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Danda Nacha: A Philosophical Exploration

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Abstract: In this research proposal an attempt is made to know how Danda Jatra (DANDA NACHA) is connected to various theories of punishment and especially Reformatory and preventive theory of punishment. A new terminology and theological theory of punishment is assumed to colloquial form of dance. Danda Nacha is one of the most important traditional dance festivals organised in different parts of South Odisha and particularly in the Ganjam district, the Heartland of ancient Kalinga Empire. The Danda Nacha is being held in the month of Chaitra (March- April) of every year. It's an ancient festival of the Kalinga Kingdom and still alive in and around the ancient Kalinga capital Sampa /Samapa i.e. modern day Ganjam district. The participants of Danda are called Danduas(also known as Bhaktas) and they pray Goddess Kali and Shiva during 13,18, or 21 days. In first section, it deals with the origin and significance of Dandanacha. The second section deals with Theological punishment i.e. the suffering, the path of renunciation. Lastly, it deals with the concluding position of the essay. "The test of love is Tapasya and Tapasya means suffering." - M.K. Gandhi

Keywords: Dandanacha, Punishment, Theological, suffering, Satyagraha, spiritual.

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OBJECTIVES

1. To present the basic characteristics of Dandanacha.
2. To know the constructive suffering and its renunciation.
3. To know the Dandanacha, Saivism and its positive awareness.
4. To study the maintenance of moral balance.
5. To promote spiritual upliftment through self-discipline.
6. To show it is an instrument of social unity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this philosophical enquiry I would like to adopt and apply several methods like, Experimental method, Field study method, Textual method, and Critical method (Kant).

Meaning of Danda Nacha

Firstly, Though dancing, as an art, is primarily for the sake of enjoyment and amusement of the individual performer or Dandua or Bhakta and the audience, it serves as an instrument of social unity.

Danda has many meanings, but there are two main meanings of the word.

- Club or Rob or Pole or stick
- Punishment

Origin: It's origin is discovered to 8th and 9th centuries (inception of Tantrism) after decadence of Buddhism in Odisha. In Odisha, after the humiliation of Buddhism, Saivism became a predominant religion. The downtrodden untouchables and low castes took to the

worship of Lord Shiva outside the Hindu temples. When the upper class Hindus hated the downtrodden untouchables and debarred them from entering the Hindu temples, they began to worship Shiva, for their salvation, once a year at a festival called Danda Nacha.

"*Abhinava Chandrika*" is a Sanskrit work on Daita philosophy written by Satyanath Tirtha, a literary work of 1568 A.D. mentions the prevalence of Danda Jatra. That signifies that this folk theatre was very much popular in the medieval period.

The various dances of the Danda Nata have various themes behind them. Each of the roles in the dances sings a different tune. Some songs are based on historical stories, while others have a more comical approach. Some groups use a question/answer approach. The groups that use that approach have one role, male or female role, ask questions, while the other role give answers to those replies. Although the songs can be performed through multiple approaches, all the songs have the same style, folk and Odishi.

Theological Punishment: People commit self-inflicted wounds to worship Lord Shiva because the philosophy of ancient Hindu says that for a person to be great, one has to have self-control over one's body (Kaya), mind (mana), speech (vakya). So in order to achieve greatness, a lot of punishment i.e. Danda, to the individual must be undergone, so this event is known as Danda Nacha.

Danda Nacha aims at arousing religious fervour as well as entertaining aesthetic pleasure among the spectators. The main aim of this type of folk dance is to

promote spiritual upliftment through self-discipline. People pay reverence to Danda dancers for their observance of religious rites during the course of their dance.

It is evident that after degradation of Buddhism, Saivism emerged as a popular religion in Odisha, most particularly for untouchables and low caste people into which the status of most Buddhism were relegated. Since the upper class Hindus monopolized the privilege of entry to the temple and debarred the untouchables and low castes from entering the Hindu temples, they began to worship Shiva outside the Hindu temples. In due course of time they observed certain rites in connection with the worship of Shiva and started a festival, once a year popularly called as Danda Nacha.

There is no caste distinction in Danda Nacha, whoever desires irrespective of their caste, creed, social and economic status may join it as a devotee or Bhakta. A Bhaktas is otherwise known as a Dandua or Rishiputra. However, participation in Danda Nacha as a Dandua or Bhakta is allowed to males only. During the period of the Danda the Bhaktas stay in the group avoiding all contact with women or anything worldly in nature and lead an ascetic life.

According to the ancient Hindu philosophy, the greatness of an individual in this materialistic world depends upon his accomplishment of self-control over his own body (Kaya), mind (mana), speech (vakya). It takes tremendous amount of practice to gain this control and amounts to a lot of self -denials.

Those who achieve this are known as the Tri-dandis or attainers of triple chastisement. Since this method of bringing purity of conduct involves a lot of punishment (Danda) to itself.

According to Bhagavad Gita, due to Karma Man are suffering. Every action entails result. An agent has undergo the result of his action. If the result of the actions are not undergone here in this life, one has to undergo them in future life. Thus, Karma doctrine establishes a link between past, present and future life. The present life the result of past Karmas and it will shape our future life. Karma doctrine presupposes immortality and transmigration of soul because the agent has to go undergo consequences. Law of Karma states that every action (Karma) is followed by certain consequences (Karmaphala). 'As you sow , so shall you reap' is the karmic maxim. Redemption is the aim of life.

In Western Ethics, we find similarity between Reformatory theory of punishment and Danda Nacha. Reformatory theory of punishment is also known as educative theory of punishment. According to this theory, the aim of punishment is to educate or reform the offender himself. It's a humanistic principles.

Punishment is the imposition of an undesirable or unpleasant outcome upon a group or individual meted out by an authority in contexts ranging from child discipline to criminal law. It's a protection against future harms.

According to Contemporary Indian philosopher Sir Mohammud Iqbal, Suffering is included with all the factors strengthening the self. All the results of individuality of separate selfhood, necessarily involve pain or suffering. No religions systems can ignore the moral value of suffering. Wisdom comes through suffering. Only through suffering that an intelligence became a soul. A place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways. Suffering is a gift from the God in order to make man see the whole of life.

"Suffering is important for the maturing of the personality."- Mohammad Iqbal

We also find similarity of it with philosophy of self-suffering of Gandhi. Gandhi's concept of Ahimsa goes for beyond renunciation of the will to kill or damage. Ahimsa to Gandhi is love. Gandhi relates love and self-suffering (Tapasya). Love never claims, it ever gives. Love ever suffers, never re-sents, never revenges itself.

"The test of love is Tapasya and Tapasya means suffering."- M.K. Gandhi

In the concept of Satyagraha, self-suffering is willingly accepted by the Satyagrahi himself with the specific intention of the moral persuasion of the enemy. Self-suffering is neither an inability to win over the opponent through violence nor a meek submission to the will of the evil-doer. It's a fight against an evil system and a tyrant with one's soul force. In other words self-suffering the of the strong. Gandhi said, Non-violence cannot be taught to a person who fears to die and has no power of resistance. Self-suffering in Satyagraha is directed to resisting humiliation as well. Self-suffering is integral to Non-violence, as it is a means in Satyagraha to overcome fear.

"Life must be lived as play, playing certain games, making sacrifices, singing and dancing, and then a man will be able to propitiate the God, and win in the contest."- Plato

"All evil is either sin or the punishment for sin."- St. Augustine.

The Augustian theodicy adds that at the end of history there will come the judgement, when many will enter into eternal life and many others (who in their freedom have rejected God's offer of salvation) into eternal torment.

“Suffering is necessary incident to the evolution of moral excellence. Much of suffering follows from the regularity and uniformity in the workings of nature. For example; fire uniformly burns the finger and certain diseases would follow if we do not take precautionary measures.”- F. R. Tennant.

Suffering is the essence to establish one’s character in the preview of moral and social norm. As points out France philosopher Alexis Carrel (1873-1944), “Man can not remake himself without suffering, for he is both the marble and the sculptor.”

Lastly, This popular folk dance of Ganjam Danda Nacha is mainly based on mythological legends. It’s influencing the society to a large extent by creating the sence of patriotic spirit, love for literature, love for self, beliefs in God, taste for music, theatre and dance. It serves as an instrument of social unity. Punishment is the form of dance associated with ritualistic service. Dandanacha forms an institution of dance, music and dramatics blended with religious social reformation and an association of Universal Brotherhood. Mainly an worship of Lord Shiva, the God of destruction of the Hindu mythology, who is also the Lord of histrionic arts (Nataraj) brings into its fold a harmonious feeling of co-existence between followers of different philosophical doctrines between political principles and set of opinions.

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