

## **Contribution Of The Paik Akhada To The Cultural Heritage Of Odisha: A Critical Analysis**

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### **Abstract of the research paper titled contribution of the Paik Akhada to the cultural heritage of Odisha: A critical analysis.**

A country or a state feels proud of her cultural heritage when her races left behind the legacy. Moreover, culture is the manifestation of the human race. Culture also acts as messenger in uniting different racial groups of the countries through inter cultural exchange. As the state is linked to a particular race, the race is linked to a particular culture and similarly culture is manifested through tradition and customs inherited by the races. Coming down to the ages, the cultural heritage of Odisha is reflected upon the martial art or Paik Akhada which is noticed in the performing art, craft and literature of the state. It was a traditional martial art, had developed and grown one thousand years ago and it was greatly patronized by the king and revolutionary leaders for fighting against the external aggression and colonial hegemony. The Paik Akhada was very much known to all the countries of South-East Asia due to their valour, bravery and feat. Odisha also displayed her military supremacy due to the Paik Akhada. During the Gajapati rule, the Paik Akhada became more prominent and paramount. With the help of the Paiks, the Gajapati rulers expanded their aggrandizement in different directions and gave a new identity to Odisha. During this period the external forces did not dare to threaten the realm of Odisha because of paiks who were expert and trained in martial art and defeated the adversaries with their techniques and skill. Prior to the outbreak of the sepoys mutiny, the Paiks stood in revolt against the British under the leadership of Buxi Jagabandhu and Jairajguru. With their traditional martial art they showed their valour and strength and challenged the British power. The traditional martial art of Odisha can be compared to the martial art form of China, Japan, Korea and Thailand. In the present world the traditional martial art of China, Japan, Korea and Thailand was famous

and was considered as sporting event, similarly the martial art of Odisha was also equally important and significant. It can be rightly highlighted here that the traditional martial art of Odisha has come to the limelight due to its unique techniques, skill and physical ability shown in different periods of time. It is remembered that the Paik akhada or the traditional martial art is very much linked to the cultural heritage of Odisha. At present this is also considered as sporting and entertaining event, only thing is that proper exposure is required to give vent to its art form and to save and keep our rich cultural heritage intact, subsequently it will pass from generation to generation.

**Key words-** *Akhada, Paik, sporting, Boxing, Taikondo, Karate, Judo, sepoys, Gajapati, aggrandisement*

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Odisha had a long history of martial tradition with glories and reputation attached to it. This martial art has been well placed in the life line of the people of Odisha. The Kingdom of Kalinga was known as the present Odisha which was subjected to military aggression of various neighboring rulers, but it was repulsed back and resisted by our own heroes who led the army for territorial aggrandizements in different directions of the state. Odisha had seen the great battle of Kalinga in which thousands of Odia soldiers sacrificed their life to resist the attack of Chandasoka, the Magadhan aggressor. The lavish bloodshed on the bank of the river Daya and the bravery and valour of the Odia militia had brought tremendous mental agony in Ashoka, who promised here to relinquish war forever. It was this Kalinga which changed Chandasoka to Dharmasoka. The great kingdom of Kalinga also had seen the fighting spirit of Kharavela, Odisha's own empire builder. Kharavela had avenged the defeat of Odias in the battle of Kalinga and brought down Magadha under his

subjugation. The military career of this emperor was one of the rare examples of oriental valour.

Odishan art and architecture displays the military valour of Odisha. In the carving of Udayagiri Rock-cut caves during Kaharavela rule it is noticed the evidence of martial tradition of Odisha. In the beautiful carving of the Sun Temple at Konark, we can find scenes of heroic deeds, warfare and friezes of innumerable elephants. The war horse of Konark is another specimen of Odishan martial art. In the performing art of Odisha the influence of Odisha military glory can be distinctly observed. The military spirit of the Odias naturally got its reflection in the art and literature of the times which reminds us about our rich cultural heritage acquired from our forefathers who tremendously involved themselves to enrich it and have given a new dimension to it.

Besides that the martial art form of Odisha is also reflected in the Odiya literature of the state. The greatest example like the literary works of Adikabi Sarala Das who lived in a time when militarism was at its splendid height in Odisha. Sarala Das was a part of the invincible Odishan army which had overrun the Karamandal coast and Kondavidu which was considered as the second capital of Odisha during the rule of the Gajapati King Kapilendra Deva. The finest example is Adikabi Sarala Das, the composer of the great Odia epic “Mahabharat” who was a contemporary of Kapilendra Deva and was an eye witness to the military glory of Odisha. In his books Mahabharat, Vilanka Ramayan and Chandi Puran the martial art tradition of Odisha has been distinctly depicted with details. In Mahabharat vivid description can be seen about the art of “Byuha” formation, the tactics of Khanda Yudhya, Gadayudhya, the war strategies etc. In Chandi Puran a vivid descriptions is found of martial art during the war between Sri Durga, an woman deity and Mahisasur, the demon king. In the Vilanka Ramayan, Ramachandra with the help of Sita was able to kill the thousand headed Ravana. In this epic Sita is depicted as the Shakti and the description of the battle between the two adversaries has been described in a heroic martial style. Similarly in Balaram Das’s “Jagamohan Ramayan” it is observed the narration of warfare education. Another example is ‘Mathura Mangala’ of the poet Bhakta Charan Das in which we can find a scene of wrestling (Malla Yuddha) between Sri Krishna and Chanur in Mathura at the

behest of demon” Kansha.” The most note worthy is Kanchi Kaveri in which it is observed the depiction of war scenes. <sup>1</sup>

With the passage of time there is another example cited here Brajanatha Badajena in his Samar Tarang who has given vivid descriptions about the martial activities of Odisha. In his another book named “Paika Khela” is also valuable for record of military traditions of Odisha. In this book there is ample description about the dress, ornaments, arms, weapons, titles of Odia Paikas (peasant militia) engaged in different military activities. The jobs of various military title holders like Maharathi, Rout, Bahubalendra, Gajendra Pahad Singh, Dakhin Kabat, Uttar Kabat, Jenamani, etc. are clearly mentioned in this small booklet entitled “ Paikakhela”. In the poetic description of Sachi Routray (Baji Rout), Godabarish Mishra, Radhamohan Gadnaik we can find martial themes displayed in a lucid manner. In this way Odia literature is a storehouse of description of heroic deeds of Odia warriors, their glories, pathos, sacrifices and inspiring patriotism.

The evidence of martial art form is also found a place in the painting of Odisha. The finest example is the Kanchivijaya painting in the Jagamohan of the Jagannath Temple, it is noticed that Lord Jagannath and Balabhadra on horseback on their way to Kanchi to fight against Salva Narasingh for the prestige and pride of Odisha. Another evidence can be cited here that is reflected on the walls of Biranchinarayan temple of Buguda we can notice the war scenes of Ramayan. One of the popular themes of the Pattachitra tradition of Raghurajpur is the marching of soldiers with horses and other royal displays, which reflect the rich martial art tradition of Odisha.

The paiks used various tools and instruments in their fight against the adversaries. In this context the most noteworthy was Ranapa Nacha. It is another performing martial art form very much prevalent in southern part of Odisha. “Ranapa”as an instrument made of wood is attached to the legs to add height to the Paikas. Wearing Ranapas a Paik could walk in double or triple speed. As Ranapas were used by the traditional Paikas of Odisha it can very well be categorized under martial art.

Paika akhada or paika akhara is a typical Odia term denotes as "warrior gymnasium" or "warrior school" prevailed and practiced in Odisha. This traditional martial art is very old and linked to the stone Age. In thousand years back they served as the training schools of the peasant militia in Odisha especially in eastern India. Today the people of Odisha has used this traditional martial art for practicing the traditional physical exercises. In reality that the paik dance is also entertaining and sporting event in Odisha. This performing art form is systematic with rhythmic movements and weapons being hit to the tune of the drum. The performer uses acrobatic maneuvers, khanda (straight sword), patta (guntlet-sword), sticks, and other weapons. In this way it shows their physical ability, technique and skill in waging the sword or khanda. It also requires physical movement and training to exhibit the movement of the sword in proper direction to win over the adversaries and to bring them under your control. This art martial art form needs vigorous physical exercise to make themselves fit and fine for the war or any type of challenge.<sup>2</sup>

The origin of paik Akhada is also very peculiar and interesting. The term paik has been derived from the Sanskrit padatika which means infantry or Akhada or Akhara. In fact Akhada is a training hall or warrior school where the peasant militia particularly the young persons from the farming section devote their time in training of art of warfare during their leisure hour so that their regular occupation or profession will not be hampered. In this way the system was well adjusted with the occupational system of the people. The paikas voluntarily contributed and sacrificed their lives for the sake of the king or state or freedom of the country.

“Akhada” is a place mostly in rural Odisha where military training is imparted to the youth who are physically fit and fine. The participants in these “Akhadas” (martial training centre) were mostly the Paikas or the peasant militia. So the composite meaning of “Paika Akhada” is a place where the Paikas were getting their military training. The Paikas were mostly Khandayats, who had tremendous control over swords (Khanda-Sword/ Ayata-Control/ Khanda + Ayata = Khandayat). So also Khandayat means the master of the sword. They may be compared with the “Samurai” fighters of Japan. These Khandayats were patriotic and loyal to their king. The king of Odisha was very much dependent on the strength of these Paikas not only for defence activities or aggression, but

also during the time of peace for smooth administration of the state. These Paikas showed their strength, valour and pride mostly during the Gajapati rule of Odisha. We found certain semblance of their martial spirit during the revolt of Jayee Rajguru against the British and the Paik Revolt led by Buxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar. Barunei, the Fort of Khordha stands as a mute witness of this valour and courage of the Paikas. The display of such martial tactics in a dance form has percolated to us as “Paika Akhada.”<sup>3</sup>

As the paiks were engaged in defending the state from the outside aggression the kings endowed them with lands for cultivating purpose. In return they were exempted from taxes in lieu of their services rendered to the kings or to the state. They were not in the regular pay-roll of the army, but still received large land grants from the king. A peasant militia, the paika's main source of income was agriculture. Thus many agricultural lands came under cultivation and substantially the production also increased which generated the source of income of the kingdom.

The paiks were organised into three ranks distinguished by their occupation and the weapons they wielded. These were the Pahari, bearers of shields and the khanda (sword), the Banua who led distant expeditions and the Dhenkiya - archers who also performed different duties in armies. The paika were led by a particular caste of kshatriya called the Khandayat\_which is a major caste in Odisha. Their percentage of population is 18% of the total population of the state. The word itself means "sword controller", from khanda (sword) and *ayata* (control). Commanders called *Dala Beheri* were each in charge of several villages of paika. They were given the responsibilities to organize the paik system in a systematic manner. Proper guidance and training was given to the paiks to expertise themselves in the art of warfare. The paiks were also given multiple works to be performed by them besides as soldiers.<sup>4</sup>

During the period of peace the paika served as law enforcement, and the paika akhada were used to keep the warrior class physically and mentally fit. During the rule of Kharavela the ancient Kalinga relied on the military might of the paika in his campaigns. In this way Odisha exhibited the prowess and supremacy because of its military strength rested upon the paik tradition. The paika and khandayat reached their zenith of power during

the Gajapati Dynasty, and were known as far as Indonesia. During the Muslim period, the kingdom was powerful enough to threaten the Islamic rule of Bengal, but the invaders did not dare to attack Odisha due to the paika's reputation and strength.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the paika lost their power and prestige under British rule. Discontent over the East India Company's policies resulted in the Paika Rebellion of 1817, wherein the former *baxi* (commander) Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Mohapatra Rai led 400 paikas in revolting against British rule. The rebels sacked the civil buildings and treasury in Khurda, killing officials of the Company. British forces sent to quell the rebellion were met with sustained attacks from the paika. The British commander of one detachment was killed during a battle at Gangpada. They defended the Barunei Fort at Khurda which is considered to be the last free fort in India to be conquered by the British. The paika managed to capture the southern portion of Odisha, and the rebellion lasted for a year before it was put down. To ensure such a revolt would not repeat itself, the colonists undertook vigorous steps to stamp out the martial practices of Odisha.

Even today we find the paik Akhada prevail in Odisha. The descendants of the paika practise at their local akhara every day after work. Demonstrations are arranged every year during Dasahara festival and other occasions. The grounds are first prepared with soft earth sprinkled with oil and water. The performers stand in two rows with wooden swords and shields. They approach each other slowly before the tempo of the music increases, at which point they engage in mock combat. In this way the paiks show their technique and skill involved in this art form at the public place so that the people of the state feel proud of its rich cultural legacy left behind by our forefathers who were great fighters like the Chinese, Japanes and the Koreans.

The rich culture and techniques of Paika Akhada can be compared to other martial art forms of India like “Kalari Payatu” of Kerala. It can also be compared with the martial art form like “Wushu” or “Kungtu” of China, Judo, Kareta Aikido, Kyudo of Japan, Taekwondo, Hapkido of Korea, Boxing, kickboxing of Europe, Kapoera of Brazil, Muyathai of Thailand. All such martial art forms are being used for physical fitness, self defence and as a sport. The techniques of Paika Akhada can also be utilized in the same

manner and can be a popular game. Thus the martial art tradition of Odisha speaks a great deal about the sporting as also military spirit and glories of the Odias.<sup>5</sup>

But now in Odisha, the Khandayat families preserved the paika akhada tradition through annual performances. This tradition has continued to the present day, but the tradition is increasingly uncommon. The paik tradition was exclusive for men folk but because of the efforts and dedication of Soubaghini Debi who was the first female performer a few decades ago, the art was opened to both genders. There is no gender biasedness in this art form. Both male and female equally participated and demonstrated the art form in a unique manner which is a rare of its kind across the country. It exhibited equality and co-relation between the two genders. Paika akhada are gradually losing its ground in Odisha today because our youth are tending towards western culture and entertainment. Moreover, artistes are also losing their interest as it could not give them bread and butter and there is less scope in generating income for the family. In this way the art form is losing its popularity in Odisha. No doubt the martial art form is very much attached to the life history of the people of Kalinga which is to be preserved by our present generation. But if both the government and the people of Odisha collectively work on it definitely this art form will get back its popularity and re-vitality in the present century.

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The picture of paik dance