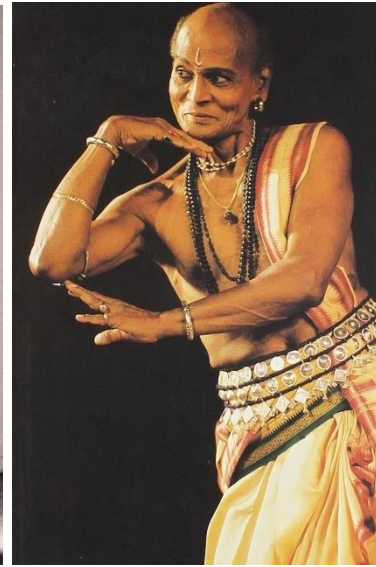




INTACH  
CLASSICAL DANCES OF INDIA

*Odissi*



“The graceful mudras,  
The expressions of this dance,  
The beautiful dresses of dancers,  
Glazing in lights;  
Magnificent Silver Ornaments,  
And graceful positions;  
The flawless tradition of Odisha,  
Odissi.”

**DID YOU KNOW?**

In 2012, 555 dancers did a 28-  
minutes long Odissi performance  
to enter the Guinness Book of  
World Records!

**Odissi Dance** is one of the eight classical Indian dances. This ancient dance form is mainly dedicated to the Vaishnava cult. Its existence in antiquity can be evidenced through the innumerable sculptures in dancing poses in the ancient Hindu temples of Odisha!

## MYTHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF DANCE

According to Abhinaya Darpana by Nandikeswar, at the request of the Indra, Brahma created the fifth Veda - the Natya Veda, by practicing which one could get both religious and material benefits, while contributing good ideas to humanity. The Natya Veda was created with dialogues from Rig Veda, music from Sama Veda, 'abhinaya' from Yajur Veda, and sentiments and moods from Atharva Veda. Brahma handed the finished work to Bharatmuni, who later exhibited Natya, Nritya and Nritya before Lord Shiva accompanied by Gandharvas and Apsaras.



## HISTORY OF ORIGIN OF ODISSI DANCE

Legend has it that at the time of the ceremonial installation of the deities in the Jagannath temple in Puri, gods and goddesses had come down from heaven to participate in the holy festival. Rambha, the celestial dancer, and two Gandharvas had attended and danced on the occasion as well! It is believed that the Devadasis learnt the art of dance from them, and the tradition of Odissi dance in the temple as an act of devotion is supposed to have continued since then.

Odissi dance is one of the earliest classical Indian dances on the basis of archaeological evidence, the most outstanding being the Ranigumpha Cave of 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. in Udayagiri, Odisha. Scholars have dated these caves and their writings/carvings to be earlier than the writing of the Natya Shastra. Odissi dance appears in sculptural form from the earliest temples of the 7<sup>th</sup> century to those of the 14<sup>th</sup> century! By the time of the Konark Temple, the Odissi style had developed with distinctive body manipulations. With the rise of Vaishnavism in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Radha Krishna cult became the chief inspiration for this dance form. Besides the glorious work of Jayadeva, Gajapati and Emperor Kapilendra, songs and lyrics composed by Upendra Bhauj, Kabisurya Baladev Rath, Gopal Krishna Pattanaik and Banamali Das are significant to the literature of Odissi Dance!



Depiction of a Dance Party at the Ranigumpha Cave in Udayagiri. The dancer on the left is posed in a typical Odissi stance, that of the *abhang* with the bent knee and waist.

## ODISSI THROUGH HISTORICAL LITERATURE

Abhinaya Chandrika is an ancient treatise on Odissi dance. It was written by Maheswar Mohapatra under the royal patronage of Sriman Narayan Deva of Khemundi kingdom in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The text deals with the Mudras, techniques, rhythm, costume, ornaments and makeup of Odissi dance!



## MAHARIS AND GOTIPUAS

The modern-day Odissi dance traces its routes to the dances performed by the Maharis and Gotipuas. The institution of Maharis or female attendants attached to the temples for dancing and singing dates back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The Maharis had to go through a ritual marriage with Lord Jagannath called Saribandhan, in which a piece of silk cloth, taken from Lord Jagannath, was tied around the Mahari's head in a symbolic 'tying of the knot'. When the dance of the Maharis slowly declined due to various reasons, Gotipuas (literally meaning 'a single boy') were trained to carry on their traditions. During the Gotipua dance presentation, young boys dressed in female costumes. It



*Maharis*

is largely due to these Gotipuas that Odissi dance is alive today and as a matter of fact, the leading exponents of this dance form, such as Kelucharan Mohapatra and Mayadhar Raut, were actually Gotipuas in their youth!



*Gotipuas*

## TYPES OF ODISSI COMPOSITIONS

There are mainly five types of Odissi dance compositions.

1. Mangalacharan - In this composition, the dancer enters the stage with her hands in the 'pushpanjali' (literally meaning 'offering of flowers') mudra, and symbolically offers flowers and prayers ('bhoomipranam') to the earth. This is followed by an invocation of the Gods. The composition ends with fast-paced dance moves and a three-fold salutation - to God, accompanying musicians and Guru, and finally, the audience.
2. Battu-nritya - This composition is a vigorous style of pure dance based on Shaivite themes.
3. Pallavi - They are pure dances emphasizing the silhouettes of the dance, and include several frozen postures of great beauty!
4. Abhinaya - As the name suggests, this composition uses drama and facial expressions.
5. Moksha - The final composition in the Odissi repertoire is aptly called Moksha. Faster in rhythm than the other compositions, this vigorous style is considered extremely difficult!



## ODISSI JEWELRY AND COSTUME



This traditional, silver-filigree jewelry style is 500 years old! Pieces include the *Seenthi*, armlets, bangles, *ghungroo* or ankle bells, earrings, necklaces, and an elaborate belt.



The traditional headgear is made only in the city of Puri! It is made from dried reeds called *sola*, in a tradition called the *Sola Kama*.



The Saree worn by Odissi dancers are characterized by traditional prints of Odisha - temple borders, intricate designs and a shiny embellishment. Generally, the Sambalpuri and Bomkai Sarees are preferred. Nowadays, 'stitched costumes' are also used!



### MUSIC, TAAL AND INSTRUMENTS

The Odissi orchestra consists of a pakhawaj player, singer, flutist, sitar or violin player, and a manjira player. The music includes poetic renditions from Jayadeva's Gita Govinda, poems of Upendra Bhanja, Baladeva Ratha, Banamali and Gopal Krishna.

The compositions are primarily rendered in Odissi Taals (such as Jhampa, Atta and Ektali) and Dakshin Saptatala.



Sanjukta Panigrahi, and her accompanying orchestra.

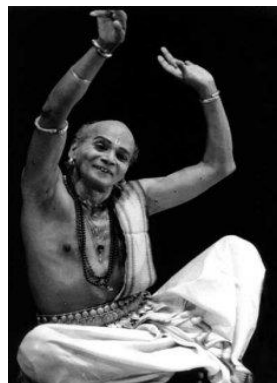
## REVIVAL OF ODISSI DANCE

At the turn of Indian independence, the future of the dance style looked bleak. By 1952, only nine Maharis remained. Further, without the right patronage and training, the Gotipua form had also declined. A few sensitive gurus, scholars and dancers tried to revive Odissi from this sorry state of affairs. Amongst the Gurus who significantly contributed to the revival of Odissi, of notable mention are Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Guru Devaprasad Das, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra and Guru Mayadhar Raut.



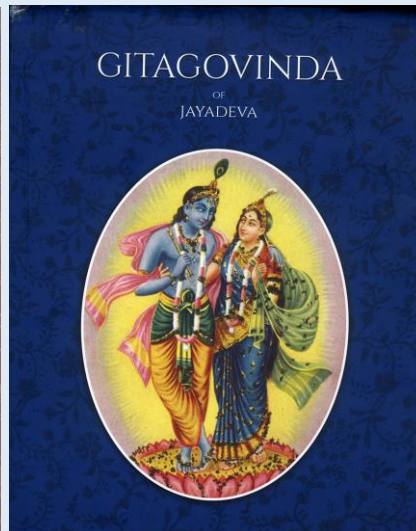
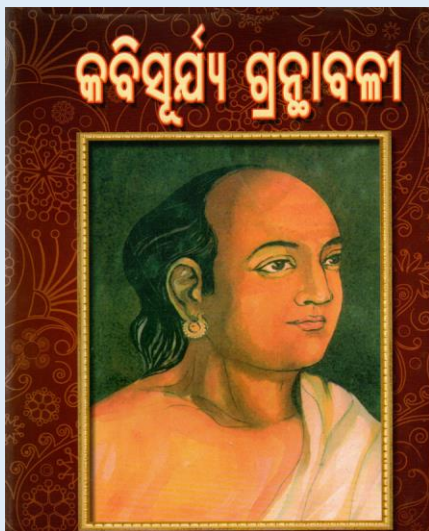
## LEADING EXPONENTS

Some of the exceptional Odissi exponents are Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, Guru Mayadhar Raut, Sonal Mansingh, Madhavi Mudgal, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Sujata Mohapatra, Geeta Mahalik, Minati Mishra, and Aruna Mohanty.



## ACTIVITY CORNER

1. Find out the characteristic features shared by Odissi and Chau dances.
2. MUDRA PLAY! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfAAyun1bTI>  
Watch this video and learn some of the mudras used in Odissi dance!  
Use the mudras that you have learned to tell any popular story, such as the one with the rabbit and the tortoise.
3. Odissi Dance extensively refers to poems and compositions by medieval writers and poets. Research on some of these texts - their history, writer, content, writing style, etc.



## REFERENCES

Course Material from Devarchana Kala Mandir  
Indian Dance for the Caribbean (illustrated)- Sandra Sookdeo  
Present & Future of Odissi - Jiwan Pani  
Images from wikipedia.org, puratattva.in, amrita.edu, amazon.in, odishashop.com, pinterest.com  
deepamodissi.com  
feminismindia.com  
yourquote.in  
timesofindia.indiatimes.com  
ccrtindia.gov.in