

***Dulduli*: the music ‘which touches your heart’ and the re-enactment of culture**

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Introduction

Dulduli is the name given to the regional tradition of instrumental orchestral music in western Orissa. In the traditional rural setting, it is known as *ganda baja* and is played exclusively by the (formerly) Untouchable communities of the Ganda (also called Pano).¹ The *ganda baja* is a ritual inter-village orchestra that carries with it indigenous concepts of rhythms, instruments and goddesses, and is associated with marriage alliances and religious ceremonies. Since the music combines gods and humans in a sensual manner, it is never absent during weddings or rituals for local gods and goddesses. In the urban setting, the inter-village orchestra transforms itself into *dulduli*, a form of folk art on stage, also known as *sambalpuri* music. *Dulduli* players are generally urban middle-class musicians, who perform mainly on stage in a range of cultural contexts.

The present chapter, which represents work in progress,² describes a musical tradition in its diverse cultural settings and in a process of social change. In so far as music represents a society, it can only be understood in its specific cultural context.³ This study thus attempts to differentiate between the rural and urban features of local music in western Orissa. When

¹ The phrase ‘instrumental orchestra’ signifies an ensemble of instruments with a choral character drawn from the different voices of the instruments, but in this context it does not signify any form of vocal ensemble. It is important to note that an instrumental orchestral tradition in South Asia is very different from the Indian traditional (classical) form of modal music. Modal music in classical Indian music is characterised by the individual solo performer and solo compositions (Daniélou 2004:10-11); it lacks the choral character of instruments as voices which play together. The choral character of the South Asian orchestral tradition otherwise resembles classical European orchestras (chamber orchestra, opera orchestra etc.). The differences from the classical European tradition lie in the fact a) that the musicians are restricted to specific social groups or ethnic categories, b) that the music is restricted to special occasions (Sachs 1923: 2-3), and c) that it represents specific regional traditions of ensembles of regional instruments (see Sachs 1923: 3-11), for example that known as the *Naykhibaja* of the Newar (Wegner 1988) or the *Damai baja* (Helffer 1969a/b), also known as the *Pancai baja*, of the Damai (Tingey 1994), both from Nepal.

²I am grateful to the German Research Council (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) for a generous research grant (from 2003 to 2005), which enabled me to conduct research into *sambalpuri* music.

³See Blacking 1973; Blacking and Kealiinohomoku 1979.

local performing arts evolve to become urban folklore on stage, the character of the cultural performances also changes. Urban folklore in western Orissa is directly connected with the music industry, the media and the world wide web. Urban folklore is also related to the constitution and rise of regional ethnicity, in so far as this can be considered a political agent.

The first part of this chapter deals with the traditional settings of the instrumental orchestral music of western Orissa. The second part sketches a profile of the transformation of a performing folk art into urban folklore and thus draws attention to the political implications of music.

I. The Traditional Contexts of *Dulduli*

Traditionally in western Orissa,⁴ music and dance are embedded in the local belief system, where instruments and rhythms represent the speech of local goddesses. The voices of the different goddesses appear in different rhythms. In the rural context no socio-religious ceremony, such as marriage or *puja* to the gods and goddesses, can be celebrated without *baja*. The musicians are invited by means of the symbol of turmeric powder, which is sent to them by different local communities, such as the Binjal, Gouro, Dhol Khond, Mali or Kulta, to perform in their villages. The music played by the Ganda musicians connects local communities, places and religious concepts. In its linking and communicative function, it can be considered an inter-village orchestra, whose mediators are the Ganda musicians.⁵

The ensemble of the folk instruments is also called a *panchabadya*,⁶ which itself refers directly to the five instruments assembled in the inter-village orchestra. The orchestra, consisting ideally of five instruments, might have between five and seven instrumentalists. The ensemble represents three categories of instruments: membranophones (*dhol*, *nissan*, *tasa*, also called *timkiri*), an aerophone (*mohuri*) and idiophones (*kastal/jhang* or *jumka*).

⁴The data are drawn from Sambalpur and Bargar Districts, especially the rural Padampur and Boro Sombar region. I am thankful to Surendra Kumar Sahu from Padampur who assisted me in my research with whole of his musical knowledge and devotion for the local music of this region.

⁵ For comparison of the Pano in Koraput, see Pfeffer 1994: 14–20.

⁶ See here the similarity with the Nepalese *pancha baja* of the Damai musicians (Tingey 1994).

The *ganda baja/panchabadya* of Western Orissa:

- 1) *dhol*
- 2) *nissan*
- 3) *tasa* or *timkiri*
- 4) *mohuri*
- 5) *kastal/jhang* or *jumka*

Dhol

The *dhol*, which is the leading instrument, is a large membranophone. The large, long drum (90 cm to 1.5 metres in length) is made from the trunk of a tree and is stringed with cowhide (*gai chomora*) on two sides. The *dhol* also has strips of cowhide (*badi*) and rings for the strips (*kol kola*). The *tali* is the right-hand side skin and is made from calf's skin; the *dhaya*, the left-hand one is made from cowhide. *Tali* are slightly smaller (37 cm in diameter) than the *dhaya* (38 cm in diameter), and the left side is played by one rubber stick (*khanda/nara*) of around 40 cm in length. The *dhol* player is called the *dholya*, who typically directs all changes of rhythm played by the *ganda baja* group. All the rhythms are spontaneous, but they are still directed by the *dholya*. The musicians learn the rhythmic and melodic compositions by listening to various rhythms from early childhood on.

Nissan

The *nissan*, another membranophone, has a tapered form like half a melon. It is often considered to be the most ancient instrument of the village orchestra. A *nissan* is made of wooden and iron sheets, and is played with two rubber sticks (*chimta*). The leather (*chipra*) that creates the sound is made of cowhide or goatskin, and is often decorated with colourful paintings.

The *nissan* is always played with maximum strength and thus has a deep, penetrating sound. In the Sambalpur area it is decorated with deer antlers, though these have begun to disappear, as hunting deer has been forbidden.

Tasa

The *tasa*, a small membranophone, is a drum made from clay (*matul*) and stringed with cow's leather (*gai chomra*), called *mola*. Its shape is tapered to a base,⁷ and it is played with two thin bamboo sticks. The sound the *tasa* makes is high and thin.

Mohuri

The *mohuri* is an oboe-like instrument. Its sound, the Ganda say, is a crucial element in changing the character of the music. Usually it is associated with the seductive voice of a capricious woman, but it can also be related to the desperate voice of a mother crying for her dead son.

Kastal

The *kastal* or *jhang* are iron cymbals; the *jumka*, which may be used instead of the cymbals, is basically a rattle.

All the instruments play together in both tune and rhythm. The most important criteria for a Ganda musician are to listen to what the other musicians are playing and to learn to play along with them. Playing *baja* also implies a sophisticated culture of listening. The musical specificity of the *ganda baja* seems to lie in its instrumental orchestral character. Through the beat of the right-hand, *talli* side of the *dhol*, the *dhol* provides orientation for the *tasa*, which then beats a double rhythm. The beat of the left-hand, *dhaya* side *dhol* provides orientation for the *nissan*, which then strikes a counter-rhythm to the beat of the *dhaya*. As the sound of the *mohuri* must often resemble the flirting of a women's voice, it is played in an extremely alluring way.

All the instruments in the inter-village orchestra are worshipped before being played. They themselves are used in the worship of gods and goddesses, but they also require worship.

Even if the orchestral character *ganda baja* can be compared with some structural features of the orchestral traditions of Nepal (Helffer 1969a/b, Tingey 1994, Wegner 1988), *ganda baja* seems to represent a regional specificity of western Orissa/Chhatthisgarh⁸.

The *ganda baja* and the worship of the goddess

The *dhol*, *nissan* and *tasa* are used in inducing trance. For instance, the *nissan* represents the voice of the goddess Nissani and thus becomes identical with her. This identification between drum and goddess can be observed in a Nissani temple near Padampur in Bargar District, where the Goddess Nissani is considered to be, and where there are three *nissan* drums on the temple altar.

***Ganda baja* and *boil*: an example of a traditional possession cult**

The relationship between *ganda baja* and the local worship of goddesses is illustrated by the local possession cult called *boil* in the Padampur/Borosombar region of western Orissa.

The ritual scene

Every Monday during *dasara* (October) in the Boro Sombar region, when the Goddess Durga is to be worshipped, she appears in the body of her priest. At this time, *boil* comes upon the *pujari* (priest). Meanwhile the *ganda baja* accompanies the act of possession, which is embodied in the dance and speech of the priest.

Definitions of *boil*

Boil is a polysemic religious concept. It can be translated as either the ‘divine dance’ or the ‘dance of gods and goddesses’. This concept refers to the religious specialist and his or her ritual involvement. The priest (*pujari*) who becomes *boil* is transformed into a sacred dancer of the Goddess Durga.

Boil can also be understood as the ‘opening’ of the local priest (*pujari*) to the entry of a divine power and can accordingly be identified with “goddess spirit possession” (Roche 2000: 288-95). *Boil* can also be translated simply as a divine power, a procreative and creative power, which comes upon the *pujari*. The phrases *boil asile* or *boil asi* (‘*boil* came’) and *boil asibe* (‘*boil* will come’) indicate the wild dance of the *pujari*, who, while dancing, represents and becomes *boil*. On the one hand, *boil* is a condition, a state of trance. On the other hand, it is the personified manifestation of the Goddess Durga. During *boil*, the *boil* himself may even completely lose control and fall down if he is not held or helped. Generally the *boil* of the

⁷The *tasa* has also leather strips.

⁸ According to personal communication (august 2005) with Dr Nicolas Prévot, at the Department of Ethnomusicology in Paris, similar musical structures can be found in Chhattisgarh.

Goddess Durga is a man, but a man with feminine attributes. *Boil* have long, open hair and wear a red sari during the *boil* ritual.

Boil charibe, jibe ('*boil* will leave') signals the end of the ecstatic dance and the end of the presence of the divine power. After the divine power withdraws, the *boil* is left numb and then returns to his or her original state as the daily priest.

***Ganda baja* rhythms and the ritual transformation**

The *ganda baja* is of central importance in the ritual transformation of the human priest into a *boil*, the divine manifestation of the Goddess Durga and of other goddesses and gods.

The concept of *bol* or *par*, the rhythm, plays a critical role in the ritual performance of *boil* possession. The trance itself is expressed in rhythms which become representative of the goddesses. The *ganda baja*, which is essentially polyrhythmic, leads the possession performance, particularly by playing the so-called *borua par*, the holy sixteen rhythms of *boil* possession.

Borua par

The *borua par*, the rhythms of the divinely possessed, have a structure of sixteen rhythms, also called *sulo par*. *Sulo par* are the rhythms represented in the *boil*, the possessed priest (*pujari*) of a goddess. Different goddesses will appear via different rhythms (*par*) in the body of the possessed. *Sulo par*, the sixteen possession rhythms, represent sixteen different goddesses. The rhythms are named after the goddesses' names and are aurally recognised by the musicians.⁹ Locally, the identifications of rhythms and goddesses can vary.

The *ganda baja* or inter-village orchestra accompanies the ritual of possession and the worship of the gods and goddesses. The music of the (formerly) Untouchable musicians in itself represents an 'Untouchable' entity of the sacred, channelling intangible local concepts of the divine as a wild, uncontrolled power, which is expressed by the rhythms and dance of the possessed priest. On the one hand, the *baja* transcends local communities in its function as a ritual inter-village orchestra. On the other hand, through its rhythmic expression of the transcendence, the *baja* enables the sensual experience of the local community and its communication with the holy sphere.

The *ganda baja* as expression of local identity

The *ganda baja* not only provides a form of religious expression, it also transmits to its listeners a strong emotional connection with local beliefs and identities.¹⁰ To quote a Ganda musician: ‘Listen to the *baja*. It touches your heart! It is the sound of the thunder storm. It is the sound of your heart beat.’ For all those whose life has been accompanied by *baja*, this music represents part of a local cultural totality, and as such the music reinforces a feeling of cultural interconnectedness. The inter-village orchestra can be considered a crucial component of cultural identity. As the *ganda baja* communicates with other cultural clusters – religious rituals and local communities – it signifies a feeling of local and religious identity. The ritual musical performance expresses an abstraction of the experience of the local community.

Having dealt with the topic of music and situated in its traditional context, I shall now discuss recent transformations in an urban setting, where tradition is becoming more and more reinvented.

II. The urban context

In the urban context, the play of culture and local identity is expressed on stage. In urban western Orissa one can discern a high degree of creativity in the performing arts. Traditional music and dance are re-vitalised on stage and create a kind of urban folklore, the so-called *sambalpuri* music. In Sambalpur it is striking that no less than two generations are searching for a ‘lost cultural identity’. The second and third generations of urban migrants continually ask themselves what they have lost due to the industrialization and modernization of their world.

In this context, in recent years many cultural institutions and centers have appeared and grown in order to re-vitalize a ‘forgotten’ local culture. These cultural groups conduct research on traditional dance and music in order re-create these customs on stage in a proper traditional manner. The aim of this wave of research in the most remote areas is to collect the ‘wild’ (yet not urbanised) rhythms and information about them before these traditions change or disappear. Many urban activists are going to the field and documenting these still vibrant

⁹ Such as Durga Par; Maha Kali Par; Ma Magala Par; Ma Tarani Par; Oila Devi Par; Subakesi Par; Tula Devi Par; Bontei Devi Par; Chandraseni Par; Ganga Devi Par; Parvati Par; Lakshmi Par; Boiravi Par; Buri Ma Par; Patmeshwari Par; Samleshwari Par.

¹⁰ On the relationship between music and emotion, see Feld 1982.

traditions in remote villages, where they observe, learn, and finally teach their young urban students how to protect and understand their cultural identity through music and dance.

Cultural programmes, such as Loko Mohotsav, the annual Folklore Festival in Sambalpur, which started in 1998, deal with the changing world and with the persistent search for cultural identity. Modern media and technology are used to promote local cultural performances on stage and to transfer them to the world wide web. In various ways local musicians are invited to Sambalpur and encouraged to continue performing their local art traditions, for which they receive recognition and money.

The Loko Mohotsav in Sambalpur is an example of the on-going process of creating and re-creating urban folklore on stage in a manner that connects it with a globalized world. In the Loko Mohotsav, local life is re-enacted and projected on to the global community. For urban cultural activists, west Orissan folklore is becoming one of the centers of musical and cultural expression. The sacredness of the traditional *baja* is being transformed into the sacredness of a performance that will be broadcast to the world.

Because of the vital work of these urban activists, art traditions are being preserved on stage, where, however, the re-enacted local traditions become fragmented by an earlier socio-cultural totality. On stage, the *dulduli* is no longer a ritual inter-village orchestra played by the (formerly) Untouchable Ganda. Instead it represents a regional folklore that is mostly being played by an urban middle class, who have migrated from the villages and have settled in the cities in the past two or three generations. Together with the cultural nostalgia being catered to by the music industry, the traditional *baja* has since become 'touchable'. With its tangibility, urban folklore is in danger of being transformed into an ever simpler and secular form of entertainment.

Music and ethnicity

Together with its cultural revival on stage, a growing regional ethnic awareness can be witnessed with regard to *dulduli* or *sambalpuri* music.

Ethnicity is the process of constructing group identity with regard to a constructed history, common origin and culture.¹¹ The discourse on culture in western Orissa is strongly connected with its impact on music and language. Cultural and political activists are trying to

¹¹ For definitions and discussion, see Guibernau and Rex (ed.) 1997; Waltzer, Kantowicz, Higham and Harrington 1982; Ben-Ami, Peled and Spektorowski (eds.) 2000.

combine language, music and culture in order to construct a distinct regional and cultural identity. The regional uniqueness of *sambalpuri* culture will be expressed by *sambalpuri* music and language. *Sambalpuri* music thus conveys political self-awareness and self-esteem. Potentially, this cultural distinctiveness may one day become the basis for the creation of Koshal,¹² a autonomous regional administration within India.

On stage, *dulduli* music demonstrates the cultural and political self-awareness of an urban middle class, since it reflects its relationship with local folk music and its power to create a regional ethnicity in urban western Orissa,¹³ mirroring a recent example of cultural metamorphosis on stage. The former socio-ritualistic *ganda baja* is being transformed into secular *sambalpuri* music, with implications for political, cultural and regional distinctiveness.

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¹² Koshal is the name of a mythological kingdom of this region.

¹³ For comparisons, see Stokes (ed.) 1994.

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