

RESEARCH

Published in Vihangama Vol. II No. 3 October - December 1994

Pandava Dance: A Performative Text

There is an enormous variety of the Indian folk tradition, with relation to its socio-economic, political and cultural history. Born of these cultural contexts, the theatre forms converge and diverge at several stages.



The folk Theatre in Garhwal Himalaya, gradually grew and developed within the cultural context, reflecting the patterns and sub-patterns of the culture. Many share broad themes such as love, hatred, victory, valour and regaining lost empires. But the most extensive body of folk performance is that based on the Mahabharata tales, popularly known as the 'Pandava Nrta' or the Pandava dance theatre. The subject is presently being studied under the lokaparampara programme of the Janpada Sampada Division, where the main thrust is to study and explore all the fields of cultural knowledge minutely, with a view to understanding the functions of different societies and culture in their totality.

The Pandava dance theatre illuminates social issues and informs local culture more perhaps than any other text. The folk version of the epic Mahabharata is constantly cited to explain almost everything from the nature of polyandry to the well being of the community through song and dance sequence and spreads the message of peace and harmony by possession, which emphasize the presence of divinity, that is constantly present and solemnise the whole sequence of the performance.

The textural or classicist structure of the Mahabharata epic composed by Ved Vyasa is a unified thematic representation. However, there are variation found all over India, especially in the oral representation of the Garhwal Himalayas manifested in the form of the Pandava Dance performance, an enactment of the ethical history transmitted through the performative art. All the Mahabharata characters, particularly the five Pandava brothers, their mother Kunti and Draupadi their consort are recognised by these dance forms which are performed by the folk artists who personify these characters and are also possessed by them.

Although there are certain variations in these dances in different regions of Garhwal which may be the reflection of continuously changing living traditions. The classicist or textual version of the epic Mahabharata is the structure consisting of innumerable episodes, reflecting the perception of various communities. The epic has usually four aspects: oral, performative, written and pictorial traditions. These aspects however do not have equitable presence and there is a great amount of variance in this respect. The Mahabharata tradition is present in folk form in the Garhwal Himalayas and it's dominating aspects are oral and performative, preserved in the religious folk songs knowing as 'Jagars' which are sung throughout the night by 'Jagari Purohit' accompanied by the drummers, locally known as 'Das' or 'Ouji' and the dances by the 'Paswa' or medium personifying the characters and the characteristic dance of the individual Pandavas and their consort Draupadi.

The two aspects are most vibrant and overshadow the other two aspects, but all the same they co-exist and interact amongst themselves by making the distinction between folk and classical irrelevant which is the true embodiment of nature and the role of art in the lifestyles of the people, preserved in the living continuance of the Mahabharata, present in the form of the Pandava dance and theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas.

Richa Negi