

# Chhow Dance of Mayurbhanj

## The Tasks Ahead

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### *Introduction*

Since Independence, there has been a flowering of interest in the classical and folk culture of India. This has been, to a large extent, due to the Akademi at the State level and the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi. Attempts have been made to analyse the intricate aspects of these dance forms some of which almost faced extinction at the time of Independence. Various aspects of their idiom, vocabulary, repertoire, gesture, thematic and aesthetic qualities have been studied and attempts have also been made to relate the various dance forms to their folk background and cultural milieu. In short, the perspective in the sphere of dance and music has been to view them as integral expressions of folk culture and its world view. Simultaneously, the different dance forms and folk cultures have also been sought to be viewed as aspects of an all-embracing Indian folk culture whose most significant contribution has been the search for an unifying idiom and symbol in the midst of pervading diversities.

The Chhow dance of Mayurbhanj, however, seems to have been left out of this current rage of cultural efflorescence. Various aspects of the dance, its origin and growth, its themes, the musical accompaniment, the gestures and aesthetic moods of the performances are yet to be studied in detail and related to the relevant aspects of folk culture in the neighbourhood. In the absence of any such detailed investigation, one finds it somewhat difficult to accept a large number of prevailing generalisations on various aspects of the dance. The dance also has not yet been brought into an all-India focus nor has its relationship with similar dance forms been studied in any detail. The Akademis both at the Centre and at the State level have yet to go a long way in helping this dance to survive and grow, not merely by way of financial assistance, but, what is more important, by organising and directing research into different aspects of this dance.

### *Origins*

When Mayurbhanj Chhow was presented at Calcutta during the Emperor's visit in 1911, *The Englishman*, Calcutta, observed: "The war dance of Oriya Paikas, it is understood, was much admired by their Majesties. The Paikas danced their best and furnished a relief from the monotony of silent processions". *The Statesman* dated 6.1.1912 commented: "The dance drew universal appreciation. The Oriya Paik dance was a great spectacle". A Mayurbhanj Chhow group-dance or *Mela nacha* (as distinguished from solo or *Futnacha*) is always spectacular, vigorous, and characterised by rhythmic fury rising to a crescendo at the end. One of the commonly held viewpoints regarding the origin of Chhow — and one unfortunately held without much significant evidence — emphasises its martial origin and character. It is, for

example, said that the word "Chhow" itself derives from "Chhauni" (military cantonment or camp) and that the basic posture and stance of the dance, its steps and gaits, and the absence of female dancers, all point to its original martial character. The prevalence of non-martial and non-warlike themes derived from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Purana-s*, the emphasis on the Krishna legend, the large number of folk subjects and the derivation of a wide variety of basic postures and *bhangi-s* from the daily ritual of the ordinary household are sought to be explained (or rather explained away) by the general observation that these items must have entered the Chhow repertoire somewhat later. No attempt is made to explain when, why or how such inter-mixture did take place. The confusion seems to flow primarily from the over-riding emphasis on foot-work (as distinguished from gestures of the hand, *hasta mudra-s*, or facial expressions and movements of the eyes, lips, etc., *abhinaya*,) that characterises Chhow and this is argued as another point in favour of the thesis of its martial origin. It is said that in the formative stages the dancers used to dance with sword or spears etc., and hence the hands and the face did not convey as much of the visual imagery of the dance as the feet did. It is, however, not explained why in most folk dances the feet render the rhythmic fury and vigour of the dance much more competently than the hands and the face. This is not to deny the possibility of Chhow deriving some inspiration from the martial spirit of the local people, but to maintain that it is basically a martial dance and that its marriage with the tribal dance *Amdalia-Jamdalia-Nacha* produced the Chhow form would perhaps be a little too clever. Such a view can be taken seriously only after a more detailed investigation into its origins.

There are some who believe that Chhow is derived from the Oriya word ଚୁଇଁ or ଚୁଲମା or ଚୁବି or ଚୁଇଁମୁଁ meaning the attempt to show off, hypocrisy, pictures or shadow respectively. Now it is almost certain that initially Mayurbhanj Chhow used masks. It was only during the time of the King Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo (around the turn of this century) that masks were discarded. Old records of the Mayurbhanj Estate indicate that elaborate methods were employed to prepare these masks, which were often multi-coloured. The primary colours used were, however, ochre, white, brick-red and black. (It may not be out of place here to mention that the tribal Santals who are justly reputed for their skill in painting their walls use these four colours even today.) These masks must have looked like painted pictures. They also served the purpose of camouflaging the character's real face and gave him the intended stylised look and this was perhaps looked upon as artistic 'hypocrisy'. The dancers did "show off" quite a bit. Etymologically, therefore, it is possible that Chhow was derived from analogous words in the Oriya language.

#### *Links with the Tribal Dance*

The martial origin of Chhow is far from clear. The Mayurbhanj region of north Orissa was not the scene of many battles in historical times and the people who lived in this area were not particularly famous for their martial traditions. There are no documentary or archaeological records which point to any martial tradition in this area. Historians are agreed that

the Kheriyas ruled the northern part of Mayurbhanj in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were an aboriginal tribe and paid tribute to the Mayurbhanj Raja in honey, *maina* birds, parrots etc. The rule of the Kheriyas was in turn succeeded by that of the Bhuiyans and the Dharuas. Maharaja Jadunath Singh Deo's attempts to obtain an increased annual tribute met with stiff resistance from the Dharuas and he invaded the Bamanghati area in Mayurbhanj district to bring it under his direct control. The Santals and the Kols came to the help of the Mayurbhanj Maharaja at a crucial phase of the battle. This is the historical background to the Mayurbhanj Estate's cordial links with the Santals and the Kols. As a matter of fact, the enlightened rulers of Mayurbhanj have always accepted the integration of the non-tribal Hindus and the tribals as part of their policy. The Santals, the Kols and the Mundas were specifically encouraged to participate in the Hindu festivals, the most important of which was the Ratha Yatra at Baripada. The Santals also participated in the festivals related to the worship of Shiva. In the Mayurbhanj village of Badamtalia, a Santal constructed a small Shiva temple by raising donations and a Hindu priest was engaged for the worship of Lord Shiva in this temple. During Shivaratri the people of the region congregate to observe this Hindu festival and the Santals also participate in it in very large numbers.

These facts point to the close integration of the Santals and non-Santals of Mayurbhanj in the patterns of their social and cultural life. The worship of Shiva in a modified form is accepted as a part of the Santali mythology. Maranburu, the highest God of the Santali pantheon, is literally the God of the Great Hills. Occasionally, the enlightened Santals think of Maranburu as another name for Lord Shiva. It is, therefore, probable that the Chhow dance which emerged as a folk dance related to the rituals of Shiva worship imbibed from the very beginning certain elements of the tribal dance. This author has collected the invocation songs of the Santals in the Mayurbhanj area. These songs (known as *Bakhen-s*) have a ritualistic basis and are generally linked to the occasions punctuating the cycle of the agricultural seasons. The text of these invocatory songs has a degree of similarity with the prayers offered to Lord Shiva during the initiation of disciples into the practice of the Chhow dance. The prayers are generally pleas for the welfare of the community. Thematically, many of the Santal dances share some of the traits of the Chhow dances. The *Dantha* dance of the Santals, for example, includes a number of themes from the *Ramayana*, and their parallels are to be found in certain Chhow dances such as the dance number, *Jambeb*. A number of Santali dances based on the Krishna legend and incidents taken from the *Ramayana* bear a close resemblance to the folk dance items performed by the villagers of the district and in particular the *Mahanta* community. A systematic analysis of the melodic pattern of the orchestra and the movements of the dance of Chhow will in all probability indicate a number of similarities between these two groups of dances. Many Santali dances are in the nature of rural pantomimes: different kinds of agricultural operations, gestures of greeting, impersonations of different kinds of birds and animals often occur. The Chhow also includes dance imitation of birds and animals (for example, Jatayu). Specific items in the Santali dance (*Lagren, Baha, Dahar, Jadur* and *Rinja*) need to be systematically compared with items in the Chhow



*A scene from Zambeb*

repertoire, with a view to discerning in detail the similarities and differences. The Santals mainly use two types of drums: the *tumdak* with its cylinder of clay and the *tamak* with its hide-covered bowl. While the *tumdak* is played with the hands, the *tamak* is beaten with sticks. The former maintains the rhythm; the latter echoes and adds to the depth of the song. Somewhat similar drums are used in Chhow dance. The use of the mahuri and the flute in Chhow dance is akin to the use of these instruments in Santali dances.

#### *Similarities with Ritual and the Folk Tradition*

One might reasonably trace the origin of Chhow primarily from the folk dances of the cultural region of North Orissa (in particular, the Mayur-

bhanj district), with a very large admixture of tribal elements. During its evolution it has acquired a discipline and rigour; and this has doubtless given it, at least in part, the qualities of classical dance. As Kapila Vatsyayan has observed: Mayurbhanj Chhow presents many problems of classification, in terms of the categories of Indian dance styles. One may, however, conclude that it is a very interesting and exciting blend of classical, folk and tribal elements with a strong ritualistic content.

The ritualistic and specifically tribal aspects of the dance need to be investigated in much greater detail. The Chhow dance traditionally, as also today, used to be a part of the *Chaitra Parva*. The *Chaitra Parva* which falls in April has the twin aspects of spring's delicate wistfulness and the vibrant energy of the coming summer. It is a time when the *sal* trees are in bloom everywhere. The landscape has bright patches of red and purple (with the *simul*, *kusum* and the *palas* flowering all around) along with the blazing warmth of the copper and brown colours of fallen leaves. The atmosphere is surcharged with the languor of spring gradually merging into the elemental energy of the sun heralding the advent of summer. The local tribals also have their own festivals during this period. The Santals have the *Pata* festival in mid-April. In Mayurbhanj and Singhbhum the *Pata* festival has essential similarities with the *Bhokta* ritual.

Evidently, the word *Bhokta* is linked to the Sanskrit word *Bhakta*. The *Bhokta*-s were hereditary worshippers and belonged neither to the Brahmin or Karan (Kayastha) castes. In fact, they were usually from the lower castes. They used to enjoy rent-free land gifted to them by the kings of Mayurbhanj. After the abolition of the Zamindari system they lost the right and title to the land. In earlier days, the *Bhokta*-s used to roam the streets of the town of Baripada singing hymns in praise of Shiva and praying for the welfare of the king of Mayurbhanj. Today we see them at the end of this journey appearing around midnight on the stage where the Chhow dance is being performed. They are dressed in red-coloured dhotis and enter with great fanfare, burning incense and sprinkling ritually prepared powders into blazing fires (*mashal*-s) which sometimes send up leaping tongues of fire seven to eight feet high. The *Bhokta*-s form different groups, each under a *Pata-Bhokta*. They observe a strict code of conduct and are invested with sacred threads and garlands of *mallika* and *champak*. They also carry canes. During this period their own *gotra*-s are changed to *Shiva-gotra*. They are referred to as *Betra Sanyashi* and *Sutra Sanyashi*.

This ceremony used to be associated with the Uda or the swinging-by-hook festival which has now been declared a criminal act by legislation because of the danger to human lives. It is not confined to the Santals alone; the Mundaris and Oraons of Singhbhum and Sundergarh districts also observe during the month of April the famous *Sarhul* festival. This is the beginning of the hunting excursions of the Mundaris and Oraons. W. G. Archer has rightly compared it to the Christian festival of Easter as the two festivals correspond to "an exaltation in the brilliant weather and the flowering trees and the sense of sprouting life" (*The Blue Grove*, p. 36). The *Chaitra Parva* in Mayurbhanj also used to have a number of ritual aspects. In an article in

the Mayurbhanj Gazetteer (Volume No. 1, No. 3, April, 1932), there is a reference to the *Bhokta* ritual commencing on the seventeenth day of Chaitra; the *Bhokta-s* used to fast (like the Patuas) before the Goddesses. Generally these *Bhokta-s* now sing *bhajan-s* before the Goddesses and Mahadeva during the four days of the ritual, culminating in *Pana Shankranti*. They perform four different *Pata* ceremonies; *Kanta Pata* (walking or rolling on thorns), *Nian Pata* (fire-walking), *Jhula Pata* or *Ugra Tapa* (hanging, head down, on fire) and *Uda Pata* (rotating on a horizontal pole). It is interesting to observe that the *Danda Nata* has its own system of *Bhokta-s*, as also the worship of Shiva and Shakti, and a large number of dance performances which resemble aspects of the Chhow. The mention of *Hakand* in *Danda Nata* is also significant. *Uda Pata* and *Pansi Pata* (jumping from a height) also figure in *Danda Nata*.

The *Danda Nata* and *Danda Puja* of Southern Orissa have similarities with the *Bhokta* ritual. With *Danda* comes the *Jhamu* dance. The worshippers are known as *Dandua* and their presiding deity Shiva is called *Danda*. The entire objective of the *Jhamu* dance and the *Danda Nata* would seem to be the sublimation and control of the body and the sense organs. The *Dandua-s*, as also the *Jhamu* dancers, walk on fire and bring to mind the ancient exploits of the *Savara-s*, the Saora tribes in the forest. The main dancer in the *Danda Nata* usually narrates a tale about Shiva as the prime source of *gyan* and *bhakti*.

It could be that the *Gajan* and *Charak* pujas of Bengal have distant similarities with the *Bhokta* and *Danda* dances. In East Bengal, those performing *Gajan* puja undertake fasts, perform elaborate rituals and worship Lord Shiva. The prime actor is known as *Maini* and he dances as Shiva while another dancer joins him as Gouri or Parvati. During the dance he wears a 'head' and this has some resemblance to the 'mask' of the Chhow of Seraikela and the mask used in the early years of the Chhow of Mayurbhanj. The main priest of the *Danda Nata* is called *Maniama*. This suggests a relationship with *Maini*.

There was a time when about twenty thousand *Bhokta-s* used to congregate during the *Danda Nata* ceremony in the Chandanswar village of Balasore district. The dance of *Chaiti Ghoda*, prevalent among the fishermen of the coastal districts, has also a similar ritualistic significance and symbolism, which may not be entirely unrelated to the cultural matrix underlying the Chhow performance. Besides, the worship of Bhairava during the *Chaitra Parva*, the traditional visit to the dance arena of the *Jatraghata* and *Nishaghata* perhaps point to the intricate connection between Shaiva and Shakta worship and the origins of the Chhow dance. Thus, before one can conclude that Chhow dance is primarily martial in origin and spirit, these various aspects of possible inter-relationships and inspiration have to be studied. That it has positive folk inspiration is beyond doubt. The tribal orientation is also extremely probable. The Santals and Bhumijas, if not the Mundaris and the Oraons, seem to have contributed, in no small measure, to its evolution. Similarly inspiration may perhaps have also been derived from the Shiva and Shakti cult. More light needs to be shed on these possible

relationships and the viewing of Chhow as an expression of the Spring Festival and its different manifestations before one can arrive at any possible final conclusion about its origin.

#### *A Composite of Various Elements*

The vigour and fury of the movements in Mayurbhanj Chhow bring to mind the dynamism of Santali and Munda tribal dances. Besides there is the relationship to Shiva worship, to the concept of the *Tandava* dance, and to *Bhokta* rituals. What is worth noting is that even the delineation of more delicate emotions (like love) is through vigorous foot-work and massive expression of vitality. There is very little that is really feminine or tender in Chhow. Grace is always married to vigour and emotion to energy.

The item *Sabara-toka*, for instance, combines refinement and strength through the various movements of the dance. The *Sabara-toka* advances through the dense jungle with a majestic and elegant sweep; he hears the sound of an animal and jumps into action. His body becomes a dynamic instrument poised to kill and then there is the grace (which follows the killing of the animal) as he splashes water on his tired face! The entire sequence of movements delineates various moods and emotions. The dance item *Dandi* conveys a more austere mood since it portrays the young initiate symbolically leaving his house to perform severe penance and yogi practices. *Kailash Leela* is much more romantic in its conception and brings in the divine *maya* of the Supreme God through a series of rapidly shifting sequences.

Sabara-toka





*A scene from Dandi*

An item like *Tamudia Krishna*, for example, combines a subdued mood (embodied in the final scene when Krishna breaks Radha's pitcher) with the sheer violence and verve of the folk rhythm which informs the entire sequence. When Krishna dances in this number it is not just an emotive and

*A scene from Kailash Leela*



tender love-dance; the dance exudes, simultaneously, a sense of kinetic energy. The essence of manhood is vigorously asserted and even the flute is waved about in an almost furious manner. But this is not allowed to detract from the lyricism of the theme and its aesthetic grace. This particular dance-number (like other dance numbers in the tradition) achieves a fusion between the vitality, the lack of sophistication of the folk-style and the restraint of a formal dance. It is not so stylised as to be a mere form, a dessicated mask, a shadow without substance. Nor is it just raw energy or rhythm without discipline or organisation.



*A scene from Tamudia Krishna.*

### *Need for Codification*

An aspect of this form which demands attention is the formal codification of the idiom and vocabulary of the dance and its synchronisation with the musical accompaniment (both instrumental and oral) wherever the latter happens to be present. Under royal patronage, Chhow definitely flourished as an eclectic art. Records prove that the Gurus used to be taken to watch the performances of not merely western ballet and ball-room dances, but also the dance of the Nolias of Puri. This willingness to be exposed to other dance forms was, however, accompanied by a very curious reluctance to codify the basic vocabulary and idiom of the dance. This built-in deficiency has continued to bedevil Chhow.

Critics have sought to divide the basic movements of the dance into six *topka-s* and thirty-six *ufli-s*, relating six *ufli-s* to each *topka* in the manner of the relationship between the *raga-s* and *ragini-s*. But this relationship has

yet to be formally described and adequately explained. The theme-content is derived from a large variety of subjects including the daily chores of the common man and the imitation of the movements of birds and animals. The snake-dance, the Garuda in *Garud-bahan* and the deer-dance are cases in point. Curt Sachs, the noted authority on primitive dance, has observed that the essential significance of imitating the movements of animals lies in the primitive belief that those animals could be subjugated and conquered through such a portrayal. This interpretation has also gained support from several noted anthropologists. The basic postures and the *Bhangi-s*, the underlying *Dharan-s* and their aesthetic background have, therefore, to be examined in the context of the broad cultural matrix that informs it.

### *Lyrics and Music*

Further, serious attempts have also to be made to compile the lyrics accompanying the dance numbers. It is a pity that even after years of performance there is, as yet, no comprehensive and definitive compilation of the different solo, duet and group dance-numbers or the lyrics which accompany them. These lyrics are largely derived from the *Jhoomar* and the local folk-songs. These have to be systematically codified so that the trainees perceive the delicate relationship between the meaning and significance of the lyric and its visual representation through the dance. The aesthetic appreciation of the lyric is an important item in the proper presentation of any dance and more particularly a folk dance. In the absence of such appreciation, the dance runs the risk of degeneration into a mechanical and routinised movement of the body.

These lyrics can be broadly divided into four groups. Some of them have a strong admixture of Bengali. The songs accompanying *Tamudia Krishna* and *Nisitha Milon* are of this nature. The song accompanying the dance item *Kirata Arjuna* is closer to Bhojpuri. There are also lyrics which are almost indistinguishable from modern Hindi. Fourthly, we have items where the accompanying songs (as in *Odia* and *Nithura Kalia*) are rendered in chaste or colloquial Oriya. Here are a few examples of the original songs (transcribed in the Oriya script) translated into English.

ସୋମର ଗାଗରି କାଖେ  
 ରଞ୍ଜି ବଲ୍ଲଭେନ ପଥେ ପଥେ  
 ସରମ ଭରମ କୁଲ ଭୟ ରଞ୍ଜି ବିତେ  
 ହେ ସମ୍ପରା ଭଜଲ ଆନିତେ  
 କି କହିବ କୋଥାୟା ଯାବ  
 ମା ହେରିଏ ଶ୍ରୀ ମାଧବ  
 କୁଲ ଛାଡ଼ା ଘର ବୁଝ  
 ଆଛେ କାନ୍ଦମ ତଳେ  
 ହେ ସମ୍ପରା

*Embarrassed by her relatives and afraid of them,  
 Rai (Radha) treads the path slowly  
 With the golden water pot in her arms  
 To fetch water from the river Yamuna.  
 She does not see Srimadhava, wonders what she should do,  
 Where she should go.  
 He, who has snatched her away from her kula  
 And ruined life in the family,  
 Stands there under the kadam tree.*

(from *Tamudia Krishna*)

ଆଉ ନ ଭୁଲୁ ଶ୍ୟାମ ପୀରୁତିରେ  
 ଆଉଣ ସୁମଧୁର ଭାବଣରେ ।  
 ଧୂଳି ଲୁମ୍ବିଟ ଗୁରୁ ଶଠ ମହିମା ମେରୁ  
 ଖଣ୍ଡୁ ସ୍ତ୍ରୀ ପରି ନହିଁ ପରୁଣରେ । ଘୋଷା  
 ଗୋପ ରମଣୀ ମୋରା ଗୁଡ଼ିଗଲେ ମଧୁରା  
 ଅପବାଦ ପତକା ଗୋପେ ଗୋରୁଛି ଚେକା  
 ଡକା ବଜଇ ଶ୍ୟାମ କିରୁଣାରେ ।

*Don't be misled any more  
 By Shyama's overtures of love  
 Ignore His sweet words.  
 The guru of lecherous and wayward men  
 He is the prince of traitors,  
 In this wide world  
 There is no robber equal to him.  
 He deserted the women of Gopa.  
 And left for Mathura.  
 The flag of His misdeeds has been unfurled in Gopa,  
 And what a monument to Shyama's accomplishments!*

(from *Nithura Kalia*)

ପାହାଡ଼ ପରବତ ପାମ୍ବୁ ମୁଛୁ ଆଳୁମୁଣ୍ଡ  
 ଖାମୁରେ  
 ଆରେ ଡେରୁ ବିମୁଗ୍ଧ ସୁମୁରେ  
 ତକା ତୁମା ବିମୁରେ । ଘୋଷା

*I would go across hills and mountains  
 Eat the jungle fruit.  
 I would sleep on your bed  
 And shower you with kisses.*

(from *Kirata Arjuna*)

It is not possible to state with any accuracy when such lyrics came into the Chhow dance. Originally, Chhow was no doubt a form of non-verbal theatre. It is possible that during the 1920s and 30s, and particularly because of the association of the Chhotrai Sahebs and Routrai Sahebs of the Estate, a need was felt to introduce some song accompaniment. The lyrics, however, cannot be said to be either original or meaningful and their authorship is also far from certain. The dance numbers could as well do without them.

Luckily for Chhow, there has been an almost continuous tradition of very able dance teachers. Till now they have, however, depended far too much on individual inspiration and their own sense of improvisation. While any creative dance does depend on such improvisation to some extent, the need for consolidation and codification cannot be denied. Unfortunately, this is yet to begin in a systematic way. Those who play the instruments also need to be guided by a regular system of musical notation. The *Ranga Raja* is after all a form of orchestra, howsoever imperfect. It cannot do without a formal system of notation to guide the drummers and the Mahuri-players. In the absence of such a system, there is a genuine danger of too much of clever improvisation and of lack of symmetry between the dance as visual imagery and its auditory accompaniment. One also notices a gradual tendency to incorporate elements of lighter tunes through the Mahuri and the flute. Over the last decade, this tendency to introduce softer music, often an imitation of film tunes, has increased and is something that must be seriously discouraged and discarded. In brief, the dance items have to be studied as an integral system of *Nritta*, *Nritya* and *Natya*. Because of the large number of character-dances, an informal system of choreography cannot be avoided, but the dances require to be systematised.

#### *Decor and Costumes*

Not much attention has hitherto been given to the costumes worn for the dance numbers. The importance of costume designing in a folk dance form can hardly be over-emphasised. As early as July 1934, the poet Lakshmikanta Mahapatra (who visited the Chhow dance of that year at Bari-pada) regretted the tendency to lay too much emphasis on glittering dresses of artificial silk. What is required is thorough planning of the sets of each dance number. The costumes should necessarily be traditional, and must harmonise with the theme, the period to which it relates, and sound aesthetic concepts.

#### *Training and Encouragement*

The Mayurbhanj Chhow Nritya Pratisthan has initiated a programme to attract regular trainees, and offered them stipends to learn the dance. In the absence of such encouragement in the past the learners used to be mainly part-time workers, such as plumbers, mechanics, and even rickshaw-pullers. Under those circumstances many of the trainees could hardly afford the time or energy for sustained and regular practice. Many of them used to brush up their knowledge and technique of the dance just two or three weeks before the Annual Festival.

Historically Chhow has passed through many phases of growth and decline. During the rule of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanja Deo (1868-1882), Chhow dance enjoyed immense popularity and rich princely patronage. Inspired by the Maharaja's example, the then Chhotrai Saheb Brundaban Chandra Bhanja Deo assumed the responsibility of training and performance of *Uttar Sahi*. He himself used to take part in the dance. His brother Gokul Chandra Bhanja Deo was in charge of *Dakhin Sahi*. The main road running east-west from the palace divides Baripada town into *Uttar Sahi* and *Dakhin Sahi*. After Sriram Chandra Bhanja's investiture in 1892, his brothers Shyam Chandra Bhanja and Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo took charge of the performance of the *Uttar Sahi* and *Dakhin Sahi* respectively. These two brothers participated in the dance and arranged for an annual grant for each *Sahi*. The training continued throughout the year and new dance items were also introduced. One record suggests that an outlay of Rs. 800/- was always sanctioned for the introduction of a new dance item and included the cost of costumes and other accessories.

Chhow dance suffered a partial eclipse after the death of Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo in 1912. The annual grant for each *Sahi* was reduced and until the early thirties the dance languished. Then Maharaja Pratap Chandra Bhanja Deo increased the annual grant to Rs. 5,000/- for each *Sahi* and took a sustained interest in the form. Dancers received handsome rewards, including land grants. Teams of Ostads, dancers and committee members of each *Sahi* were often sent by the Maharaja to observe the performances of Uday Shankar, Amala Shankar and other exponents of Indian dance. This period witnessed the evolution of expertise and high technical standards and a revival of the dance. But in the wake of the merger of the princely States into Orissa (in 1949), there was a decline. Princely patronage was no longer available and the state government did not move in to fill the vacuum. Bhabani Kumar Das took it upon himself to keep alive this dance form with the help of Ostads and artistes and presented special shows before the first Governor-General of India Sri Rajgopalachari and Prime Minister Pandit Nehru. The Central Sangeet Natak Akademi and the State Akademi came to the rescue of the dance through suitable financial assistance. The present difficulty is to maintain sustained interest and regular practice, so urgently required for a proper performance. Chhow dance is by its very nature so vigorous that there is a danger of thinness in performance in case of a long gap in training. Many of these dancers and dance teachers have to depend on other avenues of employment; some are agriculturists by profession, others are small traders. But the majority do not have any settled and assured source of income. This makes it difficult for them to continue dance practice in a systematic manner. Assurance of a number of performances inside or outside the State can provide a substantial income to the dancers and the poorer among them can then give up other part-time activities and concentrate on the dance. This calls for organisation and efforts from all concerned. A systematic training scheme was drawn up during 1970-72. A stipend is now being offered to the trainees. The Sangeet Mahabidyalaya at Bhubaneswar has opened a course on Chhow and it has become extremely popular. Three teachers have been brought on loan from the Mayurbhanj Chhow Nrutya Pratisthan. It is hoped that with gradually ex-

panding popularity, Chhow can be performed in different parts of the country almost on a regular basis and this can generate sufficient funds for the dancers to devote themselves full-time to the art.

On the occasion of the Annual Festival in 1971 a four-day discussion and demonstration programme was organized, in addition to the usual dance performances at night. Dance troupes from the interior of the district were invited to compete. As many as ten teams participated, over and above the two main teams from Baripada proper, the *Dakhin Sahi* and *Uttar Sahi*. The items presented by the lesser known groups from the interior were an eye-opener. There were very promising dancers, who with regular training and the benefit of better *gurus* could grow into mature artistes. Also in evidence were certain charming variations in musical accompaniments, lyrics and costumes as also the entire approach to the dance. Some of these regional variations inside the district need to be encouraged. In particular, two items, *Garuda Bahana* and *Kalachakra*, presented by the *Jambani* and *Sansimulia* parties were considered to be of a very high order and given special prizes.

The future growth of Chhow lies in the direction of a systematic investigation into some of the areas of uncertainty mentioned above so that this very artistic and vigorous folk-art can gain the recognition which it so richly deserves. It is a pity that this dance has not yet been performed in different parts of the country in any significant way and unfortunately it has not attracted the attention of dance critics from different parts of India. The relationship of different aspects of the dance with similar dance forms in other parts of the country should be explored as also its links with the folk culture of the area. One has to ensure that this extremely vigorous and interesting dance form is not merely sustained; it must evolve and flower.

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