



## Problem and prospects of Ganjam Folk art Forms : A case Study of Dasakathia

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Problem and prospects of Ganjam Folk art Forms: A case Study of Dasakathia Abstract  
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### Abstract :-

Ganjam, known for its numerous folk art forms, as the district had have been accommodated and preserved many folk art forms since a long period. Dasakathia is one of the popular native folk lore of Ganjam, existing since a long time. It is performed by two artistes where one is a singer (gayaka) and other one is supporting singer (Palia). The name Dasakathia derived from style of presentation as the performers of Dasakathia use the wooden clapper as the sole musical accompaniment called Dasakathia or Ramatali. In Dasakathia, themes are like Ramayana and Mahabharata presented in balled singing style. Once upon a time it was the main source of entertainment for the mass and also an income source for a particular community. But with passing time many other Medias entered in the arena like Radio, Cinema, and television, and presently Internet. After arrival of these Medias most of folk art forms are leading to extinct. So in present investigations it is aimed at (Dasakathia) understand the problems and prospects.

For data collection interview techniques have been followed, interviews conducted with the experts of the Dasakathia.

### Keywords :-

Ganjam, Dasakathia, wooden clapper, traditional media and pallia.

### Introduction :-

Ganjam, the district is known for its indigenous folk art forms. It is the place where the folk art's genealogy exists since aeons and what's enchanting is they are all native forms.

These folk art forms are like folk theater, folk dance and folk lore such as Prahalada Nataka, Rama Nataka, Radhaprema Lila, Krushna Prema Lila, Danda Nata, Sakhi Nata, Ghuduki Nata, Gahana, Bagha nata. One among them the folk lore Dasakathia is a unique and popular balled art form in the state. It is unique because of its exclusive characteristics among the other such balled art forms, as it is presented by only two artistes without any support of external musical instrument. For support the two artistes use specially designed six wooden plats made up of Seseu woods called Dasa-kathi. Among the two artists of Dasakathia, one is called Gayaka, the lead singer and the other one Bahaka or Palia or supportive singer, the Gayaka uses four wooden plats and the supportive singer, the Bahaka or Palia uses two wooden plates. Beautiful rhythm's generated by these two artistes using these plates. Another important part of Dasakathia is both the performers should have proficiency in singing, dancing and acting; lack in any of these qualities will make them an incomplete artiste.

In Dasakathia 26 Purans are presented including the epics like Ramayan, Mahabharata, and other mythological epics, along with that in Dasakathia, different episodes like Marana (means Demise) that is death or killing of different mythological characters are narrated to the audience, Harana (means kidnapping) are themes based on different kidnappings written in mythological epics such as Chandrakala Harana, Suryakanthi Harana, Madanabati Harana, Jamababati Harana etc. In Sarana (means sheltering or protection) such examples are like Dandiraja Sarana, Hariraja Sarana etc. along with that modern literatures of kabishamrat Upendra Bhajna, Kabisuriya Baladev Rath, Bhaktakabi Gopal Krushna and Madhusudan Dash's literatures are also performed.

As acknowledged before, the Balled singing Dasakahtia is completely based on music, so all the Tala(rhythms) of classical musics are utilized and the songs are composed as per the Indian classical musics. In Dasakatia generally used Ragas are like Kumudi, Jodi Paraja, Jhula and Kalasha . But most frequently used Ragas are Kalasha and Jhula as it is based on 14 words. Propitiously all the Dasakathia songs are composed with 14 words and the 14 words mathematically divided into seven and seven words between the lead singer and the supportive singer for smooth pursuance of the program. It is performed with the pitch of Mandar, Madhyama and Taraka, where the Gayaka or the lead singer always sings with Mandar and Madhyama, whereas the Pallia or supportive singer sings with Taraka for better synchronization.

### **History of Dasakathia :-**

As per the mythological believe the name Dasakathia reminisce us to mythological episodes of Ramayan. When Ayodha's king Ram Chandra waged a war against Lanka king Ravan to rescue Sita from his forceful detention, the army of Ravan approached to the battle field with beating drums. The sound of Thousands of drums was so vigorous that it created powerful seism in the atmosphere. The furious beats generated an air of panic around Ram's camp; meanwhile Hanuman approached Ram for the solution. Commander Sri Ram requested renowned architect of that time Biswakarama for the solution and Biswakarma prepared these two pieces of wooden clapper of sisau wood. Sri Ram's army entered the battle field by playing these two pieces of wooden clapper. This sound was more powerful than the drum beats which rejuvenated a new energy in Sri Ram's camp and finally the powerful army of Ravan was defeated by Sri Ram. After their victory Hanuman requested Sri Ram to name the new musical instrument which helped them to win the war over the powerful army of Ravan, meanwhile Laxmana approached and named this new instrument as Ramatalli as it was discovered by Sri Ram. But Hanuman proposed a new name with a prospective as he is the 'Dasa' means 'servant' of Ram and chanting Ram's name uninterruptedly by using these wooden clapper so the name should be given as Dasa-kathia. Since then the name Dasakathia was endured.

There is no certain chronicler about the inception of Dasakathia in a record form but like other histories Dasakathia is having some oral evidences. Basing on that, in present scenario many theories are surfacing about the beginning and nomenclature of Dasakathia. As per one theory, the district Ganjam is sharing the border with Andhra Pradesh since a long time and many Telugu communities live here from centuries. Lower Brahman categories of Telugu community so called 'Dashiri' have their profession as begging. They beg by incanting Harinam and use the wooden clapper as a supportive musical instrument. Since then Dasakathia was named after their community.

But there's one theory that has been unanimously accepted by the Dasakathia community. In 1986, Vice Chancellor of Berhampur University Prof. Benumadhava Padhy gave a new meaning to Dasakathia. He told, "Dande dande kandi kandi kari Abruta kariba" means the act of incanting the Vedic hymns on the streets by the artists is known as Dasakathia. Hearing that artistes present in that meeting gave standing applause and since that moment Dasakathia got a new meaning.

As mentioned before there has no written evidence about the history of Dasakathia, it is believed that the square one of Dasakathia begins towards the end of fifteen century that was started by many individuals belonging to various places of Ganjam. As per present performers in the beginning the balled singing style was adopted by the lower Brahman community as their profession. They were begging on the streets by singing different bhajans, episodes of Ramayan and Mahabharata by playing two wooden clappers.

As per the oral evidence the transformation appeared when a Krishna devotee Mano Sahu from Gandala and Belagoan village of Ganjam district upgraded the singing style by adding Odia devotional songs with different rhythmus (Talas) like Adi, tripati, jhula and atha tala. Later he added new mythological epics like Bhata keli, naba keli, laxmi purana etc. the next generation of Monu sahu accepted this profession as family occupation. Within a short period time the fragrance of this balled singing was spread all over the Ganjam. The other communities were also influenced by this folk lore singing style. They were like Jadu Nahak, Laxmana Nanda, Bharata Sabata and Dharmu Sahu were very famous. Soon Dasakathia singing was approved as a good medium of entertainment and the artistes got invitations from the native kings of Ganjam to perform at their courts. In those days the native kings were donating land, gold, jewelries and other valuable commodities to the artistes as an award. Sometime for the outstanding performance the artistes were also awarded with titles like Gayak Ratna, bhakta Gayak and many more. At the same time the Daskathia artistes were getting regular invitations from different villages to perform their balled singings which would continue for months together. The adios goes very heart touching, as there was an emotional bonding built between the villager and the artistes during of their stay, as if somebody misses their own people.

The new wave of Dasakathia singing occurred when Gayaka Ratna (title given by Paralakhemundi and Seragarh king) Krishna Chandra Sahu, son of Agadhu Sahu from Khandra village of HinjiliKatu entered into this arena. Gayaka Ratna Krishna Chandra Sahu not only introduced new styles of singing but at the same time composed many vedic epics for Dasakathia. He was the predecessor of Dharma Sahu and the elder son of Agadhu Sahu. There is a myth about Singer Krishna Chandra Sahu, that he was blessed by God Ganesh of Panchama village. After getting the blessings from lord Ganesh his performance became outstanding and spellbinding the audience. He spread the folk singing Dasakathia every nooks and corners of Odisha.

In modern form of Dasakathia, gayak Ratna Krishna Chandra Sahu was considered as the Dronachariya and another legendary singer Badyanatha Sharma as Arjun. There were four

disciples of Krushna Chandra Sahu known as Anata Panigrahi, Adikandha Padhy, Kashinatha Panda and Badyanath Sharma. Among them Badyanatha Sharma was the meritorious student of Krishna Chandra Sahu. Because of his outstanding qualities in Dasakathia presentation he made the balled singing style famous not only in Odiasha but all over India and abroad. For these contributions he was later regarded as the Arjun of Dasakathia.

During his reign of singing, Badyanath Sharma brought some other metamorphosis in the tradition singing style. He made folk lore form Dasakathia singing very simple and soothing for the common listeners. He introduced classical ragas to this balled singing style and composed many mythological episodes with classical touch. He gave a platform to Dasakathia singing by presenting it on Radio for the first time. During his tenure the balled singing touched sky heights and the era was considered as the golden period of Dasakathia.

### **Present Day Situation :-**

Eclipse engulfed this indigenous art form after independence, as the native kings lost their administrative power, a good source of financial support was stopped. The only source of earning left was performing on the invitations of the villagers for special occasions or once a while on radio programmes. Now the survival of Dasakathia artistes has become hard as nail. The entry of satellite channels with mega serials on television marked the last nail on the coffin. The audiences who once considered this art form as a source of entertainment, have now boarded another boat. Dasakathia wasn't the only art form which suffered this blow, the doom day for other indigenous art forms were stepping nearer. The viewers who used to be crazy towards this folk lore style, now slowly, steadily and continuously were rerouted towards the new world of entertainment.

As the demand of Dasakathia declined, situation of Dasakathia Artistes became very grim. The situation ultimately posed a danger for the survival of the centuries old art form, says the president of Ganajam Dasakathia Sangha, Gayaka Ratna Upendra Panigrahy. He proudly describes his glorious days of Dasakathia with tearful eyes; it was the time when the Dasakathia was highly respected. The artistes were awarded with good amount of wealth such as granary, cloths, jewelry, money and some time lands too as honorarium which was more than enough for them to lead a happy life. But the things are changed now and the emotional bonding between the artistes and proponents has gone astray.

The new generation is not ready to take up this art form as a profession for its consequences. This is not the case for new comers it happens right in the families of eminent and prominent artistes who gave this art form a name and identity. The present generations are choosing daily labour as source of income, instead of performing Dasakathia, the befitting example is the khandra family who has taken up this balled singing as a profession for generatios starting from Dharmu sahu to Krushna Chandra Sahu and then to Radhasyam Sahu. The grandsons of Gayak Ratna Krushna Chandra Sahu not ready to choose Dasakathia singing as their profession of survival. What's upsetting is his grandsons are working at a grocery shop as daily labour for survival. It would be unfair if said that they were not interested in balled singing but circumstances prevailed which forced them to discard their age long family profession. This situation hurts a lot to their father the singer Radhasyam Sahu, son of Krushna Chandra Sahu but he is helpless at age of 82 years. He often expresses his heartache for extinct of this art form from his family after his death. But when he was asked whether or not will he prefer Dasakathai as a profession if given chance to take up in the next life, he proudly says a yes! he would, because once his father told him that, "if you will study you will get a government job and earn good salary, but no renowned name and fame like a Dasakathia artiste". And now as a Dasakathia artiste he seen each and every word of his father has coming true, which the younger generation is yet to understand.

Gayaka (singer) Sarathi Panda, a man belonging to the Marudi cult (name of a place in Ganjam district) of Dasakathia. After performing Dasakathia for fifty years selling vegetable is his present profession for a survival. He used to stage along with his younger brother Ulla Panda to perform Dasakathia from day one of his profession. He used to say, except rain seasons they were getting invitations from different part of Odisha. Sometimes they even return back home after six month at a stretch once they start their journey. What's the beneficial part of their busy schedule was, their income was sufficient to manage their family comfortable for years. But now the demands of Dasakathia are dropped as the television and internet entered to the market of entertainment. But now those glorious days are left just as dreams for Dasakathia artistes.

The similar story is repeated with Dasakathia gayaka Ravi Satapathy residence of Ambapua village, he started his carrier as a supportive artiste (palia) to famous Dasakathia singer Ramahiri Padhi of Haladia Padar village, after the death of his partner, he started his own team and continued this balled singing since 30 years since then. But being a professional artiste of Dasakathia he is still looking for a platform to consider it as a full time job instead as a side income.

Under such circumstances one of the oldest folk lore form Dasakathia is in jeopardy and the cloud of exanimate is slowly griping this oldest art form. As the younger generations are reluctant to take over Dasakathia as a profession, we can say that sword of domiciles hanging over Dasakathia.

“Over every mountain there is a path, although it may not be seen from the valley” these phrase goes good for Dasakathia lovers if they ever meet Gayaka Ramesh Nahaka. He is one of the predecessors of Jadu Nahaka who was also trying to save this balled singing. Gayak Ramesh Nahaka, residence of Paliam Village, a professional Dashakathia Artiste of his times. Started his carrier as supporting singer (Palia) with his elder brother, since his childhood he didn't know anything but Dasakathia. After 30 years of professional carrier, all of a sudden everything became stagnate when he lost his brother in a road accident. The trauma of brother's death made this world an idle place for Ramesh Nahaka and situation forced him to discontinue the folk art which was part of his life since the age of fifteen and now he was jobless. More importantly, he didn't know anything better than Dasakathia in his life to earn his basic needs. And now the survival was very tough for him along with his family. But he never lost his hope, as we know hope is able to see that there is light despite all the darkness. The same happened in Ramesh Nahaka's life, when he found his two young nephews. Now days in the evening the paliam village vibrates with the sound of six wooden plats as Ramesh Nahaka teaches the craft of this balled singing to his two young nephews Sunil Nahaka and Rakesh Nahaka. Every day it is the routine work for Sunil and Rakesh to attend regular practicing sessions after their school hours. With time these two young artistes are earning good reputation in the field of the Dasakathia singing and day by day becoming very popular all over Ganjam. “Through these two little champs I sowed seeds of hope for Dasakathia to keep growing even till its next generations”, says Ramesh Nahaka with a pleasing face.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions :-**

“Every culture once up on a time must have the phase of pop culture and with the entry of a new one, the former may fall short in its popularity but not in its dignity. The same happened with Dasakathia, otherwise why shall I be admired and respected by the people wherever I go?” says the president of Ganjam Dasakathia Sangha Gayaka Upendra Kumar Panigrahy. He says still people acknowledge Daskathia as a medium of entertainment, but due

to lack of proper channel we are not able to reach the mass and the age long folk lore's losing its shine. He repeats the lines of Tagore which says "the clouds come floating into life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but load color to the sunset sky". Once the folk lore Dasakathia will get a proper platform, again it will reign its glorious past. Regrettably he expresses his anguish by saying, government's taking no steps to save this folk art form and behaving like a stepson.

To rescue this art form from extinction he suggests some steps, first and far most is there should have training institutes of Dasakathia and the eminent and prominent artistes must be employed to train the new comers.

There should be research division to carry some research work on this art to understand more on it and to preserve this art from being wiped out. All cultural programs organized by the government at district and state level, the folk art forms should be prioritized first.

The artistes must be engaged in government campaigning plans like Family planning, five years plans, national integration and anti drugs movement, so that the regular income could support them to run their family smoothly and the free times could be utilized for practice.

The pension amounts for the old artistes must be hiked from 1200 to 5000 atleast; so that, they can use their experiences for development of Dasakathia, for the rest of their life.

The government must have to take initiatives to organize symposium, conferences, conclaves, convocations and meetings of different experts and artistes of folk art forms to interchange ideas on 'how to preserve and impregnate all folk art forms for the future generations'.

It is true that every artiste has their own family, and they have some obligations toward their family. It is the duty of the artiste to provide them the basic needs such as food, cloth and a better education to their children. This is because as an artiste no matter what you have done for the society, if you can't take care of your family, what have you really accomplished? But unfortunately right now all most all the folk artistes are struggling to arrange the basic needs of life. Imagine when an artiste will get five to six programs in a year and the amount merely two to three thousand per program. How can he maintain his family? When your highly regarded profession keeps your family with empty stomach for moths then how can you continue with the same profession by putting family on starvation? When your profession can't secure a better future for your children how can you continue with that profession?

Regrettably the same is happening with most of the folk artistes now days. There are 125 registered Dasakathia groups in Odisha, among which only 20 to 25 groups get government campaign programs and that too within a gap of six months and sometime none for whole year. The irony is the amount of remuneration they get which is merely rupees 1000 from the state government per program, 1200 from the central government program and sometime some public performances on festival seasons.

Hopefully, may be now we can understand the vulnerable situations of those folk artistes of Odisha and the very reason why the younger generation's not ready to consider any folk art form as a career. And why they are ready to take up jobs like daily labour, vegetable vender and even migrate to other states for a better life. But the sticking part of their story is somewhere in the depth of their hearts they still wish to be a folk artiste and feel proud to be a so. For they say, "the folk art form lost its popularity not the dignity".

It's a very common tendency of our country man, to blame the government for every problematic situation without taking any responsibility. By blaming others you never win, but

you do lose to your conscience again and again. The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. If you go out and make some things to happen; you will fill the world with happy, you will fill yourself with happy. So a small initiative and some of our efforts will definitely bring a change in the age long art forms. So it's time to care; it's time to take responsibility, it's time to lead, it's time for a change and it's time to stop blaming others.

Don't forget when there was no government; the Dasakathia was proliferating like anything. It is not because they were getting good support from the native kings; it is also because of the interest and efforts of common mass towards it. Now as well wishers the same could be done by us. Presently there are many committees, youth clubs, and social organizations in the towns and villages of Odisha which are well organized than before. So if we could contribute through these organizations and invite them for performances on regular intervals on different occasions, then we'll surely be able to mobilize them not to opt out of this age long art form. And at the same time they will also feel secured with the profession after getting regular programs.

A public movement can be structured and proposed before the government for the invitation of our local folk art forms on the priority basis to perform on all the cultural programs organized by government and non government organization. For this we can also start a campaign through different Medias. These small initiatives from our part can save an age long unique and preferential folk lore Dasakathia. Because society or culture or whatever you might want to call it, has created us all solely and wholly for the purpose of maintaining its continuity and status quo.

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