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### Full Length Research Article

## DANDA NATA- AN INTANGIBLE VISUAL CULTURAL HERITAGE OF WESTERN ODISHA

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#### ABSTRACT

This Intangible culture is the counterpart of culture, which is tangible or touchable. It includes song, music, drama, skills, crafts, and the other parts of culture that can be recorded but cannot be touched and interacted with/out a vehicle for the culture. This intangible cultural heritage is handed down from generation to generation and is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history. Ritual performances also come under the preview of Intangible Cultural Heritage of India. *Danda Nata* is such a folk artistic performance of Western Odisha. This ritual dance is mostly prevalent in Sonepur, Sambalpur, Boudh, Balangir, Phulbani and Dhenkanal districts. This strange dance is performed by the agricultural communities of Western part of Odisha once in a year stating at the beginning of April (i.e. from *pratipada* of *Chaitra*) for over a period of thirteen days or somewhere twenty one days. Qualitative method was followed to collect information. This dance consists of a series of dances, which are performed, one after another with the rhythm of *Dhol* and *Mahuri* by the male members belonging to Scheduled castes, Schedule Tribes and other backward castes. *Danda Nata* is being gradually modernized in respect of music, dance costume, style and make up and thereby losing its original simplicity and traditional characteristics. The paper focuses on an anthropological understanding of this strange folk artistic performance of Odisha through the eyes of Visual Culture and to ask more interesting questions about the motivations and visions behind this strange ritual art form and to see it not as an object of art, but rather a product of one's visual culture.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Visual Culture as an academic subject is a field of study that generally includes some combination of cultural studies, art history, critical theory, philosophy, and anthropology, by focusing on aspects of culture that rely on visual images. It is defined within the study of art history, as a focus on cultural meaning of a work of art, rather than on its aesthetic value. *Visual Culture* is a collection of original and critical essays addressing 'vision' as a social and cultural process. What we see, and the manner in which we come to see it, is not simply part of a natural ability rather it is intimately linked with the ways that our society has, over time, arranged its forms of knowledge, its strategies of power and its systems of desire. We can no longer be assured that what we see is what we should believe in. There is only a social not a formal relation between vision and truth (Jenks: 2003). On the one hand, vision is lionised among the senses and treated as wholly autonomous, free and even pure. Yet on the other hand, visual

symbols are experienced as mundane and necessarily embedded, and their interpretation is regarded as utterly contingent (Jenks: 2003). So, there is no bounded definition of Visual culture it is still being thought out. Scholars are now working towards a clearer understanding of Visual Culture. They are no longer looking at an object as an art, but rather another product of one's Visual Culture. There are essentially two ways of looking at Visual Culture. One is to look at what is taking place in a specific period of time, and to examine every aspect of what is going on at that particular moment in the course of history. For example, look at the Renaissance and see what is happening politically, economically, culturally, etc. This is the idea of looking at things across the board. The other way of viewing Visual Culture is to look at it as a progression throughout history. The idea is that once an image is stored in your brain it becomes identifiable and does not appear to be foreign to our visual understanding. Visual Culture is often observed as a new methodology that looks to ask more interesting questions about the motivations and visions behind art. Intangible culture is the counterpart of culture, which is tangible or touchable. It includes song,

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music, drama, skills, crafts, and the other parts of culture that can be recorded but cannot be touched and interacted with/without a vehicle for the culture. This intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation and is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history. Ritual performances also come under the preview of Intangible Cultural Heritage of India. *Danda Nata* is such a folk artistic performance of Western Odisha which is mostly prevalent in Sonepur, Sambalpur, Boudh, Balangir, Phulbani and Dhenkanal districts. This strange dance is performed by the agricultural communities of Odisha once in a year starting at the beginning of April (i.e. from *pratipada* of *Chaitra*) for over a period of thirteen days or somewhere twenty one days. The term *Danda* has got several meanings, viz. pole, stick, time and punishment. *Nata* means dance or play. In other words; pole is symbolically represented as Lord *Shiva* and this particular dance is performed to please him. This dance consists of a series of dances, which are performed, one after another with the music of *Dhol* and *Mahuri* by the male members belonging to Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes. Now a day, *Danda Nata* is being gradually modernized in respect of music, dance costume, style and make up and thereby losing its original simplicity and traditional characteristics.

### Area of Study

Against this backdrop, the present study has been conducted at the *Saharipali* and *Kapasira* villages of Ulunda block and *Bausuni* village of Binika Block of Sonepur district. Village *Saharipali* is situated at the left bank of river Mahanadi. Sixty seven families are staying in this village among which most of the families belong to lower middle class family. Village *Kapasira* is a small village consisting of two wards, situated at the left bank of the river Mahanadi. *Bausuni* is situated on the right bank of Mahanadi consisting of nine wards.

### Objective

The paper focuses on

1. an anthropological understanding of *Danda Nata*, a strange folk artistic performance of Odisha through the eyes of Visual Culture
2. the motivations and visions behind this strange ritual art form

### Method of Collecting Data

The main method which has been used in this study is photographic documentation. Other than this, qualitative method also has been used to collect data. Personal interview of the performers and focus group interview was also done to make the documentation of the different phases of this strange ritual dance. Along with that relevant secondary data wherever available are used for supplementing the documentation.

### Findings

#### *Danda Nata: An Anthropological Insight*

*Danda Nata* in its original anthropological significance is to see how the rituals correspond to life's reality in the process of

cultural synthesis and in man's sub-consciousness scheme of higher aspiration. Regarding the origin of *Danda Nata*, there are two different sources of information, historical evidence and the traditional myth which is handed down from generation to generation. According to oral history, origin of *Danda Nata* dates back to Somagupta period in Western Odisha and to the Kesari period in Eastern Odisha. The link between Hinduism and Buddhism in *Danda Nata* can also be traced from this source as well as the prevailing rituals of *Danda Nata*. In mythical sense according to the *Danduas*, *Danda* is originated from the *Yajna Kunda* (sacrificial pit) of King *Dakshya Prajapati* the father of *Parvati*. *Siva* in order to relief from *Matruharan* (mother rape) sin performed *Danda Nata*. In *Satya Yuga* *Danda* was celebrated in *Swarga* (Heaven). Then son of *Sudharma* brought the *Danda* to *Martya* (Earth). Now a day's *Danda Nata* is celebrated in many villages.

There are thirteen performers called *Bhoktas* or *Rishiputras* of *Danda Nata* who mainly belong to low ranking castes. The main *Bhokta* who performed everything strictly regarded as *Pata bhoktas*. These *bhoktas* have to lead ascetic life for 13 to 21 days during which they avoid wine, woman, spicy food and other worldly materials and remain away from their homes and family life. In these days they take self-cooked food once a day after offering it to god. In these days the *Bhoktas* are required to wear sacred threads which they get from the village priest after he performs a *homa* on the first day. The flame in this *homa* according to tradition is produced by rubbing two sticks and carefully preserved in *bihan beria* (made up of straw) for all the 13<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> days during which the *Bhoktas* chant *kala Rudramaniki Bhiaja Hai* (worship to lord *Siva*) hymn time to time and travel religiously through villages on bare foot. When these *Bhoktas* move in a group, the members of a family sweep the dooryard and plaster the earth with cow dung in order to welcome the troop. On the arrival of these *Bhoktas* the family members pour water in front of the *Bhoktas* as a token of their respect which symbolizes an invitation to the *Bhoktas* by the host family for *Danda Nata* performance. The *Bhoktas* stop forward moving there and light a lamp in front of the house and move to their given shelter. Though *Danda Nata* is a one day celebration, it may continue for more than a day if the numbers of hosts are many in a village. A day's performance of *Danda Nata* comprises of four different phases namely *Dhuli Danda*, *Pani Danda*, *Agni Danda* and *Suanga Danda* or *Leela Danda*.

***Dhuli Danda:*** *Dhuli Danda*, mainly take place during this afternoon session of *Danda Nata*. It comprises of three following phases

1. Physical Exercise
2. Pranks
3. Ritualized Sequences

**Physical Exercise:** So far the physical exercise is concerned these can be further subdivided into two categories,

- a. pure and simple physical exercise
- b. expressive physical exercise.

In pure and simple physical exercise, the *danduas* actually do almost ten types of simple physical exercises like standing side by side in a row in front of the *kali* painting (*prava*) with

folded hands and bowed head, dancing two to three steps forward and backward several times by forming a row while singing and clapping their hands. The *Danduas* form a row with knee down and touch the earth with their forehead by keeping their hand in the back in veneration of Kali painting (*prava*). They stand with raised and folded hands towards sun, forming a row by lifting their right legs and holding them in their right hand while simultaneously grasping their noses with their left hand and hoping forwards and backwards, listening to the voice of the priest such as *don't eat meat or be a true devotee of Lord Siva*. While standing in a row and answering in form of yes or no, they lie stretched out in the dust of the village square or road, side by side and very close to each other, with their face towards the earth, which locally known as *vasuki darshan*.

When they lie stretched out in the dust of the village square or side by side, very close to each other with their face towards the sun it is locally called as *Surya Darshan*. Lying stretched out on the ground the *danduas* roll over the others who lay on the ground forming a pair, one holding the legs of other pressing his face on or between other feet or leg. These physical exercises are all enacted with the face/head towards the Kali painting and the other sacred objects, which are placed in front of sponsor's house or on the village road. Some of these exercises are enacted several times and actions are accompanied by the constant drumming and flute playing of musician sitting at the other end of the road or village square in the shade. Several priestly assistants carefully watch these exercises standing in front of the *danduas*, occasionally walking up to one or the other, touching him with a bamboo stick and admonishing him to perform more enthusiastically or correctly. In the expressive forms of physical exercises the *Danduas* mime certain everyday activities like sweeping the floor, sprinkling plants with water, sowing seeds, forming a kali or *siva* temple, forming a well, depicting a weaving loom or agricultural field or ploughing. Unlike the pure and simple physical exercises, these are performed by just some of the *danduas* in front of the *prava* while the remaining ones only sit and watch.

**The Pranks:** In the next phase of *Dhuli Danda* the bodies of *danduas* form a sort of stage or décor against which theatrical performance in the form of pranks and comical interlude take place. There are seven types of pranks namely road leveled prank where an interaction regarding the leveling of the road for good communication take place along with the emergence of Goddess Kali for giving her blessings to the *danduas*, well prank where a dispute takes place between a master farmer and his servant about where and how to built and who is the right person to take water first from the well, weaving prank where the *danduas* form a waving loom, ploughing prank where some *danduas* lies on the ground forming rectangles meant to depict field and four or six *danduas* always in pairs mime bullock attached to a plough being driven round and round. Prank relating to farmer and his wife is nothing but a simple argument between a farmer husband and wife which is solved by the interference by the sister in law and temple prank which is based on the dispute regarding making of temple for lord *Siva*. All the pranks discussed above so far represent social dramas in sense evoked by Turner (1982).

**Ritualized Sequence:** It includes the *puja* in front of the sacred objects at the beginning of *Dhuli Danda* when all

*danduas* and numerous members of neighbourhood mainly women and children assembled in front of *prava*. With devotional singing and drumming one of the priests make *tilak* of *sindura* on the forehead of devotees and hand out rice, flower and turmeric. During *Surya Darshan* (Sun Seen) the *patabhokta* walks over the stomach of the other *danduas* who were lying down side by side faced towards sun in the hot ground under hot sun of April and the priest walks by taking the rituals of God on the stomach of the *danduas*, At the time of *Basuki Darshan* (Earth Seen) the *danduas* lie on the ground faced towards earth and the priest walks over the *danduas* by carrying the ritualize like as *Surya Darshan*. The *danduas* lie on the creepers bearing nails, during this time after placing it in front of the *Prava*. Music is played by the musicians also with the cheerful cries of *haribola* and *hulahuli* by the audience and the *danduas* themselves. Then the *patadanduas* come by carrying a full pot of water and once again worship the *Prava* by uttering hymns. They place a red piece of cloth over the full pot of water and pray the *Prava* with bowed head.

**Pani Danda:** After the completion of *Dhuli Danda* the *danduas* proceed to the ponds to perform *Pani danda*. After taking bath and washing teeth with six figures long mango bough they take 13 deep in the pond and collect 13 handfuls of sands to make *Siva Linga* at the shore, near which they placed the *Prava*. Then the priest start to worship both Shiva and Kali with music beat by the musician in different rhythm. The *patabhokata* began to swing and dance stepping with the rhythm of music and the people believe that goddess comes to them. The priest worship *danda* by placing it on a *pidha* (made of wood). After igniting the *dandas* by hanging *bihan beria* (made on paddy sheaves) and by putting *Jhuna* (resin) they return to the camp. At the camp two *danduas* hold *dandas* and dance with the rhythm of music. In the middle of the dance they put *Jhuna* on the *dandas*. On the completion of the dance, they take *pana* (mixed of fried paddy, water and molasses). Then they start to cook food for them which contain *Arua rice* (unboiled rice), *Akata* vegetables (vegetables not cut) and cook them without oil and stuff and eat at midnight.

**Agni Danda:** *Agni danda* is the third phase of *Danda Nata* which varies from place to place. It starts before or after taking dinner. Here the sacred fire is ignited by rubbing bamboo wood or hanging *bihan beria* (made on paddy sheaves). Two *danduas* dance by holding *dandas* in their both hands, some time in sitting position and sometime in standing position according to the rhythm of music. In the middle of dance, they hold the *danda* in one hand and put some *jhuna* on the *dandas* in such a position that the flame of *danda* keep burning. At that time the other *bhoktas* utter *Kala Rudramani ki bhaja hei* (worship Lord *Shiva*) in a high voice. This dance is believed as the *Tandava Nrutya* of Lord *Shiva*.

**Theatrical Performance:** There are two types of theatrical performances performed during *Danda Nata*. *Suanga Danda* which is mainly about *Hara Parvati*, found in the Ulunda block of Sonepur District and *Leela Danda* which is based on the divine love of *Radha* and *Krishna* and found in the Binika block of Sonepur district. Both *Suanga Danda* and *Leela Danda* begin with the *prava nritya*, performed by *pata bhoktas* as per the step of music which continues more than twenty minutes with a semi circular red cloth, cut out in a shape of *nimbus*, made of bamboo decorated and tied to their backs. *Prava* is worshipped as the incarnation of Goddess Kali. The

character *Prava* is brought out only during the ritualistic period of 13<sup>th</sup> day of *danda nata* but if during other period of the year if this performance is performed for entertainment, the *Prava* is not brought out. *Suanga Danda* is performed by the *danduas* playing the character of *Siva-Parvati*, *Chadeiya-Chadeiyani* (who manage their livelihood by catching bird), *PatraSaura* and *Patrasaura* (belonging from *Parvatya* clan of Kalinga), *Kela Keluni* (snake charmer and his wife), *Jogi-Jogiani* (though *jogi* is totally detach from the worldly life but the *jogi* introduced in the *suangas danda* is not detach from the worldly life), *Sabara-Sabaruni* (hunter and his wife), *Bhaidhana* (means dear brother and this is the only character in *Suanga Danda* which has no consort and less important character), *Kandha-Kandhunu*, *Hadi-Hadiani* (belong to untouchable lower caste), *Dhoba-Dhobani* (washer man and his wife), *Binakara* and *Karuani* (the beginner and ender of *Suanga Danda*). *Fakir-Fakirani*, *Bhalu-Bhaluani*, *Naba Chhanaka-Naba Chhanaki*, *Brusava-Brusavani* etc are the other characters of *Danda Nata*. The themes of the *Suanga* are drawn in a form very ordinary life events and relations of the tribal and nontribal people. However the dance styles of *Suanga Danda* are quite vigorous like birds and animals of forest and perform at a very first tempo.

*Lila danda* is rooted in *Vaishnavism* culture and it is far different from *Suanga danda*. While *Suanga danda* is performed to worship of *Siva* and *Parvati* whereas *Leela Danda* is based on the divine love of *Radha* and *Krishna*. The characters of *Leela danda* are *Krishna*, *Radha*, *Sukumar*, *Brunda Chandrasena*, *Lalita*, *Vishakha*, *Chandravali*, *Brahma*, *Vedabara* and some of them introduce the character *Jasoda* also. The characters like *Lalita*, *Visakha Chandravali*, *Brunda* are the female form of messenger who take the message from *Krishna* to *Radha*, Here the *Gopabali* (young lady of Gopa) are want to get salvation through loving *Krishna*. The last phase of *Danda Nata* is *Meru Parva* which is performed on the day of *Mahavishuva sankranti*.

***Kamana Ghata***: is a very important material part of this non-material art form. *Kamana* means desires and thus *Kamana Ghata* refers to pitcher of desires. A ceremonial earthen pot is collected from potter's house and *bhoktas* carrying this pot go to nearby pond or steam or river. There after taking a holy bath a Brahmin assist them in collecting water from the middle of the river. Engagement of a priest from Brahmin caste is a clear indication of Sanskritisation. The earthen pot is then decorated with sandal paste, *Arka* leaves and flowers are offered to Lord *Siva*, as he is believed to be fond of these things. Cooked rice is also offered. In accordance with the tradition, ten to twelve handful of rice are to be cooked and offered to poor people from low caste. In case of no such people are found then the cooked rice must be thrown away. No devotee or high caste people are allowed to touch the cooked rice. The traditional story associated with the *Kamana Ghata* is that, there was a gaintees named *Kamana*. Somehow she could seduce Lord *Shiva* by her charm and beauty and succeed to make an unholy alliance with *Shiva*. When *Siva* came to his senses after years, he repented for his unholy alliance and decided to quit once. Then when *Kamana* asked him about her fate, *Siva* told that she would be worshiped in place of him once a year by the low class people. Thus the *Ghata* represents *Kamana* which is a very important ritual item in *Danda Nata*. A cane representing *Siva* and *Shakti* is kept in the *Ghata* with full of water and is

buried under the earth. The water signifies life and its burying in the earth and bringing out after one year symbolizes death and rebirth. The *Danduas* make fire by collecting the wood like *Tulsi* (Holy Basil Plant) (*Ocimum sanctum*), *Bela* (*Aegle marmelos*), *Khaira* (*Mimamosa catechu*), *Neem* (*Azardacta Indica*), *Panash* (*Autocarpus Integrifolus*) and burnt the *dandas* which had buried at the *Kamana* house (house of desire) in previous year and *beta* (a bamboo stick bearing 13 nuts, a red piece of cloth). All of the above taken by the *danduas* to the pond to make them have a holy bath which is locally called as *Maha Snana* (great bath). A new white piece of cloth place above the water and the four *danda* are kept above the cloth which is believed as the incarnation of Lord *Siva*.

***Danda Jia***: Fire is kept burning in the *Kamana Ghar* (house of desire) which is also called as *danda jia*. This indicates that one should not feel desperate under any circumstances and keep always burning in the heart. The *danduas* are igniting through the pure fire by rubbing wood.

***Parva***: *Prava* is another important material object in this intangible folk art form which is made of bamboo. The bamboo woods are collected by the *danduas* according to the instruction of goddess *Kali* from the forest by playing musical instruments of *danda*. After making it, the *danduas* placed the new *parva* in front of old *parva* and changed the *ghata* (life) from old *parva* to new *parva*. Every thirteen years they change the *parva*. The *danduas* don't immerse the old *parva* in the river or pond but keep it in the union of roof and wall.

### The Motivations and Visions behind *Danda Nata*

*Danda Nata* is a religious theatrical festival, where tribal and non-tribal people participate without discrimination. But if the *danda nata* is observed critically most the low class rural agricultural communities of West Odisha are the performers of this strange performance. So the first question raised here is that, is this strange cult is related to economy? Now when we analyze the historical origin of *danda nata* it is found that it results from the mutual contract between elite and folk tradition, following Robert Redfield which can be said great and little tradition. So, Is this strange ritual folk dance results from nothing but the devolution of cultural elements of great tradition? The following two historical evidences regarding the origin of *Danda Nata* which dates back to Somegupta period of Western Odisha and Kesari Period of Eastern Odisha support this fact:

The king of Kesari dynasty ruled over Bhubaneswara from 5<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. The dynasty was the great worshipper of Lord *Siva*. The existed animosity among the divergent religious sects was especially between *Saivism* and *Buddhism*. As royal patronage and protection extended to *Saivism*, it became a dominant religious cult in Odisha and *Buddhist* were degraded to the status of untouchables hated by the Hindus. They had no other way but worship the Hindu deity Lord *Siva* for their salvation. But they were strictly prohibited from entering in the Hindu Temples. They worshipped *Siva* once in a year in festival called *Danda Nata*. On the other hand it was reported from the field of Boudh and Sonapur district of Western Odisha, the cradle place of *Danda Nata*, during Somagupta period *Buddhism* flourished in this tribal

dominated regions and as a result of the rejection of caste system and social hierarchy by the Buddhists and also their denial for *Brahminical* orthodoxy and the supremacy of *Vedas*, the orthodox *Brahmins* and ruling class became perplexed. On the other side the local Hindu ruler of Somegupta dynasty, being the patrons of *Shaiva* cult were eager to spread the worship of Lord Siva. So in this context *Danda Nata* is a result of compromise of the upper and lower caste and the tribal people. Perhaps it was an alternative but socially more desirable and acceptable strategy to promote *Shaivism* at the folk level.

So it can be said that parochialization or localization has gained momentum and element of great tradition in order to perpetuate themselves, have gone downward and mixed with the element of little tradition. So the question which continuously arises is that, what visual mind is working behind the formation and performance of this folk art? Is it influenced by *Shaivism*? *Shaktism*? *Tantric Buddhasim*? Or it is a simple folk culture or the fusion of these four? The *Shaivism* actually needed a structural adjustment in folk tradition at a time of Hindu Revivalism. Moreover it was believed to be helpful in promoting *Shaivism* among the lower untouchable caste groups of in these regions of Western Odisha. Notably, Sanskritised tradition arise under the efforts and Patronization of Hindu Rulers (Pasayat, 1982). This is also the time up commencement of *Tantrism* after the decadence of *Budhhism*. So it can be concluded that *Danda Nata* may be a very interesting way of assimilation of the above. From the field it has been observed that the *Bhoktas Danda Nata* are required to wear sacred threads during this period of 13 days and they get it after the completion of *Homa* by the village priest. So it has been revealed that these *bhoktas* are somehow sanskritized for these 13 days along with the habit of eating vegetarian food and also for their taboo in alcohol consumption and leading family life.

As it has been described and discussed earlier, *Danda Nata* is sharply divided into four dissimilar phases among which first three are related with natural objects like earth, water and fire. The last phase, which is rather a dramatic performance, is somewhere related to two very famous mythical characters Hara-Parvati (*Suangas danda*) along with the representatives from different tribes and lower caste groups. Somewhere because of the influence of *Vaishnavism*, this dramatic phase is related to the *Leela* of another two famous mythical characters Radha and Krishna. So though the major motivation behind the performance of this strange dance form is to please Lord *Siva* in form of meditation, lots and lots of elements of folk culture have also been incorporated in this which no one can deny. The first three phases of *Danda Nata* clearly reflect the worship of natural objects like land water and fire. No one can negate the immense necessity of land and water for a simple agricultural folk group and also about their fear for the destructive power of fire. The description of *Danda Nata* and every physical activity of it though reflect rigorous physical torture on the part of the devotees, locally known as *Bhoktas* to please Lord *Siva*, and Kali some ways to get rid of health and social problems, an anthropological mind cannot get satisfied with only this etic aspect. The analysis of the deeper and inner aspect of this dance form reveals the fact that, it is not only a form of folkway to worship Lord *Siva* by the tribal and lower caste people, rather to increase fertility of land by

worshipping Earth, Water and Fire God and Goddesses. As per *Dhuli Danda* is concerned, we find two types of physical exercises in it; one is pure and simple physical exercise which is mainly related with the warming up the bodies of the *Bhoktas* and the rigorous physical activities, which takes place in the later part. These exercises are also performed to get rid of different germs of diseases as it is performed under scorching sun of April. Expressive physical exercise as implicated from its name, is mainly performed to express some day to day economic activities which is generally practiced in an agricultural community like sweeping the floor, sprinkling plants with water, sowing seeds, forming a *Kali* and *Siva* temple (showing respect to the God and Goddesses of fertility), forming a well (source of water for irrigation), forming a weaving loom (another material object of economy and used in day to day life of a simple folk community), forming a agricultural field and also forming the main agricultural implement plough.

So again instances of day to day economy of a folk community is revealing and it can be said that there must be a simple folk agricultural mind behind the origin of this peculiar cultural activities which have been represented in a shell of folk dance form *Danda Nata*. The close physical contact between the *danduas* that is required in performing these exercises can be seen as an expression of the egalitarian ethos of the dance and again we find another economic characteristic of a folk community, communism. Contact of the sweat of these *danduas* and the dust of earth also symbolizes the fertility cult. In Western Odisha fertility cult is symbolized by the wet spots of sweat on ground. If we move to the next sub-phase of *Dhuli Danda*, which is locally and popularly known as *pranks*, the dominance of agricultural economy again can be found. Simplest things of a day to day social and economic life of a Folk community, like leveling of road or making of well or weaving, ploughing or erotic interaction between a farmer husband-wife and making a temple of Lord *Siva* or Goddess *Kali*, are symbolically expressed through different dramatical acts in this sub-phase. Generally two features are common in every prank. The first one is that, there will be usually two actors who are opposing and dialoguing with each other and the second is, these actors always stand in a hierarchical relationship. The most interesting aspect of this *Prank* act is that, a pure dominance and supremacy of upper caste is reflected in each of this. On the other hand, through the prank related to farmer and his wife only a simple day to day village life can be visualized.

*Pani Danda* which is the next phase of *Dhuli Danda*, is related with water. It can be analyzed in two ways. The first is that, the *bhoktas* has gone through this phase to find pure sand (which can be only found under water) to make *Siva linga* and the second is, it can be visualized as a form of water worship from a passive sense. In the phase of *Agni Danda*, the *Bhoktas* or devotees perform *Tandava Nritya* holding the flaming *Danda* in their hand. According to mythological evidence, the *Tandava Nritya* of Lord *Siva* is the symbolical manifestation of destruction. So *Agni Danda* can be visualized as nothing but the worship of Fire and God of destruction (*Pralaya*) *Siva*. As it is discussed earlier, the last phase of *Danda Nata* is a theatrical performance which comprises of two types, *Suanga Danda* and *Leela Danda*. Where Binika Block of Sonepur District celebrates *Leela Danda* and, *Suangas Danda* is

performed in the Ulunda Block. In *Suangas Danda* we find pure blending of folk and urban tradition, as the characters in this performance are taken from both tribal and non-tribal caste society. On the other hand, the dance style followed in it has been derived from nature, resembling the dance style of birds and animal. Moreover the clothes of the *patrasoura* and *patrasourani* (Characters of *Suanga Danda*) are decorated with the leaves which advocates as cloth indicates the influence of folk culture.

In *Suangas danda* except *Binakara* and *Binakarani* all characters belong to lower communities such as scheduled tribes and scheduled castes. Though the style of performance and worshipping pattern in this theatrical performance is based on tribal culture, the most interesting feature which can be visualized in this performing art is that, the character *Binakara* most surprisingly utter Sanskrit hymn for praying different God and Goddess which is a major characteristic of Brahminical style of worship. So tribal as well as non-tribal cultural elements somewhat got mixed in the different parts of this dramatic act and the characters portrayed from different strata of Hindu Society support this fact. But their devotion towards the society and culture is purely indigenous. In all of the segments of *Suanga Danda* we find the characters belonging from untouchable caste and tribal communities are worshipping Lord *Siva* and Goddesses *Parvati*. So it can be somewhere concluded that these are those instances when once a year the lower caste and tribal people are getting a chance to worship an elite god. While visualizing and analyzing *Leela Danda* which is purely based on *Vaishnavite* culture, we find that Lord *Krishna* here is getting considered as the creator of the universe and loving this creator is the only way to salvation. So where the motivation and vision behind *Suangas Danda* is based on deep meditation and punishment, in *Leela Danda* it is based on Love.

### Conclusion

Now a day's *Danda Nata* is being a vanishing art in spite of its uniqueness in its dance style, pattern of Drama and music which is a perfect blend. Though it is a kind of *brata* in which the participants observe strict discipline, it acts more as a social messenger. In Western Odisha it is the only performing

art where different communities participate without any discrimination. On the other hand, *Danda Nata* can be also visualized as a secular institution having egalitarian ethos with the strong traces of anti-casteism. For this reason we can consider this Dance Form not only as a Dance but the product one's visual mind, that mind which was actually making a strong protest against the orthodoxy of caste oriented society and the supremacy of Brahmins who were once the only owners of the right to worship elite God and Goddess. The main motivation behind this folk theatre is to remove superstitions and blind faith in the society apart from repeating deep faith in God. Being actually a folk art it teaches the people the art of simple living and simple thinking and communism where everyone has equal right over everything. As an instance of this, we find that in this strange folk art form except the characters of Gods and Goddesses all other characters are human characters belonging from the lowest ranks of the society and even folk characters.

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