September-October, and in Sambalpur region it is worshipped on the eighth day of the first fortnight of *Aswina*. Though *Dussehra* is the occasion of *Dalkhai*, its performance is very common on all other occasions, such as *Phagun Puni, Bhaijiuntia, Nuakhai*, and lately as stage performance. The *Dalkhai* dance has several adjunctive forms known as *Mayalajada, Rasarkeli, Gunji Kuta, Jamudali, Banki, Jhulki, Sainladi*. (Satpathy, 2016, Naik, 2020, Pradhan, 2018). It is also known as *Bhaijiuntia*, the local form of folk dance *Dalkhai* is attached to the festival, where sisters fast, offer their prayer to the deity, dance and sing together for the prosperity of their brothers and matrilineal families.

> "In the ritual observance of *Dalkhai*, in order to worship the deity, the girls would fast for a whole day and in the evening, they worship the Devi, by offering cucumbers. The next day, early in the morning, the girls will go to the *pond* or river, take sacred bath and then worship the devi at the bank of the pond/river. Upon returning home, together, in a group, they will tie a thread called *Jiuntia* at the hands of their brothers, hence this festival is otherwise known as *Bhai Jiuntia*." (Meher, 2019: 41-51)

This dance is ritually performed at river side where an idol of *Dalkhai* Devi – considered a form of the goddess Durga, is installed under a tree and propitiated. Pr. Mahendra Mishra, Director, Folklore Foundation, *Lokaratna Journal*, folklorefoundation.org.in, explains:

> "*Dalkhai* is a ritual of agriculture, connected to the vegetation, and the mother cult, as a symbol of creation." (Phone discussion, July 2021)

During the sometimes thirty-six hours of worship, unmarried girls known as *Kuanris*, start the performance with a folk song, which is followed by the dance:

> "The young women dance and sing intermittently, forming a semi-circular chain spreading each other's hands across their waist. While dancing to the rhythms of the *dhol*, they place the legs close together and bend the knees. In another movement they move forward and backward in a half-sitting position. Sometimes they make concentric circles clockwise and anticlockwise. The rhythmical movements of the body and the steps are the reflection of the oneness of the mind." (Behera, 2016: 18)

Traditionally, *Dalkhai* dance is performed accompanied by a musical dialogue between young men and girls. The love story of *Radha* and *Krishna*, the episodes from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the narrative of nature, seasons, gods, goddesses, may be represented in the songs (Naik 2020). The Dalkhai song starts with the invocatives *Dalkhai bo* or *Dalkhai re*, and it proceeds with the rhythmic beats of the drums, after which starts the explosive playing of the instruments as well as the group dance (id.)

Lidia Cuzy, in her ethnographic survey in the Bora Sambar region (Western Odisha) emphasizes the sacredness of the whole ritual, and also remarks the phenomenon of trance-medium while involved in the ritual:

> "In western Odisha local discourses on the divine are enshrined in particular concepts of sacred sounds. [...] ritual music transports an indigenous knowledge, value and belief system. Music of marginalised musicians, the music of the non-Brahmin priest-musicians and the dance of the ecstatic ritual priest-dancer of local goddesses disclose a *thea-phony*, a local theory of the goddess (*thea*) resonating *in* a system of sounds (*phony*) and mediated *in* the human body." (Cuzy, 2013).
>
> "The goddess spirit possession *boil* is musically symbolised by a specific sequence of rhythms, the *sulapar*, or 16 holy rhythms. These rhythms are named after 16 different goddesses and are said to express their speeches and characters." (id.)
>
> "After the girls perform the ritual of propitiating the Goddess, they become *boil*, trance mediums embodying the Goddess Durga or Dalkhai." (id.)

The relation between ecstatic experiences, trances and choric rituals is presented presented in trans-cultural case-studies by Rouget (1980), Ginzburg 1989/1996, Eliade, 1943/1993, Eliade, 1951/1997) - the *Adivasi* woman performing the ritual says:

> "I am singing the song, but the Goddess is there in my throat, plays through me, I have no knowledge, I know nothing, I am unaware of all and of everything, so I pray to the Goddess (Maa Mangala) and I can sing, words are spoken by Maa Durga. Now play *Hulahuli Dalkhai Re*." (2019)

Fig. 2. Dalkhai ritual performed in Amdahan Village, Padampur, subdivision of Bargarh District, photography taken from a video shared by Pr. Ashok Kumar Bohidar, Western Odisha, 2019.

Fig. 3. Re-creating the *Dalkhai* 'raw' dance: Pooja Purabi Bohidar, Western Odisha, 2021.

Pooja Purabi Bohidar is a post-graduate from the Sambalpur University, in the subject of performing arts (dance) and has submitted her dissertation on the *Dalkhai* ritual (Bohidar Pooja Purabi, *Paschim Odishara Loka Sanskuti Re Dalkhai*, Dalkhai in the Culture of West Odisha. A Study). As she performs the *Dalkhai* ritual dance, in its original form, Pooja Purabi Bohidar explains: in the original form ('raw' dance), we have to bow down and dance, our chest should touch our knees, we should hold the towel with both our hands while dancing. The rhythm is 1-2-3-4 / 1-2-3-4 / 1-2-3-4-5-6—7-8 / 1-2-3-4-5-6—7-8:

Dalkhai re, Dalkhai re,
Nani ra paenji chauda bhari (2 times)
Chham chham kari jauche chali (2 times)
Hali jauchhe nakara guna (2 times)
Tukel bhini teen baula (3 times)
Paduche jana
Dalkhai re

Dalkhai re, Dalkhai re,
Girl's anklet is fourteen bhari (1 bhari = 10 grams)
Whike, walking she makes the sound of Cham Cham (anklets sound)
Her nose ring also moves (while she walks)
Girls offer flowers of mango tree to each other (to become best friends)[xv]

The folklorism is considered to be 'a second life of the folklore that has as specific moment the reproduction of the phenomenon […] out of the contexts in which it appears, normally and in other other goals than the ones it was created for' (Ispas, 2003: 40), being perceived as a 'form of idealization by revalorization and reinvention of a selective assumed past' (Kostin, 1982, Cuisenier, 2005: 92). As 'sub-category of the folklore' (Smidchens, 1999: 56) part of the folklore process, folklorism creates new variations (Istenic, 2011: 55), being 'a conscious repetition of a folk tradition seen as a symbol of an ethnic, regional or regional culture' (Smidchens, 1999: 56). The show is the last expression of the slow deritualisation of the folk culture elements (on the line ritual-ceremonial-performance), which in fact points out the organic filiation between the 'amateur artistic movement' and folklore (Petac, 2015).

Fig. 4. Pranita Nayak, Phulbani, has learned the dance in school and performing in school functions and dance competitions, 2021.

Pranita Nayak explains during a phone conversation (July 2021):

"I learned *Dalkhai* from school, some steps are my choreography, I performed during my college times. I like the music, lyrics, it is a traditional Odia song, from Sambalpur, I like the gorgeous beat, I like the costume, the flowers, the sticks, the ornaments, the red color on hands and feet, the energetic steps." (MA in Social Work, N.I.I.S. Group of Institutions, Bhubaneswar, Odisha)

Swagatika Nayak, a Ph. D. candidate in Geography at Utkal University, videographer in this project, explains:

> "Dalkhai is a Sambalpuri dance, from Western Odisha, very much liked by the people of our district, Phulbani, Kandhamal District. Since our childhood, in every school function, a performance of Dalkhai should be there. We performed this dance in national school, inter-school competition, even when we went once to Madhya Pradesh, we danced this dance to represent Odisha. I like the music, the drums, the way of wearing the saree. It represents in a very good way the Odiya culture. Most of the folk dances in any part of India, except northern India, have this kind of dance: wearing short saree, bowing down, same repetitive movements. *Dalkhai* is very famous, everybody likes it, everybody learns it." (Phone interview, July 2021)

The music is played by a number of local instruments, such as *Dhol, Nisan, Tamki, Tasa, Mahuri*, which are the original creation of local artisans, named *Pancha Badya*. All the instruments in the inter-village orchestra are worshipped before being played. Notably, they are used for the worship of gods and goddesses, but at the same time require worship themselves:

> "The instruments are usually only touched by the musicians, but there is no ritual prohibition to touch the instruments. However, no one should step over them as this is considered disrespectful and is supposed to cause a curse by the goddesses. The instruments are stored in a secular context: they are kept by the particular musician who plays an instrument. The sacredness of the instruments evolves mainly through the ritual context and the sound vibrations transforming the instrument to the mediator as well as to the corpus of a particular goddess. […] Various goddesses are assumed to appear through the sound of specific instruments and their rhythms (*par*), while the polyrhythmic structure of the orchestra is understood as the manifestation of their voices." (id.)

Fig. 5. Instruments used in Dalkhai dance, *Muhuri (aerophone), Tasa, Timkidi, Nissan, Dhol,* courtesy Pr. Ashok Kumar Bohidar, Western Odisha.

During the *Dalkhai* ritual and dance, the girls wear the beautiful *Sambalpuri Saree,* known as *kapta,* or *Saktapad,* and wear a scarf on top of the shoulders holding the ends below in both the hands. It is a traditional hand-woven saree, in the style called *Baandha,* using the tie-and-die technique, displaying motifs such as *phoola, sankha, lata, macha, hansa, kumbha.* Weaving is one of the major livelihoods earning sources of these communities.

Fig. 6. A woman working in a weaving workshop in Sambalpur (credit photo: Angelica Marinescu), and the Sambalpuri saree, Boyanika, Odisha handloom weavers cooperative, www.gocoop.org.

The rich ornaments are creations of local artisans/casts, sometimes made in silver. They dancers have their hair knotted as *Khosa* (unique hairstyle opposite of plait) and adorned with bettel nut leaves and *Pan Patri, Kanphool* used as earrings, wear ornaments like *Chaka Guna* (nose tud), *Jhalka* (ear ring) *Khagala* (necklace) *Kataria, Bandhariya, Bahati* (arm bangles), *Tudal* and *Paenri* or *Ghunsi* or *Payal* (leg ornaments), *Antasuta* (bracelet like ornament in belly), *Gunchi* or *Kamarband* (waistband) (Pradhan, 1977).

Fig. 7. Ornaments used in Dalkhai dance, photo courtesy Pr. Ashok Kumar Bohidar, Western Odisha.

Conclusion

Defining initially the culture of specific *Adivasi* communities, as a ritual, *Dalkhai* as a dance form became a cultural characteristic of the whole region of Sampbalpur and a much loved dance of the entire Odisha State in Eastern India. While more and more visible on stage, it becomes less practiced in the local communities in which it originated. From social sciences perspective, heritage, beyond being an identity symbol, creating a continuity between the past, present and future, is a unifying element for a community,

thus, heritage sciences centre upon the research on communities, and on people's perception over what heritage means to them. Cultural heritage confers to the community (nation, local community, ethnic group) or to the individuals, the feeling of belonging to common values and ideas, in continuity in time and space. Furthermore, heritage invites to a projection towards the future, to the formulation of a collective project (Di Méo, 2011). The heritage is not neutral, it results from a social production, with an ideologic, political, economic finality, and thus it is a particular form of cultural mediation representing "the continuity and perennity of a culture in time" (Lamizet, 1999), marking the belonging to culture and sociability. Nowadays, the heritage action is also a mean to confronting the contemporary societies issues, either traditional or industrialised (Mohen, 1999), the cultural crisis (Arendt, 1972) triggered by globalization, and the uniformisation brough by the mass culture, mass media and cultural industries (Jeudy, 2001). Keeping alive a tradition, transmitting it from generation to generation, allowing it to evolve and adapt, enhances and preserves the community identity. As the culture, heritage evolves continuously, and is enriched by each generation, as in order to stay alive; heritage has to keep its cultural relevance, to be practiced and learned, involving the communities.

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[xiii] According to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and according to its working definition of Indigenous Peoples, 'Scheduled Tribes' are considered 'indigenous peoples' by transnational multilateral agencies such as the UNESCO, UNDP, World Bank and the Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples or International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs.

[xiv] According to Census 2011 (www.census2011.co.in) and www.sambalpur.nic.in. See also P. K. Nayak, R. Mahana, A. Marinescu, 2019: 89-107).

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