



# AN INTRODUCTION TO TRIBAL DANCES OF INDIA

*Dr. Robin. D. Tribuwan and Pt. Nanda Kishor Kapote*

## INTRODUCTION

Man has always expressed his feelings in movement, and dancing is one marking of the oldest forms of man's emotional expressions. Dance is also a means of the crisis of life or encouraging the crops or healing the sick soul and body. Behind many ritual dances, is the belief that it is through the dance that man speaks directly to his Gods.

As rightly pointed out by Cavendish (1983:589) in the ecstasy of the dance, man bridges the charm between this and the other world, to the world, to the realm of demons, spirits and Gods captivated and entranced he busts his earthly chains and trembling and feels himself in time with all the world.

Dance, in ritual settings becomes part of these powers beyond might of man and has several functions. It becomes a sacrificial rite, a charm, a prayer, and a prophetic vision. It summons and dispels the forces of nature and heals the sick, links into the dead to the chain of their descendants, it assures sustenance, luck in the chase, victory in battle, it blesses the fields and tribes. It is a creator, preserver, steward and guardian.

Symbolism in dance forms varies from one society to another. A question that haunts a lay man's mind, is that, why do people dance? There are several explanations to this question. These are:

- (i) Most people dance simply to have fun or to entertain others.
- (ii) For some, dancing provides one of the most personal and effective means of communication and romance.
- (iii) People dance to celebrate success, harvest, achievements, etc.

- (iv) Throughout human history, dancing has been used in worship.
- (v) Dancing often serves to create a feeling of unity among the participants.
- (vi) People dance to invoke demons, spirits and deities.
- (vii) Dances are performed to recreate past history or myth.

Odom Selma (1983:18) states that, social scientists believe that dancing may have played an important part in hunting and many other activities of pre historic life. One of the major reasons as to why social scientists study dances of various cultures is, because the kinds of dances people do and how and why they do them, reveal much about culture.

### Type of Dancing

There are two major kinds of dancing, namely:

- (1) Theatrical dancing
- (2) Social dancing

- (1) Theatrical dancing is performed for entertainment of spectators. Theatrical dance forms include, modern dance, musical comedy dances, and tap dancing. Theatrical dances may take great personal satisfaction in creating something beautiful. However, their own enjoyment and need for self expression are important than their ability to interpret the dance effectively for the audience.
- (2) In Social dancing, the participants dance for their own pleasure rather than for entertainment of the audience. These are main types of social dances. Most of them have specific steps, rhythm and meanings as well.

All types of theatrical and social dancing involve movement, energy, rhythm and design.

- (a) Movement is the action of the dances as they use their bodies to create organized patterns.
- (b) Energy provides the force needed to perform movement.
- (c) Rhythm is the pattern of timing around which the dance movement is organized. Most dance movement is related to the rhythm of accompanying music.
- (d) Design refers to visual pattern made by the movements of a dancer's body.

Let us now take a look at some of the concepts and definitions of Dance.



## Concepts and Definitions of Dance

According to Martin John (1968:701), "dance is an externalization of emotional energy by means of muscular movement". It is practised not only by men in every degree of civilization and culture, but also by many types of animals, especially birds. Its purpose may generally be said to be the expression of concepts and experiences that transcend the rational means of expression of the particular individual.

In her article, in the World Book Encyclopedia (1983: 18), Odom Selma, has defined dancing, "as an act of moving the body in rhythm, usually in time to music". She further states that, dancing is both an art and a form of recreation. As an art a dance may tell a story, set mood, or express an emotion. As a form of recreation, dancing has long provided fun, relaxation, and companionship.

## Primitive Forms of Dancing

In primitive society dancing plays an important role and part in every phase of activity. Among primitive men the mystery surrounding all natural phenomena gave rise to tribal celebrations of every event of any importance in the life of an individual and of the group as an affair of religious as well as social moment. These celebrations were frequently accompanied by rituals of protection or dedication, as well as by ceremonies of purely tribal significance and personal expressions of joy or grief. That, these rites should have found form in dances is entirely logical, for even the most natural movements, when backed by intense feelings, assume larger dimensions and stranger stresses and, as the outgrowth of a particular purpose instead of merely generic excitement, step naturally into rhythm and form.

On no occasion in the life of primitive peoples could the dance be dispensed with birth, circumcision, and the conservation of maidens, marriage, death, planting and harvesting, the celebrations of chieftains, hunting, war and feasts, the changes of moon and sickness—for all of these the dance is needed—the dance in its essence is simply life on a higher level (C. Sachs—work history of dance).

## Tribal Folk Music and Dance

In their book entitled, "Tribal Cultures of India", Vidyarthi L.P. and Rai Binay (1979: 330), have stated, that folk songs, music and dance of the tribals are a composite whole, which is one of the dominant characteristic of their culture. They further state, that in tribal folk songs, verse and music go together and the musical aspect is much more reflected in practice.

As a form of recreation, dancing has, provided fun, relaxation, and companionship. Secondary literature on dance forms in different human societies has provided a wide range of theoretical and conceptual understanding. As regards to India dance forms Sidiya Kathak, Bharat Natyam, Kuchipudi, Kathakali, etc., a lot of research work has been

published. However, there is hardly any publication on the dance forms of tribals in India. Passing references of tribal dances have been made by Anthropologists, Ethnologists and other Ethnographers in the Monographs written. Thus, to bridge this theoretical and conceptual gap in Anthropology, Art, and allied social sciences this edited work has been undertaken keeping in view the following aims.

### Aims of the Book

This book aims to :

- (i) Provide an ethnographic of the tribal societies under study.
- (ii) To present an emic view as perceived by the tribals themselves about their dance forms.
- (iii) Unravel various types of tribal dances.
- (iv) Explore the correlation between dances of the great traditions with those of the little (tribal) traditions.
- (v) To study the symbolism in tribal dancing.
- (vi) Understand the various factors and influences, as a result of which some of the tribal dance traditions are changing and vanishing too.
- (vii) To provide interdisciplinary theoretical insights in this area of study.
- (viii) Finally, to provide tips for preservation and documentation of this vanishing cultural heritage of tribal India.

Before getting in to analyzing and interpreting tribal dance forms in India, let us quickly review literature on primitive and tribal forms of dancing.

The tribal people go on singing four to eight lines of a song for hours together, with the help of folk music. The simple catchy folk-tunes conveying the feelings and sentiments of their ancestors, their lives and thoughts, their activities and achievements, their morals and discipline are of great value.

The tribal folk songs are of several kind. These are life-cycle songs, sung at different occasions like birth, marriage and death: moral songs, teaching morals; thoughtful songs, dealing with different season like the spring, the rains, etc., occasional songs associated with festivals and religious songs sung at the time of offerings to deities. Again there are working songs which help in synchronizing the work. Thumar of the Oraons and Mundas which are sung at the time of planting paddy and many craft songs, for example, mat



making, ploughing, basket making, etc., are described in simple folk songs (Vidyarthi and Rai: 1975:330).

As regards to the classifications of tribal dances, Vidyarthi and Rai (1975) have classified tribal folk dances in terms of formation into:

### (1) Group Dances

In group dances, the dancers are linked to one another in a certain manner by the hands, by the waist or the shoulders. These dances are found mostly in Himalayan and central India. The best known are those in the shape of a circle or column. The 'Circular dances' that usually go by the name of "Hand dances" comprise, generally speaking movements accessible to both sexes. The column dances are dynamic, their movements are more complicated, their tempo being more sustained.

### (2) Couple Dances

They are either in column formation or without any special formation. Generally speaking, the revolving in couples prevails: the girls make pirouettes and men virtuously movements. Among couple dances, the most important group is represented by yatra and chhau, very frequent and particularly in Bengal and Bihar.

### (3) Single Dances

These are formed by a single dancer. It is not very common in tribal areas.

While Vidyarthi and Rai (1979) have provided classification of tribal dances on the basis of formation, Iyer Krishna and Ratnam Bala (1961: 210) have divided tribal dance into three categories, namely (1) War and Hunt Dances, (2) Sacred Dances, and (3) Social dances, connected with seasonal festivals, marriage, funeral, etc. Let us briefly glance at each of the above mentioned category.

#### (i) War and Hunt Dances

Dances belonging to this type are performed only by a few tribes. The Khasis and Nagas are well known for their martial dance. Nagas, perform, what is called the head-hunting dance, in full war paint of successful head-hunters, and to the accompaniment of tribal chants. It is a group item reflecting the community spirit. Survivals of war dances are found among the Garos, Bhils and Oraons.

#### (ii) Sacred Dances

The Sacred dance is perhaps the most common among the tribals. The object around which it is performed is sacred one, an idol, an altar, a sacrificial victim, a holy tree or a well. A number of dances of the forest tribes are ritualistic in origin, devised mainly for the propitiation of and will of gods, and ancestor spirits.

**(iii) Social Dances**

These dances are connected with seasons, festivals, marriage, funeral, etc.

**(iv) Marriage Dances**

Interestingly marriage dances are found among Santals, Ho, Bhuiya and numerous other tribes.

**(v) Funeral Dances**

Dancing at the death of a person is prevalent among several tribes. Among the Badagas, mourners dance around the corpse to the music of the Kata band, near Maler, relations removing their turbans as a mark of respect during the first three circles. Most of the male dancers are dressed in gaudy petticoats, and smart turbans.

**Towards a New Classification of Tribal Dances**

Based on both secondary and primary data available on the forms of tribal dances we would like to propose a comprehensive classification, which is a result of emic and etic perceptions.

Our classification of tribal dances has been evolved on the basis of :

- (i) Formation
- (ii) Cultural occasion or Event based dances.
- (iii) Tribal dances associated with productive, preventive, promotive and destructive magic/rituals.
- (iv) Dances classified on the basis of main musical instrument played during the dance.
- (v) Relationship renewal dances.
- (vi) Age and sex based dances.
- (vii) Dances performed to recreate myths.
- (viii) Dances clubbed with theatrical performance such as traditional drama, recitation, plays, etc.
- (ix) Dances depicting heroic deeds.



- (x) Dances associated with foraging behaviour.
- (xi) Inter-Tribal Community Dances.
- (xiii) Tribe-caste dances and Music performances.
- (xiii) Dances, Imitating Animal Behaviour.
- (xiv) Seasonal Dances.

### (1) Formation Based Dances

As aptly pointed out by Vidyarthi and Rai (1979 ) based on formations the tribal dances may be classified into:

- (i) Group dances (ii) Couple dances (iii) Single dances.

### (2) Cultural Occasion or Event Based Dances.

Tribal dances can also be classified on the basis of important cultural occasions or events. For instance,

- (a) Festival Dances—Found among Santhals, Bhils, Pawara, Oraons, etc.
- (b) Marriage Dances—Bhils, Gonds, Dubla, Dhodia.
- (c) Funeral Dances—Madias, Gonds, etc.
- (d) Family or Community Ritual Dances—Found among most Tribes.

### (3) Tribal Dances Associated with Productive, Preventive, Promotive and Destructive Magic/Rituals.

There is not a single tribe on the face of the earth which does not perform productive, preventive, promotive and destructive rituals.

- (i) By productive, we mean, rituals of fertility of crops, plants, animals and human beings.
- (ii) Whereas preventive rituals are those ritual and ceremonial actions performed to prevent an individual, family, a community or village from diseases, illness and misfortunes.
- (iii) Promotive Rituals are these actions or gestures performed to promote health, growth and welfare of an individual, family, community or village.

- (iv) Destructive Rituals—Actions or gesture ritually or ceremonially performed to destroy evil falls under this category.

Examples of all the above dance forms are given in the various papers written by Anthropologists and other social scientists.

- (v) Dances classified on the basis of Main Musical Instrument played during the dance.

The tarpa dance of the Warlis of Gujarat and Maharashtra is called so, because of the 'wind' musical instrument played during the dance called "tarpa". Yet, another example, namely, the 'Dhol' dance of the Thakars, Koknas, Warlis, Katkaris, Mahadev Kolis, is called so because of drum (Dhol) played during the dance. The Tur (wind instrument) and Thali (Cymbal) dances of the Dubla and Dhodia is yet another example, of this category of dances.

- (vi) Relationship Renewal Dances

Most tribal communities perform dance rituals to renew relationship with ancestral spirits who are believed to visit the village and their living family members once a year. The Dhambdi dance of the Thakars and Katkaris which is performed on "Pitra Amosha" is a classic example of this. The Dumbada dance of the Gonds, which is performed 15 to 20 years after the death of an old man or woman who lives for 60 to 70 years, is performed to celebrate his (soul's) visit to the family.

In fact as mentioned by Dr. B.V. Bhanu and Dr. R.D. Gambhir in their paper on vanishing Ghotuls, "that a number of married Kondh tribesmen visit their unmarried girl friends in the youth dormitories to renew old contacts, through dances, in the Ghotul.

- (vii) Age and Sex Based Dances

It has been also observed that certain dances among some tribal societies are exclusively performed by the males or females, or either they are performed by the youngsters or elderly people. The 'Gauri' dance among Thakurs, Warlis, and Katkaris is performed by youngsters only, whereas the Dhamdi dance among the Thakars and Katkaris is only performed by the elderly folk. Similarly there are dances which are exclusively sex based the Dhol dance of the Kukna is performed by males only. Yet another aspect as for sex difference in tribal dance and music is that, most musical instruments are played by males only.

- (viii) Dances Performed to Recreate Myth

Tribal dancing floors are schools of enculturation and socialization wherein the younger generation is taught customs and traditions through oral history. Dances are a



base to disseminate traditions through the word of mouth. Myths are actually recreated through dance formations and movements.

The Kambad dance of the Dublas, and Warlis, is a classic example of this. There is a myth among the Warlis, that once upon a time, the goddess of corn (kansari) was fed up with humanity, so she went into the mountain and hid herself. Her going away brought famine, hence not only the human beings, but gods were also worried.

Gods held a meeting and Narandev decided to find her. After a tedious effort, he found "Kansari goddess" sleeping naked under a rock. He then went to please her, but failed miserably. Narandev reported this to other gods. Then they decided to dance so as to please her, and performed 'Kambad' dance (fertility dance).

The moral behind this myth is to teach the youngsters that a seed without earth and water cannot produce grains. Therefore they must learn the significance of producing grains as well as children. Kambad dance is specifically performed by Warli males and the hip movements in this dance depict sexual intercourse of gods with Kansari as mentioned in the myth.

#### (ix) Dances Clubbed with Theatrical Performances

The Gavari dance of Bhils of Mewad and Tamasyu of the Mahadev Kolis of Maharashtra are dance forms combined with singing, drama and recitations, performed to socialize the younger generation.

#### (x) Dances Depicting Heroic Deeds

War and hunting dances of the Nagas, Bhils and Oraons are classic examples of tribal dances depicting heroic deeds.

#### (xi) Dances Depicting Foraging Behaviour

Forest dwelling tribes usually have dances of this sort, wherein scenes or actions of collecting and or gathering food is depicted. The Ghorpad dance of the Kolams, depict hunting of monitor—a reptile, so does the 'Shikari dance' of the Bhils—the honey bee.

#### (xii) Inter-Tribal Community Dances

Although tribals have been said to be living in geographical isolation as culturally distinct groups, they have been interacting with other tribal communities. Participation in certain collective communal functions is very common among some tribes. For example, the Bohada dance is performed by Koknas, Warlis, Malhar Kolis, Mahadev Kolis, Thakars, etc., together. So is the case with Dhol and Kambad dances of Thakars, in which Koknas and Warlis participate. Inter tribal community dances are therefore another category of

dances as observed in tribal society. These Dance forms perhaps may have developed to promote inter-tribal community harmony or solidarity.

#### (xiii) Tribe-caste Dance

Tribals living on the plains have been socially and economically interacting with the agrarian and other caste communities for ages. This sought of interaction has promoted friendship amongst them and hence villages where there is mixed population, comprising of tribal and caste communities we find members of both dancing together. Occasions such as marriages and festivals are best for this kind of an interaction. The Andhs of Yavatmal dance with Mahars and Mangs living in their village. These dance forms are cenit development.

#### (xiv) Dances Imitating Animals, Insects, Birds, etc.

Among the Kabui Nagas there are dances which are performed to depict behaviour of insects and birds. The honey bee and kirkits dances are best examples, depicting the food (honey) gathering behaviour of the honey bees and the noise made by kirkits. The Kabui also perform the horn bill (Langdai lam) dance to depict the behaviour of the bird. Indepth and inter-disciplinary studies on all the tribes of India may further open up vistas for developing a new classification of tribal dances.

#### (xv) Seasonal Dances

Holi—a fertival of fire marks the beginning of spring or summer. That is the time, when the tribals start preparing the land for cultivation, perform experiments to prophecya the behaviour of rains. Hence, tribals dance to welcome spring. Bhils, Pawaras are tribes who perform seasonal dances. Like summer, there are dances to welcome seasons, as well.

### Tribals Other Dances and Dances of the Great Traditions

Pandit Nanda Kishor Kapote, the co-author of this paper, and a renowned Kathak dancer, who is called as an expert to assess tribal dances performed by the tribals of Maharashtra during state level competition has found several technical similarities between tribal dances and the dances of the great traditions. He feels that the resemblance is in following aspects.

#### (1) Rhythm

Tribals have great sense of co-ordination between beats (tal) and tempo (lai). Some of the popular beats of the tribals are “Keherva” (8 beats), and Dadra (six beats). Besides, these they play other talas for dancing.



## (2) Steps and Footwork

Co-ordination of steps and footwork is considered very important in Kathak says Pt. Kapote. He states that a popular step known as padanyas having beats of Ta (1), Thai (2), Tatha (3). These steps are also found among tribal dances. However, they do not know the scientific or theoretical base behind this. They perform the steps for the sake of performing their dance.

Even the fast foot work (tat kar bol) which is prevalent in Kathak, i.e., Ta (1), Thai (2), Tatha (3) That (4), is very common among the Thakars, Katkaris, Dhorkolis, Koknas and other tribes of western Maharashtra.

## (3) Use of Ghungroo (Bells)

Most great traditional dances have the use of ghungroo. Dancers tie it on their ankles. The tribals too wear ghungroo, but tribes like Madias and Gonds tie big ghungroos on their waist and also on the knees. Well, that is the difference.

## (4) Tribal Songs and Music

Yet another observation done by the co-author of this paper and that is, tribal songs and music has a base of 'Ragas', which are prominent characteristics of the Hindustani and Karnatak music traditions.

## (5) Mudras

Few tribes, who combine dance with story telling and drama make use of basic mudras.

Finally, out of the seven dance forms of the great tradition, namely, Kathak, Bharat Natyam, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri and Odissi, Mohini Attam, tribal dances resemble Kathakali and Kathak to some extent. However, the styles of tribals have next developed due to lack of social interaction, with civilized world, lack of written script and so on.

## Tribal Music and Rhythm

Tribal music is an expression of inner life, of a musico-cultural tradition. Like dance forms, tribal music is yet another area, which needs to be explored from an interdisciplinary point of view.

Studies on tribal dances are incomplete, without understanding music. Hence, in this section of the paper an attempt has been made to provide relevant information on tribal music. Before getting into structural and cultural components of tribal music let us look into the various music instruments used by them.

Tribal musical instruments can be classified into following categories, namely:

- (i) Rhythm, (ii) String, (iii) wind, (iv) ido phones, (v) Membra phones, (vi) aerophones, (vii) Chordo phones, (viii) side rhythm instruments.

Some of the popular musical instruments played by tribals of Maharashtra are as follows:

### I. Rhythm Instruments

- (A) Dhol—Dhol is a big circular drum, which has dry skin of goats at both the ends. While playing this drum, the drummer uses sticks to beat right side, while fingers to play left side. Dhols are either kept on the ground or its string hung around the neck, while playing it. Drummer playing Dhol in the local dialect is usually known as “Dholya”.
- (B) Dholak—Dholak is a small drum of 1 ½ to 2 feet long with 6 to 10 inches diameter. It is made up of mango or banyan tree trunk. It is first made hollow later on, to put dry skin of goats on both the ends.

To tighten the skins at both the ends, tribals either use ropes or skin strings, so as to produce the required tune. It is played during group and couple dances.

#### (C) Pagai (Drum)

Pagai is yet another longish drum measuring up to 3 feet long. Its circular body is made up of baked clay on which goats skin is put. The diameter of the circles is 6 to 8 inches on the left circle, while 8 to 12 inches on the right side.

#### (D) Nagara

This is a drum played by the Pawaras and Bhils. It is a small drum, measuring up to 2 to 3 feet in length, while its diameter is 1 ½ to 2 feet. The Pawaras call it as ‘Tutadi’. It is played during weddings or Holi season by going from village to village collecting alms.

- (E) Duff—Duff is a different kind of a drum. Its diameter ranges from 1 ½ to 3 feet. Dry skin of goat or even cow is attached to a wooden circular structure. The breadth of this wooden ring is 6 to 8 inches. Duff is played only from one side.
- (F) Dhak—The famous ritual drum of the Warli tribe is played by shamans popularly known as “Dhak Bhagati.” This rhythm instrument is a small triangular drum played during wedding and harvest and other fertility rituals, to please the deities.

The main body of Dhak is made up of wood and cow’s skin is used on both the sides of the drum.



- (G) Mandar – Mandar is yet another longish drum played by the Madias, Gonds and the Bison Horn Madias of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The circular body is made up of teak wood, which is hollow from inside. Both the sides of the drum has goat's or cow's skin.
- (H) Dholki – Mostly played by the tribes of western Maharashtra, while performing 'Gauri' dance, during Holi season. Thakurs, Warlis, Dhorklis, Katkaris, etc., play this instrument.
- (I) Tibuli – A musical instrument made up of clay on which animal skin is stretched. Madias and Gonds play this instrument during Rela, Funeral and marriage dances. It is played with sticks.
- (J) Dhimki – Dhimki is more or less like Tibuli, but it is bigger in size and is played by the Korkus of Melghat region. It is a drum, whose body is made up of clay on which, animal skin is stretched. It is played with sticks.
- (K) Tabli – Musical instrument played by the Mahadev Koli, Thakars, Malhar Koli and Dhor Koli, as well. It is played while singing religious songs.
- (L) Sambule – Two drums attached to each other are played with sticks.

## II. String-Instruments

String instruments of the tribals are not as advanced as those of the classical Hindustani and Karnatak music cults, however, it cannot be firmly said that the present string instruments of the great traditions certainly have their roots or origin in tribal instruments. For, a number of tribal string instruments resemble with those of the great tradition. For example, 'gangli' of the Warlis resembles with 'bin and veena'. "Hirobai kingari" of the Thotis resembles "Sarangi". These and many other instruments resemble each other.

To mention a few, given below are examples:

- (A) Ghangli – As mentioned earlier this instrument is like 'bin' and 'veena'. It is made up of 'gourds' and bamboo. On the bamboo two or three strings are tied. It is played by 'Ghangli Shamans' on auspicious occasions, such as birth rituals, harvest rituals, during the worship of Kansari goddess, etc.
- (B) Hirobai Kingari – This instrument is played by the Thoti tribals, when they sing the heroic deeds of tribal kings mostly Gonds, etc. It resembles Sarangi. It is played like a violin or sarangi.
- (C) Tun-tune – A string instrument played by drama groups while singing and performing dramas.

### III. Wind Instruments

Some of the major wind musical instruments of the tribals are:

(A) Tarpa

This is a three-piece instrument found among the Warlis and also few tribes of western Maharashtra. It is like a saxophone. One needs to really blow a lot of air, continuously in this instrument to produce sound. This instrument is played during harvest season, i.e., Dashera and Diwali festivals season.

(B) Bigul

A famous wind instrument of the Madias and Gonds played, for communicating hunting and romantic signals. It is made up of Tad leaves and bronze.

(C) Flute

Flutes are common among the Madias, Gonds, Kolams, Korkus and other tribes of eastern Maharashtra.

(D) Pawri

Like tarpa, the Koknas have made a similar musical instrument known as 'Pawri', which is played from the centre of the ground. Whereas tarpa is played by blowing air from anterior end.

(E) Piri

Piri is made up of deer horn, bamboo and gourd. It's sound is melodious.

### IV. Other Instruments

Some of the other side rhythm instruments are:

(a) Ghungroo – Bells

(b) Kiletonda – Tinklers made from seeds of *entada gigantea*.

(c) Manjira – Clappers with bells, made of bronze.

(d) Zamlo – Another type of wooden clapper played in accompaniment of 'Dhol' (drum) by the Bhils and Pawars during indal puja.

(e) Tappa – A smaller wooden claps played as a side rhythm instrument.



- (f) Kirkis—A bamboo which is carved to make several grooves on it. The Pawaras play it as side rhythm instrument.

Well, this was a brief introduction of tribal musical instruments. Studies on structural aspects of tribal music have revealed that SA....., SA....., PA....., Ni....., are the Hindustani musical notes very common in tribal music.

Besides this our observation has revealed that beats (talas) like “keherva” and ‘Dadra’, i.e., eight and six beats are very common besides other taks. However, they have no idea of its theory, but play it perfectly well.

Here is a need to conduct research into structural and scientific components of tribal music.

### Tribal Dance Floors : Schools of Enculturation and Socialization

Dancing floors in tribal societies may have been schools of enculturation and socialization, wherein both participants as well as spectators learn several aspects of their culture including:

- (i) Types of dance forms and all rituals and ceremonies associated with them.
- (ii) Songs and their meanings.
- (iii) Creation myths.
- (iv) Inter-tribal and inter-caste relationships.
- (v) Methods of acquiring mates.
- (vi) Learn to play musical instruments.
- (vii) These and several other aspects of culture that are socially transmitted to the younger generation. Dance floors in tribal villages, reveal a lot about tribal cultures. Even if one analyzes songs sung and comprehend their meaning one can get down to the origin of that tribe and understand several aspects.

### A Word About Anticlock Movement

Tribal dances show a lot of variation in movements, but in most tribes anticlock-circular movement is very common. In the book captioned, “Medical World of the Tribals”, Tribhuwan Robin (1998) has interpreted this aspect as auspicious as viewed by tribals. They associate anticlock movement with movement of sun, moon, clouds, wind, stars, etc., around earth. Hence, all anticlock movements of tribals are found in auspicious, productive, promotive, preventive and promotive rituals of the tribals, and dance movements are no exception to this rule.

## Common Eco-Cultural Systems, Common Dance Forms

Tribes living in a common ecological and social environment tend to show similar dance traditions. This is perhaps due to the long term social contact with other tribal communities. Borrowing and exchange of music, melodies and rhythm could have taken place.

Thus, the 'Tarpa dance' among the Warlis of Maharashtra, Gujarat is also performed by the Malhar Kolis, Kokna (as Pawri dance), the Dhorkolis, etc. Similarly 'Behada' — the mask dance is performed by the Thakars, Koknas, Warlis, Bhils, Malhar Kolis and other tribes of Thane. Another example could be cited of the Rela a dance performed by the Madias.

Gonds, Kolams, Rajgonds, etc. The Dhamdi dance by Thakars and Katkaris performed to appease ancestral spirits. Now, the interesting aspect as observed by us, which may be further researched upon, is, "tribes having a lower socio-economic status tend to borrow music, melody, rhythm and dance forms from those having higher status.

## Variety and Variations in Dance Forms

Yet another observation which is worth placing on record, is the variation shown by one tribe, distributed in different eco-cultural settings of various states. For example, the Bhils, who are geographically, found in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra show a variety of dance forms.

The Bhils of Rajasthan perform Latui (stick) dance, which is not found in Maharashtra Bhils. Similarly the Chibali (marriage basket) dance is not prevalent among Bhils of Rajasthan. Secondly although hunting (Shikari) dance is common among Bhils, it is performed with a lot of variation in different states. In Maharashtra the Bhils have one or two swords and bow and arrows, whereas in Rajasthan each dancer has a sword or bows and arrows, while performing the hunting dance. It is quite possible that major tribes such as Gonds, Khonds, Santhals, Oraons who are distributed in more than one state may be showing a lot of variety and variation in their dance forms.

## Tribal Dances: Status, Continuity and Change

Before getting into understanding the changes that are occurring in tribal dance traditions, it is necessary to know the aspects around which the concept of change revolves. These are:

- (i) Geographical location of tribal communities and;
- (ii) The degree of social, economic, educational and technological changes that occurred in a tribe.



- (iii) Duration of stay, of a group or family or community in cities and towns due to permanent migration.
- (iv) Changes as a result of semi-nomadism or temporary mobility in cities and town.
- (v) Changes as a result of theatrical or stage performance. To throw light on the above factors let us look into each aspect carefully.

#### (i) Geographical Location of Tribal Communities

Based on geographical inhabitation of the tribes, we classify tribes into two categories, namely:

- (A) Tribals living in inaccessible and remote areas.
- (B) Tribals living on the plains.

Tribals living in remote areas have retained their original dance forms and the rituals associated with them. Whereas tribes living on the plains have borrowed several aspects from the Hindu caste farmers secondly because these tribal folk are in continuous contact with urban modern people and forces, therefore their dance forms are changing rapidly.

#### (ii) The Degree of Social, Educational, Technological and Economic Progress made by a Tribe

In every tribal state of India, one gets to see that some tribal communities are progressive as compared to others. These progressive tribal communities are no doubt undergoing rapid social, economic, technological and educational changes, as a result of which they are forgetting their traditional dance forms and music. Modern and Hindi film music is replacing the traditional songs, music, melodys and rhythm of the tribals.

#### (iii) Duration of Stay in Cities and Towns

Depending on the duration of stay of a group, or community in cities and towns, their life styles change. In this process tribals living in cities forget their music and dance traditions, and adapt to modern music and dances.

- (iv) Changes as a result of semi-nomadism or social mobility some tribes such as Katkaris, Gamits or Mavchis migrate to another district or state for six months or so in search of jobs and hence come in contact with urban world. Influence of modern and urban people and lack of contact with their kins from native place has brought about change in their dance traditions.

### (v) Changes as a Result of Theatrical/Stage Performance

These days a number of dance groups of various tribes are being summoned by NGO's and even government organizations to perform dances on the stage or in theatres. As a result of this following changes have occurred:

- (a) Use of costumes and cosmetics
- (b) Their performance is limited to certain time limit, hence they have become time conscious.
- (c) They have become competitive.
- (d) Dancing in cities and towns in theatres is taking a commercial turn.
- (e) New and extra-ordinary items such as acrobats, imitation of politicians, editors, teachers or government officials are being adopted by the tribals to make their dance different from other groups.
- (f) Use of musical instruments such as harmonium, tabla, flute, etc., for accompaniment, is gaining popularity.
- (g) Adopting costumes of caste groups and dancers of agrarian communities, after seeing their performances in cities like Delhi, Bombay, etc.

### EFFORTS TO PRESERVE TRIBAL DANCES

The Tribal Research and Training Institutes and the Tribal Development Department have played a pivotal role in preserving tribal dances by encouraging competitions, production of films, slides and photographs, etc., so far as NGO's are concerned, a few of them are working in this area. However, more needs to be done.

