

## **Dandanata: Representation of the Socio-Cultural Life of the people of Western Odisha through Performing Art.**

by Minaketan Bag<sup>[a]</sup> & Madan Biswal<sup>[b]</sup>

### **Abstract**

*Although there is an extensive research examining the mainstream tradition of ritual performance in India, the non-literate tradition is still mostly an explored area. Dandanata is mostly prevalent in rural pockets of Puri, Ganjam, Bolangir, Boudh, Sonepur, Sambalpur, Phulbani and Dhenkanal districts of Odisha. It is a festival that dates back to 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The rural agricultural communities of Odisha perform Dandanata once in a year starting at the beginning of April (i.e. from pratipada of Chaitra) for over a period of 13<sup>th</sup> days or somewhere it is 21 days ordeal that culminates on the day of MahavisuvaSankrantilocally called as panasankranti. The performance Dandanataconsists of Dhuli(Sand) danda, Pani (water) danda, Agni (fire) danda and Theatrical performance.A typical village life is full blown in the Dhulidanda and Theatrical performance of Suanga (dual) danda. It visualizes the duty (work), rest, recreation and other day to day happening of family. The paper tries to visualize the life of village from an anthropological understanding.*

**Keywords:** Dandanata, Performing Art, Socio-cultural, Prank, Mythical, Historical, Spectator

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### **1. Introduction**

The two terms religion and culture go side by side and are used very frequently in social science. However it is not easy to give an unambiguous definition of culture, a term that usually covers notions such as “tradition”, “cultural heritage” or “custom”. It is also equally difficult to understand whether an action is religious or not. Without recourse to the self-understanding of a religion’s adherents and the recognition of this self-understanding by the historical and social surroundings, it is usually impossible to decide whether actions are religious or not.” (Zinser: 1997:162). It can be understood only in the context of the people. The use of music in religious rituals and practices is an age old tradition of Odisha. Music is certainly a medium which can comment the sense of belonging to a community, and it can be put to serve the causes of nationalists and other power-holders (Stokes 1994) but it also opens up a quintessential field of human creativity for anthropological comparison (Hann: 2003: 234).The importance of music has been described by many anthropologists. Music can be described as a universal code; a system of signs that can be decoded in reference to its social context (Blacking 1973: XIX).Music can thus be understood as a total cultural language (Feld / Fox 1994: 25 – 53) that seeks to express something where words end.

According to the definition of Arthur Simon Music is a universal human phenomenon which incorporates song, play of musical instruments and rhythmic body touch. Music is a “sonic order” which as a cultural phenomenon must be approached in relation to aesthetic, communicative, social, psychological and religious culture-specific categories (Simon 2000: 162-63)

Odisha is famous for its rich musical heritage. The people of the locality consider a major cultural factor, expressing and transmitting a consciousness of a strong regional and cultural identity. The art form of the people is linked to the worship of local gods and goddesses as well as to life and death rituals like marriages and commemoration ceremonies. Local dance and drama traditions re-stage a divine play on earth, where the scene is manifested in and mediated through the body of the human artist, while the sounds of musical instruments represent local notions of the utterances of different goddesses. In the context of the music of western OdishaMcLuhan says in the Bora Sambar region music indeed operates simultaneously as medium and messages (McLuhan 1994).

The art form of western Odisha is not only a representation of the religious activities but also it is a clear reflection of the social and cultural life of the people. Music being an inseparable part of

the life of the people expresses the social phenomena, caste hierarchy and the culture of the people. Lidia Guzy who has done an extensive research on the musical culture of the Borasambar area of Western Odisha highlights in her book *Marginalized Music* about the complex interrelations between music and the socio-cultural hierarchy of the caste system. She says certain musical activities are restricted to members of marginalized castes and associates with the polyvalent stigma of “untouchability” and “pollution”. (Lidia Guzy 2011).

Dandanata is a performing art that can be described as a compilation of Music, sound, body movement, dance, songs, dialogue and performance. The dialogues are expressed through songs and we find less of speeches. It is a crucial and powerful cultural mechanism of creating meaning and transmitting local values. Though no written text of Dandanata is found, it has been transmitted from generation to generation through language expressing the social structure, religious belief, and environmental issues and cultural life of the people of Odisha. It is an art form that marks the personal, cultural, social, political and ethnic identity of the people of Odisha. Dandanata can be described as an art form that transmits values, ideals, and models of behavior. The personal and collective crisis performed in *Dandanata* leading to reintegration set an example for the people. The concern of the people for their village and its surroundings represents the social responsibility of the people.

The rural agricultural communities of Western Orissa perform *Dandanata* once in a year starting at the beginning of April (i.e. from *pratipada* of Chaitra) for over a period of 13<sup>th</sup> days or somewhere it is 21 days ordeal that culminates on the day of Mahavisuva Sankranti locally called as *panasankranti*. The forms of Dandanata consist of four district elements of which three seems to be more devotional by nature and the other one fits into the notions of dramatic performance. The each devotional segments involving in focal points such as *Dhuli* (soil) *danda*, *Pani* (water) *danda* and *Agni* (fire) *danda*. The last Non- devotional elements of this festival the *dandasuargas* resembles what we would normally as theatrical perform

It consists of short sequence that represent a mixture of sports, military drill, yoga, fertility rites, sacred dramas, divine procession, dance and other form of cultural performance, physical exercise, pranks, ritualized, sequence are combined with one another to form a fluid, sometimes, ambiguous, but a perfectly dynamic structure.

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*Dhulidanda* is performed in the afternoon on the hot ground under son of April. It consists of short sequence that represent a mixture of sports, military drill, yoga, fertility rites, sacred dramas, divine procession, dance and other form of cultural performance, physical exercise, pranks, ritualized, sequence are combined with one another to form a fluid, sometimes, ambiguous, but a perfectly dynamic structure. After *Dhulidanda* is over, the *danduas* proceed to the pond where they perform *panidanda*, *Panidanda* consists of acrobatic feats in water including somersaults form a different heights and pyramidal formations. The third phase is called *Agnidanda*. The scared fire is ignited by rubbing wood or by hanging *bihanberia* (made on paddy sheaves). Two *danduas* dance by holding *dandas* and return back to their camp to have their only meal of the day. All these are perform quite religiously uttering special invocations to *Agni* (the fire God) *Durga* and *Kali*. After taking meals the *danduas* come to the village for the night theoretical performance by playing musical instruments.

## 2. The Sample Area

The villages Saharipali, Kapasira and Bousuni are selected as sample area. The village Saharipali and Kapasira come under Ulunda block of Sonepur district. The village is approximately 10 kilometer from district headquarter. And the village Bousuni is approximately 10 kilometer away from block headquarters Binika. Sonepur district was part of Bolangir district till the end of 1993 and thereafter result of bifurcation of Bolangir district vide state Govt. notification No. DRC – 44 / 93 / 14218 / R dated 27.3.93 it formed a separate district known as Sonepur.

## 3. Objective of the Study

- 1) To find out the socio-religious significance of the origin of Dandanata
- 2) To understand the artistic forms and performances of Dandanata
- 3) To explore and analyze the representation of social, religious and cultural life of the people of Western Odisha through Dandanata

## 4. Methods of Data Collection

Since no printed text of *Dandanata* is available, this research work is based on extensive field study and personal interviews with performers and old timers. Regarding the various aspects of *Dandanata*, observation, case study, audio recording of song and dialogues and their documentation and photographic documentation of rituals and theatrical performance are adopted. Focused group discussions are conducted in order to collect information on certain selected aspects related to their everyday experiences. Relevant secondary data wherever available are used for supplementing the analysis

## 5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ORIGIN OF DANDANATA

The origin of Dandanata remains obscure on account of the unavailability of authentic source and no written documents. It has been orally passing down from one generation to generation. It is difficult for a researcher to trace out the origin of *Dandanata*. However during the study two sources of beliefs to supplement the origin of Dandanata are found. One is the historical belief and the other is the traditional or mythical belief which is handed down from generation to generation.

### 5.1. The significance of the Mythical Origin of Dandanata

The *danduas* express different mythical views regarding the origin of *Dandanata* during the study. Once upon a time in *Satya Yuga*, **five** sons of *Brahma*, **three** sons of *Kubera* and **five** sons of Indra saw the sage *Katru* in deep meditation and put mud, sand and other things on his body for which the sage was perturbed. The sage cursed that the persons who disturbed him 'will suffer from leprosy'. In order to get relief from imprecate they worshiped Lord *Shiva* near the shore of holy river *Ganga* observing self-punishments in the form of dance and songs. People believe that this took the shape of Dandanata in later part and the thirteen sons of Indra, Kubera and Brahma are known as '*Bhoktas*' in *Dandanata*. The Odiya word *danda* means also punishment and Dandanata is performed in the form of dance and song.

According to another myth a child of lower caste was working under a Bramhin teacher. The teacher had some Bramhin disciples who were practicing *sadhana* under his able guidance. The boy of lesser origin used to witness the practice session carefully at his leisure and in course of time he developed a great interest and knowledge on meditation. Since he was not a Bramhin by caste, the teacher did not accept him as a disciple. However the child did not lose his heart and started practising yoga of his own whenever he got time. One day early in the morning, he was in deep meditation and forgot to sweep the house. When the teacher and disciple arrived there they found the house unclean and dirty and discovered him in meditation. As a result the teacher got angry and beat him mercilessly. The small child uttered some mantras which almost burnt the body of teacher. In the meantime the disciples came to his rescue and saved the teacher. However, it was a matter of great surprise for all of them. They could not understand how a child of lesser origin could learn such a wonderful charm. They took away that knowledge forcibly from the child and concealed it in the cave of *Kailash* (where lord *Shiva* is believed to stay). Lord *Shiva* came to know about it and ordered his *Nandi* to release the knowledge from the cave for the people of lower castes.

## 5.2. The Historical significance of the origin of *Dandanata*

Though the historical origin is not properly substantiated with the historical facts, attempts have been made to establish a link with history. According to Oral history the origin of *Dandanata* dates back to the Keshari dynasty in Eastern Odisha and Somagupta dynasty in Western Odisha.

The *Keshari* dynasty ruled over Eastern Odisha from Bhubaneswar during 5th- 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. The dynasty was the great worshipper of Lord *Shiva*. Due to royal patronage and protection *Shaivism* spread to other parts and became a dominant religious cult of Odisha and created a sense of hate towards the Buddhists who were degraded to the status of untouchable. The Buddhists had no other way but to worship the Hindu God *Shiva* for their salvation. But they were strictly prohibited from entering into the Hindu temples. Gradually these people started worshipping Lord *Shiva* once in a year in the form of *Dandanata* (Das 1993: 66).

The second historical belief regarding the origin of *dandanata* can be traced back to the Somagupta dynasty of Odisha. Boudh and Sonepur districts of Western Odisha are regarded as the cradle place of *Dandanata* where once upon a time Buddhism flourished in larger extent (Senapati and Manashi 1971: 49, 110). Buddhism rejected caste system and social hierarchy based on birth and was opposed to *Brahminical* orthodoxy by denying the authority of Vedas. These factors might have adversely affected Hinduism and largely appealed to the socially down trodden people like Sudras, untouchables and tribals who had been oppressed for centuries (Thapper, 1977). Thus Buddhism provided an opportunity for the low caste and tribals to upgrade their status by joining Buddhism. Buddhism grew to such an extent that the orthodox Brahmin and ruling class became perplexed. In a view to check the growth of Buddhism, several efforts were probably made during time in Sonepur and Boudh areas. The local Hindu rulers of Somagupta dynasty being the patrons of *Shaiva* cult were eager to spread *Shaivism*. Perhaps an alternative but socially more desirable and acceptable strategy to promote *Shaivism* without allowing further expansion of Buddhism in the area was to make compromise at the folk level. It was perhaps during these phase of religious revivalism in Odisha the constant interaction between cultural elements of Hinduism and Buddhism had occurred at the folk level and the downward movement of cultural element of both these great traditions and their integration with little traditions might have taken the shape of *Dandanata*. So *Dandanata* can be described as an interesting way of assimilation of Hinduism and Buddhism.

The research has a limitation to substantiate mythological evidences and historical facts to prove the beliefs of the people of study area regarding the origin of *Dandanata* notwithstanding its socio-cultural relevance. The mythical and historical origin of *Dandanata* clearly reflects the institutionalised social hierarchy, brahmanical domination and oppression of the lower caste people in the society. Thousands of years have passed since the origin of *Dandanata*, uncountable performances of *Dandanata* must have been taken place generation after generation. In course of time, Odisha has moved from the agrarian society to the knowledge society the industrialisation and has witnessed many changes but still there is no substantial change in the social status and position of the lower caste people. Notably, even today *Dandanata* is performed mainly by the lower caste people in Odisha. They are still in a vulnerable and marginalized position in spite of various legal provisions and constitutional safeguards guaranteed to them in the post-independence India. The evil practice of untouchability is still prevalent in some parts though it is prohibited and punishable under Article-17 of Indian Constitution. The restriction over the village temple, separate bathing *ghats* in the village pond, separate place for the children in school are not uncommon even after 65 years of independence. A contradictory analysis of the origin of *Dandanata* may describe it as a strong reaction against the Brahminical domination and at the same time as a diplomatic move by the dominant Brahmins to maintain their supremacy in the society and an appeasement to maintain their status quo as well as the traditional social hierarchy.

## 6. The performances

*Dandanata* is performed through four phases in a day. It begins with *Dhuli Danda* and ends with theatrical performance and *Panidanda* and *Agnidanda* are performed in between. After *Dhulidanda* is over the *danduas* proceed to the pond, where they perform *panidanda*.

### 6.1. *Panidanda*

*Panidanda* consists of acrobatic feats in water including somersault from different heights and pyramidal formations. After reaching at the pond first they finish their daily work, they brush their teeth with sixth fingers (four to five inches) long mango bough, which protect mouth from different germ and bad smell. Then the *bhoktas* take their bath in the pond and cool their bodies, which was hot at the time of *DhuliDanda*. The *bhoktas* take 13 dips in the pond and collect 13 handful of sand and make *shivalinga* at the shore. Near the *Linga* they placed the *prava*. The priest starts to worship both *Shiva* and *Kali*. The musician beat music in different rhythm. The *patabhotas* began swing and dace with the step of music. The people belief that goddess comes to him. The priest worship *danda* and placed on a *pindha* (made on wood). Then they ignite the *dandas* by hanging *bihanberia* (made on paddy sheaves). By putting *Jhuna* (resin) they return to the camp. At the camp two *danduas* hold *dandas* and dance with the rhythm of music which is very intoxicating to see. In the middle of the dance they put *Jhuna* (resin) on the *danda*. At that time the flame of *Danda* was so lighted. However in many places the *panidanda* phase is now a days omitted.

After performing *panidanda* the *danduas* take *pana* (liquid of fried paddy). Then they start to cook rice for them. Which contain *Aruarice* (unboiled rice), *Akata* vegetable (vegetable not cut) and without oil and stuff. Then they eat at midnight.

### 6.2. *Agnidand*

The third phase of *DandaNata* is *Agni Danda*, which start before or after taking dinner. It varies from place to place. The sacred fire ignite by rubbing bamboo wood or hanging *bihanberia* (made on paddy sheaves). Two *danduas* dance by holding *dandas* in their both hands. Some time they dance 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* (resin) on the *dandas* in such a position that the flame of *danda* ablaze. At that time the other *Bhoktas* utter *Kala Rudramanikibhajahei* (worship the lord Shiva) in a high voice. That dance is believed as the *TandavaNrutya* of lord Shiva. By following that procedure they come to worshipper house.

### 6.3. *Dhulidanda*

*Dhulidanda* is performed in the afternoon usually in the middle of the village. It continues for around two hours and thirteen *Bhoktas* participate in it. It is humorous which provides full entertainment to the audience with social and cultural elements inherently present in it. The researchers have called it as the Prank. The expressive acts of *danduas* are carried out in a solemn mood and under the supervision of priestly assistants; one known as the *PataDandua* (Main Priest) and the other his assistant. Moreover these pranks are performed strictly by the *danduas* with the indication of their priestly assistants. These *danduas* play the role of women and hence they are dressed as women with all the expertise and props of female dressing necessary to make their disguise impressive and credible.

*Danduas* do not have any text to recite apart from 'yes' or 'no' in response to priestly admonishments. They are short of mute actors, a trait in their character which is emphasized by the fact that in many sequence they hold a straw in their mouth, the function of which is explicitly connected with *danduas* obligation to remain silent. There is no written text to rehearse the dialogue. But there is a lot of improvisation and it is this on the spot alterations, embellishment and spontaneous inspirations by the actors. Two aspects that are common to all the pranks are; there are usually two actors opposing and dialoguing with each other and these two stand in a hierarchical relationship.

The pranks can be categorized into five different kinds.

- ✓ the well prank
- ✓ the weaving prank
- ✓ the ploughing prank
- ✓ the prank relating to farmer and his wife
- ✓ the temple prank

### 6.3.1. The Road leveled Pranks

The Road *Levelled Prank* describes the village road and the beliefs associated with it. In this Prank the priest or his assistant first directs how to level the road for good communication. A *dandua* answers “we shall level the road by bulldozer” then a *dandua* lies on the road and two *danduas* push him slowly. So like a bulldozer he rolls on the ground and when the leveling work is going on the roller meets a *khunt* (Pillar) on the way. The role of *Khunt* (Pillar) is also performed by another *dandua*. The *danduas* want to root it out so that the road can be levelled properly but suddenly it gets thrilled and tells “I am goddess *Kali*, you cannot root out me”. The *danduas* request goddess *Kali* to be kind enough and go out so that they can level the road. The goddess agrees to that but asks for a male goat sacrifice. The *danduas* offer a male goat and level the road.

### 6.3.2. The Well Prank

Several *danduas* indicated by the assistant of the priest sit in a circular manner to take decision to dig a well. In the meeting several questions are raised such as where and how to build the well and who will be the right and first person to take water from the well. In one place the servant is complaining about being exploited until a village head joins into settle their dispute. In this prank the *bhoktas* discuss different problems surrounded with making well and drawing water from well. Selection of spot indicates regarding the convenience of all inhabitants of villagers whereas drawing water from the well indicates the prevalence of social hierarchy in the society. Again all the disputes are solved by the village headman rather by the police. It also indicates the prevalence importance of hierarchical society.

### 6.3.3. The Weaving Prank

The *danduas* form a weaving loom and two /three priestly actors miming priests argue about the proper way of weaving. The *Danduas* perform the act of weaving and when the weaving is completed, the cloth is taken of the hands and shoulder of the *danduas* and measured by the priest who uses a stick to measure as if it were a yard stick. Then a dispute arises about the price of the cloth which is meant to have been produced as a gift for *Kali*. During these weaving pranks a lot of slapstick fist fights as well as comically exaggerated wailing and commenting occur.

### 6.3.4. The Ploughing Prank

The Ploughing Prank merges seamlessly each and every activity of cultivation. The *danduas* perform a ploughing act in an agricultural field all of them acting as the field, the plough man and the bullocks. Then there is an act on the quarrel between two farmers regarding the quality and price of one of a bullock. There is some haggling regarding the question of how to raise the money for this bullock at there a mock *puja* is conducted in present of bullocks as it was a sacred cow or some other deity. Furthermore, while ploughing the servant suddenly break down, as if overcome by heat, water is poured out over him until he is revived. Then the ploughing continues until the bullocks full of sweat and dust, rejoin their colleagues. While the field *danduas* remain lying on the ground. In those groups with a more knowledgeable priest, songs depicting the time of the monsoon are sung and the episode in which Rama, *Sita* and *Laxaman* leave the royal capital of *Ayodhya* for their forest exile is recited.

The ploughing prank continues until the farmer and his wife out in the fields. Immediately after bullocks leave the field, some four or five women enter into the *pendal*. One of them is carrying basket on her head containing food, another brass vessel with water. They enter the stage in a single file. They circumambulate the fields several times by singing song accompanied with the music. Their way of walking is dance like and changed from time to time according musical rhythm.

Then a longer episode begins. The women that are the wife, sister in law and wife of neighbour's farmer, leave their houses in order to meet the farmers in the field at lunch time. At the beginning one woman does not see her husband in field and she asks another farmer of neighboring field. As a custom of rural Odisha, a wife cannot speak the name of her husband but enquires about him by mentioning *amarsemane* (my Husband). Finally she finds her husband sleeping under the shade of a tree. He is rudely woken of by sprinkle of water in his face. While he wakes up shakily and sleepily, his wife scolds him for his laziness, until he becomes alert to the occasion and angrily asks why she had come. After this little domestic dispute some conciliatory gesture and word replace the angry one. Wife asks why you are angry with me. I have brought some tasty curry for you. There is a further teasing between husband and wife in which the other woman, especially the sister in law take part. The wife then tries to persuade her husband to take some food, but he only starts to eat after

some further teasing, urging and even forced feeding. In the accompany song and the play itself are slightly sexually illusive scenes. Finally the husband promises to take his wife on a shopping trip into town once the period of sowing and planting is over. Following this, the women help him with the farming work, weeding, ploughing, sowing and replanting the rice seedling.

### 6.3.5. The Temple Prank

The Brahmin and the priestly assistant raise the question of building a temple for worshipping Lord Shiva, which material should be use, what would be the entire cost and how long it would take to build. The *danduas* perform an act of building a temple some of them acting as the temple itself. When the temple is completed, twoprotagonists have an argument about how to consecrate it and conduct the daily *puja*, so as to get the maximum amount of money out of the devotees with minimum amount of work. The various mocking scenes of this prank show the priests in a rather undignified light pulling each other's ears, slapping their cheeks and having fist fight. During their subordinate mimes cleaning his behind with consecrated temple water or when he tells the Brahman to eat his stools because he is so mean. There are further rather blasphemous scenes depicting.

All the pranks discussed so far represent social dramas in sense evoked by Turner (1982). However their social dramas which have found their way back on the stage and which are thus dramas in the proper theatrical senses, not just in the metaphorical sense of the term. Thus various disputes which the audiences encounter are highly stylized. In them, I was assured, there are no concrete hints at actual members or events with respect to the village in which they are played. However, some spectators may come to associate the one or the other enacted dispute with persons or events from his or her neighborhood, for at least a stock types, these theatrical disputes and the characters being mocked in them are well known to everyone from village life. Ultimately, then the audience is provided with a satirical mirror reflection of their own everybody lives. The pranks are comically exaggerated 'stories people' tell themselves about themselves, to quote Geertz's famous prose (Hasan:1970).

The Pranks are a depiction of the village life with all its scenic beauty and ugliness as perceived by the viewers. The typical village surroundings along with simple things like road, well, temple, Dhuli (sand), agricultural field etc. are represented in these Pranks. The themes of the Pranks center around the leveling off a road for better communication, the discussion for the construction of a well for drinking water, the construction of a village temple and the subsequent fight among the priests to be the worshiper of that temple, some sweet fights and romance between a husband and his wife during agricultural activities etc. These things may appear unimportant and valueless to an outsider but these are an integral part of and have a strong meaning in the socio-cultural life of the village people of western Odisha. The Pranks not only give a visual representation of these things but also the common problems of the village, benefits of common resources, the social relationships and bonding among the village people, the beliefs and practices of worshipping gods ad goddess and the mutual love, affection and interdependence between the husband and the wife are nicely presented mostly in comic form which is both entertaining and enlightening for the spectators.

## 7. The Atrical Performance

There are two types of theatrical performance in *Dandanata* i.e. *Suangadanda* and *Leeladanda*. During research it is seen that the people of Binika block of Sonepur district celebrate *Leeladanda* whereas the Ulunda block performs *Suangasdanda*. However there is common performance in both the dandas known as *Pravanritya*.

*Prava* is worshipped as the incarnation of goddess *Kali*, which means ablaze. This dance is performed by *patabhoktas* as per the rhythm of music. It continues more than twenty minutes. A semicircular red cloth cut in the shape of nimbus made of bamboo decorated and tied with the back of *pata-bhoktas*. The character *prava* enters the stage only during the ritualistic period of 13<sup>th</sup> days of *Dandanata*. *Prava* is ordinarily a solo character in *Dandanata* but there seems to have been variations. This is also known as *Tandavanritya* of Lord *Shiva*. The *patabhokta* performs dance with different postures of his limb in tune with the *Sohalakhadi* (sixteen beats) music, played by *dhulia* (*Dhol* player). The *dhulia* really plays an important role. The performance of dancer is beautiful and enchanting. Sometimes the dancer holds the holy lamp and the other *danduas* put *jhuna* on the burning lamp to abalaze. The other *danduas* utter *Kala Rudramaniki Jai*.

The word 'Suanga' corresponds to the Sanskrit 'swang' which means graceful acting. Dance is always based on music. Any dramatic performance consisting of dance and music therefore is known as *Suanga* in Odiya language. In *Dandanata* like any oldest *suanga*, every character enters to the *pendal* by dancing with the rhythm of music and gives his self-introduction with a short description of what the character is wearing or supposed to wear, gait and make up. In between dialogues, both the speaker and the listening character dance vigorously. This pattern is a regular feature in every sequence of the *DandaNata* which distinguishes its identity from other type of performing arts. The actors of *suangas* express their acting through songs. When the actors sing, the musician play *dhol* (drum) in low sound. At the last part of the song the sound of *dhol*(drum) began to high and the actor's dance with the step of rhythm of the *dhol*.

### 7.1. *Siva-Parvati*

*Nandi* is an essential character of *Dandanata*. He is called as gate keeper or messenger of *Siva*. He informs to the audience of the arrival of *Siva-Parvati* and prays to *Siva* for the goodness of audience. The *Dhulia* (player of drum) welcomes to *Siva* and *Pravati* from the decoration room. The audience waits to listen the conservation of *Shiva* and *Parvati*. Here both the characters act like worldly character. *Siva* enter to stage by holding *Trisula* (*Trisula*) whereas *Parvati* only a handkerchief. They dance with the step of rhythm of *dhol* after sung song. They express the past-future and the sequence of *Dandanata* in the form of poetry.

Tradition of *dandanata* relates to the worship of *siva* and *parvati*. It is said that *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* are the gods of *Sristi* (creation), *Sthiti*(existence) and *pralaya* (destruction) respectively. In order to avoid *pralaya* *Siva* or *Mahesvara* is worshipped. To quiet him hard meditation is required, *dandanata* is another form of hard meditation. It is also reported that *dandanata* is the synonym of *shakti puja* which is worship of energy and strength. However, *Siva* is invoked like this.  
*Shiva* –

“*Kailasubahara Hara basibusavapithira*  
*Shire jataorddhashashisajehei,*  
*Bhaktamanankaradukhadhyanejani*  
*Asitankapasehelebijehei.*”

**Meaning:** God *Shiva* went out from the *Kailasha* Mountain by sitting on *brusabha* (bullock). At that time *jata* (malted locks of ascetics) and half circle moon look very beautiful on his head. After knowing the unhappiness of devotees and he arrived near them.

*Parvati:*

*Baharileheimabati se dukheati*  
*Kahigalepasupati se dukheati,*  
*Karamalikhnamorakedehina*  
*Pranapatihelejati, se dukheati,*  
*Tejialonkara, hrudeastihara,*  
*Sangebolilebibhuti, se dukheati,*  
*Basuabalada, bahanasampada,*  
*Smasanebulantirati, se dukheati.*

**Meaning:** *Parvati* went out with sorrowfully and blamed to luck because her husband became *jati* (sage). He wears *astihara* (garland of bones) smear *bibhuti*(ashes) on the body and wondering at the cemetery on *basua* bullock at night.

It may be noted here that in *Dandanata* the character themselves give their own identities on the *pendal* perhaps for the convenience of general audience which constitute mostly illiterate, ignorant, simple, lower caste/class people in a rural area. For instance, when *Siva* comes to the stage he sings. All the characters in *Dandanata* have the element of the common people of the region. As a result, one can easily get the replicas of the different aspect of the life style of the people. They are so life-like that one can see himself in these characters. This is why, folk play is considered to be the mirror of the society, where social behaviour, prevalent tradition, faith, daily life, emotional relationship, gods and Goddesses, pattern of thought, dress, ornament and behaviour etc. are all expressed and bloomed through the local language and dialect for common entertainment. Here *Parvati* asks different questions regarding *dandayatra*, and *Siva* answers them. All the conservation between *Shiva* and *Parvati* occur in the form of poetry in local dialect.

*Parvati:*

*ShunaAhePraneswara  
KimpaTumbheKailashapurahie  
Asibhramanakaraethorahie*

Shiva:

*ShunaGaurisadhire  
Bhaktajanachintakarantikhare  
Ambheasichhudandajatare, Gouri go.*

Parvati:

*Ahie deva pasupati  
Dandajata ate kemantaritihie.  
Tahasunibakumoramati, Shankarahie.*

Shiva:

*Bhuja sati ebeeha  
Chadeiyanisangadharichadeiya go  
Nrutyagatireasibachanha, Gouri go.*

Parvati:

*Ahe deva suladhari  
Chadeiyatumarbhaktakiparihei  
Kahasansayajau mohair, sankarahei.*

**Meaning** O husband: why are you moving here by leaving *Kailashapura*. Shiva answered suddenly the devotee meditate so that I have to come here. Again Parvati wanted to know about *danda* and how *chadeiya* became his devotee. All question of Parvati are answered by Shiva one by one. Again the character of *Ganesh* is very impressive because it is depicted in a very cosmic style. *Ganesh* represents a small child and so many things of eventful childhood lives are expressed through it. For instance

*“Ma go ma, ma go ma,  
Du dudeija mote”.*

Here *Ganesh* is a little child and feeling hungry. He requests his mother *Parvati* to give him breast milk, which is genuine image of a child in our social life.

## 7.2. *ChadeiyaChadeiyani*

*Chadeiya* and *chadeiyani* live in the forest. They manage their livelihood by catching bird using snare. The snare is given by Lord *Shiva* and Goddess *Parvati* with a restriction that the *chadeiya* should not catch the birds namely pigeon, peacock, parrot and cuckoo. If he catches, he will die. But the *Chadeiya* forgets the restriction and dishonors Lord *Shiva* again and again. Lord *Shiva* and *Parvati* become angry and make him die by snake-biting. *Chadeiyani* looks for her husband as *chadeiya* does not return to the hut and finds him dead in the forest. She goes on crying for long hour and prays to *VanaDurga*. *VanaDurga* pleased by the prayer of *Chadeiyani* appeals Lord *Shiva* and *Parvati*. *Shiva* and *Parvati* relent and send *Dhanwantari* (the physician of Gods). *Dhanwantari* comes in the form of snake charmer and makes the *Chadeiya* alive.

The episode has also the romance between husband and wife. At one point of the act after returning from the jungle by catching birds the *Chadeiya* says:

*“Barajakshihemajema*

*Mora Kula Chandarma, asaasa re  
tora, kinikini nada  
moraamaraousodha, asaasare.”*

The *Chadeiya* says:

Hey! The daughter of *Barajakshi*,

The moon of my dynasty

Come, Please come.

The sound of your Bengal is my immortal medicine.

Come, Please come

When *Chadeiyani* does not reply to *Chadeiya*, he again calls loudly

*“Kamarabadha share sadhi  
Manichandrapua die radi*

*moraChadeiyani, asachanchaledaudi  
kanjanakshi Chandra-muhi  
rakhamojibanaheipranasahi  
jibajibana lo to binabanchibinahi  
gatahelasadamas  
banasteasilipakshimarita  
bhajane, sapaneachusapanemorapasa.”*

Here *Chadeiya* is seen as mad in love, he tells I am shouting because I am affected with cupid arrow, my dear *Chadeiyani* please come quickly, ‘O’ quick eyed I can’t live without you. This part of this *suanga* is show the erotic sentiment of the character.

There is a quarrel between the *Chaideya* and the *Chadeiyani* when *chadiyani* complains regarding the poor condition of house, shortage of daily needs to maintain a family. This is a clear reflection of their acute poverty and poor living conditions. But after a while the quarrel ends with a happy settlement and the *Chaideya* again prepares himself to go to the jungle to catch birds. The *chadeiyani* reminds him about the promise they made to Lord *Shiva* and *Parvati*

*Chadeiyani* says: *Mo ranasunaseinatha  
Kebenamaribaehipakshita  
Siva pasekarichhaheisapatha*

But the *Chadeiya* become perplexed by the nature, and kill a peacock, for which *Shiva* and *Parvati* make him die by biting snake. When the *Chadeiya* does not return to his hut in the evening, *Chadeiyani* looks for her husband and finds him in dead in the jungle. She cries and cries at last she prays to *VanaDurga*. *VanaDurga* become pleased and appeals to *Shiva* and *Parvati*. *Shiva* and *Parvati* relent and send *Dhanwantari*, the physician of Gods. *Dhanwantari* come in the form of a snake charmer and makes him alive.

The *Chadeiya* earns his livelihood by catching birds and selling them in the nearby villages with a vow not to kill certain types of birds like the peacock and the cuckoo. This denotes maintaining a balance between one’s livelihood and the protection of nature. The breaking of the vow leading to the death of *Chadeiya* can be interpreted as the punishment for the violation of the law of nature. Surprisingly, the birds mentioned in the *Chadeiya-Chadeiyani* episode of *Dandanata* are protected today by the environmental laws made by the Government of India. It is also a well-known fact that the protection of nature and environment has arrested worldwide attention in the era of globalization. The mournful cry and prayer for *VanaDurga* to save the life of her husband shows the love and commitment of *Chadeiyani* to her husband. The role of a wife has been idealized and prioritized with the climax of the *Chadeiya* becoming alive after the prayer of *Chadeiyani*. The same thematic description is also found in Hindu Mythological story of *Sabitr-Satyaban* where *Sabitr* is able to bring her husband back from *Yama* (the god of Death) through her devotion and intelligence. The women of contemporary *Odisha* also observe a fast on the day of *SabitrAmabasya* praying for the safe long life of their husband, the religious practice popularly known as *Sabitribrata*. In the story of *Chediya* and *Chediyan*, the wife is seen as the savior of the husband. The power of a woman to save the life of her husband challenges the stereotype belief that women are weak, powerless and less intelligent, thus clearly reflecting the feminist ideological thoughts.

### **7.3. KelaKeluni (Snake charmer & his wife)**

*kela – keluni* are great devotees of Lord *Siva*. They are sent by Lord *Shiva* to save the life of *Chadeiya*. The *Kela* brings variety of snakes in the basket with him. With the blessing of Lord *Shiva* he has acquired the knowledge to cure a patient from snake bite and give him back to alive. Again he has acquired the knowledge of *stambhana* (Benumbing), *Mohana* (causing of delusion), *Basya* (subdue), *Uchchatana* (uprooting), *Marana* (killing), *Tarana* (saving), *Akarsana* (attracting), *Udanda* (Flying) and such other black magic. He plays a wind instrument which is locally called as *Nageswar*. *Sapta-swara* (seven sounds) bring out from the *Nageswar*. He also plays a small drum called as *damburu*.

The *Kela* sings self-introductory song, invocatory songs, songs relating to snake, *padmatola* (song relating Lord *Krishna* plucking of lotus from the lake *Kalindi*), song relating to places, mountains, rivers, states, as well as the snake bite cure mantras.

In the form of song he shows his present by the order of *Shiva* and *Parvati*. If he recognizes any snake then he shall take.

“*Bisa to bias kalinagabisa  
abisaku kale iswaragrasa  
sarpaaditahubhakshilelesa  
jhadabisajhada  
najhaduboilekaharaagyna  
iswaraparvatinkarakotikotiagyna.*”

Among the poison the black cobra is so poisonous. That poison was drunk by *Shiva* and a small particle of poison ate by the snake. So the *Kela* sing that the poison come out from the patient according to the order of *Shiva* and *Parvati*.

“*Hara parvatinkahukumahoila  
uthoreghaudacetho  
Kabichandra bole chadeiyauthila  
Nasa gala tarakasta.*”

*Shiva-Parvati* ordered to get up the *Chadeiya*. The injury of *Chadeiya* also became removed. *Kela* had also a consort called *Keluni* who does tattoos and sing song relating to it. Again a quarrel is started between them and solved with compromise.

The snake bite and the episode of *Kela- Keluni* remind the spectators about the incidents of snakebite in their own locality. The people of the study area reported that snake-bite is not uncommon in their area and the same practice of inviting a snake charmer after the snake bite is also found in the study area in the contemporary society. The people of the sample area believe more in the treatment of the snake charmer than in the medical treatment. Some respondents also report that in their locality there are some snakecharmers who can suck the poison from the body of the person through their mouth. The treatment given by the snake charmer is free as it is also believed that when a snake charmer charges money or anything else for the treatment, his magical treatment works no more and it also brings a bad reputation for him. This phenomenon of the snake bite and the treatment of the snake charmer is an integral part of the socio-cultural life of the people in the study area.

#### 7.4. Jogi-Jogiani

The person who keeps a vigilant watch *todanda* at the *kamanagriha* (house of desire) is called as *jogi*. The word *jogi* denotes to a person who is totally detached from the worldly life. The basic objective of a *Jogi* is to get salvation through devotion and worship. But there is a deviation in the character of *jogi* in *Dandanata* as he is not detached from the worldly life

The *jogi of dandanta* wanders from place to place all day long and comes home in the evening. He orders his wife to serve him food. The wife is displeased with him and replies that he may cook himself and eat. As a result quarrel starts between them. In the same *suangas* a group of *joys* enter the arena together exposes their identities and speaks about their adoption of begging due to their laziness. It is not the detachment to worldly affairs and faith in God but their laziness to work for food which had made them to put a garb of fake *Jogis*. The sequence turns to be a satire.

Recognizing the voice of her husband *Joginitells*;

“*A atiekantamohara lo mausa*

*Aatiekantamohara  
Tundbarikarijanidelini  
Chalititankarkhara.*”

**Meaning:** It is my husband, I knew after listening to his voice. His style of walking is quick. Again it is seen that though he is a *Jogi* still he is not free from worldly life and he falls in love with a lady and asking her where are you staying and where have you seen me that you are telling me husband.

*Jogi:* “*keondeshare to ghara lo sajani  
Keondeshara to ghara  
Keonthare mote dekhinathilu  
Boluchhugerasthamera.*”

Again polygamy is seen in the character of *Jogi* in *Dandanata*. Lastly he agreed to turn and marry her.

“*Tumbha bola nische kali sabhajane  
Tumbha bola nische kali*

*Jogibeshatezisanjogihesi  
Hatadharikarineli.”*

*Not only in Odisha but also in other corners of the country we do find the yogis who are supposed to refrain themselves from a common man's emotions of lust, greed, anger, envy, vanity, fear, revenge etc. He is expected to be living by begging above all these emotions detached from the worldly life. The characterization of Yogi-Yogiani episode in Dandanata is satirical as the Yogi is found to have all worldly activities that a common man does. He does no work and his wife is displeased. This is a criticism to the laziness of the yogis. Begging has been condemned and understood as an evil practice and hence 'every man must work' is probably the message of this episode for the onlookers of Dandanata.*

## **8. Conclusion**

Dandanata is a first vanishing performing art; it is unique as it involves dance, drama, music and sociology in a perfect blend, displays an unbounded creative energy that continues to be a vital force even today in a global perspective. Dandanata is a kind of *brata* or *osain* which the participant (*danduas*) observe strict discipline. This is always preceded by a vow made to acknowledge a wish already fulfilled or to get rid of a misfortune or disease suffered by any member of the *danduas'* family or expecting a wish to be fulfilled in future often birth of son. Apart from this spiritual reason, participation in *dandanata* is considered to be a religious or spiritual act. *Danduas* participate in it out of their devotion to Lord *Shiva* or Goddess *Kali*. Thus, the primary motives for one's participation is said to be removal of sin and attainment of liberation, fulfilment of desire in life here or here after. All those physical exercise, no matter whether of the expressive or of the pure and simple kind take place under the hot sun on hot ground for a period of two hours and more putting great strain on the energy and physique of the participants. For these reasons it is also counted as punishment. 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. Within the community of performing *danduas*, notions of purity stemming from caste distinctions are extinguished. However, with regard to persons, animals, food and things (such as friends, dogs, meat, modern thing), the need to avoid them and even the danger of becoming polluted by them, have increased. Again *dandanata* is more a social messenger than a source of entertainment. In Odisha, It is perhaps the only form of performing art that is deliberately performed and participated by different communities. Though most participants are usually from a low ranking caste, their social background has no meaning as there is no caste or class among the *danduas* during the *dandanata*. This egalitarian character of *dandanata* is also expressed quite over by the fact that all *danduas* dress in the same way, undergo the some penances and observe the same restrictions. That is perhaps the reason, why people, even historians believe that it originated post Buddha to counter his spread. *Dandanata* is a secular institution having egalitarian ethos with traces of anti-caste and anti-Brahmanism conducted by member of subaltern group.

The sixteen dual characters of *dandanata* reflect the different issues of day to day happenings of family life including love, affection, sentiment, union and separation. The social life of the village surrounding with its scenic beauty and the day to day happenings find its place in the theme of Dandanata which increases its social relevance. The spectators can watch themselves and their life events through the act of *Danduas*. The Chadeiya, a yogi, Kela or Keluni of Dandanata described in the article may be found in the same village where the act is performed. The different issues reflected in the act during the performance like the construction of a village temple, the levelling of the village roads, the ploughing scene, the dispute between the husband and wife and then again the reunion of the couple are of equal importance of the spectators as they experience it in their own life. The issue raised in the performance of Dandanata related to the poor communication in the village is still an unsolved problem that exists in many rural pockets of Odisha. The restriction on the Chadeiya not to kill certain kinds of birds and the punishment to him for his act of disobedience can be analysed in the present context of the animal rights and environmental protection as we find many laws and act being passed in the recent past. The emergence of the animal rights activist and their importance being gained in the contemporary society reminds us about the similar issues raised in the Dandanata. The Chadeiya's livelihood of killing birds with some restriction is a strong example of sustainable development; development that fulfils the needs of the present generation leaving a scope to the future

generation to fulfil their own needs. In this very particular context Dandanata can also be interpreted as a medium of creating awareness through performances which is enjoyable and attractive. Thus the paper concludes that Dandanata is a true representation of the socio-cultural life of the people of Western Odisha and a reflection of the issues that has no boundary. The style of performance of dandanata through song and dance and different acts of the danduas can also be replicated in different modern forms of performing arts.

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