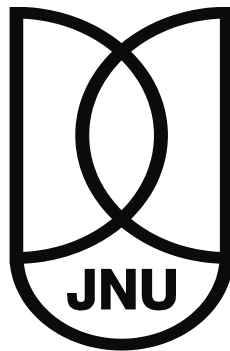# ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN:

CHOREOGRAPHING YOUNG BODIES IN GOTIPUA

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University

for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

MONDAL KRITTIKA

THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND AESTHETICS

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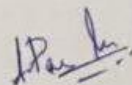
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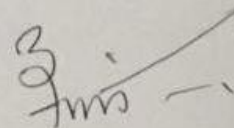E-mail : aesthete@mail.jnu.ac.in

15 July 2019

CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the dissertation titled **ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN: CHOREOGRAPHING YOUNG BODIES IN GOTIPUA** submitted by **Mondal Krittika** is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Doctorate of Philosophy** at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree in this University or any other University and is her own work. We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Dr. Ameet Parameswaran

(Supervisor)

Prof. Naman P. Ahuja

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis titled **Illegitimate Children: Choreographing Young Bodies in Gotipua**, submitted by me at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre and Performance Studies, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other University or Institution.

Krittika Mondal
Date: 15/07/19
Place: New Delhi

Dedicated to my parents and foreparents

who instilled in me the desire to

'cultivate the mind'

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The sun is setting to the right, glistening lightly on the white marble, making the magnificent stupa appear slightly orange. The muddy waters of the Daya River have long forgotten the past that erected this colossal structure. Perhaps in the faints echoes of "nām myōhō renge kyō"[1], the only memory of the bloody war of Kalinga that remains today is the Dhauli Stupa, built by Emperor Asoka to commemorate his formal acceptance of Buddhism, triggered by the loss of 50,000 lives. It is beside the stupa that one of the first rocks edits of Asoka- carved on the belly of a sculpted elephant- was found. It declares his policies, wherein he talks about the religious tolerance that he wishes to propagate in the land. It perhaps seems only fitting that just beneath these structures, there lies a lone house with an open stage on which a handful of boys are bending their bodies into seemingly impossible poses. They are all between seven to twelve years of age and wear their long hair in ponytails. Their physique is exceptionally fit for their bodies which are slender, bare except for their black langots. They are practicing the traditional art form of Gotipua- a curious melange of the various religions and faiths the land of Odisha embodies.

Gotipua is an ancient art form of Odisha, specifically the district of Puri in coastal Odisha, known distinctively for its unique use of the body. Etymologically, Gotipua stands for "one (goti) boy (puo)", even though in its contemporary form it is generally performed in groups of seven-eight dancers who are young boys, between the ages of five and fifteen, cross-dressed as women on stage. The performance tradition is known distinctly for its acrobatic movements and tableau formations called bandha, which accompany the graceful, synchronized dance. Gotipua's uniqueness lies not only in its performance but also in the body of its dancer, as only prepubescent young boys are allowed to train and perform in this tradition. Thereafter,

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[1] The central mantra chanted in Nichiren Buddhism, evoking the Lotus Sutra, which seeks to eradicate negativity from the self and the world.

they cease to be gotipuas[2] and continue to lead a usual life, some even choosing to become musicians (especially pakhawaj[3] players) or pursue Odissi dance.

As a dancer of Odissi, I have always known of Gotipua dance as an exuberant and sprightly performance. In order to make me jump a little higher or bring some more energy to a movement, my teacher would often say, "Think about how a gotipua would do it!" In spite of knowing about it for years, I only saw it on a television show in 2009. I was immediately enraptured by its physicality and synchronicity and awed by how different it looked from my imagination. I had always imagined it to look like Odissi but performed by younger bodies with more buoyancy, but was surprised to see that the composition was completely different from Odissi and also included some structural formations. My curiosity about the dance form in later years left me unsatisfied as I realised that very little had actually been documented on this performance form.

From 2009 to now, there has been a growth in the presence of Gotipua on popular media. It is now accessible through the many videos of Gotipua performances put up by people from all parts of the world, especially on the internet. There seems to be a sudden buzz in the Gotipua world with troupes getting more performances in India and in the rest of the world, as opposed to the quiet, desolate existence that they were living in before the 1990s. The sudden boom in Gotipua's popularity has been possible, as I will present, due to the introduction of a novel element called bandha. Up until the 1950s, bandha was not a part of the repertoire, but with the reconstruction of Odissi, Gotipua realised it needed an attractive element that would distinguish it from Odissi and attract the audience at the same time. Hence, a new addition was made to the repertoire- bandha nrutya- which used bandha movements and poses to present the body in Gotipua. The dance is made even more fascinating by the dotting of the movements with freeze-frames or tableau-like structures by the dancers depicting scenes involving gods or imitating structures like temples, chariots, mountains and so on.

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[2] I use capitalised 'Gotipua' to denote the dance and 'gotipua' when talking about the dancers.
[3] Pakhawaj is a drum-like, two-faced instrument, similar to the *mridang*, that is widely used in Odissi and Gotipua music.

The inclusion of bandha nrutya in Gotipua's repertoire has given a new identity to this traditional dance form that essentially was used for the enactment of Bhakti poetry since the 17th century. This new identity highlights the bodies that bear the Gotipua tradition- the bodies of children. In this research, I study the location of the young body especially since the body that is presented is of a female temple dancer. In this juxtaposition, I analyse how Gotipua choreographs this young body to represent its ideology and its tradition.

I have titled my thesis as 'Illegitimate Children'. Now at first glance, it may seem like a venture into the legal aspects of using children in the tradition, but I do not use the term in that context. When I talk about the "illegitimate" body, I mean to signify the aberration of being a child in a tradition such as this, wherein being a child is a necessary requisite to be a part of it. Generally, a child that trains to be an artist grows up and develops or matures, biologically as also in their skill. There are many a disadvantages to being a child, the foremost being that they are always seen in opposition to being an adult. This dichotomy necessarily produces power structures which generally see the child as the 'minor' or 'lesser' being. Ironically, in a tradition such as Gotipua, or any of the religious performances using children, the child is seen as superior to an adult by virtue of being pre-pubescent. This perspective does not validate or legitimise the child-body as being superior in any way, but rather subverts the politics into making the child-body 'extraordinary' as Banerji posits (2010).

In studying Gotipua, I realised that although the tradition had been not only existent but also popular in the district of Puri for centuries, it did not enjoy the respect and repute of a tradition so ancient. Of course, those who stayed in and around the tradition considered themselves blessed, as the Gotipua tradition was earlier carried only by servers of the temples, but outside of it, the tradition was barely surviving in the local environment. This made me question the legitimacy of the form itself, especially with respect to Odissi, a dance that was reconstructed using Gotipua as a crucial base. This research therefore, questions the legitimacy of the bodies that carry the tradition, and the tradition itself to read the ways in which they mould their existence to become more and more acceptable.

The existence of Gotipua became legitimised by the reconstruction of Odissi and subsequent scholarships which suddenly created acknowledgment about this long unknown tradition that helped safeguard one of the oldest dance forms of India-Odhra-Magadhi (*Natyashastra*). In the reconstruction of Odissi, Gotipua saw its fair share of recognition from the dance scholars of those times. D. N. Patnaik (2006) and Sunil Kothari (1990) have elaborately written on Gotipua as a keeper of the *mahari* tradition, fundamental to the renaissance of Odissi as a Classical dance. Similarly, Madumita Raut (2007), Priyambada Mohanty Hejmadi and Ahalya Hejmadi Patnaik (2007), Ranjana Gauhar (2007), and Mohan and Ashish Khokar (2011) have all mentioned *Gotipua* in their works on Odissi. Anurima Banerji in her work *Odissi Dance: Paratopic Performances of Gender, State, and Nation* has done exhaustive research on Gotipua, including its plausible origins and the "extraordinary gender" of the child. It is her work that has hugely influenced by research and has helped me grasp some concepts with regards to Dance Studies vis-à-vis Gotipua. Priyambada Mohanty Hejmadi's recent work on *Gotipuas* (2019) has also been useful in that she provides information that has been available or inaccessible previously. As the sole work done exclusively on Gotipua, her work has given a significant perspective to this research.

The works of Kapila Vatsyayan (2015, 2016), Projesh Banerji (1985), and Mandakranta Bose (2007) on Indian dance have been instrumental in unwrapping certain concepts of the choreography of the body in Indian dance traditions and the related philosophies. There are also certain ancient and medieval texts on dance like *Natyashastra*, *Manasollasa*, *Abhinaya Chandrika*, *Samgitratnakara*, and *Nartananirnaya*, which have helped trace the roots of this dance form although they do not mention Gotipua. Certain texts like the *Ain-i-Akbari* and the *Bihar and Puri Gazetteer* which have detailed the local traditions and performances have also helped in placing the context of the performance and imagine its erstwhile form. I use these words to emphasise how the body has been choreographed by the tradition through the ages, with the changes in its form and philosophy. This in turn, helps in understanding how the young body is also choreographed using the same frameworks and whether these frameworks undergo any changes for such bodies.

As per the methodological approach of this work, I have mainly considered oral history to be the driving force. For a tradition that has been surviving for centuries but has failed to find an important place in the written accounts of its time, oral history is my main point of intervention. In this, I use Barbara Browning's (1995) method of juxtaposing one's own experiences with the knowledge of those who have been the bearers of the tradition. Unlike her, of course, I am not a student of Gotipua, so I may not have the insights of the tradition like she has when talking about Samba. Susan Leigh Foster's pivotal work on *Reading Dance* (1986) has also been used extensively to inform my perspective on analyses of the tradition and its choreography. Again Banerji's work in chalking the history of the dance and the different elements that inform it have helped in shaping my ideas regarding Gotipua. On one hand where she uses the term Odissi as inclusive of and identifiable with all the allied forms that create it, I have instead stressed on not calling Gotipua by another, modern appellation to preserve its identity as an older tradition, sometimes even using the term Odhra-Magadhi to denote the tradition. A field of study which has heavily informed my work, other than Performance Studies of course, is that of Child Studies. In that, the works of Kehily (2009), Bernstein (2013), and Qvortup *et al* (2009) have helped in grasping this new field and utilising it as a lens to study Gotipua.

In order to understand the use the body in Gotipua, I find it necessary to chalk out first the roots of this form in the first chapter. Gotipua as it exists today has a very recent repertoire which includes a lot of acrobatic stances and movements. Earlier, the performance of Gotipua only had one or two dancers who would enact the Odia songs that their guru would sing. The gotipuas themselves would also be trained in singing and playing an instrument and would do the same whilst another gotipua danced. The cross-dressing of the gotipuas became popular in the 16th and 17th century when the proponents of the Bhakti movement started advocating emulation of the female form by way of *sakhi-bhava* in order to get closer to Krishna, or his presumed avatar of Jagannath. As Gotipua was always danced outside the temples but in places of religious meets and during religious festivals, it had the element of being a 'popular' dance. It therefore became an ideal propagator of Bhakti by way of the cross-dressing and the spread of the folk songs of those times. To add to its charm, Gotipua also used some bandha stances, which were done by individual dancers by challenging the

limits of their bodies. Unlike the present display of tableaus, the solo or duet dancers would showcase a handful of body-contouring poses towards the end of the performances.

In displaying acrobatics or *yoga* through its repertoire, Gotipua showcases a form that is different from the other two dances of the region viz. *mahari* and Odissi. Although the three are always represented as though in continuum through history, I like to think that Gotipua's form is different from even *mahari*'s even though their language might be the same. In the chapter 'The Histories of Gotipua' I trace the multiple narratives that inform this tradition. I begin by tracing the appearance of a dance form that resembles Gotipua through the available architectural and textual resources of the region, recognised as Odhra-Magadhi in the *Natyashastra*. The visual texts like temples, caves and stupas tell us about the existence of an acrobatic dance form at least during the 7th century. The evolution of the Tantric cult which stresses on the body as the site of transcendence and the fusing of the various religious beliefs like Shaivism, Shakti and Buddhism during this era showcases the dancer's body as being a powerful tool of devotion, rather than a decorative or aesthetic art.

The textual evidences with regard to dance and performance also give some clues to the origin of Gotipua's form. I refer to the *Natyashastra* for the oldest reference of the Odia style of dancing, and also try to see if the element of *pindibandha* described in the text could refer to the yogic poses in Gotipua, as they are a group dance. The *Manasollasa* and the *Samgitratnakara* both talk of local dances which use acrobatics and challenge the bodies of the dancers. Coming to the 16th century, we find the mention of Gotipua performance in *Ain-i-Akbari*, as a cross-dressed dance by young boys. It is in another text of Akbar's court, *Nartananirnaya* that we find the mention of elaborate acrobatic sequences that coincide with the bandha stances used in Gotipua. The element of batunrtta, an important part of the Gotipua repertoire, also fins mention on this text. The Abhinaya Chandrika, written in the 17th century, talks exclusively about the dance of Odra, and discusses bandhanrutya as a difficult dance which can be easily performed by young bodies, and should be practiced inly under the supervision of a *guru*. This reference is widely used in Gotipua performances today in order to explain the characteristics of bandhnrutya.

Bandhnrutya is also written as a favourite of the kings, indicating its popularity in the 17th century.

Apart from these texts, the main trove of information regarding Gotipua's history is the oral accounts of its practitioners. These accounts have been written by Banerji in her work and are the most common histories of Gotipua. The various stories that recall the origin of the Gotipua tradition show the importance of the dance in the spread of the Bhakti movement. Most of the stories relating to the origin of Gotipua feature Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Ramananda Raya, both of whom were instrumental in the spread of Vaishnavism in Puri. Another narrative suggests the plundering of the temples by the Mughals as the turning point in the history of dance, as it was during this time that women stopped performing in public and hence, cross-dressed boys were introduced to take their place. In a different narrative, not commonly told or quoted by Banerji, Gotipua also traces its roots to the ancient Shaivite temples of Puri where many believe that both Gotipua and *mahari* were originally dedicated to Shiva, before the State patronage to Jagannath made them into Vaishnavite practices.

The chronicling of the past helps in analysing the current tradition of Gotipua and where it traces the origin of the form that is intrinsically attached to the tradition now. I posit the tradition of Gotipua as having the element of flexibility in that it moulds itself to the changing times and philosophies to be able to survive through the centuries. In a place like Puri which has seen the influence of many religious movements, up until the present, it become imperative for Gotipua to choreograph itself, and thereby the body that performs it, to cater to the patronage and audiences of the contemporary times. This outlining of the form of Gotipua through the ages is an important project as I try to map the religious influences on the tradition which trains the young body.

In the chapter 'Patronizing the Tradition', I further analyse the different sources that helped in the survival and propagation of this from. These sources of patronage are important as the bodies of the dancers by virtue of being young, were thought to be in need to a custodian who could help safeguard the tradition and also the dancers. The tradition of Gotipua, like all Indian arts, was an oral tradition and

involved the young bodies to stay in a residential accommodation while they dedicatd themselves to the art. In this process, I enumerate the patronages of the akharas, the mathas, the zamindars and finally the gurukuls in keeping this tradition alive. All the patrons had specific roles to play at their respective times. The akharas helped develop a monastic tradition which stressed on the importance of physicality, while the mathas ensured the sustenance of the form by giving it importance in religious functions. The patronage of the zamindars ensured that the Gotipuas could sstain themselves at a time of political turmoil when the socio-economic conditions of the society were inadequate to support such an art. Finally, the gurukul system of patronage which is still prevalent helped the survival during the change of the millennium when Odissi was gaining importance and Gotipua had almost gone into oblivion.

This chapter also details the training process of young gotipuas by listing their daily routine and the prescribed way of living. As a tradition deeply entrenched in religion, it subscribes to the idea of dedicating the dancing body to the god. At the same time, the society where it thrives also not relates it to a certain philosophy of worship while also dictating certain norms. The most visible of these norms is the disallowance of the female figure in the tradition. Although some contemporary teachers allow the girl to learn Gotipua, most teachers refrain from it citing it to be an unacceptable break from tradition. The latter also consider female dancers as the wrong candidate for the performance of this form and look down upon them. In discussing the common issues that Gotipua schools have with the female body, I posit that more than a break from tradition, it is the usage of a non-cross-dressed body that seems to cause a discomfort. For the tradition to uphold its philosophy, the body of the cross-dressed child is imperative.

The patronage of these different institutions not only helped with the survival of the tradition, but also its development. The flexible nature of Gotipua has created itself by surviving through these different institutions, giving rise to different styles of the same performance. These styles become more apparent in the varied spaces where Gotipua is performed. In the chapter 'Different Performance, Differing Styles' I describe several performances ranging from 1984 until 2017. As there is no available

record of what the changes in the choreography of the tradition were, I refer to the dance that has been recorded in written and videographic evidences, done in the twentieth century, to chalk out the recent inflexions. The major recent change in the form has taken place in this century as the dance adapted to its present proscenium form, further adapted to the televised performance. I elaborate on four different performance spaces- the 1980s video which is probably the oldest video evidence available, two performances at Jhulan Jatra- a more ritualistic space, two recent proscenium performances in the second decade of the twenty-first century, and two 2-minute performances that were telecast on reality-based dance shows. The performances take place in distinct spaces, for varied audiences, and make stylistic changes best suited for that platform. The examples truly exemplify the flexible nature of Gotipua's choreography which helped in it maintaining its popularity over the centuries. I also posit that Gotipua in fact, has stylistic differences between the different Schools which I recognise as the Dimirisena School, the Raghurajpur School and the Bhubaneswar School, that present the body in subtly different ways, although following the same philosophies.

In the following chapter 'Choreographing the Gotipua Body', I read the choreographic elements used in Gotipua. I try to see the tradition as per the different deific origins ascribed to it. I believe that any religious dance form tries to emulate the movements and the character of the god that it worships. I therefore try to chalk out the influence of Shiva and Jagannath in the traditional and contemporary style of dancing and investigate what it tries to signify through it. This chapter also examines the different modes of choreography as suggested by Foster in *Reading Dance* (1986) by using a similar method to read a Gotipua performance. Using the ideas of Vatsyayan and Banerji in deciphering the nature of Indian dance, I also chalk out the basic stances and elements that make up the dance. Along with those, the exercises used as part of the training are also detailed, as they are vital to the moulding of the flexible body of a Gotipua dancer. Of utmost importance in the choreography is the group dynamics of the dancers, especially in the bandha nrutya. As structural bodies, the quality of the performer to become a cog in the whole process of performing marks an important use of the child-body. I read the bodies of the gotipuas as important parts to creating a collective Body of Gotipua that has become symbolic of the contemporary tradition. It is the mimetic quality of the performance of Gotipua

that makes the collective body more important than individual bodies of the dancers, further complicating our understanding of synchronicity and virtuosity. In the absence of a dancer who signifies the tradition, the Gotipua Body itself, albeit in different styles of the different Schools, become the signifiers of the dance.

In the final chapter 'Illegitimate Bodies of Children', I accumulate all the different elements discussed previously and use them to analyse the child-body in the tradition. Beginning with the broader understanding of children in the Hindu religious belief system and related performances, I narrow down to the figure of the child as being indispensible to Gotipua on account of its flexibility, both in terms of physicality and gender. The juvenile body is generally preferred for the ease of disciplining and moulding as per the needs of the tradition. At the same time, it evokes a sense of imagined childhood which helps to posit the performance of Gotipua in a frame different from those of adult performers. The androgyny of the child-body also acts as a marker of this imagined childhood and helps propagate the *sakhi-bhava* demanded by traditional "master-choreographers" who direct the bodies. The succession of the tradition in a mimetic way ensures that the ideal of the gotipua-boy remains fixed irrespective of the multiple surrogates which fill its position. This chapter ultimately questions the place of such a body in the tradition. The child-body as part of a collective which projects itself as the Body of the dance, is not given the recognition it warrants as a performer, giving birth to a desire to take the position of the master-choreographer once outside the tradition. It finally questions the legitimacy of the body with respect to the labour it invests in the tradition, thereby questioning the 'imagination of childhood' itself.

Chapter 1

The Histories of Gotipua

It is difficult to find out the history of Gotipua due to lack of research. What I am telling you, you won't hear anywhere else because it's a family tradition- my father heard it from his father and his father and so on in generations. My father was also a gotipua but then he got educated, went to Kolkata, learnt Kathak under Prahlad Das and then went to Jamshedpur. He knew seven Classical dances. My sister became an Odissi dancer, and even the students who learn Gotipua here become Odissi dancers. This is how the tradition goes.

My father went to stay in Jamshedpur but my grandmother was very attached to this place. In fact, even after my grandfather left to stay in Puri, my grandmother still stayed here. As my mother was close to her, I was brought here when I was very young. So my childhood and schooling have all been from this place. I have always been identified as my grandfather's grandson and have always been respected for it. You see, we don't need to learn Gotipua; we have grown up around it. Our family is the patron of Gotipua. In our temple, if there is no Gotipua then there is nothing!

My forefathers, when they had fought a war in the South, they had won an award from the King. Hence we get gifted a stick of sandalwood, Jagannath's cloth and mahaprasad from the Jagannath temple on Mahashtami day. This is called the Record of Rights. It is considered to be highly respectful in the history of the Temple as very few people receive it. Our family receives the Record of Rights for our totem, the Balunkeshwar temple, on Mahashtami, or Dussehra as you would know it, for puja.

In 1558, when Odisha was under attack, my forefather migrated to this place which he had sought out from before as it was difficult to be accessed by plunderers. He came here and made the temple. Even now, we have our ancestral house there. The people there do not remember our history; they think we have only shifted a couple of generations back and brought their gods with us. Even the art forms migrated here but there are two art forms that can never migrate or develop here- one being a theatrical form called Jhamu Jatra and Sitala Shashti. Our ancestral village

is a place called Baulabandha along the Chilika Lake which falls in Khordha district, although the culture is of Ganjam. But Gotipua did not come from that side.

Odisha's earlier cultural capital was Jajpur, where Shakti was worshipped. Then it became Bhubaneswar with the worshipping of Shiva, after which it became Puri when Vaishnavism flourished. The King also changed his capitals accordingly- Jajpur, Khordha (including Bhubaneswar) and finally Puri. So there is no relation whatsoever with the South. The only influence from the South was when the Gajapati of Puri entered a matrimonial alliance with Andhra Pradesh and the new queen brought along a harem of dasis. The devadasi tradition prevailed there. Here, Gotipua existed as a devotional tradition in Shaivite practice but lost the favour of the King to Vaishnavite practices. Gotipua did not get included in the Vaishnavite culture but its literature did. Only devadasi culture developed therein.

– In conversation with Nepolion Pattanayak.

The magnificent Sun Temple of Konark is known primarily for being an intricately carved and beautifully sculpted monument dedicated to the Sun-God. Built in the thirteenth century CE, it is a rare kind of temple whose grandiosity lies in being fashioned to a chariot, borne by twenty-four wheels and led by seven horses. It is a striking example of the cultural, economic, social and scientific progress that Odisha had made during the Chola dynasty (11th to 15th century CE). It is said that the main idol of the temple used to hover in mid-air, supported by strong magnets which were later stolen by plunderers. Although the idol now resides in the London museum, what still enthrals visitors to this day is the gorgeous sculpturing on the temple and surrounding structures. What is more captivating to a dance researcher though, is the huge *nata-mandap* which is built in front of the main temple. A structure separated from, and elevated to the height of, the temple, the *natyamandap* or "dance hall" carries some of the most detailed illustrations of Odishan performance art. There are numerous dancers and musicians on the pillars in and friezes around this structure, along with a figure that is believed to be of the head-teacher of these artists (Patnaik 2006). A grand sculptural piece of art, the Konark temple not only continually inspires dancers but is also a memorial to the flourishing dance tradition of its time.

Odisha has many temple structures especially in the Puri district that, like the Konark temple, are testimony to the thriving culture of dance that has existed for centuries. Bhubaneswar, the current capital of the state of Odisha, is also known as the city of temples, most of which are replete with sculptures of dancing men and women. Given the fact that Gotipua has existed mainly in the coastal district of Puri, the treasure trove of sculptures will be exceptionally helpful in chalking out the evolution of this 'local' form. Gotipua is a more recent name for what was called *sakhi-pila* or *akhada-pila* in recent history (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019). Known by the name Odhra-Magadhi (lit. of the region Odhra and Magadh; Odhra is the ancient name for Odisha) in ancient texts such as the *Natyashastra*, I will try to follow the evolution of this tradition, specifically focussing on the acrobatic element that is central to Gotipua and its characteristic choreography. As far as Odhra-Magadhi is concerned, scholars of Odissi have painstakingly mapped out the oldest plausible sculptural reference and later developments in the style, especially with reference to temple sculptures and religious movements in history (Patnaik 2006, Banerji 2010, Khokar and Khokar 2011). This chapter will use those findings and dig deeper to unearth more of its dimensions like the characteristic flexibility used by the tradition– both, in its use of acrobatic and the adaptability of the form.

I will primarily follow the methodologies used by dance scholars D. N. Patnaik (2006), Anurima Banerji (2010) and Rekha Tandon (2012) –in their researches on Odissi– and Priyambada Mohanty Hejmadi (2019) –whose is the sole independent work on Gotipua– to chalk out the available histories – oral, textual and visual. As a dance form that has long been identifies as the "mother form" (Nepolion Pattanayak 2017) of Odissi, the investigative researchers done by the aforementioned scholars detail the visual and textual sources on Odhra-Magadhi and Gotipua which converge in my study of the form. The first study of Odissi, done by D. N. Patnaik in the 1950s and was not only immensely helpful in shaping Odissi to what it has become today, but also became the touchstone for later scholarships on the Odissi and Gotipua traditions as he was the first to write about it. It should be noted that at the time of Patnaik's research, he was more familiar with Gotipua, and it was only after the publication of his book on *Odissi Dance* in 1958 that Odissi was properly re-constructed as an independent Classical style (2006: iii, iv). Therefore to avoid confusion, in order to denote the dance tradition that has been existent in Odisha, it

helps to use the word 'Odhra-Magadhi' instead of demarking it as either Odissi or Gotipua or any such recent appellation. I will map out the history of this rich form to see how it evolved to become what is known today as Gotipua, through the various social and religious movements that are etched into the memory of Puri through written, carved or oral evidences.

Gotipua: A Prologue

Gotipua as popular dance tradition has existed for as long as the local of Puri remember, although not much has been written about it. The word Gotipua comprises of two Odia words, *goti* and *puo* meaning 'one' and 'boy' respectively. According to Patnaik (2006) and Banerji (2010), Gotipua emerged in the 16th century with the advent of the Bhakti movement. I will elaborate and elucidate systematically why this view does not hold true, although there is no doubt that Gotipua became very popular during and after the 16th century. It is also accepted that the Bhakti movement introduced the element of cross-dressing which is a trademark of Gotipua since the 16th century (Patnaik 2006, Banerji 2010, Moharana 2013, Pattanayak 2017, Mohanty Hejmadi 2019). The Bhakti movement worshipped Krishna, as an avatar of Vishnu, and propagated the belief that in order to achieve spiritual union with the lord, one has to emulate the *sakhis* or female-companions of Krishna. In keeping with this belief, gotipuas dress as girls (or rather, little women) to perform during important religious festivals and programmes. The virtuosity of a gotipua lay in performing *bachika abhinaya* (lit. *bachika* is so recite and *abhinaya* is to enact), the art of singing while dancing which is seen as most important by MohantyHejmadi and Hejmadi Patnaik (2012: 47). The Bhakti movement in Puri, and Odisha, was spread largely by Gotipua which made popular songs and poems of many Bhakti poets through *bachika abhinaya*.

The Gotipua tradition only employs pre-pubescent boys who are trained vigorously to make their bodies supple and flexible. As I will elaborate in the forthcoming chapter, the gotipuas are trained in residential schools or *gurukuls* (lit. house of the guru) where they brought by their gurus or given by their parents, generally between the ages of five and seven years. They get trained to perform on

stage in about a year and typically perform till they are about fifteen years of age when they start showing signs of puberty. This ensures that their facial and physical features are still child-like and they can cross-dress convincingly. The erstwhile gotipua would also sing, dance and know how to play an instrument. Due to their tender age, their vocal chords would be ideal for singing voices which did not disagree with their cross-dressed guise. Moreover, they would dress like female temple-dancers, complete with garlands, to look credible in their get-up.

The Gotipua costume that is currently part of the tradition shows its Vaishnavite[4] influence in that it mimics the dressing style of the temple dancers or *maharis* of the Jagannath temple[5]. The costume used during performances is a traditional *saree,* a *kanchula* (blouse) and an *odhni* (stole) across the chest, with a hip-piece called *nivibandh*. A gotipua generally grows out his hair to enable tying them in a bun, which is then decorated with flowers. They were jewellery made of beads on their ears, necks, arms and waists. On their eyes, they apply kohl generously, dab lipstick on their lips and have ornate white patterns drawn their foreheads and cheeks to complete the facial make-up. The entire ensemble is completed with the wearing of *ghungroos*. Mohanty Hejmadi in her book *Gotipuas* (2019) details the current and former costume and make-up of a gotipua and concurs that the current costume is more of a copy of the Odissi dance costume. She also adds that "Rout had lamented about the influence of the evolving Odissi costume on the traditional costume of the *gotipuas* as early as in 1978!" (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 51).

The relation between Odissi and Gotipua has been a contentious one, especially since the project of reconstructing Odissi began in the mid-1950s. Odissi was fashioned to re-imagine the ancient and lost dance form of Odhra-Magadhi, and the living traditions that contained the form were *mahari* and Gotipua. It is common knowledge that the gurus who came together to create modern-day Odissi were mostly trained in Gotipua and used elements of the dance to reconstruct Odissi to its current form[6]. Conversely, the coming of Odissi as a 'Classical' style both validated and endangered Gotipua's existence. On one hand, with the growing recognition of

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[4] Vaishnavism is the name for the religious movement that reveres Vishnu and his many avatars.
[5] For more, see Apffel Marglin (1985)
[6] See *Nartanam*'s Issue on the 'Stalwarts of Jayantika' (Citaristi 2018)

Odissi, Gotipua became known as the repository of the ancient dance form, the missing link between the two traditions. On the other hand, the similarity between Odissi and Gotipua created a new identity of Gotipua as a style that resembles Odissi but is performed by younger, cross-dressed bodies, limiting the tradition within contemporary narratives and neglecting its rich heritage. This rupture in Gotipua's history negotiated the way in which it identified and presented itself, as I will elaborate throughout this research. The coming of Odissi was also crucial to Gotipua as it introduced the element of 'bandha nrutya' in its repertoire which, although drawing from traditional roots, was an innovative and grand presentation of acrobatics in a performance that was previously laden with the narrative elements of 'abhinaya'. As I will further unravel in this chapter, this modification in Gotipua's form is not uncharacteristic of the tradition and is in fact, quite emblematic of the nature of Gotipua.

In this chapter, I will discuss the tradition that is Gotipua, detailing especially the evolution of the form to what it today using historical evidences- scriptural, sculptural and oral. I believe that as a popular dance form that has always catered to the masses, it is inherently flexible in nature, just like the bodies that perform it. The present style of Gotipua in which acrobatics have gained prominence displays the body necessarily as that of a child- flexible, androgynous and disciplined into synchronicity[7]. Of these, the quality of flexibility is the most obvious to and admired by the audience, resulting in the massive popularity of bandha nrutya. At the same time, I see this quality as coinciding with the very nature of Gotipua as it is a tradition that, since the living memory of the form, has constantly moulded itself to cater to the needs of the audience. As I detail in the coming sections, the original form of the dance Odhra-Magadhi was popular among the kings and people alike and was performed by both men and women. Then, over the centuries, it has taken myriad forms, from religious and ritual performances to celebratory and entertaining ones. Currently, it is developing itself to suit the needs of a proscenium stage, a space it did not get until after Odissi became popular[8]. Nonetheless, the tradition of Gotipua, as we will see, has a typical form that remains constant in spite of its flexible nature. As

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[7] I have explained this in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.
[8] The development of Odissi as a Classical dance introduced many proscenium shows and festivals in Odisha. Gotipua started being performed on proscenium stage as an adjunct to Odissi programmes, as small twenty-minute performances in the middle of the lengthier Odissi shows (Sahoo 2013).

we read Gotipua through history, this form becomes clearer and becomes beneficial for the analysis of the body used in this tradition, which is the purpose of this research.

The Beginning of History

Among scholars and dancers alike, Odissi is often considered to be the oldest 'Classical' dance form in the Indian subcontinent. This is mainly due to two factors- firstly due to the depiction of dancers in the Udaygiri caves dating back to the 2nd century BCE, and secondly due to the mention of Odhra-Magadhi in the *Natyashastra* –considered to be the oldest available manuscript on theatre, and therein, dance. Although no one knows what the dance of the dancers frozen on the walls and panels of the Udaygiri caves was called or how Odhra-Magadhi was choreographed, there is no doubt that there was a flourishing dance tradition in the area that was popular and well-reputed. Considering the *Natyashastra* is largely considered to have been written between 2nd century BCE and 2nd century CE (Vatsyayan 2016: 24), it can be assumed that the immortal dancers of the Udaygiri caves were dancing the Odhra-Magadhi form (Ghosh 1950: 243). During the time of the *Natyashastra*, there were other works written on dance and the performance arts which, unfortunately, are now lost (Bose 2007). "[B]y his own admission Bharata does not deal with the many styles peripheral to his central tradition", but nonetheless, the detailed description that is available to us and its comparison with later works helps chalk out the evolution and growth of the dance and dance studies in ancient India (Bose 2007: 9).

In post-independence India, dance and the other arts blossomed from different regions in order to not just remind people of their heritage but also to assert a culture that was antithetical to that of the colonisers. In this bid to assert 'Indianness', dances that were emerging around that time and were also seen to follow the directives written in canonical texts such as the *Natyashastra* were tagged as 'Classical'. Odissi too, is deemed a 'Classical' dance as it fits these prerequisites and was in fact identified with the 'Odra-Magadhi' style. The lack of research on Gotipua and the profound emphasis on Odissi in academia has resulted in the erasure of the fact that Gotipua too identifies with the description of the dance form found not just in the

Natyashastra, but also later works like *Manasollasa*, *Abhinayadarpanam*, *Sangita Ratnakara*, and *Abhinaya Chandrika*. Although the *Natyashastra* is more about drama, it includes dance to be an important part of the repertoire, and elaborates on it accordingly. It explains how the dance/ drama came into being, and thereby how one must begin a recital. It also details who is suited to dance, how their character must be, the movements used, the use of the different parts of the body, and even the different kinds of dances. In the section explaining the different styles of dances, the *Natyashastra* lists four types depending on their geographical division, and names the Eastern form as Odra-Magadhi, inclusive of the areas of Odra and Kalinga, which comprise present day Odisha (Ghosh 1950: 104). The few architectural evidences found of that era, like those of the Udaygiri caves, clearly point to the existence of an established style of dance which coincides with what contemporary Odissi has assimilated from Gotipua.

The *Natyashastra* elaborates on many facets of dancing and many have been discussed at length by dance scholars like Ghosh, Vatsyayan, and Bose, to name a few. With respect to Gotipua though, what is important to note is the emphasis on the training of the body that is followed in Gotipua and how it coincides with the description given in the *Natyashastra*. In traditional dance forms, not seen any longer in the contemporary training of modern 'Classical' dances, the body is massaged first and then made to exercise as a part of the training, a ritual that Gotipua follows till date, "[f]or without such an exercise the States, the Sentiments and the Sauṣṭhava[9] cannot be produced in the least" (Ghosh 1950: 543). This concept of using 'yoga'[10] in order to train the mind along with the body of an actor, as opposed to 'vyayam'[11] or simply 'exercise' is a tradition that seems to have been intrinsic to the Indian performing arts even at the time the *Natyashastra* was written. The bandhas used in

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[9] "The Sauṣṭhava: Those performing the exercises [in Aṅgahāras] should take care of the Sauṣṭhava, for the limbs without it (Sauṣṭhava) create no beauty (lit. do not shine) in drama or dance. The Sauṣṭhava of limbs is to be presented by being still, unbent, at ease, not very upright and not much bent. When the waist and the ears as well as the elbow, the shoulder and the head are in their natural position (sama) and the breast is raised it will be theSauṣṭhava [of the body]" (Ghosh 1950: 205)

[10] Yoga is "the progressive control of the whole body" in order to "the body, the *prana* [vital breath], the unconscious and the sub-conscious strata of the mind, the mind and the forces of individuation, under one's control; and to be conscious of one's identity with the supreme reality which is within us as our very Self" (Alter 1992:80)

[11] Vyayam is "a system of physical training designed to build strength and develop muscle bulk and flexibility" (Alter 1992:82). Although vyayam stems from the philosophy of yoga and are very similar in practice, vyayam emphasises more on building physical strength.

Gotipua are postures from yoga that were initially used to make the body supple and lighter, although they now are used as distinctive choreographic elements in bandha nrutya.

Another important element that is described in the *Natyashastra* but is not often discussed due to lack of clarity is the "pindibandha". *Natyashastra* describes pindibandha as a group dance which are of four types- *gulma* (the collective), *srinkhala* (holding hands), *latā* (putting arms around each other), and *bhedyaka* (each one separately dances away from the group) (Ghosh 1950: 71). Mandakranta Bose elaborates that pindibandhas are "prescribed only for female dancers" and considered appropriate only for a specific time after the entrance of the dancers in order to invoke the blessings of the gods (Bose 2007:112). She further explains that

> Piṇḍibandhas are dedicated to different gods who are denoted by their emblems, which are represented by the formations created by the dancers. In addition, the dancers form ritualistic diagrams. Bharata states that in order to be able to create such formations in an appropriate manner, these dancers require careful and thorough training. (Bose 2007: 112-113)

The nature and function of the pindibandhas seem to be similar to that of bandha nrutya tableaus in the contemporary choreography although Gotipua is believed to have evolved into a group dance fairly recently. As per Priyambada Mohanty Hejmadi, the current bandha tableaus are inspired by the Kandarpa Ratha motifs used widely by *patachitra*[12] painters of the Puri district, an example of which is also found in the inner sanctum of the Jagannath temple (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019). Does that then imply the existence of such a group dance, probably done by women, in the history of Odhra-Magadhi which has been re-introduced by the Gotipua tradition?

The widespread popularity of dance in this region is also evident from the architectural samples from the Udaygiri caves (c 2nd BCE) near Bhubaneswar, generally considered the first representation of dance in stone in India (Pattnaik 1967, Khokar and Khokar 2011). The Udaygiri caves, and nearby Khandagiri caves, are thought to have been a resting place for the monks. But the niches that had the dancing figures on the cave, known as the Ranigumpha or the 'cave of the Queen',

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[12] Patachitra (lit. leaf paintings) is a traditional art form of Odisha wherein palm leaves are used as the canvas for paintings done with natural colours. See Khokar and Khokar (2011).

suggest that the place must have held dance performances or was used for the training of the same. Sunil Kothari states that Dr. Anand Coomarswamy interpreted it "as a scene in a *natyashala*, or dance hall" (1990: 13). The faded inscription on the niche of one of the bigger caves, called Hathigumpha or 'the cave of the elephant' proclaims the work done by the Jain King Kharavela, "versed in the science of the Gardharvas (i.e. music)," who "entertains the capital with the exhibition of dapa, dancing, singing and instrumental music and by causing to be held (*sic*) festivities and assemblies" [on-site translation of the Hathigumpha[13] inscription]. D. N. Patnaik, while writing about this inscription, has also translated the line to indicate acrobatic performances although the on-site translation does not mention it (see Patnaik 2006: 7).

The Hathigumpha inscription starts with talking about the repair work done by King Kharavela and then goes on to describe his other conquests. What is of importance form the perspective of Indian dance studies though, are the dancers on the walls of the Ranigumpha, and especially their poses which coincide with the ones used in Gotipua and Odissi. Patnaik (2007) identifies one of the dancers as being in the chauka[14] pose of Odissi and another in a pose from batu[15]-nrutya. Not only does the Hathigumpha cave mention the royal patronage of the arts, Patnaik also mentions that "he revived the cultural trends of ancient Kalinga in dance, song and instrumental music" and helped in their development (2006: 8). Performances were important, even then, to not only mark celebrations and festivals but also to celebrate religious events. Patnaik observes that one of the categories depicted in the Udaygiri caves is of adoration of the Kalinga Jina, a relic of importance in the Jain tradition which said to have been displaced by the Magadha rulers and then brought back by King Kharavela as per the Hathigumpha inscription. There is also a frame with a tree surrounded by a female dancer and a male musician, which could also be a representation of worship which was quite common in ancient nature-worshipping cultures or perhaps a symbolic representation of the erstwhile Buddhist customs of the area.

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[13] Hathigumpha cave (or the cave of the elephant) is a tall cave in the cluster of caves at Udaygiri and has an overhanging brow with an inscription of seventeen lines talking about the rule of the Jain king Kharavela.

[14] Chauk, also written as chowk is one of the basic stances of Odhra-Magadhi. See Fig. 11

[15] Batu is an element of the Odhra-Magadhi repertoire, elaborated later in this chapter.

The Body in Worship

Buddhism has been quite influential in shaping the religious norms of the culture of Odisha. Given the fact that it is in eastern India from where Buddhism had initially spread, the rule of Emperor Ashoka in Kalinga during the 3rd century BCE had made a lasting impact on the cultural ethos of the land. After the end of King Kharavela's rule, the history of Odisha is not very clear as there are not many archaeological evidences barring some coins found in the area. With respect to dance, we find temples with carvings of dancing devotees and even gods and goddesses belong to the Shaivite[16] and Buddhist traditions. This is important from the point of view of this research because Gotipua seems to liken itself to these traditions apart from being heavily influenced by the later Vaishnavite movement in Puri.

A project by Nilofer Shamim Haja (2007) called 'Celebration of Life: A Study of Sculptural and Mural Depictions of Dance and Music in Buddhist Art of India' offers many insights into some of the oldest depictions of dance and music in India. Although not focussed on Odisha, her work gives an overarching idea of the concept of dance in ancient India, they provide evidences of dance as part of devotional practices as found in Buddhist sculptures and paintings. There are reliefs in the Bharhut Stupa (Madhya Pradesh) dating from mid-2nd century BCE which although crude, show female dancers and musicians performing a style which looks very similar to Odhra-Magadhi. There are poses which look similar to the stances *ardha-chauka*, *kunchita* and *pristadhanu* used in Gotipua. There is even an image of what seems to be a child, amongst women dancers, in *kunchita* pose. Similarly, in the nearby stupa of Sanchi (3rd c BCE- 11th c AD), there are many reliefs which have dances and musicians, either in groups or alone. Of these, many are holding branches or fly-whisks and are known as 'Salabhanjika' in Buddhist iconography. Weston and Tandon (2012) discuss the evolution of these figures in Odia temple sculptures, using the other term for them- 'alasakanyas'.

Moving towards the West, we see in the caves of Ajanta, Aurangabad (2nd c BCE- 6th c AD), paintings of female dancers and female musicians, and even the mythical creature *kinnar* known for their dancing and music. What is interesting in

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[16] The followers of Shiva are known as Shaivites, and the philosophy as Shaivism.

these caves though, is the representation of a female deity as the dancer. This last phase of the caves showcases the introduction of the female figure as gaining power (Brancaccio 2010), through the growth of an alternate division of Buddhism known as Tantra, infusing magic and rites with the existing belief system. In fact, Brancaccio takes the Aurangabad caves to be the example of "*Tantra* in embryo form" (2010: 190). Brancaccio mentions that although mentions of music and dance, even female musicians and dancers are referred to in Buddhist texts, "[w]hat *is* extraordinary is that at Aurangabad… this imagery and practice were strongly emphasised" (2010: 193). She attributes this to the possibility of a growing competition and exchange between the Buddhists and the Shaivites of that time. Meanwhile, we see around this time in Odisha, the incorporation of Buddhism and other cults in Shaivite architectures, thereby confirming Brancaccio's assumption.

While the Western and Central parts of India saw the growth of dancers in their cave iconography in the Buddhist culture, Odisha comes in to the picture around the 7th century CE with sculptures of dancers in Shiva temples. Of prime importance amongst these Shaivite temples is the Parasurameswar temple circa 650 AD. This temple is unique in that it is has the first architectural proof of Gotipua, along with many other curious inclusions. The temple has sculptures from varying religions, probably indicating the melange of idol worship during its time. Along with its prime idol of Shiva, it has on its facades, the icons of Buddhist, Shakti, Tantric and Sun-worship cults. This period in Puri's history may have been one of confluence of cultures, under one overarching umbrella, like the contemporary times wherein these sects are clubbed under the tag of Hinduism, or it could be indicative of the tolerant nature of prevailing Shaivism. It could also indicate that the art was developing around this time, which could explain the occurrence of the contoured figure in one of the niches (Kothari and Pasricha 1990: 16; Weston and Tandon 2012: 17). The *atibhanga* position, as pointed out by Kothari and Pasricha, bear resemblance to the bandha practices by the Gotipuas (*ibid.*).

Also of interest, according to Weston and Tandon (2012), is the niche that may have housed an image of Parvati. To the two sides of the niche are figures- one male, one female- in *chowk* stance, which according to them "seems to indicate that this body position played an important part in prevailing ceremonies" (2012: 22).

They further elaborate that this stance probably symbolised a "means of activate the latent energy in the body of the worshipper" as it is supposed to impart the power of *tandava*[17] in a dance (*ibid*). This stance of power then, is not just being associated with the male worshipper, but also with the female, as the inclusion of Shakti suggests. The temple through its built and architecture also allows for a social life along with temple rituals. The inclusion of a flat-roof hall, in front of the sanctum could have served the purpose of gatherings or even performances. On one hand, the dancing friezes suggest the relation of divinity with the art, and on the other hand, it points towards the growth of Tantra in Shaivite rituals. Weston and Tandon tag this era to be the time when Tantra was gaining momentum and was attracting the masses by making "the act of worship… a grand theatrical experience, engaging all the senses and incorporating rhythms, postures, gestures and chants" (2012: 25). This is validated by the many male figures on the western entrance of the temple, both dancing and singing, frozen in time while revelling in their religiosity.

The Body as Worship

The absence or rather the lack of evidence of body-contouring in visual imagery up till the 7th century may indicate that acrobatics was probably not seen as aesthetic in the decoration of the ritual spaces of that time, or even popular as a choreographic element of dance. Nonetheless, the evidence of postures in *abhanga*, *tribhangi* and even *chauk*[18] show that the prevalent dance style must have developed to a specific form, especially in temples dedicated to Shiva who is imagined to be the prime dancer in the universe in Hinduism as well as, more importantly, in the texts about dance. Pia Brancaccio in her book *The Buddhist Caves at Aurangabad* refers to Choubey who says that the Shaiva Paśupata[19] traditions strictly followed the "canonical rules of the *Natyaśastra*" and that music, singing, and dancing are some of the requisites of attainment of liberation (2010: 193). Using Tantric scholar Ronald M. Davidson's opinion, she writes that "many of the irrational practices that were so

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[17] Tandava is known widely as the dance of Shiva, especially as per the ancient books on dance, and as such it is associated with males or masculine physicality in dance.

[18] These three are the basic stances of Odhra-Magadhi, especially given prominence in Odissi. See Fig. 11

[19] The Paśupata tradition is a Shaivite sect that gained popularity in the Malwa region and other parts of Maharashtra around the 5th century CE (Brancaccio 2010: 193)

important in later tantric rituals may have come directly from the Paśupata tradition" (*ibid*.). Davidson further also states that "[t]heir virtuosity in vocal song and structured forms of dance [was] perhaps an extension of their involvement in court life and missionary activity… including the employment of temple girls, devadāsī, for their performances" (qtd. in Brancaccio 2010: 194). Davidson's work gives an insight into the importance of dance in Shaivite temple practices and the importance that it held in ritual proceedings. Coming from that, the competing Buddhist practices of the times seem to have imbibed the same practices of using dance as a means to reach a transcendental state.

As far as Odisha is concerned, Weston and Tandon (2012) talk of Tantric practices as the confluence of Shiva and Shakti, the male and female energies, wherein the latter was slowly gaining importance around the 8th century CE. The successive couple of centuries saw the flourish of Tantrism in Odisha, as we see from the many temples being dedicated to Shakti, Yogini, Chamunda and such powerful female deities. Kothari and Pasricha mention that there are sculptures of dancing gods and goddesses like Haruka, Vajravarahi and Marichi at the Ratnagiri excavation site in Odisha's Diamond Triangle[20] (1990: 15). This shows that the use of the body in ritual worship seems to have taken an active role. Weston and Tandon elaborate on these Tantric architectures, discerning between the mainstream and the more extreme cults, calling them Right hand and Left hand paths respectively. They posit that the former was allowed to prosper in and around the city centres whereas the latter spread around in the outskirts of the district. What they call the Left hand path is intriguing because it presents before us the example of Tantric rites in the bare form- possibly denoting that art which was integral or useful to the ritual rather than merely aesthetic. The open spaces in and around the temples of Yogini and Varaha along with the erotic art suggest that the body was an important part of the religious ceremonies. Many friezes also showcase women being inspected or attended to by males, presumably priests, indicating that the body was used as a powerful tool to connect with the divine. According to Weston and Tandon, the images of dancers and musicians on the periphery, "suggest that they too formed part of the proceedings, but

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[20] The Diamond Triangle is the name given to the famous Buddhist centres of Odisha at Lalitgiri (Cuttack district), Ratnagiri and Udaygiri (both in Jajpur district). Please note that the Udaygiri mentioned here is not the same as the hill-caves near Bhubaneswar.

were not given centre stage" (2012: 46). We can also infer that as the erotic had taken centre-stage, like the art suggests, the use of music and dance would have provided the backdrop for empowering the body and getting it to a heightened state of divinity. It shows that the body now was not just the medium to reach the divine, but rather it contained the potential to become divine with the art of music and dance, coupled with some rituals. As Weston and Tandon rightly point out, these images and temples reinforce the idea of the woman's body holding importance in religious proceedings, further elaborated by the Right hand path's temple imagery and practices.

Whereas the Left hand path emphasised on the erotic, the Right hand path focussed more on the beauty of the female figure. The temple in the latter genre improved upon the posture of the female dancer, giving prominence to what is known as the *alasakanya* figure. She epitomises the quality of the female dancer by way of her form, her movements, her grace and her *lasya*[21] (lit. gentleness). This path also encouraged the performance of female devotees in temples, with a view to provide entertainment to the gods, as we see in the practices of the *devadasi*. In fact, the female body, depicted in the temple architecture symbolises what Odissi, by being a bearer of the *mahari* tradition, seeks to represent. The use of the body in soft, sensuous movements, aimed to please the gods and the people alike depicts what Odissi aims to reproduce as the State's 'Classical' dance today. The temples of the Right hand path also showcase acrobats on their walls, although few in number and easy to miss. Nonetheless, the posture of the figures are all in accordance with the style that Gotipua and Odissi use today, suggesting that there must have existed an established form of dance which followed the approach the ancient texts took on the use of the body.

Temples like Mukteshwar (950 CE), Brahmeshwar (1060 CE), Lingaraj (11th century CE) and Jagannath (12th century CE) are well-known for their depiction of the culture of those times and have also been instrumental in shaping Odissi today. The increasing use of *alasakanyas*, as Weston and Tandon point out, give us an idea about the importance that dance gained in temples (2010). The Brahmeswar temple has a

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[21] *Lasya* is identified as a softer, feminine dance done by Parvati, Shiva's wife, as opposed to *tandava* which is seen as more masculine and physical, performed by Shiva, described in the *Abhinayadarpanam* and *Samgitratnakara* (Vatsyayan 2015)

plaque that explicitly states that the patron queen Kolavati dedicated beautiful women to the temple in the service of the lord- perhaps the first mention of the devadasi system. What is most intriguing though is that along with the dancers, many of the temples show the musicians as female- a tradition that seems to have been lost to history. In fact, *most* of the musicians seen in the temple structures seem to be female, giving rise to the question- why are they not mentioned or remembered in history? We could speculate that they merely serve an aesthetic objective. But I would like to presume that their presence hopes to indicate to a culture that was commonplace in the earlier times, especially in the temples.

There are also images wherein female performers are shown doing acrobatic postures, for example at the Jagannath temple or the Lingaraj temple. As I have mentioned the famous image of the Kandarpa Ratha found in the inner sanctum of the Jagannath temple is often seen as the inspiration for the tableaus created in bandha nrutya. In fact, J. P. Das elaborates on the genesis of this motif in the practice of an erotic game called *raasa* played by the *gopis* to woo Krishna (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 46). He mentions that "[t]he game consists of fanciful twisting of their bodies in difficult postures so as to compose the form of an elephant or a horse or a chariot to provide a mount for the joyrides of Krishna", and although it is a part of Vaishnavite culture, this motif does not find pictorial representation in any other part of India. The presence of acrobatic stances as a rare but repetitive occurrence makes it plausible that there existed a culture of performance including acrobatics, but probably not in the mainstream. This could also explain why the image of the dancer in a yogic posture at the Lingaraj temple is tiny (Weston and Tandon 2012: 80).

It can be speculated that the performance tradition where acrobatic or yogic postures were used evolved from the Left hand practices and continued to survive in the fringes, away from the mainstream Right hand practices which used the devadasis. Therein get bifurcated the traditions of Gotipua and Odissi, the former being a tradition that used the body in the ritual practices as a means to transcend and be closer to God (even as a *gopi* or milkmaid if the god is Krishna) as opposed to the latter in which the body of the dancer was more aesthetic and was used to please the God. It is curious that the performance tradition that included acrobatics and had female musicians sounds similar to what Gotipua aims to present to the audience.

These visuals traces give an indication of a performance either similar to Gotipua, wherein these female figures are actually cross-dressed dancers, or one that Gotipua came to replace in the days when female performers became obsolete.

I believe that although the Right hand path is perhaps of more importance to the re-imagination of Odissi, the Left hand path is equally, if not more, important for understanding Gotipua, as I will elaborate later in the chapter. As many oral histories link the form with Shiva temples, it is important to trace the form as having roots in these centuries where the intermingling of Shaivism and Tantrism took place, especially to understand the curious inclusions of bandha nrutya and batu in the repertoire. The Hirapur temple is well-known for its round, open structure, its inside walls lined with figures in such a way that makes us imagine the devotee paying obeisance to them one by one in a circular motion. This temple houses the female figures in erotic bandha poses, totalling up to sixty-four poses, known famously as the *chausathi* bandha. Many people believe that the introduction of bandha in Gotipua may have come from these stances, as they use the body in extreme ways (Moharana 2013, Mohapatra, B. 2017). Similarly, in the Tantric cults, Shiva is often shown as Batuka Bhairav, a furious form from sixty-four forms of Shiva. In Gotipua, the item[22] batu is believed to have taken its name from Batuka Bhairav to whom the dance is dedicated (Patnaik 2006: 89). These links give an important insight to the history of the form, even though the meaning of the terms batu and bandha have been varied over time, and find mention in the texts I will be discussing next.

The Desi Style of Dance

There have been a few texts after the *Natyashastra* which have either commented on (like *Abhinavabharati* and *Srngaraprakasa*) or extended (*Visnudharmottara Purana* and *Sangitaratnakara*) the understanding of dance given in the former text. The *Natyashastra* is hence, considered to have been highly influential to the writings on dance in the ancient period, and its influence is seen even in the contemporary times when alluding to the Classicistic nature of Indian performances. It was only in the 12th century that King Somesvara III wrote a varied

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[22] The individual pieces that make up the repertoire in Gotipua are colloquially called 'items'

understanding of dance in an elaborate text on the science and arts called *Abhilasitarthacintamani*, better known as *Manasollasa* (Bose 2007: 45). What was different in this text was that Somesvara divided dance (calling it nartana) "into six types: nāṭya (mimetic), lāsya (delicate), tāṇḍava (vigorous), viṣama (acrobatic), vikaṭa (ludicrous) and laghu (light and graceful)" (Bose 2007: 46-47). He also describes six types of dancers wherein he includes the danseuse, the actor, the dancer, the bard, the wandering performer, and the acrobat (Bose 2007: 45). But, more importantly the *Manasollasa* elaborates on the concept of marga and desi styles, as classical and regional traditions of dancing, indicated in the *Natyashastra*.

While talking about the marga and desi styles, Bose writes, "The classical style was acknowledged to be the one codified by Bharata in the Nāṭyaśāstra and taken to form the core of the entire tradition of the art. But it was also recognized at this time that many regional and popular styles were equally part of that tradition and therefore needed to be recorded" (2007: 11). This is important from the point of view of Gotipua's form because *Manasollasa* indicates that the desi style, or popular dances, had formed an important part of the dance traditions existing in the court and in popular practice. He distinguishes the desi style as being different from the marga tradition "first, by putting its emphasis on the style of presentation rather than on the content of the composition, and second, by concentrating on the use of more acrobatic movements" (Bose 2007: 217). Bose deduces that the two styles should not be seen as exclusive styles but rather as two different stylistic approaches of the same basic art form (2007: 217). This indicates a growing rift between popular and classical styles of dance, just like we see in religious approaches of the Left and Right paths around the same time.

The desi tradition that Somesvara talks about could be a reference to a style like Gotipua or a dance that inspired it. I believe that this juncture in time between the 10th and 12th century must have been crucial for Gotipua's primitive form, establishing a tradition that used elements of the canonical style and infused it with more Tantric practices. The body was now a medium that did not just aim to please the gods or the audience, but also became a medium to reach the supernatural. The use of acrobatics indicates the engagement of the body in a more vigorous way, indicated by the use of the term "visama" which also means "difficult", in order to

make it something that can be achieved only by arduous practice and dedication. In the 13th century work *Samgitratnakara,* Sarngadeva lists "visama" as a type of nrtta, describing it as "dancing round and round with ropes and the like" (Raja and Bernier 1976: 4). This dance seems to be a part of a desi dance known as perani, practiced in Andhra, and mentioned in many texts until the nineteenth century (Bose 2007: 59). Perani seems to be a completely acrobatic form which includes comedy, dance, and skills like carrying a heavy burden, performing Bhramarika, rope-walking, dancing with a dagger, and using weapons (Raja and Bernier 1976: 199). The example of perani may be an extreme use of acrobatics but the *Samgitratnakara* does mention in its elaboration of the use of the feet (cari) that they should be used not only for dancing and walking (gait) but also in fighting and wrestling, and accordingly enumerates them as earthly caris, aerial caris, desi earthly caris, and desi aerial caris. The use of cari in dance and fights is also enumerated by the Natyashastra but are divided only as earthly and aerial caris and are to be used mainly in theatre as per need (Ghosh 1951:197). We can presume that the *Natyashastra* either did not delve into the dance forms using such caris -and was hence limited in its description of them- or that dance forms like perani may have evolved in the intercepting centuries. With respect to Gotipua though, the usage of dance training not just for performance but also for defence is believed to have been an important factor in employing young boys for the same in the later period. I will discuss later how Banerji provides a narrative according to which "the gotipua order grew out of this new system designed to promote both self-defence and corporeal discipline" (2010: 217).

The *Samgitratnakara* also distinguishes between the tandava and lasya styles of dance, performed by Shiva and Parvati respectively, an element it shares with the *Abhinayadarpanam* probably written in the same century by Nandikesvara. This shows a shift towards recognising a female deity and propagator of dance, even though women have been dancing for centuries. The introduction of women as symbols of power has been co-opted not just in religious practices but also in mythology, giving an interesting perspective to the evolution of the Left and Right hand paths which emphasised on Shakti and Shiva respectively. Although Shiva remained the preceding deity of dance in the Right hand path of worship, the inclusion of women performers and the growth of the Left hand path with respect to performances seem to have given an impetus to include the female deity as the

propagator of the *lasya* dance in mainstream practices as described in the *Abhinayadarpanam* (Ghosh 1997: 37). Apart from this division of dance into tandava and lasya, the *Abhinayadarpanam* provides an insight into dance deeper than any other text did before its time, giving the codifications that are in use in the contemporary forms. From its detailed descriptions, we can be sure that there was a formal style in place which predominated the understanding of dance, probably the mainstream 'margi' or 'classical' style.

The elaborative description of dance in these 13th century texts lead us to believe that dance was a very popular entertainment or part of worship. The Konark temple is the biggest proof of the thriving culture of dance in Odisha during the 13th century. It has a dedicated *nata-mandap* or dance-hall in front of the main hall, decorated with hundreds of figures- dancers, musician and acrobats. There is even an image that is identified as the royal dance teacher of those times. Apart from the intricately carved *natamandap*, there are dancers and musicians on every side and tier of the main temple itself, perhaps indicating the prevalence of arts in common and royal life. The frescoes at the Konark temple give a glimpse into the cultural prosperity of the region in those times. It has accounts of the king receiving exotic presents from the ambassadors of other countries, along with descriptive images of religious ceremonies and public festivals. The widespread use of dance motifs and the presence of a separate and elevated dance hall at the Konark temple indicate to the existence of a performance tradition that was not only thriving but also both popular and important to the temple rituals. Weston and Tandon have written that the temple was built dedicated to the Sun God after King Narasimhadeva won against the advancing Muslim Afghan kings and wanted to celebrate his victory by building a magnificent "architectural masterpiece" (2012: 87). The dancing figures around the temple are proof of the celebration and also devotion of the King to the Sun-God.

A Favourite of the Kings

Although Narsimhadeva and the later rulers of the Eastern Ganga dynasty were able to thwart the attempt of the Afghans to conquer Odisha, the Afghani general Kalapahad finally managed to capture it in mid-16th century by defeating

ruler, Mukunda Deva (Banerji 2010: 237). Kalapahad is infamous for being ruthless in his capture of the State and his raids of local shrines and temples and especially of the Jagannath Puri in 1558 (*ibid.*). But the Afghan rule too was short lived and was overpowered by the growing Mughal rule in the country by the end of the 16th century, briefly coming under the rule of Akbar. Akbar was a known lover of the arts and was tolerant of multiple traditions under his rule. It is not surprising then, that two very important texts on the contemporaneous art and culture were commissioned by him- Abu'l Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* and Pundarika Vithhala's *Nartananirnaya*.

The *Ain-i-Akbari* (16th century CE) details Akbar's reign in five volumes encompassing trade, economy, administration, foreign policies, culture, philosophy and even Akbar's words of wisdom, written by his court historian Abu'l Fazl. As an encyclopaedia of his tenure, the *Ain-i-Akbari* also details the court practices and modes of entertainment therein. Abu'l Fazl's account of singers in *Ain-i-Akbari* includes different types of performers. He explicitly mentions performers called *Kirtaniyas* who are Brahmans "whose instruments are such as were in use among the ancients. They dress up smooth-faced boys as women and make them perform, singing the praises of Krishna and reciting his acts" (Jarrett 1894: 257). This is possibly the first mention of a performance that is similar to *sakhi-pila*[23] or Gotipua. It shows the boys being managed or mentored by musicians who could have been Vaishnavite Brahmans, working to spread Bhakti across the State. This cursory mention of such a culture could indicate the prevalence of such cross-dressed performances by young boys in Krishna-worship or Hindu culture, as an anomaly would have warranted some explanation.

Another term found in the *Ain-i-Akbari* is 'Akháṛá', used to describe a performance that happens at night, danced by (female) domestic servants of the "nobles of the country" (Jarrett 1894: 258). The performers are described as all being women, including the musicians and lamp-bearers. This is reminiscent of the all-female performances seen in the temple architectures of ancient Odisha. The *Ain-i-Akbari* also documents such performances to employ artists who teach slave-girls to perform. In North India, such practices or performances became common during and

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[23] As I elaborate further in the chapter, *sakhi-pila* is another name for Gotipua which loosely indicates the boys who perform like milkmaids (*sakhi*).

after the Mughal rule. Curiously enough, such all-night performances by slave dancers gained popularity later in certain other Muslim empires in specific areas, albeit in the bodies of cross-dressed pre-pubescent boys[24]. But for now, I would like to focus on the term *akhara* used here, as it does not denote a gymnasium as is common in North-Indian parlance and is used rather, for describing a kind of performance itself. The idea of the *akhara* will be discussed at length in a later section but it is necessary to mention here that Gotipuas were also called *akhara-pila*s, or boys of the *akhara*, at one point.

Along with abhinaya or enactive performances, the *Ain-i-Akbari* also documents performances that were acrobatic in nature. There are mentions of the *Nats* who are rope-dancers "and perform wonderful acrobatic feats" (Jarrett 1894: 258), reminiscent of the *perani* dancers who performed visama, described earlier by Sarngadeva. There seems to be an array of distinctive entertainers in the court like musicians, dancers, acrobats, rope-dancers, mimics (*bahurupi*) magicians (*bazigar*) and many others who show that Akbar was well-aware of the various performance traditions from the different corners of his Empire (Jarrett 1894: 258).

Another text of importance to this research is the *Nartananirnaya* commissioned by Akbar and written by Pundarika Vitthala in the 16th century CE (Sathyanarayana 1998: 168-169). Although very little research is available on the text and the original is rarely found, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts has published 3 volumes of the *Nartananirnaya* as the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth volume of the Kalāmūlaśāstra series (1994-1998), edited by Kapila Vatsyayan. This translated critical edition by R. Sathyanarayana helps understand better the thick description given in the *Nartananirnaya* of the dance forms of that time. The third volume deals extensively with dance and gives a good analysis of the form that was prevalent during Akbar's reign, and Vitthala explicitly mentions that the text is being written as per the King's taste ('*ruci*'), probably at his request (Sathyanarayana 1994: 19). Historian S. Srikantha Sastri writes that Vitthala was honoured "with the title '*Akbariya Kalidasa*' signifying an important place in the court (Sathyanarayana 1994: 15). He was a knowledgeable musicologist,

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[24] I discuss köçek, a performance of this description, in chapter 5.

danceologist, dramaturgist and art-critic and wrote two texts important texts in Akbar's court related to music and dance - *Ragamala* and *Nartananirnaya* (Sathyanarayana 1994).

Like Somesvara, Vithhala calls dance 'nartana', and elaborates more on the desi tradition, perhaps because Akbar favoured them or they were more prevalent then. The *Nartananirnaya* is primarily a text on dance with detailed notes on its ancillaries such as the cymbalist, drummer, singer and drama. It is one of the few works that details the local styles, possibly indicating a change in the aesthetic of popular dance. Bose further argues that the styles we know today as Odissi and Kathak evolved from the traditions described in these later works rather than ancient texts like *Natyashastra* (Bose 2007: 2). The two styles are better explained in *Nartananirnaya* as different by demarcating them as *baddha* and *anibaddha*[25]- wherein the former can be seen as similar to Odissi (or as I will argue, Gotipua), and the latter can be identified as Kathak. Mandakranta Bose explains that *bandhanrttas* are so called because of it "closed" structure (2007: 200) as they are "set pieces with every movement in their structured sequences clearly specified for the dancer" in terms of both rhythm and choreography (*ibid.*). As opposed to this, *anibandhanrttas* are more flexible and can be altered in form and content as per aesthetic requirements. Texts such as *Natyashastra*, *Brhaddesi* and *Sangitratnakara* also talk of *baddha* and *anibaddha* patterns as musical terms (Bose 2007: 198-199) but as dance styles, they are elaborated on for the first time in *Nartananirnaya*.

Unlike Bose's reading of *bandha*, Sathyanarayana posits that *bandha* here, stands for its literal meaning which is "combination" or "tying together" of ropes or such props, "arrangement, body configuration, construction of formation etc." (1998: 269). As per the *Nartananirnaya*, "that which is regulated by rules of *gati* etc., is said to be *bandhaka* dance" (Sathyanarayana 1998: 117). Elaborating on *bandhakanrtta*, Sathyanarayana mentions that *bandha* was "widely known and practiced in South India since about the fourteenth cent. A.D." (Sathyanarayana 1998: 269). He supports this fact by providing the example of Reddy King Pedakomati Vemabhupala who, in about 1400 CE, gave a list of twenty four bandhas in his work *Sangitacintamani*

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[25] Not to be confused with 'bandha' and 'anibandha' although they denote the same things.

(Sathyanarayana 1994: 270). Vemaphupala further elaborates on bandha saying that those performed by an even number of dancers are 'sama' and those by an odd number of dancers is 'visama'. The term visama is described in the *Nartananirnaya* as a type of nrtta which "involves weaponry, and [executing] rotations with ropes [or such props] etc." which is the same definition that *Samgitratnakara* gives (Sathyanarayana 1994: 3). The use of the term visama to indicate a desi, acrobatic dance seems to be prevalent, indicating a well-established style, although Vemabhupala's description seems to be closer to what Gotipua uses as bandha today. As we have seen, the Natyashastra mentions the existence of pindibandhas or group dances which seem to be the same bandha Vemabhupala talks about. I posit that the idea of bandha as a fixed and group dance must have evolved into a different style by this time, as we find its detailed description in the *Abhinaya Chandrika* which is written in Odisha hardly a century later.

Bose mentions that the bandhanrtta of the *Nartananirnaya* are created out of "a base of sixteen karaṇas or short dance sequences; (whereas) the bandhanṛtta of Odissi requires seventeen" (2007: 212). She emphasises on the similarity between the two by stating that when she showed Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, a student of Gotipua in his youth, some line drawing of the bandhranrttas described in the *Nartananirnaya*, "Mr. Mahapatra confirmed that these were indeed the sequences he was taught" (*ibid.*). He further added that these dances are physically so difficult that not only are girls not allowed to train in it, the more acrobatic ones are now performed only by Chhau dancers (*ibid.*).This only goes to prove that bandhanrtta is an ancient traditional style of dancing and the use of acrobatic or yogic poses in Gotipua is nothing new. Another feature of Gotipua that finds mention in the *Nartananirnaya* is batu[26]. Batu is an elementary dance piece of the repertoire inclusive of basic postures and movements, the successful performance of which marks the dancer as more qualified than an amateur. Although batu has now become part of the Odissi repertoire, it was originally a part of Gotipua's traditional repertoire. In fact, before bandha-nrutya became a full-fledged presentation (in mid-1950s), it encompassed performing individual bandha acts at the end of batu (Moharana 2013, Pattanayak

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[26] A more detailed description of batu is given in the next chapter as part of the Gotipua repertoire.

2013; Sahoo, B. K. 2013). In fact, Guru Satyapira Palai was of the opinion that "Bandha has no meaning; it is just a pose done at the end of batunritya" (2013).

> The description of batu in *Nartananirnaya* is as follows:
>
> *Janubhyaam bhoomilagnaabhyam padbhyam vaa mandalakritih*
>
> *Namraprushttham lataahastou paatram bhramanamaacharet*
>
> *Tadaasou vaturityuktah suryamandalvad gatih* (1998:164)

Sathyanarayana translates it as:

> The *patra* should execute a rotation in the form of a circle *<maṇḍala>* with knees and feet resting on the ground, with bent back and *latāhasta* pose. Its *gati* is of *sūryamaṇḍala* (*bhanavigati*); this is called *vaṭu*. (1998: 165).

I will agree with Bose here when she says that even though the description is insufficient, it corresponds to the movement in the piece called batu danced in Odissi taken from Gotipua's repertoire (2007: 214). The *Nartananirnaya* places batuka, or batu, as a part of the sequence of anibandha, placing it last in the order of performing. Bose believes that "the bandha category encompassed the styles that had been firmly defined and codified by long usage", whereas styles under the anibandha category were still evolving (2007: 2010). Interestingly, one of the dances that are enlisted under bandha is śabdanṛtta (Sathyanarayana 1998:145), a dance that shares striking similarities with Gotipua and is mentioned by Patnaik (2006) and Khokar and Khokar (1990) as formerly being a part of Odissi. Sabda or sabdaswarapata is a dance that exists sparsely now only in a specific area of the Sambalpur district but dancers like Guru Debaprasad Das, who introduced it to his Odissi repertoire, and Chitrasen Swain, who is bringing it back into his Gotipua troupe, are working to re-introduce it to the Odra-nrtya form. Sabda was known as a tandava item which "pays homage to aspects of the deity chosen for veneration—typically Shiva, Durga, or Ganesh" while a pertinent shloka is recited in rhythm (Banerji 2010: 531). The definition given in the *Nartananirnaya* calls sabdanrtta "auspicious" and provides a very detailed account of how the body and hands should be positioned and moved, ending with the note that "*Svaras* should be [displayed] only with voice, [words] with limbs and movements of mood-expressive glances, *tāla* should be displayed with the feet and the *śabda*[*prabandha*] syllables with rhythm" (Sathyanarayana 1998:145). The inclusion

of sabdanrtta as a part of bandha dance indicates that it was an established part of the repertoire with a fixed choreography and rules[27].

The Text on Odra-nrutya

As we come into the 17th century CE, we come across the only text written exclusively about the dance of Udra or Odisha- the *Abhinaya Chandrika* written by Maheswar Mohapatra[28]. Although the text is haphazardly composed, it gives a detailed insight into the dance that was prevalent in Odisha at that time. It elaborates on the hand gestures, foot position and body movements used in this dance using the local nomenclatures. Some of the names seen in the *Abhinaya Chandrika* are still used in Gotipua today although many of them are now being lost as they are taking newer names from Odissi that ascribes to more Classical texts like the *Natyashastra* and the *Abhinayadarpanam*. The dance detailed in *Abhinaya Chandrika* has an acrobatic element called bandha nrutya (Patnaik 1999: 67), as opposed to "baddha nrutya" which follows rules (Patnaik 1999: 74). The description of bandha nrutya in the *Abhinaya Chandrika* leaves no doubt that it is the same dance that is done by the Gotipuas thereby confirming the existence of such a traditional form at least in the 17th century.

> The couplet describing bandha nrutya in the *Abhinaya Chandrika* says,
> *bandhanrutya mahaaghoraṃ nati kashta pradaayakam*
> *kishora anga saapekshaṃ vishamaṃ youbanaantarey*
> *gaganaa dvimukhaa chaiba toranaa shayanaa tathaa*
> *kshudraa trishoolaa dambaruha vrutaanga mithunaashrayaa*
> *pradeepaa deepa bhedashcha naanaakshetrey samaashrayaa*
> *shrunu tvaṃ dashabhedanshcha banddhah raajagana priyah*
> *paadau bishama sanstaanau karau kutilataashrayo*
> *paadau karau samaayuktam nrutya kashta pradayakam*
>   (Patnaik 1999: 67)

Patnaik translates it as:

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[27] See Banerji (2010) for more on 'Shabda Nritya'.
[28] There is a debate about whether the text was written in the 17th or 18th century CE (see Banerji 2010: 536)

> Bandha Nrutya is the most difficult and painful for a danseuse. It should be done during adolescent period which becomes difficult after youth. Gagana, Dwimukha, Torana, Shayana, Kshyudra, Trisula, Damaru, Brutanga, Mithuna and Pradipa – these are the ten varieties which are favourites of the Kings. Here feet and the hands are used in acrobatic manner. Joined together the hands and the feet make the dance difficult (*sic.*) (*ibid.*)

The description explicitly states that it is a difficult and painful dance that should be done in the "adolescent period which becomes difficult after youth" (Patnaik 1999: 67). The lines above state that the ten varieties of bandha were dear to the Kings, indicating that this was a court performance. This may have been the reason Rath Sharma mentioned that Gotipua dance was a royal dance in his manuscript, although the original manuscript makes no distinct mention of Gotipua (1999: 2). Apart from these ten types of bandha, there also mentions of other stances which are physically challenging, like bibhanga bandha which is an acrobatic pose, called as kumara nrutya (lit. dance of youngster) and should not be practiced "beyond the age of sixteen" (Patnaik 1999: 48). Similarly, there is the mention of another acrobatic stance called baddhaputita, which is favoured by the king (Rath Sharma 1967: 18). The *Abhinaya Chandrika* specifies that the ten bandha poses are very difficult and painful and is forbidden to be performed without the supervision of a guru or without practice (Rath Sharma 1967: 25; Patnaik 1999: 73). The bandha poses practiced today have different names although most of them are similar in nature to the ones listed in the *Abhinaya Chandrika*. Priyambada Mohnaty Hejmadi writes that there are currently twelve bandhas in practice and enlists them as-"Chirā, Lahuniā, Chaki, Sarpa, Sagadi, Chhatra, Mayura, Chāra Mayura, Bheka, Padmāsana, Khāi (named Garuda by Das, 2002), and Hansa. A recent addition is Kumbhira (crocodile), which is more of a hand stand" (2019: 38-39).
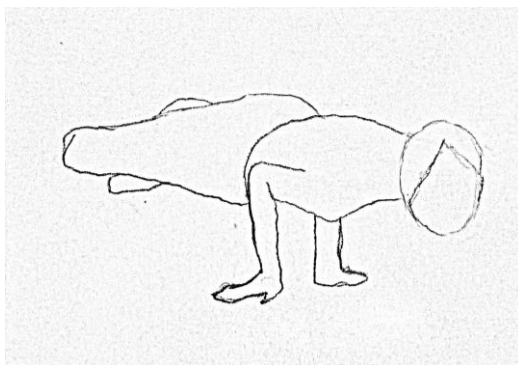
Figure 1: Kumbhira bandha   **Figure 2: Sarpa bandha**
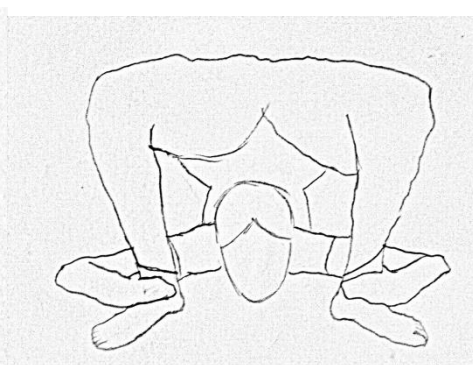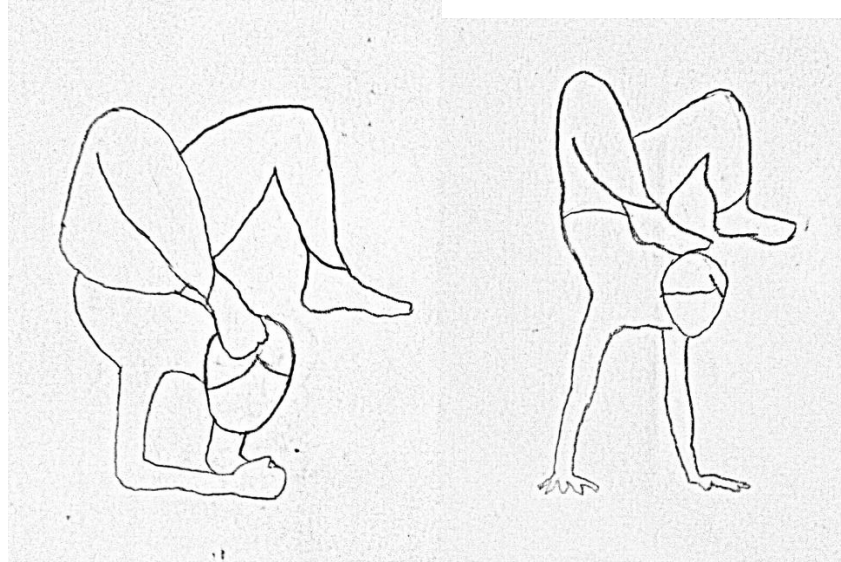
Figure 3: Hansa bandha   **Figure 4: Mayura bandha**

The *Abhinaya Chandrika*, being the most recent of the texts discussed above gives the description of a form closest to Gotipua. Also, as I will discuss in the forthcoming section, dance scholars also opine that Gotipua flourished or at least was established around the 16th and 17th century CE, substantiating the fact that there existed an acrobatic dance which evolved from Odra-nrtya into *mahari*[29] and Gotipua (Patnaik 2006: 64, Banerji 2010: 219, Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 19). These architectural and textual evidences give an insight into the evolution of the form of the dance but in order to understand the philosophy or the politics of the tradition and the body therein, it becomes imperative to pay attention to the oral histories. Gotipua's main feature along with the acrobatic choreography is the cross-dressing which, surprisingly, does not find mention in ancient or medieval texts barring the mention of a similar performance in *Ain-i-Akbari*. Therein the local histories of origin and evolution become important. Scholars like Banerji and Mohanty Hejmadi who have done an in-depth study of Gotipua chalk out the history of Gotipua through these oral repositories, corroborating them with the written historical movements in Odisha.

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[29] Banerji quotes Ileana Citarasti who has written that *mahari*s too had to execute some "*bhandas* or acrobatic poses corresponding to some of the 64 bandhas of the *KamaSutra*…[k]nown as 'Maithuna Nritya'" (2010: 188)

The Oral Histories

      Gotipua has been a part of the ritualistic life of the people of Puri for centuries, even though it never achieved State recognition or sanction. It has been transmitted orally and has become a part of Puri's heritage through stories and hearsay. There was also a time when Gotipua was so popular that many rich and respectable *zamindars* (lit. land-owners) in Puri had their own troupe as a mark of their cultural and religious passion. Due to lack of documentation, it is difficult to determine when the tradition acquired the form it has today but with the help of oral accounts we can try to outline an inkling of the context in which it may have emerged. We must take into account here that the original form of Gotipua was quite different and perhaps had more to do with enacting the local songs, even as a public performance, but it may also be interesting to unearth the roots of the physically challenging parts of the dance, as it is unique to Gotipua's form. What is most interesting though is that while the textual or visual references provide more information on the choreography or the physical form of the tradition, the oral histories concentrate more on cross-dressing as the birth of the tradition.

      Anurima Banerji, in her work *Odissi Dance: Paratopic Performances of Gender, State, and Nation* notes several stories on the origin of the tradition through common oral histories. She puts forward four of the most commonly heard histories about the inception of the tradition, three of which revolve around the medieval Bhakti saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. As a propagator of Bhakti in the form of Vishnu devotion, Chaitanya is famous in Bengal and Odisha for being his greatest devotee. There are therefore, many myths surrounding his arrival in and time spent at Puri. According to the Bihar and Orissa Gazetteer, he arrived in Puri 1510 CE and popular folklore recounts that he lived there till he disappeared in the sea (Mansfield 1929: 125). In spite of Chaitanya's role in these histories, scholars like Patnaik (2006), Mohanty Hejmadi (2019) and Banerji (2010) believe that Chaitanya himself had very little to do with the Gotipua tradition and it was his followers who might have later established the tradition in the 16th century. Nonetheless, as an ethnographic study, it is important to note the several histories related to the tradition. I will first talk about

the four histories mapped out by Banerji before detailing a couple of histories that are lesser known and much less popular.

In the first history that Banerji recounts, Chaitanya, on his arrival to Odisha "as an incarnation of Krishna", was disappointed to not have received "a ceremonial welcome by the devadasis" as was done for the other deities. He therefore asked young boys to dress up as female dancers and give birth to this new custom (Banerji 2010: 212). According to the second tale, Chaitanya, enthralled by the grandeur of the Chandan Jatra[30], wanted to include a dance service that would continually entertain the Gods for all twenty-one days of the festival. Due to their menstrual cycles, which "orthodox Brahminical thought" considered problematic, women could not be allowed to dance continuously for so many days. Hence, young boys dressed as women were made to dance in their place (Banerji 2010: 213). Although this seems plausible, Banerji herself has explained how this tale seems spurious as the batches of *mahari*s performing at the Chandan Jatra would keep rotating and thereby follow the rules of "blood prohibitions" (Banerji 2010: 214). At the same time, Khokar and Khokar too have talked about both Gotipua and *mahari* being performed at the Chandan Jatra (2011: 113).

The third history portrays Chaitanya in a different light wherein he proscribed women dancing or mingling freely with men. Banerji specifies that "under Gaudiya Vaishnavite logic, women were cast —in bizarrely diverse modes— as temptations, distractions, competition, and inexplicably, also as superior spiritual models, impossible to emulate" and hence it would be sacrilege for them to dance in public (2010: 214). He therefore, encouraged men to feminize themselves and innately feel the power of women, or *sakhi-bhava*, in order to worship the sole male power of Jagannath, and thereby initiated the tradition of Gotipua. Chaitanya visited Odisha during the reign of Prataparudra Deva (1497-1540 CE), whose minister Ramananda Ray became a devout Vaishnavite under the influence of Chaitanya. Many versions see Ramananda Ray as the important propagator of Gotipua (Patnaik 2006: 64; Kothari and Pasricha 2002: 94; Banerji 2010: 215). Kothari mentions that at the time

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[30] Chandan Jatra is one of the biggest festivals of Odisha, stretching over 42 days, half of which are celebrated outside the temple and the rest inside. It generally falls in the month of May on the Hindu auspicious day of *Akshaya Tritiya* and the construction of Jagannath's chariot for *Rath Jatra* (chariot-festival) starts on this day.

of Ramananda Ray, followers of Vaishnavism in Odisha "did not quite approve of dancing by women as a pretext of worship" and hence, introduced the custom of Gotipua. It is important to note here that "*mahari naach*" was existent and prevalent during that time and "the boys were not a substitute for the *maharis*, for they had no link at all with the temple" (Kothari 2002: 130).

Though not a substitute for the *mahari* tradition, the fourth tale talks about the Gotipua tradition as emerging due to the decline of the former. This story has to do more with the emergence of Gotipua after the Afghan invasions and the consequent Muslim rule in the 16th century. The Afghans had repeatedly attacked the Jagannath temple, and with it, its women. The *mahari* tradition could not be sustained under such circumstances (Banerji 2010: 215). At the same time, the purdah system restricted women performing on stage, "either because the new patrons forbade it, or because the devadasis themselves wanted to eschew contact with mlecchas (foreigners), in accordance with orthodox thought" (*ibid*.). The re-establishment of order and proliferation of Gotipua was put in place with Akbar restoring the Khurda[31] King, Ramachandra Deva[32], back to the throne in 1592 (Banerji 2010: 217). According to Kothari, in the aftermath of the plundering, Ramachandra Deva had built official residential areas for the *sevayatas* (lit. servers of the Lord) and within the "several categories among the priesthood [*sevayatas*]… one was that of the Gotipuas" (Kothari 2002: 94). Ramachandra Deva also initiated a number of *akhada-ghar*s, which is generally read as gymnasiums, under the reign of the secular Akbar. Patnaik mentions that "As the King of Khurda, a temple-state, Ramachandra Deva had supreme religious authority and he considered it his duty to protect the temple from intruders" (2006: 66). The introduction of this physical culture and the dearth of female temple dancers is believed to be responsible for Gotipua's engagement with acrobatic movements showcased on the cross-dressed, nubile bodies, even though essentially a dance form.

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[31]Khurda was a small state in the district of Puri

[32]Ramachandra Deva was returned his title of the King and his control over the temples in Odisha by Akbar in 1592 while still being under the Mughal rule (Banerji 251). Under his control, the tradition of *mahari* and Gotipua both flourished (Banerji 177, Kothari 95; Mallia 56).

The last history is what Banerji terms as the "Muslim thesis" wherein the destruction and plundering by the Muslim dynasties is highlighted in order to project the emergence of Gotipua as a cross-dressed acrobatic tradition as a response to the tumultuous times (Banerji 2010: 219). She posits that although the role of the Muslim thesis may be one of the reasons, the changing environment of the times, along with the increasing popularity of the Bhakti movement is what led to the introduction of a tradition such as Gotipua. She agrees with other scholars that Gotipua originated around the 16th century and was alive during Akbar's reign (1556-1605) based on the reference of a transgender performance in the writings of that time (in *Ain-i-Akbari*) (2010: 256). She also states that the element of cross-dressing was popular in many Odia dance forms due to Vaishanvism but none had been formalized like Gotipua was under Ramachandra Deva emphasizing the State's role in popularizing Gotipua (Banerji 2010: 270).

The Akhara-Pilas

The term 'Gotipua' for this dance tradition is relatively new and still uncommon for many villagers who would rather identify with its older names. The dancing boys were earlier called *akhara-pila*s or *sakhi-pila*s, both of which correspond to the histories of Ramachandra Deva and Ramananda Ray repectively. In the villages of Puri, they are often also called *akhara-pila* as the villagers identify them with the erstwhile *akharas*. Mainly though, the boys are still famously called *sakhi-pila* to relate them to the cross-dressing and devotional nature encompassed by the term '*sakhi-bhava*' made popular by Chaitanya. Interestingly, Mohanty Hejmadi talks about the definition of Gotipua according to Shri Gopal Chandra Praharāj which distinguishes the term 'gotipua' from '*sakhi-pila*'. According to it,

> In *Utkala*, tender-aged good looking boys are dressed up as girls who sing, dance and do *abhinaya* on *Paurānika* (mythological) themes. If these *Paurānika abhinetās* [lit. actors] are more than one, they are known as *sakhipilā*. The boy who sings while dancing is called a *gotipua*. (MohantyHejmadi 2019:13)

The above lines clearly demarcate between solo and duet performers calling them gotipua and *sakhi-pilas* respectively, making the latter a fitting term for the dance that is performed today. The term *sakhipila* also has a very specific connotation of

Vaishnavite trans-dressing associated with this tradition, something that the other terms gotipua and *akhara-pila* do not have. It may be due to these two major reasons that the term *sakhipila* is still prevalent colloquially in villages today as the dance performed by a group of boys as opposed to single boy performers (viz. *goti-pua*).

The use of the term *sakhi-pila* is also attributed to having roots in another similar dance tradition called the *Sakhi Nacha* or *Sakhi Nata*. D. N. Patnaik describes *Sakhi Nacha* as "an imitation of the voluptuous dance of the *devadasis* who belonged to the adjoining Telegu regions", practiced in the southern districts of Odisha (2006: 66-67)[33]. Banerji uses all three terms *Sakhi Nacha*, *Sakhi Nata* and *Sakhipila* to mean the same tradition which "seems to be a variation of an old South Indian devadasi dance with erotic overtones which has otherwise disappeared" (2010: 529). In my interaction with several locals and Gotipua gurus, the general idea was that *sakhi-pila* was the name used for Gotipua whereas *sakhi-nacha* or *sakhi nata* is another dance form from the southern districts of Odisha and is in no way related to the Gotipua tradition. The definition of the term given by Praharaj seems to clear any doubts regarding the specific term and its usage and brings into perspective the reason the term is still used locally.

Another term that is widely used for the gotipuas is '*akhara-pila*', associated with the *akhara* or community spaces in the villages. *Akharas* are places in village centres and streets where people gather for group activities including tuitions in music and dance, and physical exercises. Although the term is now heavily identified with body-building and wrestling and has been often mistaken by scholars for being merely a gymnasium, the meaning of the word in Odia is a little different. In Odisha, it is a norm for every village or settlement to have a central meeting place which is known as an *akhara-ghar*. Mohanty Hejmadi calls them "sort of cultural centres" (2019: 19). It is a known fact that most Odissi gurus were erstwhile gotipuas and learnt the art from *akhara-ghars*.

Unlike contemporary *gurukuls*, gotipuas earlier used to train at *akhara-ghars* while residing either on temple-grounds or under the auspices of the temple, funded

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[33] See also Kothari and Pasricha (1990:44)

by the kings or *zamindars*. It should be remembered here that gotipuas earlier were fewer in number and would not be trained en masse so there was no need for a separate space for their training. Therefore, perhaps, it made more sense for them to be training at community spaces in a multitude of arts while staying under the temple's patronage with other *sebayats* of their age[34]. D. N. Patnaik (2006), and Kothari and Pasricha (1990) mention that Ramachandradeva built seven lanes around the Jagannath temple for the servers or *sebayats* of the temple to reside in. While the *maharis* would stay in the street called *Mahari Palli* or *Anga Alasa Palli* (Patnaik 2006: 60), the gotipua boys would stay in the lane called *Chapa Akhada Palli* (Kothari and Pasricha 1990: 44). It was also Ramachandradeva who "while reviving the daily rituals of the temple which remained suspended for a considerable number of years established gymnasiums in each street of the town to encourage physical culture in order to help protect the temple from intruders" (Patnaik 2006: 66).

Gotipua's Shaivite origins

The establishment of gymnasiums by Ramachandradeva and their subsequent use to train the gotipuas in physical exercises is often cited as the reason behind Gotipua's acrobatic element. But, there is another school of thought that attributes the physical nature of Gotipua to its pre-Vaishnavite roots. There are some gurus who believe that this tradition started in the Shiva temples much before it started being used to spread Vaishnaivism. So much so that Nepolion Pattanayak, founder of Natyamber Gotipua Gurukul, reinforces this oral history by affirming that Gotipua originated at the Balunkeshwar (a form of Shiva) temple in Puri district, of which his family is a care-taker.

Pattanayak follows the legacy of his grandfather Chandrashekhar Pattanayak who, according to Mohanty Hejmadi, "dominated the field of *gotipua* tradition in the early twentieth century" (2019:81). Chandrashekhar Pattanayak remains to this day, a highly revered pundit who fostered and developed Gotipua in his village of Dimirisena. In contemporary times, most Gotipua gurus directly or indirectly come

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[34] Not all *sebayats* were trained to be gotipuas. Only those who were perceived to be good-looking and proved to be good percussionists and singers were taken for performances, unlike the modern tradition where every boy enrolled at a gurukul is, by default, a gotipua.

from the Dimirisena School of tradition while the rest ascribe to the Raghurajpur School. I will elaborate on the differences between the two traditions in the fourth chapter but here I would like to point out that while the latter believes in the Vaishnavite origins of Gotipua, the former continues to negate that in order to favour its Shaivite origin history.

The first statement that Nepolion Pattanayak gives to support his claim is that "Shiva is the god of dance but also of yogasana" (2013). As I have discussed before, the bandha postures that are done by the gotipuas are essentially postures or *asanas* of yoga, initially done as exercises to keep both the body and mind sharp. Yoga helps to stabilise both by making the doer concentrate on their breathing while performing slow movements that strengthen different parts of the body. Pattanayak (2013) further states that the Gotipua tradition has to have developed in the Shiva temples as the practice of keeping boys till puberty as ascetics and training them in dance and yoga under a guru was done to make them physically and morally stronger, a feat identified with Shiva and not Vishnu or Krishna. Guru Satyapira Palai (2013) too, concurs that the Gotipua tradition was initiated in the Shiva temples whereas the *devadasi* tradition comes from Vishnu temples.

If we look at the contemporary state of Gotipua, we see that the training generally takes place in Hindu *gurukuls*, the heads of which worship both Shiva and Vishnu (as Jagannath or Krishna) within a pantheon of gods including Ganesh, Brahma, Durga and so on. Curiously enough though, the older gotipuas and *gurukuls* recall that they were always attached to the Shiva temple of their village. In his conversation with me, Guru Jayakrushna Naik, head guru at the Konark Natya Mandap mentioned that the donation of boys in case of ill-health is a practice of the Shiva temple. Good looking boys would be trained as dancers and singers whereas the rest would be trained in *pakhawaj* (2013). The biggest example of course, is of Dimirisena where the Balunkeshwar temple was a famous temple for such donations with the practice continuing until circa 1994 (Mohapatra, G. 2017). Senior Gotipua dancer, Guru Bhagirathi Mohapatra told me that he too, was donated to the Shiva temple beside his current home in Barala (2017). Even though he is well over sixty years of age, he and his students still perform in the temple courtyards on certain occasions to continue their loyalty towards the temple as gotipuas.

The link that Gotipua shares with the Shiva temple seems even more obvious during the Chandan Jatra, the festival when the Jagannath idol is brought out along with certain other deities and taken on boat (*chapa* in Odia) rides in a nearby water tank for twenty-one evenings. In her book, *Wives of the God-King*, Frédérique Apffel-Marglin talks about this festival and details how the idols of Jagannath (as Madan Mohan) and his wives, and his brother Balabhadra (in his incarnate as Ramakrishna) along with five Shiva idols (from different Shiva temples in Puri) are placed in two boats respectively and toured in the tank[35]. She mentions that

> On the boat of Mādan Mohan and his wives the devadasis take turns dancing and singing… On the boat of Rāmakrisna and the five Śivas young boys dressed as women dance. These boys are called 'one son' (*gotipua*) or 'child of the *akhaḍā*' (*akhaḍāpilā*) (1985: 104).

Marglin further elaborates on her observation by proposing that "dance performed by males would seem to have existed at one time in Orissan temples" and judging by the fact that the boys would only perform on Shiva's boat, she reckons they were "performed only in Shiva temples" (1985: 317). Marglin makes these statements based on the fact that many of the Shiva temples in Odisha have male dancers on the niches, although not dressed as females. It can thereby be assumed that the tradition of a male dance which gave importance to yoga and celibacy was initiated in the earlier Shiva temples (7th to 9th century A. D.), in accordance with the story of the origin of dance in ancient dance texts like *Natyashastra* and *Abhinayadarpanam* as being given to humans by Shiva in *tandava* form. With the onset of Tantrism around the 7th and 8th centuries, the female form started gaining importance and we see the rise in the number of female dance sculptures in and after 10th century Puri.

As far as Gotipua is concerned, how the cross-dressing came into the tradition is not known but any evidence of visual representation of such cross-dressed dancers would easily be mistaken for their female counterparts. Pattanayak believes that in the 12th c. A.D., the reign of Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva saw the inception of the

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[35]MohantyHejmadi also mentions this in her book, although she refers to Ramakrishna as Rama and Krishna, and the five Shivas as Panchu Pandavas (2019: 21).

Jagannath temple and the devadasi tradition saw the decline of the Gotipua tradition. It was the King's patronage towards the Jagannath temple and the devadasis which reduced favours towards the Gotipua dance that existed in the Shiva temples in the previously Shaivite society. This caused Gotipua to sustain itself through the patronage of *zamindars*. It was much later in the 16th century that Chaitanya saw Gotipua performances and used it to propagate Vaishnavite beliefs (Pattanayak 2013). To further support this history, Pattanayak claims "Chaitanya wasn't a dancer. He lost his senses and danced in a trance, so how could he have influenced Gotipua dance?" (2017). As I have stated before, the general consensus amongst dance scholars too is that Chaitanya or Ramananda Raya (in the 16th century CE) had no role to play in the promotion of Gotipua and it was perhaps used by later followers to spread Vaishnavite culture. After all, once the royal patronage was discontinued due to political turmoil especially after the 17th century it was the religious monasteries called *mathas*[36] and local *zamindars* who patronised local cultural forms. It is therefore natural that such patronage gave rise to commissioned performances that suited the religious leanings of the benefactors, in this case local *zamindars* and Vaishnavite mathas. This also explains why the Chaitanya histories, in spite of being unsupported by any written or sculptural evidences, are so dominant in the oral accounts of the tradition.

The Origin of the Dance

As per the sculptural, written and oral histories, we can clearly see that Gotipua became a very popular dance form in the 17th century as a commissioned or entertaining popular art form. There is no doubt that the post-Chaitanya Vaishnavite movement gave an impetus to this traditional performance and provided avenues for performances in differing places and occasions. But, as this chapter suggests, there was a tradition already existing before the advent of this phase that has become identified with Gotipua's history. But, as the previous tradition is lost in living memory, I delineated the history of the form instead, in order to understand the body that is used in this tradition.

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[36] I elaborate on *mathas* in the next chapter.

From the available sculptural, textual and oral narratives, we can see that Gotipua was an ancient dance form that was not necessarily performed by young bodies. The descriptions of bandha and acrobatics in the ancient texts give the indication of a dance form that was similar to Gotipua, but is known either as Odra-Magadhi, to scholars with sculptural evidences dating back to the 7th century also supporting this. The use of the body as per the Shaivite or Tantric discourses of physicality mark this form to be older than the 10th century, and the image Kandarpa Ratha at the Jagannath temple pin the existence of the tableau formations which is reimagined in Gotipua as bandha nrutya, dates back to the 12th century. Thus, the popularity of an acrobatic form is without doubt attached to the history of dance in the area of Odisha from a long time. At the same time, while the dancers and musicians in the Shaivite and Tantric temples are both male and female, there seems to be an increase in the trend of using female musicians by the time the Right-Hand path was established. This can mean two things- either the dance existed as a female performance, or that cross-dressing was common even in those times.

Gotipua as we know it today is a very recent dance style, emerging around the time Odissi was reconstructed in the mid-twentieth century. The modern name itself is attributed to the 20th century CE by Kanungo (Banerji 2010: 217). Even the earlier names that we are aware of – *akhara-pila* and *sakhi-pila* – quite possibly became common only after the 17th century with the popularity of Vaishnavism. Perhaps the tradition was known by another name like batunrtta or bandhanrtta which we find mentioned in the texts but are not in use anymore. Gotipua is the only surviving Classical style from the Odhra-Magadh area according to the descriptions found in ancient texts. That said, its flexible nature and love for popularity categorised this acrobatic and fluid tradition as a desi style that was popular between the 10th and 12th century CE.

The trope of cross-dressing in this tradition is attributed to the Bhakti movement of the 17th century. Although that is the popular idea, we must remember that impersonation as cross-dressing has always existed in Indian performance tradition and is mentioned in theNatyashastra as "imitative impersonation" (Ghosh 1951: 542). Also, from the passing reference of the cross-dressed boy performers in *Ain-i-Akbari*, it seems like it was quite common at the time. A text like *Ain-i-Akbari* which was chronicling the times would specify the novelty of a performance if there

was one, like the detailed description of the *bazigar* or the *akhara* (Jarrett 2895: 258). It will not be wrong to assume that the performance of Gotipua must have been in existence since before the 12th century (as per Pattanayak's recalling), perhaps even before the 9th century, using Marglin's (1985) observations, and became more popular after the 17th century when it assumed certain duties as the purveyor of the Bhakti tradition. The tradition had disappeared into oblivion again in the middle, around the 19th and 20th centuries (Barik 2013) with only a few performances during certain festivals, and gained popularity again after the 1950s after re-inventing itself to suit contemporary aesthetics of popular performances.

So, even though the origin of Gotipua is not completely traceable, we see that there are glimpses of the form in the history of dance in Odisha. For a tradition that has survived, with good and bad phases, since the ancient periods, Gotipua has accepted and discarded many elements in its formation to what it is today. As we see, in the current tradition, elements like pindibandhas and bandhanrtta are being re-introduced to the repertoire, while some like *bachika abhinaya* and batunrtta are fading away, chiselling the form to suit the needs of proscenium spaces which is where the dance survives today. Some other elements like cross-dressing and the use of yoga in training have remained in the tradition at least form the 17th century CE. This is an accurate example of the flexible nature of the tradition that I mentioned earlier in the chapter. The underlying feature of Gotipua is the ability to change as per the space, patronage and demands of the time, and hence, to find an "authentic", "unchanging" Gotipua is a pointless exercise. It becomes important instead, to read the tradition in the contemporary form in order to study its elements in the light of the purpose they serve today, as I will in the forthcoming chapter.

Chapter 2

Patronizing the Tradition

The Chandrasekhar Gotipua Kala Samsad was started by Guruji. I am also a student of that gurukul, of that style. When we were learning, we used to stay at the temple. We used to get our days' two meals there. From the coconut tree of the Lord, we used to pluck coconuts- have them for breakfast and make oil from to be used in massages. We were wholly dependent on the Lord. We did not have any connection to our families whatsoever. Even if any family member, even parents, died we wouldn't tonsure our heads. We wholly belonged to the Lord.

Nowadays, people keep them at their own houses, but we never stayed like this. I stayed at this Balunkeshwar temple. I came in 1991 when I was around ten years old. I offered Him my hair then. After that, two more kids came in the next couple of years. So perhaps around '94-'95, all of this stopped. The zamindar tradition existed but there wasn't much involvement with the temple.

In our time, when we stayed at the temple, we would have to memorise one song daily. As it is done today, we would wake up in the morning, freshen up, practice music, and exercise. Then we used to sweep around the temple area and clean the utensils that are used inside. Brahminji used to come and offer the khai[37] puja; we would eat the khai with coconut for breakfast. We had to leave for school around ten o'clock on most days. Around one o'clock, during lunch time, someone would keep lunch for us if we'd tell them, or else Brahminji would keep it in the gotipua room for us. We would eat that when we got back at four o'clock, and then again practice. But, our gurus never gave that much attention to studies, because we were supposed to concentrate on Gotipua. We had to completely memorise 180 songs- one song per day. So should I work on doing that or study? Because if we didn't memorise, we would get a thumping! Every evening Guruji would come and first make us practice musical notes and then exercise. Then he would put the lyrics of the given song into a tune. Finally, we would practice a few items and do the abhinaya.

– In conversation with Gautam Mohapatra

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[37] *Khai* is puffed rice.

How old are you and since when have you been learning?

I am seventeen years old I started learning when I was ten.

When you started learning, how long did it take for you to master bandha?

I am still in the process of learning bandha… just like studying never stops, learning bandha also never stops. As girls, we take longer to learn when compared to boys. We learn bandha little by little; it is still a process.

So, how easy it is to do all the bends in bandha?

Nothing is achieved easily…

But do the boys find it easier?

No… not even for the boys. It all depends on practice- the more time you give to practicing, the better you get at it. If you can't give that much time, then progress will be slow.

You are one of the older girls. So do you feel uncomfortable at all doing bandha?

Yes, a little bit as we are older, but we overcome it. It is after all a dance tradition, and therefore we do it. What can we do? Dances are of different kinds- be it Odissi or anything else. You have to do it accordingly. This is Gotipua, isn't it? It is painful, but we do that too.

In bandha, when you need to roll or stand on your chest, does it hurt or is it too painful?

It hurts a little but not that much.

And how do you manage during menses?

So far I have never needed to perform during periods, thanks to the grace of Lord Jagannath. But if that ever happens and the programme is at a temple, then we'll refuse. But it is just a matter of five-six days. If there is a cultural programme or on stage, then we can perform without any issue.

But don't you feel any discomfort while performing?

Well, we do feel a little uncomfortable but we adjust… what else can we do? There are not many kids learning. No one wants to learn Gotipua anymore because it is painful, because they want to use that time for studying. They do not think that this is an art. It stays in our body forever. If tomorrow when we get married, we can teach our kids too. But nobody wants to think that they'll teach kids or that their kids will even learn this!

– In conversation with Kaberi Palai

Gotipua has many histories that weave together to create a tradition full of varied and vibrant elements. The multiple histories also come from, and create multiple narratives and styles of, the same tradition like different shades of the same colour. The long and winding path that Gotipua has taken to become what it is in the contemporary has passed many milestones, some of which are remembered and the rest forgotten. These milestones also reflect on how the dance has choreographed itself in the use of certain bodies and their movements. The bodies that create a performance of Gotipua are themselves created carefully through a strict tradition that has passed orally from one generation to the next. Although such oral traditions too encounter some changes from time to time, their basic principles and modes of training remain constant. The oral modes of training which are known today date back to a maximum of three generations of gurus, but with the inception of Odissi in the mid-twentieth century, the style of training has also evolved with the tradition and has started confirming increasingly to textual sources like the *Natyashastra*, *Abhinaya Darpana* and *Abhinaya Chandrika*.

The process of becoming a gotipua is exhaustive and commands a lot of dedication. This can be said of almost all the arts, but perhaps what separates Gotipua from many is the fact that the training module is especially created for the juvenile bodies that perform the dance, thereby having stricter codes of discipline and supervision. A Gotipua dancer typically enters the tradition at around five years of age and by the age of ten has perfected the art and its style. In this chapter, I will elaborate the Gotipua tradition by focussing on how the dancer is sculpted by the different processes in that I will enlist the prerequisites of being a gotipua, how they are recruited, their daily lives and their social standing. Throughout history, there have been various institutions and patrons that have helped further this tradition, built on the virtuosity of the child-body. I will enumerate a few of these patrons, as far as oral memory allows, before elaborating on the current module of training that is most commonly followed, the *gurukul* system. Of course, as a dance that has a strong heritage in oral history, there are certain fundamentals that are considered sanctimonious by traditionalists, but with growing commercialisation and urbanisation of the tradition, many changes are being incorporated.

The Akharas

As I have mentioned in the last chapter, the term *akhara* in Odia stands for a community space. Joseph Alter, in 'The Wrestler's Body' (1992), describes the word akhara as "the social and spatial organization of any specialized group. From this general definition derive two primary common-sense denotations of the term: one is, of course, the akhara as a wrestling gymnasium; the other, the akhara as an ascetic monastery" (Alter 1992: 183). In the context of Gotipua, both definitions deem fit. It can be assumed that the latter would have been more fitting to the Gotipua tradition as it is a milder form of ascetic practice, with the spiritual training involving singing, dancing and playing the instrument to please the Lord, Jagannath. With Puri being a hub of religious activities throughout the year, one can see how the akhara culture could have blossomed in every street. Although akharas have long since diminished, the oral histories of the tradition continue to posit it as an important space which helped the formation of the Gotipua tradition. I would like to add here that I choose to spell the word as akhara, and not as akhada, since the former more closely resembles the Odia pronunciation (*akhraa*) and helps to distinguish it from the North-Indian pronunciation (*akhaadaa*) and association, of being only a 'gymnasium', due to increasing mediatisation of and focussed academic interest in North Indian, especially Banaras', practices of Hindu austerity.

As I see the physicality of the tradition as evolving from Shaivite yoga, I believe that such ascetic monasteries themselves had acrobatics and yoga which at a later point streamlined into spaces for body-building such as gymnasiums. Even today, most akharas are highly religious in nature and have strict codes of discipline and conduct, including celibacy in most cases. Alter discusses the Dasnami Nagas who initiated physical training into spiritual practice and even started the inclusion of Shudras (lower-castes) into the akharas "to increase their numbers in order to defend Hindu shrines and monastic institutions from Muslim intervention and aggression" during Akbar's reign (1992:183). This seems to be very similar to what Ramananda Ray initiated in Puri and could also help explain why the Gotipuas did not dance inside the temple, as according to the rules of the Jagannath temple, non-Hindus and lower castes are not allowed to enter the shrine. Even to this day, most of the Gotipua boys belong to the Khandait caste who "are mainly the descendants of the old rural

militia" (Mansfield 1929: 90), and although a few number of lower caste boys learn the dance they do not perform at the mathas or at such religious places during festivities[38]. According to the other dancers at the gurukul, even though the teacher does not explicitly disallow their participation, they themselves believe that they will be cursed if they enter such spaces[39].

The *akhara* therefore was a more secular religious space emphasising on the development of a lifestyle. In Puri, the *akharas* were not known to exclusively belong to specific sects or religious groups and had gained a more communal identity where people would gather in the evenings and children could attend dance, music or martial art classes, at least till the start of the twentieth century (Sahoo, B. K. 2013, Pattanayak 2013). Many gurus of Gotipua and Odissi also learnt music and dance from *akharas*. It should be noted though, that akharas were not residential and the dancers who trained there either lived in *gurukuls*, temples or their own homes. While the gotipuas were known as *akhara-pilas*, they would mostly train in temples (some in *gurukuls*), but because they would be trained for their art in *akharas*, they were identified by that name in common parlance. There was no name for the dance that they performed and it was simply called '*nacha*'[40] or 'dance' of the *akhara-pila*s.

The Mathas

The dance that is done by the gotipuas is after all, a descendant of the Odra-nrtya style albeit done by young boys. As discussed in the previous chapter, the roots of the cross-dressing are not exactly known but it can be said with certainty that these *akhara-pilas* were used extensively for the propagation of the Bhakti movement thereby gaining the name *sakhi-pila*. These performers gave a momentum to the popularity of the local poets amidst the common masses, especially during festivals. In this endeavour, the system of mathas has been greatly influential to the tradition by

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[38] On the field, I was told at multiple schools that so-called 'lower' caste boys were enrolled as students but while taking interviews, I did not come across a single student who came from such a caste.

[39] This was a general view that most students seemed to adhere to, at the Laxmi Priya Gotipua Nrutya Kendra and at Guru Kailash Biswal's school.

[40] It is a common practice for local dances to be termed simply as 'dance' in the colloquial dialect. The identification of such traditions by specific names becomes more prevalent when the dance tours or is performed outside the local space. According to J. K. Dost (2017), *naach* in Eastern and Northern India denotes a musical theatre which using the technique of female impersonation.

providing economy, opportunity and even accommodation throughout the centuries. Many a times, the *sebayats* of the temples would live in these mathas and those who became gotipuas would go and train at the akhadas.

The Bihar and Orissa Gazetteer describes mathas as "monastic houses originally founded with the object of feeding travellers, beggars and ascetics, of giving religious instruction to *chelas*[41] or disciples, and generally of encouraging a religious life" (Mansfield 1929: 122). The mathas of Puri have been established since the medieval times, some existing even during Chaitanya's visit, and have been an intrinsic part of the religious life of the locals, outside the temple space. Not only are these *mathas* known for lodging hundreds of pilgrims, some are given special duties for distributing the first meal of the Lord to the devotees or performing certain other rites[42]. Gotipua owes greatly to the *mathas* because they were the main cultural centres in Puri which popularised local traditions, especially during festive occasions.

The mathas of Puri belong to various sects, mainly following Vaishnavism taught by different preachers. Such mathas are around the main temple of Jagannath while some other mathas belonging to the Shaivite sects are found in the Swargadwar area of Puri, closer to the ocean. These mathas are the main organisers and participants in the ritual festivities that take place in Puri all year round[43]. They are headed by the respective head-priests or *mahants* and are run by the donations they receive. In earlier centuries, these mathas received huge donations from the kings and *zamindars* who owed allegiance to them. The Bihar and Orissa Gazetteer records a rough estimate of "the annual income of twenty-nine *maths* from land alone at Rs. 1,45,400" in 1848 (Mansfield 1929: 123). Mansfield believes the revenue to have increased in the next eighty years. In recent times though, the revenue of these *mathas* seems to have decreased significantly with many struggling to survive, even though the number of *mathas* have increased[44].

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[41] *Chelas* are younger priests of the *matha*.
[42] See Mansfield (1929) and Pattnaik (2005) for more.
[43] Odisha, and especially Puri, has thirteen major festival in one year.
[44] Mansfield (1929) noted there to be over seventy *mathas* whereas Pattnaik (2005) records 136 in his article.

These mathas have traditionally been associated with the culture of Puri as they are vibrant and more active during festive occasions. With respect to Gotipua, the Jhulan Jatra is the main occasion for performing at the mathas. During the Jhulan Jatra, the mathas typically decorate a courtyard or assembly hall called "*Jhoolana Mundi*" (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 23) in order to make a *jhulan* or swing for Krishna and Radha in front of which they have performances every evening to please the gods and the devotees. These *jhulans* are typically very competitive as they vie to be recognised as the best decorated matha with the best performances. The locals even remember there being prizes from the local municipal bodies for such decorations but nobody knows when exactly that practice came to a halt[45]. Needless to say, the more prosperous mathas generally invested more money and got the best performers and decorators, and were more popular during such times. The general public would flock to such *mathas* to see the performances being promoted, and this system greatly aided the popularity of Gotipua in the medieval and colonial eras.

The Gotipua tradition was so intrinsic to the Jhulan celebrations that there is an entire repertoire of songs in Gotipua dedicated only to this festival. Mohanty Hejmadi has noted down a few commonly sung songs of Jhulan called the "*Jhulanti range*" (2019: 71). She gives the name of a few songs, "*dekha sahi rahi ho, ki shobha go kunje* (Banamali); *Bitalaku alingana* (Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanja); and *Dhire Radha kara dhari* (Abhimanyu Samantasinghar)" (*ibid.*). As I will elaborate in the proceeding chapter, these songs generally describe the beauty of the forests where Radha-Krishna and the *sakhi*s play or the play-time between them, as the *jhulans* seek to emulate these situations. As Krishna is seen as a naughty cowherd in his youth, these songs portray his characters and make him more 'real' or likeable to the audience[46]. Gotipua is attributed to have made these songs very popular through their night-long celebratory performances during Jhulan Jatra, so much so that they are still reminisced by the audiences. Erstwhile gotipuas would have to know this range of songs at the top of their heads, as both singers and dancers, because the interactive nature of such festive performances meant that the audience could demand for a particular song, and would also reward them accordingly if pleased. The unique

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[45] These comments were made by locals when I was in Puri, enquiring about the mathas which were holding Gotipua programmes, and as such, they are anonymous.

[46] I discuss briefly these qualities of Vaishnavism when I discuss the child-figure in religious performances in chapter 5.

characteristic of *bachika abhinaya* ensured that Gotipua was the perfect mascot for the disseminating nature of the work that the *mathas* undertook. For this reason, the mathas kept a good rapport with the Gotipua troupes and the zamindars directing them. Priyambada Mohanty Hejmadi recounted how many of the matha heads actually chose the songs which the Gotipuas performed during Jhulan Jatra (2017). According to her, "some of the matha heads were also *vidwaans* [scholars] and well-versed in music" resulting in the maintenance of a certain quality in terms of aesthetics (*ibid.*). Therefore, many matha heads and their respective mathas were crucial to the popularity of Gotipua, especially in the Bhakti era, honing the tradition to suit their aims while also giving them a respectable space of performance. Mohanty Hejmadi mentions how several mathas "not only patronized but also maintained their own troupes." (2019: 19)

Although the mathas of Puri are no longer as involved with the Gotipua tradition, festive occasions like Jhulan Jatra still call for performances of Gotipua, albeit quite unlike the night-long performances of yesteryears[47]. Some mathas even gained popularity for having Gotipua performances even if other mathas were patronising other folk or traditional art forms. One of such mathas is the Emar matha which is one of the most famous mathas of Puri and was the touchstone of cultural aesthetics in its prime. Emar matha was established by the Hindu theologian Ramanuja (circa 11th century), and has typically been one of the richest mathas thereby allowing it the privilege of having the best performers of any tradition. Unfortunately though, in 2011, it was cordoned off and razed by the government, resulting in the suspension of traditional celebrations, after 18 tonnes of silver was discovered in its compound (Barik, S. 2016). The case of Emar is not isolated in that most mathas of Puri are now unable to keep up their traditional roles of cultural propagators, mainly due to the lack of substantial funding. The mathas that were once prosperous are now badly dilapidated or under-maintained. Owing to this, the places which once supported Gotipua and helped it flourish are no longer able to support it. In the current situation, only those troupes which value tradition over economy have the fortitude to perform during Jhulan Jatra, in front of audiences that are lesser interested in older customs and with students who no longer execute *bachika*

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[47] I have elaborated a couple of performances at witnessed at the 2017 Jhulan Jatra in the next chapter.

abhinaya. In the 2017 Jhulan Jatra, Gotipua performances took place in only four mathas of Puri- Uttar Parshva Matha, Punjabi Matha, Siddha Bakula Matha and Radha Ballabha Matha.[48]

The Zamindars

The system of the mathas functioning and supporting Gotipua also largely depended on the patronage and guidance of some *zamindars* of Puri who sought cultural advancement. *Zamindars* not only patronised the Gotipuas but were also famous for maintaining and housing their own Gotipua troupes. Mohanty Hejmadi (2019) talks about the *zamindar* system in detail as her own grandfather had a Gotipua troupe and, being from the area and era where this practice was flourishing, she has seen this culture closely. For his report on Gotipua for the Department of Culture, Government of India, Chittaranjan Mallia has documented several notable *zamindars* who helped in promoting and preserving Gotipua in the early 20th century (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 24). Although there were many local *zamindars* who maintained Gotipua troupes, Chandrashekhar Pattanayak receives mention as most of the contemporary Gotipua teachers either come directly or indirectly from his school in Dimirisena. Pattanayak was a scholar in his own right and managed a troupe for four decades (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 81). *Zamindars* like Pattanayak mainly provided housing and opportunities for the gotipuas to perform. Some even had well-decorated arenas, specially built for performances (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 24).

The present-day style of Gotipua owes heavily to the zamindar system. Mohanty Hejmadi writes that it was the zamindar system which introduced an amorous element to the bhakti-rich tradition (2019: 25), possibly veering it away from the typical mode of performance that was existent earlier. The element of bandha-nrutya which is currently popular as a distinct and important part of the repertoire was also created during the zamindar culture, notably under the aegis of Chandrashekhar Pattanayak (Sahoo, B. K. 2013, Pattanayak 2013). Guru Lingaraj Barik (2013) also mentioned how individual *bandhas* would get rewarded by *zamindars* when they were performed by solo gotipuas. At one point, Gotipua also included some dare-devil feats

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[48] The detailed descriptions of the Jhulan performances in these *mathas* follow in the next chapter.

like picking up a needle stuck on a banana with the eye (Moharana 2013, Palai 2013) or dancing to the rhythm on a plate while carrying lamps (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 47). Mohanty Hejmadi describes at length the *thali*-dance (lit. plate-dance) which was a part of the Gotipua repertoire until very recently and was also tried to be incorporated into Odissi but without much success (2019: 46-47). All these elements were brought in to cater to the myriad tastes of the elite *zamindars* who would pay handsomely if entertained. As discussed in the last chapter, Gotipua has the character of flexibility which has helped it survive through the many centuries, and the *zamindar* system too utilised that flexibility to its advantage.

The *zamindar* system gave way to more commercial troupes who became known as *Ras Leela* parties that toured and performed all over Odisha with minimum troupe members (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 25). In the 1800 and 1900s, Gotipua troupes, consisting of four to five people, would travel "about the state and the Odia-speaking tracts of adjoining states to earn their livelihood" (MohantyHejmadi 2019: 26). With the changes in their style and content, these travelling troupes would be more attuned to the popular tastes and perform for various occasions, not related to religion. Guru Lingaraj Barik recalled how his teachers had taught him to dance and sing Odia, Sambalpuri and even Hindi film songs in order to cater to public demands (2013). Although that fashion seems to have died, and is only followed in the contemporary times when performing on television[49], such inclusivity in Gotipua's repertoire signifies the height of its popularity amongst the common masses. The popularity of such troupes ensured that they were commercially viable and was able to pay all the troupe members including the boys, or specifically their families. The *Ras Leela* parties, according to Mohanty Hejmadi, consisted of the guru who "sang and played the harmonium", two accompanists "one on *mardala* (*pakhawaj*) and a *gini* (cymbal) player", and "one or two dancers" (2019: 25). This is, co-incidentally, also the description of the typical Gotipua troupe that Patnaik (2006) and other Gotipua gurus give (Sahoo, B. K. 2013, Barik 2013, Palai 2013).

Interestingly, although most gurus attribute the Gotipua tradition to have emerged from the practice of donating boys to the temple who would then be used for

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[49] I have discussed this at length in the next chapter.

performances, Mohanty Hejmadi (2019) suggests that such boys who were donated to the temple would perchance pick up the art well enough to perform although the existent Gotipua troupes may not necessarily always have such boys. She discusses how boys were actually recruited for Gotipua after paying their families some amount, sometimes even turning out to be "an expensive affair" (2019: 26). In fact, Guru Barik points out that donating boys for *seba* was practiced mainly at Dimirisena whereas at other places, troupes would actively look out for students that could be recruited (2013). As Gotipua started becoming more commercialised, since the inception of the *zamindar* system, it started moving away from temple spaces and ritual festivities. Of course, those who wanted to remain rooted in tradition continued to honour such occasions and still do, but on the whole, it gave rise to a new chapter in Gotipua.

Around the middle of the twentieth century, Chandrashekhar Pattanayak, and his Gotipua institution, was famous for producing brilliant artists. As mentioned earlier, most of the Gotipua gurus of today are either directly or indirectly from his school. In 1956, he worked along with percussionist Guru Mayadhar Raut to set bandha-nrutya into the form that we see today (Sahoo, B. K. 2013, Swain, L. 2013, Pattanayak 2017; Pal 2012[50]). According to Nepolion Pattanayak (2013), bandha was not popular in the 1950s and 60s as the attraction of that era was film music. Bandha-nrutya as a set choreography was performed first by gotipuas Dhrubacharan Biswal and Gobind Pal who travelled to Dimirisena from Darada to learn from Chandrashekhar Pattanayak's institution (Barik 2017, Swain 2013). Following the success of Pattanayak's institution, many other Gotipua schools started emerging in different villages of Puri. By the end of the century, there were major *gurukuls* established and flourishing in Raghurajpur and Konark. Some other gurus like Guru Gobind Pal, Guru Lingaraj Barik, Guru Laxmidhar Swain, Guru Bhagirathi Mohapatra and Guru Pagal Swain started teaching Gotipua at their villages too, but were soon incorporated into the major gurukuls at Raghuajpur, Dimirisena or Konark.

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[50] Guru Gobind Pal mentions at the 2012 Gotipua workshop, held at the Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre, that bandha was included in the repertoire only after 1954.

The Gurukuls

As an Odissi dancer learning in the city of Mumbai, far from the roots of where the dance was conceptualised and created, I mostly learnt it over the weekends in batches of two hours. Although our main teacher Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, a gotipua in his youth, popularised the dance through months-long intensive workshops and gurukul-style training, I never had the opportunity to learn directly from him or in that mode of tutelage. Hence, my teacher, Guru Debi Basu would be elated when summer vacations would arrive and she could finally take a month long workshop with seven to eight hours of dance at a stretch, including only a short break for lunch and refreshments. For her, it reflected closest the original tradition of learning in a gurukul where the main thing you would learn is the art without the interference of schools, work or household chores.

This module of gurukul teaching is held as ideal within the Indian arts even in urban spaces as it provides a more immersive learning experience. It harkens back to the heritage of orality where learning an art was also seen as labour-intensive and as important as learning any other skill. In Gotipua, the system of gurukul learning is believed to have been put in place after the temple lost its eminence in the political scenario, which coincides with the coming of the British rule. The temple services continued to be managed by the descendants of Ramachandra Deva until the 18th century (Mansfield 1929: 122). It was later disrupted for many years with periods of plunder, interference and change of hands. Although the Marathas were Hindus, the Jagannath temple did not see much development during their reign until subsequently, the British took over (Mansfield 1929: 134). The British then handed the reins of the temple administration to the nominal King again- an arrangement that was in place until very recently (*ibid*). By the late twentieth century, all these modules gave way to the gurukul system that started becoming more and more commercial resulting in the school-type institutions prevalent now.

During the zamindar system, many zamindars would keep the students at their own houses, like Pattanayak did, whereas others would fund them for performances and amenities while they stayed at temples or the guru's house. The gurukul system, therefore, seems like a natural progression because even though the funding ceased

(due to the *zamindars* lessening in number or becoming economically weaker or simply disinterested in the tradition), the gurus still wanted to continue teaching the art at their own expense in order to prevent the tradition from dying. The *gurukul* (lit. the family/lineage of the guru) is an ancient system of schooling in India wherein students stay at the guru's house or in a hostel nearby, with their gurus as guardians, and devote most of their time to learning. They stay away from their families and see them only once or twice a year. At the *gurukul*, the students form an almost familial bond with their teacher and the other students, and take the shared responsibility of taking care of the household. They not only learn to be disciplined with respect to their art, but also self-sufficient in terms of cooking, cleaning and washing their own utensils and clothes. According to gurus Laxmidhar Swain (2013) and Nepolion Pattanayak (2013), this makes the boys more 'cultured' and better equipped for the future, and also as ideal by the society they live in.

The idea of a *gurukul* is to have the students as close to the guru as possible in order to keep them closer to the art and inculcate a lifestyle that is beneficial or typical to the form. This tradition was useful especially to disseminate oral culture as the residential nature of the school meant lesser distractions and more immersive interest in the subject of learning. Like the masters of Gotipua like to say, Gotipua is a *sadhana* which literally means that it is a 'dedication' wherein you engross yourself completely in the form and it becomes a part of your life (Moharana 2013, Pattanayak 2013). Both the art and the guru become central to the learning process in that the students develop a very close bond with their gurus, almost like a parent (Palai, K. 2017). An example is seen in the 2001 documentary about Gotipua dancers - *The Master of Dance* (produced by Sangha Productions). In the film, a student tells the filmmaker that they look after their teacher- Guru Maguni Das- as he is getting old. Their concern for him is apparent in the scene where they go for the *Rath* Jatra together. In the crowded festive atmosphere, the kids keep a close circle around their aging guru who never misses the Rath Jatra. The devotion of the guru to the gods is sublimely reflected in the students' devotions to their teacher.

Simply put, gurukul service is very similar temple-service. Like the *sebayats* were responsible for the chores of the temple, the students at a *gurukul* are expected to do the same for the *gurukul*. A typical *gurukul* has between ten to twenty students,

living as a family and being equally responsible for the maintenance of the *gurukul*. Generally, the only adult in the *gurukul* is the guru and perhaps the odd gotipua who is well-past his prime. The load of the house-hold chores therefore fall on most of the older students, with the younger ones helping where they can. The *guru* is typically not expected to do much as he is revered and should be served rather than be serving. The *gurukul* is traditionally a 'homosocial'[51] space, wherein there is no female in the household, as the guru is mostly a *brahmachari* (lit. abstinent). This is of course, in the strictest of scenarios and is generally not adhered to in the present times. The present gurukul may have a couple of women, belonging to the guru's family- his wife and/or his unmarried daughter. Nonetheless, the boys have to take care of themselves and the gurukul, as part of their tradition. There are no female students who stay at *gurukuls*. In the rare cases where girls learn Gotipua, they generally stay in their own house in the village and never in a residential set-up. One of the reasons for this male-centric system of living is supposedly to keep the mind away from sexual thoughts or desires, in the presumed hetero-normative state of society. According to Moharana, a gurukul helps to inculcate 'good' values like cleanliness, self-sufficiency, respect for others, and a caring attitude towards the young and old alike; "It makes the boy grow into a man who is poised, well-groomed and well-mannered, and helps him find a good bride who is well taken care of" (2013).

The idea behind the gurukul system, especially for Gotipua, was to enable the student to completely immerse himself in his schooling/training, especially in the affective years between twelve and fifteen years of age before puberty begins to kick in. Being in an environment where everyone is training or discussing the subject of learning fosters more curiosity and produces more knowledge about it. Such a space also allowed for training to take place at all times, accounting to almost half or three-fourth of the day. In the present times though, the compulsory school education necessitated by the government allows for lesser training time but even then, a student does stay engaged in an environment of knowledge, especially investing more time in the art during the weekends. On the other hand, some Gotipua schools nowadays are giving in to encroaching commercialisation and the lack of time, and creating a tuition system instead of following the gurukul system. This means that there are two-hour

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[51] I say homosocial because the space is still not completely gendered. The boys are generally at the peak of sexual curiosity around the time they leave Gotipua. More implications of this will be discussed in Chapter 5.

classes daily or two-three times a week, increasing in frequency whenever shows are nearby. Guru Kailash Biswal (2017) teaches Gotipua in such a manner and says that it copes with the new, fast-paced society that is forming today. He also believes that it becomes easier for girls to learn in such a class as it does not need them to stay away from home. He follows this mode of training and he has many girl dancers in his troupe, dancing Gotipua, Odissi and even Chhau. He does not see the necessity of the gurukul system anymore as the dance itself has become heavily commercialised. A similar system is followed by Chitrasen Swain, one of the younger teachers from Bhubaneswar who keeps students at his *gurukul* but believes in the necessity of rigorous practice only when shows are near or during vacations, as he has seen what the lack of education can do to a growing child. He says that children can pick up compositions fairly easily during the few practice classes during the week which get thoroughly practiced anyway when programmes are closer (2017).

Irrespective of the few anomalies presently in the mode of teaching, most teachers still consider the *gurukul* system as the most productive model for a tradition like Gotipua, mainly because it needs a lot of discipline and constant work to make the body a certain type. With the model of training like the contemporary school which Biswal ascribes to, it takes longer to learn and excel at bandhas (Palai, K. 2017). Most Gotipua gurus realise this and hence favour keeping the boys under their constant watch and training. Overall, the schedule and training of the dancers follow the traditional ways and methods. The Gotipua tradition is famous for creating well-rounded artists in that the training includes singing, dancing and playing an instrument. Although the dancers do not sing anymore, a few schools do teach music and instruments as a hobby to those who show interest, although it is rarely pursued. In spite of this, training to be a gotipua is hard as the practices are intense and need a lot of physical effort. The trainees need to be young so that their bodies are supple and malleable to be able to perform *bandha*s as is expected of a contemporary performer. This needs years of dedicated effort and a certain discipline which is made available through a systematic and age-old method.

The Daily Life of a Gotipua

As far as the older gurus can recall, the daily schedule that was prevalent for Gotipua training in their days is the same as that in prevalence today. This entails

getting up very early in the morning, and having dance practices at least twice a day. The typical day of a gotipua looks like this:

4:00 A.M.	→	Wake up
4:30 – 5:30 A.M.	→	Oil massages and freshen up
5:30 – 7:30 A.M.	→	Warm up, stretches and physical training
7:30 – 10:00 A.M.	→	Getting ready for school and brunch
10 AM - 4:00 P.M.	→	School
4:00 – 7:30 P.M.	→	Snacks and homework
7:30 – 9:30 P.M.	→	Dance practice
9:30 – 10:30 P.M.	→	Dinner and sleep

A typical day begins early and the boys, especially the younger ones get oil massages before freshening up. This custom of giving oil massages is very old and typical to Indian dance culture (Mohanty 2012). Guru Gautama Mohapatra mentioned how they would use coconut oil extracted from the temple's coconuts for these massages but modern *gurukuls* use either coconut or sesame oil, bought from the store. The massages are meant mainly for newer students whose joints are not yet as flexible as the older dancers. It is generally the oldest of boys who give massages to the younger ones, after having been taught by the gurus, in order to relieve their nerves and muscles. They concentrate more on certain areas like the inner thighs, near the groin, and the tail bone, that are generally underused but are crucial in stretches. For younger, newer students, not only the bandha exercises but the stretch during massages itself is painful and some even end up crying for a good part of the first month. But as they get trained into the system, they themselves learn how to keep their bodies flexible through designated stretches and exercises. For the older students who are adept at bandha, simple warm-ups and exercises in the morning are enough to maintain flexibility. While some receive massages, the others freshen up and start stretching and warming-up to begin physical exercises. In most *gurukuls*, the warm-ups are followed by bandha exercises and practice but in few *gurukuls* like the Konark

Natya Mandap where singing is giving equal importance as dancing, the boys practice *gala-sadhana* (lit. voice practice) after the basic warm-ups and then continue with the rest of the exercising.

The morning practice session mostly concentrates on steppings and bandha-nrutya practice. The practice of specific items or *abhinaya*s is not done now as attention is rather given to pieces that are more acrobatic or physically exerting in nature. The guru generally does not need to be present at these morning sessions as they are mainly routine practice and do not have composing or choreographing. The time just after sunrise is considered to be ideal for physical activity and the boys are also fresh and well-rested. Also because the morning sessions are time-bound, they are generally not used for creative compositions and newer choreographies. As I have mentioned, it is generally the senior dancers who mind the morning sessions and their job is to see if the new students are using their bodies as prescribed, through the steppings and bandha exercises. Stepping are small pieces of footwork that help develop the foot-body co-ordination and body postures needed in the tradition. I will discuss in chapter 4, when I talk about the choreographic tools of Gotipua, what the traditional and contemporary steppings are and how they help mould the body.

After two hours of rigorous practice, the boys need to get ready for school which generally starts at 10 o'clock. On Saturdays, government schools (which are where the gotipuas mostly study) run from 7 to 10 o'clock, and therefore the morning session takes place after school and not before. Also, as Odisha gets really hot during summer, government directives order schools to function from 6 A.M. to 11 A.M. and during this time too, the morning sessions happen after the boys get back from school. Barring such occasions, on normal school days the boys generally get around three hours to take baths, study and have brunch before leaving for school. School gets over at around four o'clock and after getting back, the boys again get a couple of hours to have a meal, unwind or study, before practicing dance in the evening. At the Abhinna Sundar Gotipua Nrutya Parishad, Guru Basanta Moharana ensures that the boys also sit for a prayer and meditation session at 6 P.M. before they start practice so as to cultivate spirituality and concentration of the mind (2013). Konark Natya Mandap also includes an evening prayer session before they start practicing dance.

In the earlier system when there was no school to attend, the boys would start with the exercises- both physical and vocal, followed by the practice of steppings or footwork, doing the physical bits of the training much before noon. At that time, their guru would give them a specific song to memorize during the day. The student would then try to commit to memory that song while going about the daily chores assigned to him, mostly at the temple. In the evening, the guru would ask every student to say aloud the verses of the song given in the morning (Mohapatra, G. 2017, Biswal 2017). He would then go ahead and explain the meaning of those lines and show them how to perform them. Thus, the training of abhinaya would take place in the evening. Due to this system of memorising songs, a Gotipua would learn over a hundred songs in his first three to four years of training- a phase of growth when the mind is very sharp and pliable. As Guru Bhagirathi Mohapatra recalls, the songs he learnt in his young days stayed in his memory throughout his life with the accompanying dance as it literally translated into action whatever was being said in the song (2017). I saw for myself how, even in the autumn of his life, Mohapatra can recall songs in the flow of the conversation. In fact, in our dialogue lasting over an hour, he must have burst into at least 5-6 songs while enacting them, to detail some aspect of Gotipua or elaborate on a saying. For him, abhinaya was as natural as breathing and he could not stop himself from bursting into one every 10-15 minutes of the conversation. Another young teacher, Guru Gautama Mohapatra, agreed with Mohapatra's view that the children learning Gotipua today hardly know a fraction of the vast repertoire that the tradition has to offer (2017). He said in his interview, that during his training years, he would always be in fear of his teacher as he wasn't very good at remembering the songs and would struggle to memorize them through the day. But, regarding the current generation of students, he was very sympathetic as he thought they would be overburdened if asked to memorize so many songs, especially with the bulk of study done in school and the lack of time due to it. He also believed that one need not be too harsh on these kids as the present repertoire of Gotipua, stressing more on bandha, did not need them to know so many abhinayas.

Unlike the previous years where the evening sessions were for abhinaya, the current module includes all parts of the repertoire in the evening practice as abhinaya is not as important an element as it was but it still performed from time to time. The evening sessions are also the main sessions for the day and generally start around 7:30

P.M. It involves practicing basic foot, hand and facial movements, and also foot-steppings known traditionally as *pada-sadhana* (lit. practice of feet). These sessions are supervised by the guru who uses the time to correct the dancing style or postures of the students and to choreograph newer compositions. Most of the learning by the students takes place during the evenings, and sometimes the practices can even go well into the night depending on the number of upcoming performances. When there are not many programmes, the sessions last from two to three hours. At the Konark Natya Mandap, the boys live like they would at a *matha* and hence begin the evening with prayers at shrines inside the campus. They then practice singing first, followed by dance rehearsals. The occasional singing and music tuitions in most other *gurukuls* take place on holidays or Sundays when the students and teachers get more time and practice for longer. Compared to those gotipuas, the Konark gotipuas know a few more songs which were once intrinsic to the tradition. Guru Gautama Mohapatra of Dimirisena also mentioned that he always strives to teach the abhinaya song to his students as it helps enact the dance better (2017). He even prides his students to be better at abhinaya due to the same. According to him, it is not that the boys are not mature enough to perform abhinaya, as it generally perceived by most gurus. It is just that no one, including both the students and the teachers, has time anymore to devote to the slow-process of memorising songs.

The loss of *bachika abhinaya* in Gotipua has as much to do with the adaptation of the form to the contemporary stage, as it has to do with the social structure of today. Bandha nrutya became popularised after the current generation of gurus tapped into the available market of acrobatic dance on Indian and international stages. Although yoga and dance are not very separated from each other in Indian dance culture, the novelty of kids doing acrobatic in saris, a seemingly difficult costume for such feats, soon became popular due to contemporary media. Also, since the reconstruction of Odissi and its popularity inside and outside India, Gotipua appeared to offer the same style but in a novel format, triggering its entertainment value outside of its traditional spaces. At the same time, the compulsion of education for all kids and the access to better higher education in cities, gives hope to the students to have career options that were not available before. Even as dancers, most of the boys dream to become gurus of Gotipua or Odissi as they see it as a viable career options, something that was not the norm in society a few generations back.

With the choreography stressing more on *bandha-nrutya* and less on *bachika* abhinaya, students can devote more time to studies in their school-life, giving them a good base for further studies.

In order to truly correspond to the contemporary dance circuit, many emerging gurus now provide the training of Gotipua in a non-residential format to encourage kids of the town to participate in learning the art. This enables those from outside the typical sphere to learn this as a dance, just as one would learn Bharatanatyam or Odissi. As I have mentioned before, Guru Kailash Biswal follows this module in his village Sakhigopal. Although some boys do stay at his house, he conducts Gotipua classes three to four times a week, wherein girls from the village and nearby can also train. He has nine girls in his school, more than the number of boys that train under him. Biswal teaches both Gotipua and Odissi and makes *bandha* training compulsory for both as it helps make the body suppler. On one hand, emerging teachers like him are breaking traditions to allow female dancers, whereas on the other hand, places like KonarkNatyaMandap follow the ages-old tradition of training the boys as monks, even requiring them to wear ruby-coloured robes during the day while going about the daily chores.

Society and Gotipua

To be a Gotipua is a matter of pride is what most *gurus* would tell you. This is because the traditional role of a gotipua was that of a server in the temples, seen as a fortunate position. The kids, especially boys who train in traditional *gurukuls* which are attached to temples, are highly revered in the neighbourhood, even called the 'children of god'. Even those students who are not in traditional *gurukuls* are respected because they server the gods by entertaining them during religious festivities. Moreover, whenever there are celebrations at the local temples, the presence of the boys, not necessarily as performers but rather even as normal kids, is seen as auspicious. In Bhubaneswar for example, Guru Bijay Kumar Sahoo of the Nakshyatra Gurukul is almost exclusively asked to grace the local religious events as a Gotipua guru (2013). His student too, are invited and served food specially in order

to gain merits as per the Hindu belief of karma[52]. Nepolion Pattanayak (2017) of Dimirisena, told me of an incident, typical of many, when his neighbour- an old woman- had prepared special food for guests and kept them in her open kitchen. The gotipua boys from Pattanayak's school were playing nearby and seeing the foodstuff kept outside, took it and ate all of it without asking the woman. When the old woman saw this, she reprimanded them, lovingly and without anger. According to Pattanayak, she felt blessed that the 'children of god' ate food that she had made with her own hands. He also echoed a popular belief that having long hair, kept uncut because of their service to god, made the kids more "naughty" as it reflected "His mischievousness[53]" (2017).

This is curiously similar to what David Mason mentions while talking of the characteristics of young actors who play Krishna. He mentions that child actors would often nudge, prod and giggle with each other while on stage, and that mischievousness "helps to identify the actors as manifestations of Krishna" (2009: 161). He further quotes J. S. Hawley who reckons that for devotees "the best Krishna is the one who acts the most like himself, a child unbridled" (2009: 161). This correlation of kids being playful, naughty or mischievous to gods, especially to Krishna, earns them a lot of reverence for being simply what they are, viz. children. According to both Mason and Hawley, children in India are generally worshipped and pampered by the society (Mason 2009). Mason talks about his own experience in India where his children were always treated with a lot of affection, some Vrindavan locals also referring to his two-year old boy as Gopal, or infant Krishna (2009). Although I refer to the context of using children in religious performances in chapter 5, I would like to elaborate here how the children learning Gotipua are treated in the society around them as also in the *gurukuls*.

According to popular oral history, Gotipua boys were donated to the temples or *mathas* as gratitude for fulfilled wishes or good fortune[54], or by "*mānasika*, a tradition… where sickly children are offered to the *mathas* for a stipulated time" (Mohanty Hejmadi, 2019: 26). Mohanty Hejmadi also mentions that many of the

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[52] A Hindu concept of causality which guides that good actions, especially in relation to religion, will bear goodwill in the next birth.

[53] I describe this in detail in chapter 5.

[54] For most parents, good fortune corresponds to begetting a male offspring after years of yearning.

gotipuas were actually recruited by paying their parents, either in the form of money or land (2019).The gotipuas of yesteryears had to have certain qualities like good dancing, acting and singing skills as they were soloists. Sometimes, boys were also recruited for their good looks or good voice. In fact, I was told by Prashant Sahoo, a senior student at Konark Natya Mandap, that he was recruited because his brother, a student of pakhawaj, told the guru that he has "a pretty-looking brother at home" (2013).

The recruitment of gotipuas now is not contingent so much on their looks as it is on their own will to endure the strict training regime at the *gurukul*. The most common way that students come to be gotipuas now, is by word of mouth, dependent on the popularity of the guru back in his village. Many of the boys are either close or distant relations of the guru or are sent by parents who get inspired by the guru's success, and envision the same for their kids. In most cases, boys are brought from the native villages of the guru where he promises to take good care of their wards and provide them basic amenities (Sahoo, B. K. 2013, Barik 2013). The students also generally come from economically weaker sections of society, and their parents send them to the *gurukuls* as it ensures that they get three meals a day and good education, along with learning a sustainable art form which helps further their educational[55] and economic pursuits once they come of age. Sometimes, students leave their training mid-way if they find the acrobatics too difficult or are disinterested in dance; but mostly, the boys develop a likeness for the stage and the accolades and aspire to become professional dancers in the future. Perhaps the urban allure of a professional life is far more charming than the regular rural life that they are used to, or perhaps their love for dance and their habit or discipline makes them overcome the hurdles that they may need to face to live the life of a professional dancer.

Although on the commercial stage, Gotipua seems to be gaining some success, the reality of the schools and *gurukuls* is far from that. Most of the schools suffer a financial crunch at all times because the dance performances which are their only means of income are heavily dependent on 'festival' seasons and networking. Here, festivals mean not just the religious festivals but also dance festivals which are very

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[55] Many gotipuas use their training to their advantage in under-graduate programme as the government of Odisha allows for Music or Dance to be an elective in their Arts programme.

popular in Odisha[56]. Guru Chitrasen Swain, for example, not only helps organise such festivals form his school Aradhana Dance Academy, but also trains his students to perform specifically for proscenium stages as he believes that the traditional do not offer income and do not justify the energy and hard-work they have to put in (2017). For this, he is constantly on the lookout for newer shows and only trains his students according to those dates, as he would rather they concentrate on their studies at other times. He also find performances of shorter durations as being profitable because he opines making the young students perform for hours on end is cruel and not rewarding enough. This sentiment seems to echo in the majority of the schools from the low turnout visible during ritual festivities, even though most gurus will not admit it for fear of appearing untraditional.

In spite of the reverence that Gotipua students claim to receive for being who they are, the Gotipua tradition is nonetheless a dying one. The pressing issues for most *gurukuls* seem be the disinterest of the people in giving away their boys to Gotipua schools, along with the lack of a stable income. The question of economy is a sensitive as, one hand, teachers generally attribute their fate to the Lord and accept the amount they get paid; but at the same time, fate does not feed them and they have to continuously be on the lookout for shows. The lack of patronage from the State is a major problem for this tradition, although occasional instances of State funding and scholarships help keep the schools afloat. The Corporate Social Responsibility that the private sector is compelled to undertake has also provided some relief to a couple of Goitpua schools. But, as the instance of senior artist Bhagirathi Mohapatra shows, there is no respect for Gotipua artists. He says that he had received several awards and accolades in his heydays as a teacher at Konark Natya Mandir, but once he became old, there was no financial help from anywhere. "The lamp that provides light has darkness underneath it" he says, repeating this Oriya idiom from time to time throughout our dialogue (2017). Even though he still performs at Gotipua Festivals and teaches at workshops, he does not get remunerated for it, and a respectful wreath of flowers is what he has to be content with. The situation is similar with Guru Birabar Sahoo, probably one of the oldest surviving Gotipua performer and guru, who currently lives with his son at Bhubaneswar. He too had been an illustrious teacher at

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[56] The Gotipua Dance Festival was started in 2011by the Ministry of Culture for three years, and later started getting organised as an annual function by different schools. There are also festivals of Odissi which give space to Gotipua and a few other festivals of traditional performances.

the Konark Natya Mandap and was instrumental in the survival and propagation of the tradition, but now, in his autumn days, he is ailing with no support whatsoever form the State or the Institute to which he was attached.

Even though the Gotipua boys are seen as the children of god or as special attendees of the temple, they survive a difficult life during and after their Gotipua life. Most *gurukuls* serve plain meals, enough to keep them healthy, but just about. Take any picture of a Gotipua and you will see the lanky figures of growing boys who could be more robust for the physicality they entail. For those who wish to continue the tradition as gurus, life only becomes harder and their dedication to the form is what keeps them going. Guru Gautama Mohapatra recounts that even though there were many boys in his Gotipua school, the local temple where he used to teach, and its associated ashram where the boys were staying, refused to keep them any longer because they were incurring high costs (2017). He was forced to abandon the ashram and ask for help in and around the village but in vain. Finally, he had to set up a *gurukul* in his own village house where his family maintained carpentry workshop, which is where he still keeps his classes alive. The tradition of Gotipua, thus, is living in an ironic situation, where it seems to be gaining some recognition in terms of the art that they showcase, but are unable to keep up the tradition which is attached to it. While the *gurukuls* are becoming more accommodating to the current times, they also have a traditionalistic approach to certain other elements.

The Goti-Jhiyos

As far as upholding traditions are concerned, the most debatable issue is of including girls in the tradition. Gotipua, be it in its performance dedicated to God or its system of transference, is bereft of any female body or its influence. Ironically, the only feminine trope is that of the imitation of femininity by the boys. The tradition lives and cultivates in a homosocial environment where it projects a representation of women/girls although distancing itself from the same. As Mallia (2013) mentions, "the tradition is goti-puo, not goti-jhiyo", indicating that it should only be performed by boys (puo) and not girls (jhiyo). There is no concrete reason as to why girls were never allowed or are still barred from the tradition except that it is the norm to do so. Although the ritual element of Gotipua has now become diminished, it still holds its fort strong when disallowing girls to enter the space. There are many reasons that are

given for disallowing girls, mostly based on stereotypes. For most traditionalists, neither the teachers nor the students can be female and hence, there is no space for a female figure. For instance, in my interview with Bijay Kumar Sahoo, when I asked him why he did not teach girls, he answered, "when boys can be decked up to look so pretty, where is the need for girls?" (2013). The exclusion of females exists because of certain sociological factors with relation to the tradition and the gender norms that prevail in these societies, especially related to Hindu belief systems. The general stereotype of girls being weaker than boys is used time and again to defend the traditional view which considers boys to be purer than girls due to late onset of puberty.

A common reason for restricting girls or women to perform Gotipua is menarche. According to many gurus, the onset of puberty restricts Gotipua in many ways (Sahoo, B. K. 2013, Moharana 2013). For one, girls reach puberty much before boys do. For a student who starts learning at the age of five to six years old, attaining puberty around ten years of age is too early. Although it can be argued that girls don't always mature so soon and there are those who hit puberty only around the age of fifteen, the possibility of them maturing still threatens the form, as they appear more feminine than what Gotipua highlights. There is a general notion that girls' bodies can change while they are in the tradition and that they might look different in the group of gotipuas. The secondary gender markers seem to pose a problem not just in the showcase of those bodies, but also in the upkeep of the tradition which is ideally bereft of sexuality. For Biswal though, this has never appeared to be a problem. He trains girls along with boys and when they wear the traditional costumes, there is not any obvious difference between the two sexes. The girls too, claim that they do not feel uncomfortable to be dancing alongside boys who cross-dress as girls. As far as menstruation is concerned, Sumitra Palai, a sixteen year old student of Biswal, claims that there is no pain or much discomfort while dancing at that time (2017). She also added that although she generally doesn't prefer dancing while bleeding (probably due to popular notion surrounding menstruation), there is no rule that prevents you from doing it if you please. Kaberi Palai (17) adds to this by saying that if there is a programme and they have to perform during menstruation, even if they feel a little discomfort especially while performing bandhas, they adjust as there is no other option (2017). The only time they refuse to perform while bleeding is if the

performance is in a temple, as there are stereotypical ideas about defilement. Menstrual blood, in the Hindu religious system, is seen as both powerful and dangerous, although it is also seen as a pollutant of sacred space (Banerji 2010: 213). This is probably why most gurus find it an uncomfortable subject to discuss, and often refer to it as the "problem" that girls have which makes it difficult for them to practice and perform regularly (Sahoo, B. K. 2013, Moharana 2013). Biswal (2017) though, does not seem to mind menstruation as long as his students are fit to perform, as it is no longer a religious ritual but rather a stage performance.

Another primary cause of concern with allowing girls in the tradition seems to be with keeping them under the same roof with boys. Although sexual understanding and maturity develops towards the end of a gotipua's life, mature members of a gurukul are generally sceptical of the sexual implication that may occur with the inclusion of girls into the homosocial environment. The absence of any female figure in the tradition for so long has maintained a certain gender politics and the entry of girls is taken to be a threat to the sanctity of the form. Moharana admitted that he is sceptical of hosting young girls because as the boys get older, they also get more curious sexually and "maturity diverts the mind" which becomes "a problem for the art" (2013). Nonetheless, there is a five-year old who has joined Moharana's *gurukul* in 2017, but whether she will be allowed to stay amongst the boys as she gets older is something only time can tell. Also, there is a hushed but prevalent notion that a girl who stays out of her house for so many years will not be looked at respectfully. Therefore, the female students who are now learning Gotipua stay at their own homes, and visit the *gurukul* or dance school only for classes.

Some of the gurus find it an aberration to include girls in the troupe as they believe it becomes unfaithful to the traditional roots of the dance, which emphasise on cross-dressing of male bodies. As Mallia says, "this is Gotipua; *puo* stands for 'boy' and hence it is meant to be done by boys. The philosophy behind it states that it be performed only by boy dancers, not by females" (2013). But this sentiment is decreasing as there as more and more gurus ready to teach girls as long as they do not stay with the boys. Some gurus also stay averse to employing girls as they feel that girls cannot perform *bandhas*. When interrogated as to why girls were not allowed to practice bandha, the most common answer I received was that they are physically

inferior to boys and hence they cannot sustain bandha (Sahoo B. K., Pattanayak 2013). It is a general misconception that the physical exertion and stamina needed for long performances cannot be endured by girls.

Many teachers also wrongly assume that the girl's skeletal frame is frailer than that of the boy and hence it should not be overused lest it be problematic for childbirth later (Moharana 2013). This myth that celebrates the physicality of boys over that of girls has long been shattered by various gurus of the tradition. For example, Kothari and Pasricha (1990) showcase the example of bandha in their book by using the photographs of a disciple of Guru Deba Prasad Das, Bijoylakshmi Mohanty. In fact, the lines in *Abhinaya Chandrika* which describe bandha nrutya[57] and are used by almost all the gurus in bandha nrutya performances talk about a danseuse (*nati*) indicating that the tradition was perhaps maintained by girls. Mohanty Hejmadi (2017) recalls that around the mid-twentieth century, where it was popular for every literary meet to have a performance after, "two kinds of performances were absolute hits- one was the *thali* dance by Madhuri Mohanty, and the other was *bandha* performed by two sisters, Bishnupriya and Banapriya"[58]. Of course, even though both these elements came from Gotipua and were taught by Gotipua gurus to girls, they were not christened as Gotipua yet and were used for training the body to be more flexible, irrespective of sexes.

Similarly, both Moharana and Biswal have successfully trained and encouraged female Gotipua dancers and they have never complained of physical incompetence. BasantaMoharana, for example, has taught Gotipua not only to girls but also women and he stated that he never had any problems. His experiment with women was carried out as a result of the interest shown by some female dancers when his troupe from Abhinna Sundar Gotipua Nrutya Parishad went to perform abroad. As it was against tradition, Moharana first taught his younger sister in order to gauge if the girl's body could yield the same kind of performance. He then took one month long workshops abroad where he taught much older women (in their twenties) the art of Gotipua dance. Because these women were already physically fit and accustomed to yoga, they did not face any problems in doing bandha or the rest of the repertoire.

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[57] The lines 'bandha nrutya mahaghoram' are given in chapter 1.
[58]Mohanty Hejmadi also talks about this in her book on Gotipuas (2019: 47)

But Moharana himself taught the dance abroad because it loses its traditional roots on that platform and cannot be identified as a deviance. Contrary to that, Biswal's experiments with using girls in Gotipua has been successful and according to his student, Kaberi Palai, it is hugely appreciated by the public as they feel proud that even girls can perform such impossible feats. According to her, "they (the audience) get surprised and also very happy as it is the pride of Odisha and India" (2017)

There have been many girl dancers who have learnt Gotipua's repertoire; mostly those belonging to families tied intrinsically to the form for generations. Priyambada Pattanaik for example, the granddaughter of Chandrasekhar Pattnaik had learnt bandha, but since becoming an Odissi dancer and teacher, she neither performs it anymore nor teaches it. Dancer Aloka Kanungo also used bandha in her Odissi choreographies but like most of the female performers, she is better known for her Odissi than her knowledge of Gotipua or bandha. Mohanty Hejmadi also mentions in her book *Gotipuas* (2019) that her daughter Ahalya learnt the *thali* dance and was bestowed with many awards for reviving the tradition in Odissi. But most people do not mention it or see it as integral to Odissi's development. Banerji alludes to the early gurus of Odissi teaching bandha as part of the training in order to keep the body fit, especially to young children (Banerji 2010: 515). But women are never identified with this apparently 'masculine' element and they have never been considered the bearers of this tradition. Male teachers seem to think that it is impossible for a woman to continue the tradition (Barik 2013, Moharana 2013). Unlike male Gotipua dancers who generally stop learning when they reach puberty, and then stay in the tradition as musicians or teachers, women are perceived to become so engrossed in household duties and childcare that they cannot possibly continue the tradition. This too, was countered by Kaberi Palai who believes that since it is an art that stays in the body, they can teach it to their kids after they get married (2017).

As I have mentioned before, these 'problems' regarding the female body are manifestations of sexual stereotypes even though the space is supposedly pre-sexual. Even though there are evidences in the form of experiences by female dancers, many gurus are still wary of having the female body in the tradition, while constantly innovating in other spheres to stay abreast with contemporary times. For example, Bijay Kumar Sahoo had tried to introduce a male costume for his boys to break out of the traditional set up as they were performing on stage and has even appeared on a television show with the boys dressed only in dhotis and an *uttariya*, a folded cloth

hanging from their necks with their ends fastened into the belt, but he still thinks that including girls in Gotipua will be too far from the tradition (2013). I believe, based on the interviews with teachers, that the idea of excluding the female figure from the tradition is purely based on social and sexual stereotypes that have no grounding whatsoever. As more and more teachers are becoming open to teaching Gotipua to girls, these stereotypes may eventually fade away but for now the tradition is still mainly restricted to boys. The evolution of the Gotipua tradition has always been as per the taste of the audience and the contemporary popularity of the elements. I believe that the disallowance of girls or women in the homosocial environment is independent of the prevalence of bandha as the latter became a part of the repertoire very recently. At the same time, fearing a loss of traditional values by teaching girls is hardly a valid concern for teachers who have been instrumental in changing the core element of Gotipua- the *bachika abhinaya*.

The traditional roots of the dance being part of temple rituals and *matha* culture are slowly but surely dying, especially with the heavy commercialisation of the troupes and the emphasis on bandha-nrutya and tableau formations. As Gautama Mohapatra points out, there is no need for a contemporary student to learn the songs with the hiring of professional singers and limited abhinayas. But, this change in tradition has, as Mohapatra (2017) laments, resulted in the depreciation of the quality of the abhinaya in modern performances. As the boys are no longer invested in learning the lyrics or the meaning of the songs, they do not enact them fairly and with conviction. He elaborated his point by mimicking the current style, in the very popular song '*dekha go, sakhi dekha go, Radha-Madhabchaali, dekha go*', which literally translates to (Mohapatra enacting) 'See, dear friend, Radha-Krishna are going there. See!' He uses the hand gestures in their correct order, describing each word, and looking at his hands when showing *sakhi*, Radha and Madhab (Krishna) to impress upon the viewer that one is telling her friend that Radha-Krishna are walking there, see! He then, with an air of dissatisfaction, mimics the current students by using the hand gestures loosely and sometimes out of order and by looking at his hands at the wrong time, elaborating that it is not the students' fault that they don't convey the *rasa* of the lines as they do not understand them (Mohapatra G. 2017). Guru Bhagirathi Mohapatra repeated the exact words when I spoke to him about the loss of

bachika abhinaya, stressing on the fact that the new-age *gurus* no longer insist on their students memorising the songs the way he or his teachers used to (2017).

The added impetus on bandha is also creating a more physically focussed form of the dance that was essentially more enactive. This has led to the decline in the popularity of the local poets and their songs- many of which used to be on the lips of the connoisseurs of Gotipua. I saw an example of this when I visited the Radha Ballabha Matha during Jhulan Jatra. Some of the audience members were visibly familiar with Abhinna Sundar's repertoire and their guru, Basanta Moharana. They would ask for certain songs to be performed next and even gave money to the dancers and, more often, the musicians for belting out a requested or popular number. Of course, due to restricted knowledge of the current repertoire, Moharana could not always comply with the audiences' requests but he tried to be a sport by playing more popular songs while asking the younger audience to sing or play along. This is the issue with most *gurukuls* and schools today, wherein the students known only a handful of abhinaya*s* as opposed to the hundreds that their gurus knew. It can be said that the cleaving of the tradition from its more *nrtya* roots is depriving it of an essential part of its heritage. The lack of available time for training is mainly the reason for changing the nature of the dance. The idea of being a gotipua a few decades earlier is very different from what it is now. The change in Gotipua's tradition is visible from not only the emphasis on *bandha* but also from the changes in the rest of the repertoire. The typical Gotipua repertoire was much longer and more diverse than the one taught today. This has impacted the traditional repertoire in that the current students learn a limited selection of pieces and thereby a condensed repertoire. We will see in the forthcoming chapter how the showcased repertoire varies from space to space, but before describing those permutations, we need to understand what the basic repertoire of Gotipua is. Here, I have detailed the complete repertoire while also mentioning the earlier forms and names of individual pieces and how they are used to present Gotipua to varied audiences.

The Repertoire

Gotipua's repertoire is quite elaborate and includes different parts that were given varied importance at various junctures of time depending on the audience. We have seen how the *sakhi-pilas* would perform more enactments of poetries as opposed

to the current gotipuas who perform more acrobatics in the form of *bandha* choreographies. A complete Gotipua repertoire is at least two hours long, and is mostly seen nowadays only at festivals like the Jhulan Jatra. Sometimes, a performance done for a non-Indian audience or at a venue outside of the country also includes the full repertoire as the performance is expected to be full-fledged and there are no restrictions on time (Moharana 2013). On the other hand, the most commonly seen proscenium performances in the country are bound by time and hence are hardly twenty minutes long, consisting of an invocatory piece and one more item, generally a *bandha-nrutya*. The invocatory piece too, as we will see in the examples of contemporary performances in the next chapter, is not pure dance and often is also filled with bandha stances and tableaus. According to Bijay Kumar Sahoo, "the paying party (patron) deserves treatment according to how much they pay" which is also why international patrons are revered more than national or local ones (2013). Moharana also believes that foreigners are keener to know more about the dance and the tradition than the locals, and therefore give more time and money (2013).

The repertoire of Gotipua as it exists today emphasizes on *bandha* whereas it was hardly an important part half a century ago. Many of the individual elements have undergone some structural changes while a couple of them are not even performed any more. Most of the parts are recognised today by the names adopted by Odissi rather than their traditional names, and thereby also take on some characters of Odissi's classical reconstruction. The mimetic[59] nature of the current training module ensures that the body is trained to be closer to Odissi in some parts of the repertoire, as their gurus or seniors are trained in Odissi after leaving Gotipua, except for during bandhas which are solely part of the Gotipua training and choreography and hence unique to the style. A more detailed explanation of the repertoire will perhaps enunciate better what I mean with reference to the Gotipua body and style. I illustrate the repertoire in the traditional order in which they are meant to be performed.

Bandana: The invocatory item with which the dance programme is begun is called Bandana which literally means to pray or even praise. It is salutatory in nature and typically invoked the *guru* and is hence also called guru-bandana. Amongst the

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[59]The mimetic nature of the training and its impact on choreography is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

current performing troupes, only Abhinna Sundar Gotipua Nrutya Parishad follows this tradition of performing a guru-bandana whereas the other schools prefer instead to invoke deities of the Hindu pantheon including Jagannath, Shiva, Saraswati, Ganesh, Durga etc. before paying obeisance to the *guru* and the audience. There are different *shlokas* (lit. rhymes) which are used to pray to respective gods and depending on their religious inclination and deity of choice, different schools use different *bandanas*. The choreography of a *bandana* includes all the elements- *nrtya, natya* and *nrtta-* as it gives a glimpse into the form without elaborating on it. In the contemporary fashion, *bandha* elements are also included in the *bandana*.
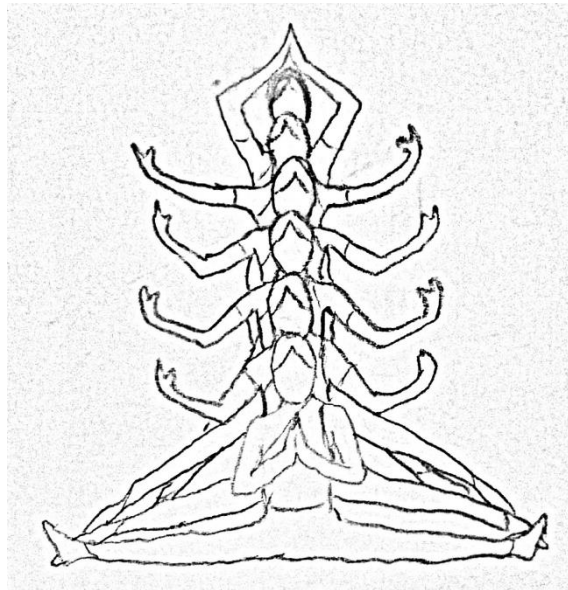
Figure 5: Chira welcome pose

The bandana was called so in the colloquial language quite literally to denote its purpose. According to Gautama Mohapatra (2017) it was also known as *jagaran nrutya* as it was the first item to be performed in order to wake up the lord in the temple. In the Jayantika papers published in *Nartanam*, the stalwarts of Odissi considered dividing the first part if the repertoire, currently known as mangalacharan, into *jagaran nrutya* and *bandana*, indicating that these were popular names before the reconstruction of Odhra-Magadhi into Odissi (Citaristi 2018: 157). Eventually it was decided to baptize it as mangalacharan, a name that is currently used not only in Odissi but also Gotipua (Citaristi 2018). It is not very clear why the piece is called mangalacharan although it could suggest an 'auspicious beginning'. The current choreography of the mangalacharan consists of *bhava* accompanied with pure dance, although the nature of the erstwhile bandana was slightly different. Up until the start of the twenty-first century, the gotipuas used to recite a *shloka* honouring the guru

with their palms together in reverence, and then perform a song and dance choreography describing a god. I have described one such performance in the forthcoming chapter. In the current system though, since there is no singing, the entire composition is danced, generally with the addition of bandha nrutya.

Batu: Batu or batunrutta is one of the oldest parts of the repertoire that finds mention in a text of the 16th century -the *Nartananirnaya-* as an item which is very difficult to execute. As a dance that uses *nrtya*[60] to train the dancer's body, it is an intense choreography that showcases the basic forms. It is also known as '*baadya pallavi'* as "it is dependent on *baadya* (percussion) and has a lot of *bolparan* (saying aloud the rhythm beats)" (Pattanayak 2013, Mohapatra, G. 2017). 'Pallavi' means to elaborate or blossom and is generally used to signify a dance that stresses on showcasing its form, mainly through nrtya. Pertaining to *batu*, Mohapatra mentioned that unlike the *sur pallavi*, which is based on *raagas*[61], the *badya pallavi* was earlier taught in different traditional *talas* (lit. rhythms) like *triputa*, *matha*,*adi* and so on, typical to Odia music[62] (Mohapatra, G. 2017, Mohapatra, B. 2017). He professes that he had learnt a few in his initial years during the early 1990s although he does not remember or teach them anymore (Mohapatra, G. 2017). Most Gotipua schools teach only one *batu* in contemporary times, the one adopted by Odissi and is based on the *chaturasra ek-tala*, which is a cyclical rhythm of four beats. The choreography elaborates on the musical instruments used traditionally in the dance form, like the veena, flute, cymbals, and the pakhawaj.

As I have mentioned before in the last chapter, *batu* comes from the name of one of the fierce forms of Shiva, Batuka Bhairav, to whom the dance was dedicated, perhaps because Shiva is believed to be the primal dancer. The dance is filled with *nrtta* and *nrtya* elements which were mainly used to mould the learning body to the specific form of the tradition. It is widely believed that *bandha* postures were initially

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[60] The elements of Indian dances are generally codified as *natya*, *nrtya*, and *nrtta*, according to the *Abhinayadarpanam* and *Samgitaratnakara*, which corresponds to acting or storytelling, sentimental or emotive dance, and pure dance without sentiments respectively (Vatsyayan 2015).

[61] *Raagas* are typical to Classical Indian music and signify a specific combination of notes (*sur*). *Raagas* characteristically have a set pattern of specific notes which can be played around to make music, as per prescribed rules of when it should be sung, for what mood, on what occasions etc.

[62] Odia music is a Classical style of music that is believed to have evolved through the intermingling of Northern (Hindustani) and Southern (Carnatic) Indian Classical music, due to its geographical location.

part of *batunrtta* before becoming a full-fledged performance (Sahoo B. K. 2013, Barik 2013, Mallia 2013). In the earlier choreographies when one or two dancers would perform *bandha*, there were no group formations or tableaus. Instead, the *goti-puo* or solo boy-dancer presented a couple of *bandha* postures like *mayura, sagori, lahunia*[63] and so on, or performed the *thali* dance, or *hatas* as Debaprasad Das calls them (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 46). An older gotipua, Guru Satyapira Palai (2013), recalled that in some cases, the boys would also perform entertaining antics like bending backwards and picking up needled stuck on a banana with their eye

Sarigama: Sarigama is so called as this element is composed on specific *ragas* which are sung, not with the help of lyrics but with notations like Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma etc of Indian Classical music which make up that *raga*. It is also called thai-nat in Odia or pallavi as per the Odissi lexicon. The item is pure *nrtta* and the movements are set to the tunes of a particular *raga* or a mixture of *ragas*. The choreography of these compositions are mostly fixed and they elaborate the movements of the dance style and the rhythmic pattern of the song, by moving from slow patterns to faster beats, ending in a crescendo.

In the current repertoire, sarigamas are very rarely performed, mainly only during shows outside of India to display the complete repertoire. In most contemporary performances of twenty minutes, it is not viable for most *gurus* to put in a ten-minute long sarigama piece elaborating the complete item. Out of the many sarigamas that were prevalent earlier, the most commonly taught and performed one starts with "re re ma pa dhani…" although, apart from their practice sessions, I did not see the item being performed on stage.

Abhinaya: Abhinaya means 'acting; and this part of the repertoire elaborates on the *nrtya* and *natya* elements of the form. Generally taken to be songs praising the gods, we can trace the lineage of modern abhinayas to the onset of Vaishnavism in Odisha. They mainly use local, traditional songs written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by poets such as Upendra Bhanja, Banamali Das and Gopalkrushna as those were Gotipua's heydays. As I earlier mentioned, there existed an entire collection of

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[63] The names of the bandhas are mentioned in chapter 1. See Mohanty Hejmadi (2019) for more details.

songs specifically to be sung during certain festivals like Jhulan Jatra and Chandan Jatra (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019). But, as traditional performances mould in order to survive, Gotipua also adds newer abhinaya*s* form time to time as per the demands of the audience. As I have mentioned before, Gotipua does not shy away from using songs of other languages (Barik 2013).

Sometimes, the abhinaya may also be a sa-abhinaya which is an abhinaya that uses the tune of the previously performed sarigama, but with lyrics, in order to contrast or complement them. This is a technique also used in Odissi but is typical to the Gotipua tradition. As the abhinayas were mainly poems converted into songs, it was just more convenient to fit the lyrics in a previously memorised sarigama tune. With the *maharis* being dictated to only sing the Jayadeva's *Geeta Govinda* in the temples (Patnaik 2006), Odissi traces its traditional abhinaya*s* to the Gotipua repertoire. It was mainly due to the earlier system of gotipuas memorising at least two hundred songs that these traditional and folk tunes and poems have survived in Odisha.

Bandha nrutya: Bandha nrutya is the most famous but most strenuous part of the Gotipua repertoire. As is mentioned earlier, a major part of the training of the body, nowadays, is done to achieve good *bandha* postures and movements. The most recent addition to the Gotipua repertoire, bandha nrutya has become emblematic of the form, although it uses very little *nrtta* elements and in its contemporary form, is mainly made up of tableau like formations and the grand display of postures. Although it is not known when or how the tableau formations entered the choreography of bandha nrutya, it is interesting to note that there is a mild similarity to the *jhanki* that the Raslila performers create (Mason 2009). He describes the *jhanki* as "a tableau, a picture of the players suddenly coalescing from dance and presenting the characters in an iconographic poses explicitly suggesting the poses of temple images and other devotional art" (Mason 2009: 6).

As we will see in the description of performances in the next chapter, *bandhas* became popular only in the recent decades and is choreographed as per the liking of the respective gurus. Most of them are set to the lines '*taam thei taa kadataka taa hom taa taka taa*', sung in a repetitive melody and using rhythm variations from time

to time. Bandha nrutya as a separate performance piece of the repertoire was introduced only in the mid-1950s, with some attributing it to Guru Mahadev Rout who helped set the bol (words) 'tam thei…' in 1956 (Palai 2013, Sahoo B. K. 2013). At that time, the bandha nrutya choreography only presented certain *bandha* postures and movements. Over time, most gurus have come to choreograph the entire item in tableaus, intercepting them with few *bandhas* to re-position the dancers. The tableaus created in bandha nrutya do not have any sequence to them, although like the *jhankis*, they too symbolise "devotional art" in the form of Radha and Krishna figures or scenes from mythological episodes involving Krishna. Some bandha nrutya tableaus are also created for geometrical aesthetics, mainly at the beginning or the end of the recital.

Figure 6: Two tableaus depicting Krishna

Bidai-sangeet: Bidai-sangeet literally means the song of parting. It is the last item of the repertoire and is also called moksha or mokhya as per the Odissi lexis. It pays the final homage to the guru, deity and audience before taking their leave. Generally, it is the smallest piece of the repertoire and is done at the very end of the performance. Depending from guru to guru, there are group formations and the dance pieces, although very little, are *nrtta*. It has become common for the current troupes to bring out a big Indian flag towards the very end and wave it on top of a pyramidal formation, evoking the patriotic feeling of the audiences and ensuring a thundering

round of applause and sometimes even standing ovations. It seems to remind the audiences that this tradition, like Kaberi Palai (2017) mentions, is the pride of both Odisha and India.

The earlier performances of Gotipua were complete in that the entire repertoire, generally with two abhinayas, would be performed in the order mentioned above. The performance up until the early twentieth century would start with one or two boys coming on to the stage or courtyard along with the musicians, after which they would put on their *ghungroos*, salute their gurus by touching his feet and begin by singing the shloka with hands folded (Barik 2017). The rest of the repertoire would start off with an abhinaya praising a god and then follows with the batu, sarigama and another abhinaya before ending with the bidai-sangeet (Palai 2013, Barik 2017, Mohapatra, B. 2017). The preference of order and items would depend on respective gurus but in most cases, this was the order that was followed. Also, as mentioned above, there was no separate item called bandha-nrtya and bandhas as singular postures or movements were performed at the end of batu. Nowadays though, the repertoire presented varies from audience to audience in that most contemporary proscenium performances (of about twenty minutes) consist of the mangalacharan and guru-bandana, followed by a long bandha-nrutya and the mokhya, seamlessly performed without a break. If performed at rare hour-long programmes or abroad in front of a curious audience, the entire repertoire is still performed with the addition of an elaborate bandha-nrutya. As we will see in the following chapter, most modern performances have elements of bandha and tableau like formations in other items also, irrespective of bandha-nrutya. The repertoire and the variations therein will become clearer in the next two chapters, describing different performances and the choreography of Gotipua.

Chapter 3

Different Performances, Differing Styles

The Gotipua dance that was done by our gurus, if we do it now the audience will not want to see it as they want something new. I can vouch for that! They won't take it well…

I spoke to the Director of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and asked him "why don't you send Gotipua to foreign countries?" He said, "Because they need to be 18 years old." "Bur Sir, after eighteen years of age, they won't be able to perform Gotipua! If you will ask him to bend, he won't be able to, he'll lie flat!" He told me that it's a Government rule so I told him to make an exception to the rule as this form is unique to Odisha. If we call any artist, everyone is travelling abroad. This tradition should be made popular by you, by us; that our responsibility. Who doesn't want to take their art abroad?

We used to do bandha when I was learning and that is why I've gone for foreign tours six times. But, we should go more often as it is so popular there! When we had gone to London… We had done our makeup and were waiting to perform the opening act at the Edinburgh Mela, London[64], and there were around 600-800 audience members just to see what it is! They saw our dance- our difficult postures, our controlled movements- they went gaga; Gotipua was in demand thereon! There were around 3-4 stages, and when they would see that Gotipua is scheduled to perform at a specific time on a certain day, everyone would be there! It became so popular. But the Indian government does not understand this.

We used to dance non-stop for three hours as gotipuas. It is a very difficult dance. But that is not fair to kids. We have no right to exert them so much. Half an hour is enough… You'll see in the programme today a new item. We have changed Gotipua a little bit. So many people have made changes to the dance, especially while performing on TV or for private shows. There should be changes, but they need to be gradual. If in one year, you chop off the hair, make the dress shorter and change the

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[64] The Edinburgh Mela typically takes place in Edinburgh, UK. But in 2002, it also took place in Dublin and London. Interestingly, the theme that year was Bollywood. (http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2002/08/18/stories/2002081801001200.htm)

costume, then it won't be accepted. Little changes, made slowly over time will get
people used to it.

- In conversation with Chitrasen Swain

The performance of Gotipua has undergone many stylistic and choreographic changes over the years while the tradition has evolved to suit contemporary needs. I have discussed in the last chapter how a major change in form has taken place in this century as the dance adapted to its present proscenium form, and included bandha nrutya to become symbolic of the tradition. As there is no available record of what Gotipua must have been in its earlier times, in order to study the changes in its style, we can only refer to the dance that has been recorded in written and videographic evidences, mainly done in the twentieth century. This coincides with the time when major changes where taking place in Gotipua, with respect to repertoire, choreography and ideas of how a troupe should be. Through interviews, written accounts and sparsely available video footages, we can see that there has been an evolution in the form and style of this dance since then to now.

The earliest available video of the dance is of 1984 and can be found at the Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar and matches the description of the earliest written accounts of it, which is of a troupe having "four or five members and the Guru always remains in charge of it. He also sings and plays on the harmonium. Other members are two accompanists i.e. a Mardala[65] player and a Gini[66] player, and one or two boy dancers." (Patnaik 2006: 66). Even though the recording is of the late twentieth century, according to the staff at the Odissi Research Centre, this was an attempt to keep a record of the Gotipua tradition as it was meant to be, before bandha-nrutya became popular. In this chapter, I will elaborate on four different performance spaces- the 1980s video which is probably the oldest video evidence available, two performances I witnessed at Jhulan Jatra which is a modern performance but at a more ritualistic space, two proscenium performances in the 2010s, and two stage performances that were performed for shows on nationwide

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[65] *Mardala* is similar to the *pakhawaj*, both typical percussions used in Odia music.
[66] The *gini* or a pair of cymbals is also typical to Gotipua music, especially used by the guru if he is not playing another instrument. Cymbals are synonymous with religious music in most of India.

television. The performances take place in distinct spaces, for varied audiences. Through these examples, we can read the stylistic changes that take place with differing audiences and can gauge whether they present the dance any differently.

<u>Caught on Camera: the Earliest Video of Gotipua</u>

In a hazy, grainy video, amidst the faded colours and whites lines on the screen, we see the faces of the musicians clearing. There is Guru Maguni Das adjusting the tone of the pakhawaj with Guru Surendra Mahapatra holding on to the harmonium and Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra sitting next to him. The beats of the pakhawaj start playing and the camera pans to the dancers- two sari-clad performers around ten to twelve years of age. Their costumes look similar to the present-day costume, without the fan-like section between the legs, only the dhoti. The jewellery seems to be made of beads, and they even have nose-rings which are attached to the hair with silver-strings. The hair buns are also decorated with a circular mesh-like cloth with frills on the edges to make the hair look fuller. The main attractions though, are the garlands that both the dancers have on themselves. It gives the impression of a ritual performance- something that is being done to honour the gods.

The presentation begins with the chant 'Gurur Brahma Gurur Vishnu…'[67] where there is very little movement and the young dancers mostly stand and enact the words in reverence, followed by a nrtta piece that may count as the entrée now popularly called the 'mangalacharan or bandana'. The dance style is very mature like what one can see in solo Odissi dances today, and what the old Gotipua gurus seem to reminisce. The boys sit diligently in chauka and carefully do the steppings without any haste or glitches. They are definitely very expressive and seem to know well that both expressions and gestures are very important in enacting poetry. This is elaborated further in the next two pieces which are abhinayas based on Odia Bhakti songs. Although the harmonium player is also singing, the boys also sing along with him and know the complete lyrics to all the songs. They show a good level of finesse in showcasing the lyrics along with an expertise over the movements. There is very little bandha executed in these items, and as expected, there are no formations or

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[67] This is a Sanskrit shloka alluding first to the Hindu trinity of Brahma Vishnu and Mahesh, then the other gods and finally the teacher. It is generally called the Guru Bandana, i.e. an Ode to the Guru.

structures. The few bandhas that are presented are body-contouring poses which display the agility and virtuosity of the dancers.

Like this video, the Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre, Bhubaneswar (ORC) has three more videos recorded in 1984 in its limited archive. This and another video were recorded at the ORC in order to be documented for further research. The accompanying *gurus* are the same in both the video although the dancers vary. In the latter, the costume also includes a fan and the head is decorated with the tiara that present-day Odissi dancers wear[68]. Although the presiding singer is Guru Surendra Mahapatra in the videos, the boys do join in from time to time. In the second video, there is also an abhinaya in which the dancers take turns to dance while one rests in *tribhangi*, joining in when the refrain part of the dance comes in. This is characteristic to the older duet tradition in Gotipua (Palai 2013, Barik 2013). The other two videos are from the *mathas* of Puri but one of them was not working when I visited the archive. The video which was available was shot at the Oriya *matha* in Puri where there are again, two dancers with a Guru, and all of them are singing during the abhinaya*s*.

What was clearly visible in these few videos is that the style and content of the performance has definitely changed over the years. In the interviews that I had with senior gurus, they often lamented the loss of evocative dancing or *bachika abhinaya* in the contemporary repertoire (Mallia 2013, Barik 2013, Palai 2013, Mohanty Hejmadi 2017). There was constantly the mention of the current form stressing so much on physicality that the *lasya* or abhinaya element of the dance was being forgotten, something that is clearly visible in the videos. As I have mentioned earlier in the last chapter, gurus would make their students memorize the folk poems and then explain their meaning before teaching them the dance depicting it. Although there are still a few gurus who explain the content to their students, the tradition of memorising the songs is no longer needed as the performances have professional musicians. From the above footages, it seems that this could be the time, around the turn of the century that professional musicians were being introduced in the repertoire. The boys instinctively sang while dancing, even in the presence of an

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[68] This is similar to how the gotipuas look in one of the oldest available photographs of them, taken in 1986 (Citaristi 1987).

additional singer. Their unhurried and controlled pace of the dance also display an acute knowledge of rhythm.

The maturity of the young boys in the videos is exceptional with regard to their age and one can see the dedication to the art form. Oftentimes, I have been told by current gurus that young boys are too immature to showcase certain expressions, and hence bandha nrutya is ideal for them (Sahoo B. K. 2013, Swain L. 2017, Biswal 2017), but these boys prove that to be absolutely false. In emulating the lyrics of the songs, they truly appear to enact to the audience the *bhaav* or feeling of the song, very unlike the current dancers who mostly just smile through the entire composition. According to Guru Bhagirathi Mohapatra, this is because the current gurus are more interested and invested in bandha-nrutya rather than abhinaya*s* as it is more profitable (2017). In the video that I describe above, the postures and poses performed by the dancers seem cruder than the polished style that the current tradition seeks to emulate from Odissi. Their arms in *chauka* are a bit elbowed up and the hand gestures are more limited, but that does not seem to be a stylistic fault. In fact, it shows that the body was trained in a way different from how it is done now, as I will detail in the forthcoming chapter. Earlier, the gurus let individual bodies adapt to the prescribed form in their own way, as opposed to the uniformity of the current training which herds all bodies as same and makes them imitate the style from generation to generation of students. The absence of group performances earlier also eliminated the need for a synchronic, imitative style of dancing.

The videos seem to be of a time when group performances were still not widespread. Even though bandha nrutya as a separate piece in the repertoire is believed to have been included towards the latter half of the twentieth century, the older videos nonetheless retain the style and repertoire of the erstwhile tradition in order for us to gauge the changes that took place later. In the contemporary scenario, it is very rare to witness solo or duet performances on the proscenium stage, even though they may be seen at ritual or festive celebrations. The inherent characteristic of a solo or duet performance is the emphasis on abhinaya, as opposed to bandha nrutya which is, by nature, a group presentation. Although the ritual performances (which are discussed below) do sometimes engage two to three dancers for an abhinaya presentation, they are very often interspersed with bandha tableaus, catering to the

present style. There is almost an erasure of the solo form that the dance used to have. When senior Gotipua, Guru Bhagirathi Mohapatra, enacts poetry in between his parley, or while enacting it on stage, he completely immerses himself in the content of the poetry. This comes from the training that Mohapatra received in his younger days that has stayed with him. As he says, once you understand and imbibe the lyrics, the rest comes naturally (Mohapatra, B. 2017). This naturalness that he embodies was also seen in the dance of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, the most famous exponent of the Odissi style who is known to have been a Gotipua in his young age. It is not surprising then that these young duet and solo dancers in the videos also make their abhinayas seem so natural and effortless, due to the strict training that they underwent.

As we see in the video described, the performance starts with the chanting of the shloka 'Gurur Brahma Gurur Vishnu' with the dancers standing and enacting the words without the use of *nrtya*. This was not typical till a few years ago as Guru Birabar Sahoo mentions at the 2012 Gotipua Seminar at Bhubaneswar. Earlier, the dancers would only stand with their hands folded and sing a shloka devoted to a god before starting the performance. The two-day seminar at ORC also discussed other changes between the earlier form and the current form, many of which were apparent in these videos. For one, as discussed in this seminar, we see that the footwork that was used in a gotipua's performance earlier was very light-footed and limited. Similarly, it was also not a dance that needed much space, nor a stage, to be performed. In a few examples where the older gotipuas demonstrated the earlier styles, their arms too, were a little above their shoulders and some even displayed steps which are not done anymore. Unfortunately, many such elements are not visible now due to Gotipua being taught by dancers who learn Odissi after leaving the Gotipua tradition, thereby disciplining and training the new bodies differently.

Preserving Tradition: Performances at the Jhulan Jatra

a) Uttar Parshva Matha:

The celebration of Jhulan Jatra has started and the mathas around Puri are decked and ready. Jhulan Jatra celebrates the Hindu month of Shraavan, just after

Krishna Janmashtami[69], when Krishna and Radha are placed on a swing (jhulan) that is decorated with a cascade of flowers. The mathas create beautiful tableaus with swings, replete with flowers, creepers and an array of women like gopis and apsaras (nymphs). Unlike earlier years, there is no competition to win, but the mathas still try to outdo their previous year's arrangements, perhaps in the hope that it will get them some more funds or sponsors for next year. There is lesser excitement now as compared to what the festivities were like before. There are also lesser performances in the evenings. Prices of everything, even for religious functions, have inflated and there is hardly any money to spare, let alone on performances for entertainment.

Opposite the Northern Gate of the Jagannath temple, among the many smaller mathas lining the lane, the Uttar Parshva Matha stands as an old, dilapidated building, almost hidden amongst the hawkers and cattle roaming in front of its gate. Avoiding the droppings and puddles of water, we enter the non-descript gate of the matha, unsure if this really was the venue. The cobbled path wound to the right, veering towards a bungalow-like structure with a porch where many shoes and slippers lay astray. Ah! Perhaps these were of the audiences and devotees? Inside, wide steps led down to a small covered courtyard, presumably kept empty for the evenings' performances. To the left, a couple of steps guide to the alcove where the idols of Radha-Krishna are kept, seated on a jhulan decorated with garlands of flowers and figurines of nymphs showering petals on the couple, highlighted with colourful focus lights. A priest sits on the steps and tugs at the rope tied to the swing to gently sway it to and fro. Right opposite the alcove, there is an elevated platform, seating the group of dancers who will perform soon. To the side closer to the entrance are seated the musicians, and some people, perhaps the audience, are seated behind them. The opposite side is traditionally meant for the patrons and, in the current scenario, seats the head-priest of the matha and another senior priest. They are the only ones who have chairs (and a table) for their perusal.

As the evening fades, the dancers of the Laxmi Priya Gotipua Nrutya Kendra start their performance in the courtyard – the first to commence the night-long programme by varied dance troupes from different districts. Their teacher Guru

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[69] *Janmashtami* is the eight day of the moon cycle in the month of *Shraavan* when Krishna is believed to have been born.

Lingaraj Barik, minds the percussion while his son is at the harmonium, singing the accompanying Odia folk songs. Two dancers start dancing at the centre stage to the song "ki shobha go kunje". The boys seem a little older but look like mature dancers, expressing the lyrics with a certain amount of understanding, even though they need more synchronicity. Through this song, the dancers describe the beauty of the forest, made even more enchanting by the presence of Krishna whom Radha so deeply adores. Most of the dance is performed facing the alcove, as if being presented for the enjoyment of the deity, akin to traditional belief. After a couple of stanzas, the dancers use the refrain in the chorus to turn ninety degrees to face the patrons, in front of whom they enact one stanza. The next two stanzas are done facing the remaining two sides.

Figure 7: Laxmi Priya gotipuas saluting the mahant

The Uttar Parshva Matha is one of the oldest *mathas* of Puri, as per O'Malley's accounts (1929: 123), which makes the continued celebration of Jhulan Jatra many centuries old. According to the *mahant* or chief priest of the matha, the matha was established in the eleventh century and they have been following the practice of patronizing the same lineage of Gotipua since its inception (2017). In fact, Guru Lingaraj Barik's troupe follows the lineage of the traditional performers for this matha, after two generations of his gurus and their troupes. The matha *mahant* also stressed on the importance of Gotipua by saying that irrespective of whether there is a *jhulan* or not during Jhulan Jatra, there have to be *kirtans* (lit. religious songs) and Gotipua performances. In keeping up this tradition, it is trying to retain the older

practices at a time when it is becoming extremely difficult, especially with lesser budgets and poor donations from devotees. Moreover, the *mahant* was nostalgic of the time when there would be so much excitement around Jhulan Jatra that Gotipua troupes would be invited to stay at the *matha* for almost a month before and after the festival. Up until fifteen years back, they would not only be given lodging and food but also be paid a handsome sum for their participation (2017). Unfortunately, the current economic conditions of the *matha* do not allow for more than thousand rupees to the troupes for their performances at the Jhulan Jatra, which is barely enough (Barik 2017, Mohapatra, G. 2017). Guru Barik continues to perform at the Jatra in spite of the meagre payment only to continue the ancestral tradition he is part of.

This Gotipua performance was more typical of the old style, as it is generally remembered, due to two reasons. Firstly, as this was a traditional setting, Guru Barik tried to keep the repertoire almost devoid of bandha and bandha nrutya and focussed mainly on popular Odia abhinayas and secondly, Barik himself is considered to be one of the few gurus who have maintained the older style, without getting influenced by the Odissi reconstruction, especially in his singing and choice of songs (Mohapatra 2017, Pattanayk 2017). Under his training, not only were the dancers skilled in their enactment of the songs, they also danced facing every direction like it was done earlier in similar performance spaces. It tried to emulate what older performances must have been like, as they were generally done on the streets or on open stages like this. The matha where the performance took place could have easily allowed for a unidirectional performance as there was an elevated stage available (the place where the performers were seated before their performance). But that would have meant being at a height higher than the *jhulan* which would also be perhaps, against the traditional setting.

As the evening was inclusive of different local performances like Gotipua, Odissi and modern Odia dance, the gotipuas did not perform a full repertoire. Instead, they performed on a few abhinayas, performing for a total of about forty minutes. The first abhinaya 'ki shobha go kunje', is a very popular Gotipua piece, and was performed by two senior gotipuas. It is a traditional Jhulan song and fully encapsulates the flavour of the season as it describes the blooming flowers and colourful forests. The senior dancers performed on a couple more songs before the

rest of the performers joined in. They performed one abhinaya together called "*Aame Odia*" (lit. 'We Odias'), which is a very popular number in proscenium performances. This fact was clearly established as the boys not only radiated exuberance while doing the steps and tableaus, as indicative in the lyrics, but also projected more finesse in their enactment, something that gets lost in the more dated or uncommon songs. This song takes pride in the fact that one is Odia, or belonging to Odisha, and goes on to enumerate the various attractions of the state and its people. Curiously, the choreography portrays masculinity in full thrust, as the boys act more like men-enacting stereotypes like patting their biceps and walking in puff-chested gaits- and lesser like the women they are dressed as. They also execute many bandha movements as contained in the choreography. Unlike the duet performance which is more akin to *sakhi-pila*[70], the group performance was more emblematic of Gotipua's current style which mixes physicality and synchronicity. It was more fast-paced and exuberant and showcased the child-body better, something that contemporary Gotipua increasingly strives to achieve, as I will discuss in the last chapter. Let us see another Jhulan performance before comparing such ritual-time performances with those captured in the 1980s videos.

b) Radha Ballabha Matha:

In front of the main entrance to the Jagannath temple, at the Singha Dwaar (Lion Gate) on the Eastern side, a hoard of devotees stand looking up to the temple, with their arms thrown up in prayer. Oblivious to the world, they are unaware of the matha standing behind them, facing the temple in adoration just like them. Unless told, it is difficult to imagine that the old building at the corner opposite the temple, hosting a sweet shop, also hosts a matha on the first floor. The lane leading to it is narrow and hardly busy as most tourists do not venture in that direction. Unlike most mathas, the Radha Ballabha Matha is on the first floor of a building, accessible by a flight of stairs, with a non-descript old waste-paper shop at its entrance.

Standing in front of the flight of steps on the ground floor, I could barely see up the steep stairs to where it was leading. But once I climbed them, I appeared directly in front of the narrow door post of the matha. The door opened diagonally to

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[70] I have discussed *sakhi pila* in detail in Chapter 2

a small, open courtyard flanked on all four sides by buildings. Entering the open space, there are a few steps to the left, leading up to the nook where the jhulan is set up, directly in front of the Jagannath temple. Amidst the flowers and creepers of the jhulan, tiny figurines of nymphs surround the figures of Radha and Krishna who are enjoying the swing. On the steps is a priest of the matha, gently tugging at the rope tied to the swing. Opposite the nook, the building holds a platform, open towards the courtyard and adorned by pillars, where a group of priests are seated in a circle and are singing songs of devotion to set the mood for the evening, while the other chelas seem to be busying themselves with the preparation of the evening's programme. The Jhulan festival has just commenced and nobody seems to be really sure when or who will be performing in the evening but they do know that they should expect many devotees to come for the festivities.

It is almost eight in the evening and Basanta Moharana arrives three more people and six students and gets busy preparing for their performance. That seems to be too large a troupe for such a small space! While three of them add the finishing touches, three others are ushered by Moharana's younger brother to the Panjabi Matha on the Southern side, along with their vocalist. Some chelas of the matha come out and spread a carpet on the floor of the courtyard where the dancers will perform. The group of devotees on the platform ends their singing session and comes down to the border of the courtyard, on the steps or on the edge of the carpet to now assume the role of the audience. Amidst the flurry of activities, Moharana comes out of the inner room with his harmonium, a percussionist following him, while a student brings his pakhawaj at their heels. They arrange the instruments and the microphones to one side of the courtyard-turned-performance arena such that they are perpendicular to the dancers who will be facing the deities while dancing. The performance starts with a Bandana- "Gurur Brahma, Gurur Vishnu" including some acrobatics along with the dance, followed by the abhinaya "dekha go, Radha Madhaba chaali". As the evening proceeds and the crowd thickens, many audience members start cheering and also asking for specific songs to be performed. Moharana seems to be at ease with these requests and wards them off with a smile, giving the audience more popular and well-rehearsed numbers that garner accolades. In spite of the festive nature of the programme, most of the abhinayas include bandha stances, although bandha nrutya as an item is not performed. The three boys perform for almost three hours, dancing

on traditional Jhulan songs, with the contemporary twist of bandhas and tableaus showcasing Krishna from time to time.

While the boys were dancing and executing bandha postures, I realised that it was totally acceptable and popular for the appreciative audience to put money on the harmonium or to hand it out to the guru after circling it in front of the dancers' faces (to ward off the evil-eye, as per Hindu practices). One particularly keen audience member was so happy with the performance that he took out three ten-rupee notes to pin to the boys' sarees. Unable to do so because of the lack of fastening pins, he handed it over to the boys to pin it to their chests themselves so it would be displayed. The two older boys contemplated it for a minute or so before feeling embarrassed, and then placed the notes on the harmonium. The younger one though, took a safety-pin and secured it on the cloth that went across his chest, and did not seem to be bothered by it during the rest of the night. Their teacher, on the other hand, although grateful to the audience for showering appreciation seemed a little uncomfortable with my presence as an outsider in this whole situation.

Figure 8: The older gotipuas hesitating while the younger gotipua pins his ten-rupee note

The performance by the Abhinna Sundar Gotipua Nrutya Parishad at the Radha Ballabha Matha was a night long performance which lasted for almost three hours, starting with a bandana, followed by a series of abhinayas and even including bandha nrutya before ending with the mokhya. The three students were the only performers of the night and were hugely popular with the admiring audience. Many kids were also very keen on the performance and sat near the musicians or as close to the performance arena as possible. As Moharana tried to retain the flavour of Jhulan Jatra, most of the compositions were on traditional Oriya songs that are hardly seen on stage anymore. This kind of festive occasion recalls the rarer and more local Bhakti songs, which the dancers, in spite of learning them during their training from time to time, practice minimally. The songs such as "*kari Jamuna teere*", "*Radha jhuri jhuri*" and many others which were performed at this event are part of the old repertoire which existed in Gotipua akharas. The difference between the oft-performed items and rarer, more Jhulan-specific items was stark as the dancers were very comfortable and well-rehearsed with the former, while they would look at each other or be unsure of the choreographies in the latter.

Moharana's troupe performed on a single night of the Jhulan, but at two separate places with three students at each matha. The performance described above, at the Radha Ballabha Matha, was presented by the older boys, two of around seventeen years of age and another who would perhaps have been twelve years of age. The other performance at Panjabi Matha, a little further away, included much younger dancers, two of whom would have been around eight to ten years of age and one girl of about six, who was just starting to learn. Panjabi Matha, although an old and revered matha, was much less-crowded and decorated than Radha Ballabha Matha. Moharana encouraged the youngest dancer to perform at the venue in order to ward away stage fright, even though she performed for two hours while constantly looking at the older dancers for cues. In order to not wear out the dancers, there were even solo and duet performances which gave some rest, especially to the younger performers. Even though there were performances of *bandha*, unlike the norm in earlier years, owing to the lack of space, they were limited to predominantly tableaus, as the dancers showcased Krishna or Radha and Krishna in between the stanzas. What

was evident though, is that even if the choreography was practiced, one could see that the shots were being called by the older dancers when it came to making the tableaus, and they would ensure as much as possible that the younger one did the more acrobatic and movement-based *bandhas*, especially at the Radha Ballabha Matha.

At the Radha Ballabha Matha, even though the audience was seated on all sides, the performance was only done facing the Jhulan (and thereby the Jagannath temple behind it) while the head priest or *mahant* took up his position on the steps of the *jhulan*. The audience was scattered and rarely static, but that did not seem to bother the dancers whose sense of covering the space during their performance was commendable. While the Gotipua performance took place during the course of the evening, the area behind the performers, where the *chelas* were singing earlier, got converted into a dining area. Rows of banana leaves were laid out as night fell and the devotees increased in number. It appeared to be customary for the matha to distribute free meals on festive occasions, as people knew they were coming in for both a meal and a show. The performers however seemed unfazed by the movement of the audience behind them and past the performance space.

Unlike the proscenium stage, this open performance space appeared to be more casual and relaxed, more so for the dancer than the audience. The older boys seemed to be quite conscious of their presence and would giggle or slightly laugh if the composition or tableau needed them to act like the amorous Radha-Krishna or a coy *gopi* or Radha. Perhaps it is the formal set-up or the distance between the audience and the performer that this kind of self-awareness during the performance is rarer, or rather controlled, on the proscenium stage. The audience too, seemed to be more familiar with the tradition of Gotipua as they knew the songs that were being sung. In fact, Moharana insisted that the kids (boys and girls alike) who were present in the audience seat themselves next to him and sing along as the gotipuas danced. Although in the earlier times, the audience interaction could be imagined to have been more, what with the patrons and connoisseurs demanding for specific songs, the residue of that system was still traceable. The audience would dole out requests for local Bhakti songs whenever there was silence in between the presentations, and seemed to take the performance as an integral part of the festival. Moharana later admitted that he enjoys performing at this matha for this very reason as there are still

people who understand the importance of Gotipua at such occasions and cherish the tradition (2017).

The performance of the Jhulan would typically be a long event wherein the Gotipuas would dance every evening for the five days of Jhulan, for five to six hours. Of course, as mentioned by the *mahant* of the Uttar Parshva Matha, the entire gotipua troupe would stay at the *matha* and hence, different boys would perform on different evenings (2017). The older tradition of Gotipua with solos and duets was well-suited for such type of performances. In the contemporary system, with the lack of both funding and time, the *gurus* do not invest in these festivities nor train for them specifically. In the Jhulan Jatra of 2017, out of the four performances of Gotipua that I managed to scout for in Puri, two were done by Abhinna Sundar Gotipua Nrutya Parishad, one by Laxmipriya Gotipua Gurukul and the fourth took place at the Siddha Bakula Matha, where Guru Kailash Biswal brought in his troupe that performed a fusion of Gotipua, Odissi and Chhau. His troupe consisted of both girls and boys who wore different costumes and performed dance and acrobatics with equal ease. Theirs was hardly a traditional performance, considering they had a fusion of three Odia dance form and a separate music performance by Paika artists. Biswal's troupe's performance closely resembled a proscenium performance and was even done facing the audience and not the *jhulan*.

As per the traditional performances of Gotipua are concerned, it was customary for the dance to take place during three main festivals- the Jhulan Jatra, the Chandan Jatra and the Dol Jatra. The performance of Gotipua at Dol Jatra[71] seems to have long been discontinued as no contemporary troupes perform there and it does not find mention in Mohanty Hejmadi's book (2019). But according to B. K. Sahoo and Moharana, Gotipua was essential to Jhulan Jatra which can be concurred by the fact that Dol Jatra is essentially Vaishnavite in nature and Gotipua was integral to almost all the Vaishnavite practices at one time. Moharana also added that when the Jatra or procession during Dol would go from house to house in the villages, the gotipuas would perform at the front for five minutes to attract the people. Many a times,

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[71] Dol Jatra is to Eastern India what Holi is to North and Central India. Celebrated mainly by the Hindus, it is seen as a predominantly Vasihnavite festival. Some indigenous cultures also celebrate it as the festival marking the coming of spring.

"people [would] call them home for lunch or dinner" indicating a strong connection between the locals and the tradition (2017). Similarly, Gotipua was also integral to Chandan Jatra[72], even when the performance of the *mahari*s had ceased. According to Mohanty Hejmadi, the gotipuas would lead the procession here too, when the idol of Jagannath and other gods would be brought out to the pond. In her experience, "by 1955, it was just a symbolic ritual that the boy was dressed and went in the *chapa* but did not dance" (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 21). But the tradition was later revived as Kothari and Pasricha (1990) report seeing a Gotipua performance on the boat in 1966. In contemporary practice though, the boys do not dance anymore on the *chapa* and only sing Bhakti songs, if at all (Barik 2017).

As far as Jhulan Jatra is concerned, it is the only ritualistic performance that continues, albeit dying slowly. With the commercialisation of the tradition and the changing nature of the dance, it is fashioning itself into a more proscenium performance that is increasingly finding itself difficult to position itself in religious spaces. As is characteristic of Gotipua, it is still evolving to suit contemporary needs. We will see how, in its current form, the tradition presents itself on the proscenium stage in order to highlight the virtuosic bodies of the dancers, rather than the Vaishnavite elements or songs. In the group choreographies of today, it becomes more profitable to make the dance more about the bodies dancing it rather than the religious beliefs that popularised it in the earlier centuries. This is not to say that the religious roots are completely cut off, but it can be easily seen that it is not the driving force of the contemporary tradition and training. The move towards proscenium performances is bringing about a shift in the tradition of Gotipua which highlights the acrobatic elements more than its erstwhile religious identity.

Taking Centre-Stage: Contemporary Proscenium Performances

a) Aradhana Dance Academy at Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Bhubaneswar- 2017

The eight dancers in gold and pink saris have been dancing for about twenty minutes now. After having finished with a popular favourite 'Ame Odia', they re-enter

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[72] See Chapter 1 for details on Chandan Jatra.

the stage to solemn music. The music starts with the flute, and then comes the percussion of the tabla[73]. The singer starts singing "taam thei", indicating that it is bandha nrutya, as the dancers start with steps in chauka. Suddenly an unusual instrument is heard in the music- the hollow, sweet sound of a khol[74]. The singer then starts saying certain shlokas in Sanskrit. It is not very clear to me what he says but I can make out that he is describing certain elements of the dance as I hear familiar phrases and words like "bisama sarira sanchari", "joubana", "anga" and a few others. The formations along with these lines also seem to be atypical. For instance, during one of these shlokas, the boys come together to the centre of the stage as the lights dim from the sides and focus completely on them. They form couples, holding another dancer's waist and link together like the four spokes of a wheel. While the lines are sung, or rather recited, they move clockwise once and then anti-clockwise. Once this is done, the four dancers on the outside break the formation and face the corners with their hands folded, while the others form an inner circle, their faces facing outward. Tapping their toes, all the dancers move clockwise again and then reposition to create a bandha posture where the dancers form lahunias[75] of two and face the corners.

With the tihai of the khol and the flute taking a crescendo, the lighting changes and the dancers come back to normal standing postures with their hands folded. The singer again starts singing 'taam thei" and it looks like the usual bandha choreography where the dancers form more recognisable formations with each couplet of the song. While the alternating bandha music and shloka recitations continue for about five minutes, one paragraph catches my ear. The singer recites "lalita chaari" (lit. soft walk) and the dancers come together in a line at the back of the stage and stand in abhanga position. The dancers then walk towards the front gracefully with the singer accompanying with the bols[76] "dhindhaati nakataa, tintaati nakadhaa". The singer proceeds to recite "lalita chaari chakkaa bhaunri" (lit. soft walk, round rotations) and the dancers rotate on their spots in chauka in batches of

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[73] The *tabla* is an Indian percussion instrument that is typically used in Hindustani Classical music.

[74] The *khol* is a percussion instrument similar to the *mridanga* or *pakhawaj* but is hollower and sharper in tone. It is typically used in Assam, Manipur and West Bengal and is identified with the Vaishnavite music of those parts.

[75] *Lahunia* is a bandha posture in which the dancer bends backwards to be on all fours and lifts his waist to look like an inverse 'U'.

[76] *Bols* are words used to supplement the rhythm of the percussion.

two, one after the other, displaying what is known as bhaunri in Gotipua. The next line says "Utthachi baitha chauka chira" and the dancers dance these typical Gotipua terms by sitting down and jumping up in chauka (utha), sitting in chauka (baitha), chauka, and chira (split), and then perform a few basic steps. It was then that I realised that this song was using the traditional couplets used earlier in the training of Gotipua when it was purely orally transmitted. It finally dawned on me that this was no ordinary bandha composition…

Figure 9: The Aradhana Dance Academy in a tableau formation

The district of Puri has quite a number of Gotipua schools and *gurukuls*, many of which are based out of the guru's homes or near them. Even then, most of the proscenium performances take place in the city of Bhubaneswar as part of dance festivals and such events. That said, the three Gotipua schools which function out of Bhubaneswar itself are considered to be among the best in the league today. This may be attributed to the professionalism of the performances or the good networking of the gurus, as none of them are very old or traditional. Nonetheless, in terms of innovation, popularity and synchronicity, the Orissa Dance Academy, the Nakshyatra Gotipua Gurukul and the Aradhana Dance Academy are some of the most sought after groups in the Odisha festival circuit. The most recent *gurukul* of the three, Aradhana Dance Academy is run by one of the youngest Gurus, Guru Chitrasen Swain, and like the

other two in the city, trains students in both Odissi and Gotipua. Swain himself is trained in both and professes that he teaches Gotipua as it is his duty to continue the fading rich heritage. He is traditional in his outlook but also modern in his approach in that he prefers Gotipua performances to be short and condensed, as it gives enough time to display the art that the dance has to offer, without asking for too much energy from the dancer, needed for longer, four to five hour performances (2017)

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I got the opportunity to speak to Swain before his troupe's performance at the Outreach Cultural Programme, organised by Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan and Infosys Foundation, Bhubaneswar, meant to make the audience (mainly students of Business Administration) aware of the rich traditional arts heritage of the state and the country. As I spoke to Swain while the boys prepared to go on stage, I saw that the boys hardly took an hour to prepare for the show and seemed to be thorough professionals, trained to do this from a tender age. The eldest got ready sooner than the younger ones and then helped them out. There was also a make-up man helping them with the eye make-up – an ex-student of the *gurukul*, now pursuing a Diploma in Dance at the Utkal Sangit Mahavidyalaya, Bhubaneswar. Swain too, helped with the hair and make-up, mainly putting finishing touches whenever an extra hand was needed, but he was mostly free to overlook other matters like how the music is to be played, whether the organisers had the names correct for filling the participation certificates, whether the light-man had arrived and so on. As Mohanty Hejmadi too noticed when she met the Gotipua dancers from Nakshyatra Gotipua Gurukul, the boys were really smart, unlike the "humble and demure gotipuas" of the past, indicating that the tradition has indeed caught up with the times (2019: 29).

While talking about the changing form of Gotipua, Swain said that although he did think that change is good, especially if it is evolving with the times, he also believed that it needs to be gradual in order to become acceptable. He was glad that I was there to witness that programme because he was presenting a composition that was new but also traditional. The good thing about the programme was that he was given a good slot of forty minutes to an hour which was enough for him to showcase the entire repertoire without overworking his young students. As he kept repeating, the Gotipua tradition has always been very harsh on the kids performing it and he would be the happiest if it gets culled due to child labour regulations. But as it is a

heritage that is ancient and he is a bearer of the tradition, he also took it as his responsibility to promote it. Therefore, in his capacity, he tries to maximise the labour of the kids by minimising the time and effort they need to put into the training –by having sparse practice sessions during school-days and having workshop-like sessions in the summer vacations– without compromising with the tradition –by ascribing to shorter proscenium performance packed with more traditional elements.

The evening's repertoire began with the bandana, paying obeisance to the gods and gurus along with some basic *bandha* postures. It was hugely admired by the audience who seemed to be appreciative and looking forward to more. The bandana was followed by a popular abhinaya called "*Dekha go…*" which describes the beauty of the couple Krishna and Radha. Needless to say, the dance had elements of *bandha* along with the descriptive choreography. They then performed another abhinaya "*Aame Odia*". As described above, the choreography is more masculine in its exaggerated gaits and stances and utilises a lot of *bandha* movements rather than tableaus, unlike the previous compositions which showcased more tableaus. After the abhinayas, the dancers presented the bandha nrutya which was choreographed on the conventional song "*taam thei*", showcasing more thoroughly the virtuosity of the boys in *bandha*, through the various postures and tableaus.

The most interesting and exciting part of the bandha nrutya recital was the inclusion of certain shlokas which detailed the various elements of the Gotipua tradition, similar to the sabdaswarapata recital that is now lost in Gotipua. As described in the first chapter, sabda or sabdaswarapata is a part of Odhra-Magadhi that was used for the valorisation of gods, and exists today as a complete form in a specific area of Sambalpur. Although performed with reference to gods, the literal meaning of the word 'sabda' is 'word' and stands for the descriptions which are given in the shloka while they are being enacted. In Swain's choreography, he uses sabda not to describe the gods but the tradition. By using couplets used in the erstwhile training system[77], the choreography displays the elements as they are recited. Fused into bandha-nrutya, the attempt was a commendable effort to bring more traditional elements into the popular proscenium piece of bandha nrutya, though in a new avatar.

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[77] This is described in detail in the next chapter while talking about the earlier, oral system of training.

In her interaction with me, Mohanty Hejmadi appreciated the effort of this intervention but also pointed out that "it is more of acrobatics due to the clientele" (2017). Nonetheless, trying to find a fine balance between the modern and traditional, the inclusion of sabda into Gotipua may even chart newer paths for a dance that is trying to break away from its likeness to Odissi.

On one hand where the inclusion of sabda elements in bandha nrutya was spectacular to watch, on the other hand, the performance was marred by the fact that stage was much too small for a boisterous performance like Gotipua, noticeably so in its height. Like all the proscenium Gotipua recitals, the troupe made many tableaus representing Krishna on the chariot or on a pedestal and similar tiered formations. Unfortunately for the troupe, the stage which was provided for this performance was meant more for skits, conferences, presentations and such functions, meaning the stage was not tall enough. Due to this unexpected issue of space, every time the tableau reached a height beyond two figures, the upper part of the frame would get completely cut off. Sadly, the boys were neither mature nor impromptu enough to deal with this kind of a fiasco and they continued to dance in spite of this glitch. But this meant that many of the tableaus lost their meaning and their charm, including the final one where the highest figure sways a big Indian flag, amidst the solemn tune of '*Vande Mataram'*. Hence, although the bandha-nrutya evoked many a great emotions and responses, the experience unfortunately was bitter-sweet for both the troupe and the audience.

b) Orissa Dance Academy at TEDxXIMB[78]- 2015

The light comes on as the music starts. With the soothing crescendo of the flute and the tihai[79] of the pakhawaj, a row of dancers enter the stage with their hand folded. As the lights brighten to illuminate the entire stage, eight dancers in red blouses and red dhotis appear standing one after the other on the stage. The dancers are quite young, and have beautiful makeup with white ornamental designs on their

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[78] TED stands for 'Technology, Entertainment and Design', a non-profit organisation that helps spread innovative ideas and XIMB stands for Xavier Institute of Management Bhubaneswar. Retrieved from TEDx Talks YouTube page- https://youtu.be/k2XTmY9MDL0

[79] *Tihai* is the term used to denote the repetition of an instrument thrice, generally signalling the end of the song or line.

faces, and beaded jewellery at their waist, wrists, arms, necks and hairlines. Unlike most other Gotipua performers, they have their midriffs uncovered, looking more like the dancers seen on the walls of Konark. On cue, they split progressively and lift their folded arms up before bending to alternate sides to create a beautiful pattern like leaves on a stem. Bringing their waists back to centre, they then open up their arms one after the other to appear like a blossoming flower. As the flute melody comes to an end, the dancers stand up straight again and with the song- taam thei ta kadataka ta hom ta hata ta- start dispersing to cover the entire stage.

Sitting in chauka and stamping their feet one after the other, the dancers use their chins and eyes to navigate the audience's gaze to their hands. With measured steps, the little dancers effortlessly glide around the stage. Within two minutes of the performance, the dancers split in groups of three, two, and three, and create the first bandha frame. Two dancers on two sides in the front, and one at the back, bend backwards to execute lahunias, while three dancers climb on top of them respectively. With their feet in chauka, the topmost dancers fold their hands and lift them above their heads, with smiles on their faces. After a few seconds of holding their poses, the three dancers jump down while the other five come back to upright positions and continue dancing a refrain step at the same place with their hands adorning their chins. Turning their back to the audiences, they lift their hands in anjalihasta[80] and bend backwards to show their smiling faces upside down. In a way, they resembled the letter 'A' with their feet as the base, hands as the tip and faces in the middle. Again after keeping the pose for a few seconds, they stand up and rearrange themselves using the same refrain pose done earlier, placing four dancers in the middle and two couples to each side. Suddenly, as if without any premeditation, the four dancers execute synchronized handsprings, two to the front and then two to the back. They then proceeded to execute four more handsprings at a faster pace to the front with equal ease. Alternating between dance and acrobatics, they use their supple bodies to create different designs and patterns on stage.

The performance described above is of the Orissa Dance Academy, Bhubaneswar, at the Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar. The Orissa

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[80] Folded hands which denote reverence or a welcome, generally used to greet in India.

Dance Academy was established in 1975 and is known primarily for their training of Odissi. It is attributed to organising many dance festivals, including the Dhauli-Kalinga Mahotsav. The festival site at the foot of the Dhauli hills with the beautiful Stupa in its background also serves as a residential Gotipua school. Owing to recent economic constraints though, the Dhauli *gurukul* now stays active only during the vacations. During the rest of the year, the ten to twelve odd residential Gotipua students shift to Bhubaneswar to stay and train at the Bhubaneswar school. This not only provides better exposure and education to the students but also gives them the opportunity to learn Odissi with the students who visit the school for evening classes. This is why the students of the Orissa Dance Academy have a style that is closer to Odissi in that their *chaukas* and *tribhangis* are more pronounced. We shall delve into the difference in styles a little later in this chapter. First, let us discuss the performance that has been described above.

As is usual in a contemporary proscenium performance, the troupe performed a fifteen-minute long bandha-nrutya, displaying their acrobatic skill and vigour, but in certain ways, the performance was also slightly different from usual Gotipua performances. First of all, the dancers look different from the usual gotipuas as their costume consists of only the *kanchula* (lit. blouse) and dhoti, without any *odhni* (lit. stole) on their midriffs, as is usually seen. This style of wearing the costume is similar to the earliest Odissi costumes wherein the *odhni* would be of muslin and almost sheer. In Gotipua though, this style of using sheer *odhni* is rare but not uncommon, although the complete absence of it, is[81]. Secondly, the dancers were all very young, perhaps less than eleven or twelve years old which is uncommon, especially in contemporary performances. The lack of older bodies was a refreshing change but it did alter the choreography of the dance. As there were no taller bodies, the few tableau formations were lower, up to a maximum of two tiers, and not as grand as is usually seen. Also, most of the bandha-nrutya was composed of bandha postures and movements rather than tableaus which, although more traditional, was rather a disadvantage in this situation. As the stage was higher than the audience seating and the dancers were short, the individual bandhas like *sagori* or *lahunia* were not very visible from the audience. The postures, hence, did not receive much applause. The

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[81] For detailed notes on the costume and make-up of a gotipua dancer, see Mohanty Hejmadi (2019).

performance ended with a signature frame of the Orissa Dance Academy wherein the dancers stood in a diagonal line, all facing on corner, and assuming different bandha stances as the music faded away.

Having seen a number of proscenium performances, this performance of the Orissa Dance Academy was unique in the use of only younger bodies. In contemporary performances, it is very rare to see proscenium performances that do not use older bodies. Most *gurukuls* include a couple of older boys to provide height and strength to the tableau formations. They provide a useful base on which younger boys can climb in order to not only make the tableau grand but also more visible. Mallia sees this as a sign of Gotipua's downfall as "when a masculine figure enters and does the dance, it does not look good" (2013), but such strategies help highlight Gotipua's new identity as an acrobatic dance form. The new form that Gotipua has taken today, the tradition no longer serves to be a proponent of Bhakti but rather of childness[82] which identifies with the virtuosic qualities of synchronicity, discipline, agility and flexibility. For this purpose, the multiple bodies of Gotipua coming together and showcasing tableaus formations become more important than the individual body of a dancer performing *bachika abhinaya*. We will see further how this quality is highlighted even more as the time given becomes lesser, viz. in entertainment shows on television.

Two Minutes of Fame: Gotipua on T.V.

In the last decade or so, many Indians have seen Gotipua, irrespective of whether or not they known of its name. This is mainly due to a boom in dance shows on Indian television. These dance shows which earlier were fewer and promoted Bollywood dance styles, have increasingly started patronizing acrobatic performances under the garb of calling them 'contemporary' performances. Since the inception of a series called *Dance India Dance* (DID) on Zee TV in 2009[83], the Indian audience has been receiving a taste of performance styles from all over the world, often fused with other (generally Indian) dance styles. Gotipua first appeared on these dance-based

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[82] I discuss this term in detail in the last chapter

[83] Although there were a couple of other dance shows that realised during this time, they were more celebrity based whereas DID had "ordinary" people who dreamt of becoming star dancers. The only other such dance show to become popular was Boogie Woogie which premiered in 1996.

reality shows in December 2009, during an audition round for Season 2 of DID. The performance lasted for about four minutes and used the typical bandha music of '*taam thei*'. Although they did not get selected, they received much appreciation from the judges as it was a unique style which was like Odissi but cross-dressed.

After DID, there was a rise in the popularity of similar dance shows and competitions which swept the country at the start of the new millennium, both on mainstream and regional television. Gotipua saw some recognition on mainstream television through appearances on almost all the popular reality-based national entertainment shows namely *Entertainment ke Liye Kuchh Bhi Karega*, *Hindustan ke Hunarbaaz*, *Dance India Dance, India's Got Talent* and so on, between the years 2009 and 2017. The increase in the demand for acrobatic choreography in the Indian and global contemporary dance space gave a fair amount of credit to Gotipua for its bandha compositions. Unlike proscenium or festive performances, appearances on TV shows are shorter and limited in terms of the content that they can showcase. So in preparation for their 'two minutes of fame', Gotipua schools had to sometimes alter their choreography to suit the presentation as per the needs of the audience and in this case, judges.

a) Nakshyatra Gotipua Gurukul at Hundustan ke Hunarbaaz

With the resounding sound of the conch-shell, the camera shows just 11 pairs of legs in red and yellow dhotis. The upper half of their bodies which were hidden, slowly straighten up from behind, as the music changes to the thekas[84] of the pakhawaj. A soft male voice sings "bandhanrutya mahaghoram natikashta pradayini" as the dancers crouch down on all fours, put their weights on their forearms, and lift their legs up in the air. They then slowly pull apart their legs before bringing them together and placing them firmly in front of their faces in order to roll up from their waist and stand facing the audience. As the song "tam thei" starts, the dancers disperse for a round in chaari before displaying a welcome tableau, with the front dancer in a full split with anjalihasta, the middle tier with four dancers positioned on hidden bodies with open arms and the highest dancer on the third tier

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[84] Hard slaps of the drum, in this case, the pakhawaj.

with hands above the head in anjalihasta. The tableau stays hardly for two seconds before it breaks. The dancers move around again to re-assemble in a line across the stage. They assume the bandha pose of mayura[85] and play the beat of the rhythm with their ankles bells, receiving cheers from the audience awed by their balance and rhythm.

Regrouping again, they form another tableau resembling the Kaliya-mardana episode of Krishna. Keeping the frame for a few seconds, the dancers again arrange themselves with soft chaaris as four dancers form a tableau towards the back of the stage while the rest of the dancers form a line before suddenly breaking out into synchronised front handsprings. The audience is audibly more surprised and excited by this swift display of vigour. The dancers then come together to form a couple more tableaus before finishing the dance with an overlapping spread of progressive splits across the stage with their hands folded above their heads, resembling a fan, and profiling their faces to one side in one swift movement with the final beat.

The performance described above was performed by the Nakshyatra Gotipua Gurukul, Bhubaneswar on a television show called *Hindustan ke Hunarbaaz* (lit. India's Talented People) aired in 2017[86]. It should be noted that it was also Nakshyatra Gurukul that had performed in 2009 on DID Season 2, but the two performances were drastically different. In the earlier performance, the choreography focussed more on *bandha* movements rather than tableaus whereas they were abundant in the later performance. Guru Bijay Kumar Sahoo seems to have really discovered the "wow factor" of grand tableaus on such shows and maximised its potential. Unlike proscenium performances, this presentation of bandha nrutya was devoid of typical steppings of movements that fill up the space between two bandha movements or tableaus. Instead, the vigorous elements were consciously highlighted vis-à-vis simple *chaari* or walking to showcase the dance as a form that is filled with acrobatics. On one hand, it could be a tool to attract and awe a newer, wider audience; while on the other hand, it could be to posit the style as a specifically acrobatic but cross-dressed dance form.

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[85] With their forearms on the ground, the dancers lift their legs up in the air, slightly curved towards their heads. This is called *mayura* or peacock.

[86] Retrieved from https://www.hotstar.com/tv/hindustan-ke-hunarbaaz/s-1042/outstanding-dancers-and-magician/1000173283

The performances of Nakshyatra Gurukul or rather the choreographic style of its guru, has a more masculine touch in that they use heavy footed steppings during bandha-nrutya, almost like stomping, and have more sudden, sharp movements. This is not to say that there is no grace, because in abhinayas or in the intermediate dance pieces between bandha movements, there is some amount of *lasya* executed by his dancers. As one of the judges of the show, Sonali Bendre, commented "as they are boys, they have amazing strength, especially in their shoulders; so perhaps girls may not be able to do the acts they do; but at the same time, they are so graceful that we do not really miss their (girls') presence". Sahoo is also credited to have tried to introduce a more masculine costume for the gotipua boys by doing away with the *kanchula* and wearing the *odhni* in a different way and changing the make-up of his dancers. But, his attempt met with criticisms from most of the senior gurus as they found it to be sacrilegious (Sahoo, B. K. 2013, Mallia 2013).

As I have mentioned before, Sahoo's gurukul is more popular on proscenium shows, as it is on television programmes. This can be attributed to his distinct choreographic style, especially while creating tableaus. Sahoo tries to keep the movements and formations in bandha nrutya very geometric, making them pleasing to the eye. He does use older dancers in his troupe to provide a base for tableaus and also uses them strategically while creating intermediary lines or patterns, putting them in the foreground or background to create a more striking visual plane. He also ensures that the movement are swift and, many a times, sudden, providing an element of surprise to the audiences. For example, when other troupes utilise an entire line of the song to position, bend, lift and do other movements to transition from chaos to a recognisable tableau, Sahoo partitions the line, to first position, then prepare for lift or splits and, in a fraction of a second, execute all the movements together to create the tableaus in a flash. This makes the performance crisper and less chaotic, making his style popular among the viewers and organisers. This point will be better understood when compared to the next example of a television performance by a troupe that is from Dimirisena and not Bhubaneswar.

b) Chandrashekhar Gotipua Kalasansad at Entertainment ke Liye Kuch Bhi Karega

With the slight sound of a gong, the timer is started. The camera pans from the audience to the stage as the timer ticks- 60, 59, 58, 57... The intro of a popular Hindi film song- Radha kaise na jale- starts playing as the dancers enter the stage in a two files. They position themselves in a neat file and bring up their hands one after the other to greet the audience in anjalihasta. As the singer starts with the lyrics, all the dancers spread out in two groups while the central dancer assumes the role of Krishna, holding the flute in his hands and prancing in between them. The other dancers on both sides of Krishna dance amongst themselves in a circle for a few seconds before coming together in a line and posing in tribhangis as the music comes to a rhythmic pause. As the vocals become upbeat, there is suddenly a flurry of movement where the dancers reorganise their positions on the stage. They come together to form a tableau with Krishna in in front of what seems to be a decorative archway. The gong sounds again but the judges and the audience still seem to be enjoying the dance, indicating that on the timer that it is a "full on" performance.

The dancers break their formation and regroup again to form a bandha formation with progressive splits in a way that the audience sees only the heads and arms of the dancers behind the foremost one who is sitting down as Krishna with hands showing his flute. They spread their arms out gracefully and sway to the beat, making the audience and the judges sway with them. After a few seconds of holding the pose, the dancers get up to do a tribhangi step while moving around the stage. They create another beautiful Krishna tableau before finishing their presentation with the final tableau which shows Krishna atop a mountain and amidst trees, holding the sudarshan chakra[87] on his forefinger. The last tableau is a hit and the audience applause continues as the hosts of the show come on stage cheering- full on, full on! As the claps subdue, one of the judges Farah Khan, says "you were amazing! But before anything else, answer me this – are you all boys or girls?"

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[87] *Sudarshan Chakra* is Vishnu's weapon, a rotating disc with serrated edges; lit. 'wheel of auspicious vision'.

The Chandrashekar Gotipua Kalasansad, Dimirisena, is one of the oldest *gurukuls*, following the legacy of Chandrashekhar Pattanayak. As a school that is still attached to the temple services, the Chandrashekar Gotipua Kalasansad is more traditional in its approach to the dance. The performance described above is their performance at an entertainment show called *Entertainment ke Liye Kuch bhi Karega*[88]. The format of this show is such that all the performances are timed by a stopwatch. The timer is indicative of whether the performance is being enjoyed by the judges and audience, wherein the performer has to perform uninterrupted for at least 60 seconds for it to become a "full on" performance which earns them a cash prize. Both the audience and the judges can choose to stop a performance if they find it uninteresting.

This performance of Chandrashekar Gotipua Kalasansad took place in 2011 and is one of the rare occurrences where a gurukul not based in Bhubaneswar got the opportunity to perform on television. We see that the performance was done on a Bollywood song- *Radha Kaise na Jale*, and not on the traditional bandha nrutya music. This is a common practice when performing on a wider, more popular platform, and as Barik (2013) also mentions, was not uncommon in the earlier days of Gotipua either. In fact, it was a deliberate choice to take a song that alluded to Krishna and Radha in order to facilitate the typical bandha tableaus while also keeping it familiar to the audiences nationwide. In the song, Radha starts complaining that Krishna meets other *gopis* in *madhuban* (the forest), and thereby makes her jealous. The choreography though, had no relation to the lyrics except for the fact that there was Krishna and the other dancers, presumably *gopis*, dancing with him. Generally, the fact that the lyrics were not enacted might have been incompetent for a Gotipua composition, but for such shows, it is completely normal to use a song as a base while performing stunts or acrobatics in a sequence. At the same time, the choreography was traditional in that it followed a typical bandha nrutya pattern of showcasing *bandha* movements and common steps before proceeding to the tableaus. At a format where the troupe only gets about two minutes to perform, this resulted in the composition being too slow at the start and then chaotic towards the end. Nonetheless, the performance was seemingly well-received by the audience, anchors and the judges

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[88] Retrieved from Youtube- https://youtu.be/nZ6VqWqOyaY

alike. The fact that they were not interrupted also meant that it was a successful, or rather a "full on" performance.

In television shows such as these, even though they are called 'reality shows', it is no secret that they are completely scripted and not spontaneous at all. For a traditional and lesser-known performance like Gotipua, these shows become useful to promote an art that is otherwise restricted to the local audience. In both the shows mentioned above, and in other such shows in general, we see that not only are the acrobatic elements celebrated, the tradition is also perceived and popularised with the reverence of a heritage art. As Moharana comments, "bandha nrutya shows *leela* (lit. god's play) in a short time to awe audience enough to forget everything" (2013). The scripts focus heavily on the gender-bending to showcase this as a unique traditional form. In fact, more often than not a judge even appeals to the masses to promote and preserve such traditional performances. While other acrobatic performances in modern and gender-affirming costumes are applauded for their flexibility and innovation, Gotipua is generally limited to compliments about the cross-dressing and the antiquity of the tradition. For example, the performance of Nakshyatra Gurukul in *Hunarbaaz* was followed by a minute-long mini-documentary on the tradition, how it came about and what the economic background of the students was. A judge, Terence Lewis, also elaborated on the age-restriction of the dancers. Here, it is interesting to note the image of Gotipua that was being projected – a traditional, gender-bending, acrobatic dance form, where the performers are poor and hence get not only get an opportunity to get education but also learn an art form. In fact, Lewis also commended the *guru-shishya parampara* (lit. student-disciple tradition) as it teaches a philosophy and a way of living to the younger generation. Ironic as it might be, the present of the tradition is often overlooked to glorify its past while the tradition itself is trying to evolve to suit contemporary audiences.

Spaces and Structures

The study of the dance in the varied spaces wherein it exists gives a thorough understanding of not just the different possibilities of its choreography, but also of the differences that have come about in the style. As we see in the first examples of the

archived videos, the dance was a solo or duet form that highlighted the acting and singing abilities of the dancer while retaining the philosophy of Vaishnavism. The performances also displayed the time and effort that went into individuated training of the gotipuas. As opposed to that, the contemporary performances display more the agility of the child-body and its ability to perform in a group effortlessly. This aspect of Gotipua will be discussed at length in the next chapter but here, using the examples detailed above, I would like to compare the differences in style and choreographies of the tradition from different times and spaces.

With the transformation of the Gotipua gurukul into a commercial residential school with many students, the training module of the tradition has also changed. Emotive training and individuated attention is no longer a primary concern. What has become more important is building the strength and flexibility of the body while also teaching a sense of discipline and synchronicity. The multiple bodies of the gotipuas represent the collective body of Gotipua which moves together and make sense only as a whole, especially in the making of tableaus. As is seen in most proscenium performances, the main part of the Gotipua repertoire is the bandha-nrutya and the bodies are accordingly trained to exemplify it. When it comes to much shorter programmes, like those on television, the repertoire condenses even further to highlight more and more elements of bandha nrutya- the postures, the movements and the tableaus. In the case of more successful teachers like B. K. Sahoo and Chitrasen Swain, the tableaus become the major attractions while they also pay attention to the neatness of the formations. This is a stylistic choice that the Bhubaneswar gurus chose to make while showcasing the tradition. For most other gurus, the tableaus are as important as the bandha movements and postures, set in attractive formations and performed with synchronicity.

The recent highlighting of bandha in the Gotipua repertoire has resulted in providing an important space to structures, or what is colloquially called "settings" in Gotipua. These are new additions in terms of choreographic elements used to position the dancers in specific formations to maximise the visibility of the bandha postures and movements. They are patterns and structures made with the body, similar to the tableaus, but showcasing *bandha* movements. They do not hold any representational value, but add an aesthetic element to the choreography. These are solely dependent

on the preferences of the gurus and since they have emerged in the last few decades, they do not follow any traditional rules or directives. Generally, in a typical bandha-nrutya, the dancers proceed from showing individual bandha stances to geometric patterns using bandha movements or postures to tableau formations. Each gurukul or guru has a specific style in which he chooses to end the bandha-nrutya. While most gurus use the mokhya to end the dance performances, some like Chitrasen Swain and B. K. Sahoo use the Indian flag for a flavour of patriotism while others like Laxmidhar Swain display a final frame of varied bandha postures used by the tradition.

Although broadly, most of the *gurukuls* follow a similar order and pattern in choreographing bandha-nrutya, there are some differences that are visible in certain characteristics of their respective presentations. I broadly divide these characteristic into three schools of styles- the Dimirisena School, the Raghurajpur School and the Bhubaneswar School. I have mentioned earlier in this dissertation that Dimirisena was the original keeper of the tradition that we see today as it had disappeared from other villages, and it was only later that more schools opened in different places in Puri district like Raghurajpur, Konark, Ghatakudi, Darada, and most recently, Bhubaneswar. Nonetheless, with the development of the form under the different gurus and their varied influences from Odissi, there are certain specific features that characterise one School from another.

The Dimirisena School, examples of which would be the Chadrashekhar Gotipua Kalasansad, the Konark Natya Mandap and the Laxmi Priya Gotipua Nrutya Kendra, are characterised by their effort to retain some elements of the traditional style. Not only do they try to retain the more traditional system of training, but they try to present the essence of the erstwhile form in their performances. For instance, the Konark Natya Mandap still treats the students as belonging to a matha whereas the Chadrashekhar Gotipua Kalasansad prides itself on being devoted to the temple and partaking in its duties from time to time. As far as choreographic elements are concerned, the Dimirisena School is characterised by an unhurried style of dancing where there are no sudden movements, instant tableaus or rushed repositioning. More often than not, the Dimirisena School sticks to the traditional repertoire and uses more bandha postures and movements rather than grand tableaus in bandha-nrutya.

The Raghurajpur School which is spearheaded by the Dasabhuja Gotipua Odissi Nrutya Parishad, and also includes the Abhinna Sundar Gotipua Nrutya Parishad, is more famous in circles outside of India due to the Tourism Departments of Odisha and India promoting them. Raghurajpur itself has been recognised as a 'heritage village' by INTACH[89] (Indian National Trust for Art and Heritage) due to its rich culture of *patachitra* paintings along with Gotipua dance. The Raghurajpur School believes itself to be the original proponents of Gotipua and adheres to the belief that Gotipua is a strictly Vaishnavite dance form (Moharana, Pradhan 2013). In showcasing the dance, the Raghurajpur School is characterised by the excessive use of chin movements. Most often the students are also not very old and once over the age of fifteen, they leave Gotipua and start teaching younger students. The choreography of bandha-nrutya is similar to the Dimirisena School, although the Raghurajpur School does try to include more traditional abhinayas in their performances.

The Bhubaneswar School is the most recent and commercialised of the three. Gotipua was never typical to Bhubaneswar but with the growing popularity of the dance and more dance festivals being organised, it is a profitable location for a modern Gotipua school. As I have mentioned before, there are only three schools in Bhubaneswar- the Orissa Dance Academy, the Nakshyatra Gotipua Gurukul and the Aradhana Dance Academy. As these *gurukuls* are based in the city, the training of the gotipuas often takes place alongside Odissi and their gurus or senior students are heavily influenced by Odissi. The bodies of the students therefore, are akin to Odissi dancers where the postures can be distinctively identified as proper *chauka*, *tribhangi* or *abhanga* during the dance. Although these postures exist in Gotipua, they are not as enforced as they are in Odissi and oftentimes are not vividly distinct while dancing. But the Bhubaneswar School ensures that the bodies train at par with Odissi in presenting a form that is more polished than the cruder erstwhile form.

As the Bhubaneswar schools deal more, if not solely, with the proscenium audiences, they understand very well the elements which suit contemporary needs. As

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[89] INTACH is an NGO dedicated to conserving cultural heritage, which has been awarded a special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Coucil.

a choreographic style, the bandha-nrutya of the Bhubaneswar school alternatively uses bandha movements and tableaus to project the tradition, concentrating more on creating grand tableaus. At the same time, the performances of the Bhubaneswar School are more boisterous and tend to have sudden movements in order to awe the audience. The movements and tableaus are more synchronous and greatly emphasize the idea of Gotipua as a collective Body. The idea of the gotipua bodies as a Body becomes pertinent as the performers are not seen as individual dancers, especially in the new form that Gotipua is taking. Earlier, the body of the dancer was taken to be complete in itself, having the additional quality of being a singer. But, as we see in contemporary performances, the body is reduced to an entity which helps create the Body of Gotipua. The virtuosic element of the child-body in being flexible does not get identified with the individual dancer as much as it is used to project an image of Gotipua, by the gurus.

The transition of the identity of the bodies is seen clearly when we compare the performances of the yesteryears with those of today. Even in the performances of today, there are clear differences in the way the bodies are projected during Jhulan Jatra, proscenium performances and television shows. Although the format of the Jhulan Jatra asks for the dancers to be virtuosic like that of the erstwhile gotipua, the current training module does not prepare them for the same, thereby making it difficult for them to be identified as *goti-pua*. As Mohanty Hejmadi comments while talking about the Gotipua Dance Festival she attended in 2012, "I saw the whole Festival but I did not see a single Gotipua, as I didn't see a single person singing and dancing" (2017). As we see in the Dimirisena School, traditional bandha-nrutya choreographies give some merit to the individual bodies as there are displays of bandha postures and movements, albeit in synchronisation. The increase of tableaus, like in the Bhubaneswar School, does not give the scope to even see the individual bodies in the group formation. In addition to this, the importance given to the structural formations have also allowed for bigger, more mature bodies to enter the stage along with the group. As I have mentioned, these bigger and taller bodies act like bases for the tableaus, providing support to the group. But, at the same time, not only do they break the tradition of keeping only pre-pubescent boys in the dance, they also create a visual discord in terms of height. It goes without saying that puberty

causes their bodies to become lankier, thereby distinguishing them from the shorter and younger bodies.

Another change that is often lamented is the digitisation of Gotipua's music. Gotipuas earlier would accompany their dancers with their own singing, giving the audience a sound which was that of a child and not of an adult. The loss of *bachika abhinaya* has resulted in the complete annihilation of the child-voice in Gotipua, replacing it with a trained, often polished, adult voice because of which "the songs do not sound as rough or childish anymore" (Mallia 2013). This again results in the loss of the identity of the dancers as children, and instead detaches the dancers from the singer. It projects the male singer as the voice of the Gotipua Body. Not only that, many gurus see the coming of digital recordings as a break from tradition too, as they do not create the same musical atmosphere that live music does (Mohapatra, G. 2017, Barik 2013). Nonetheless, digitisation has proved to be a boon in the contemporary scenario where the *gurukuls* are unable to sustain themselves economically as not having live music cuts down costs (Sahoo, B. K. 2013). In any case, the current tradition of Gotipua highlights the virtuosity of the body of the dancer more than any other element of the tradition.

The increasing popularity of bandha nrutya in contemporary performances is not only due to a certain performance aesthetic demanded by the audience, but also due to the desire of the gurus to project the tradition in a certain way. This desire is fuelled by the need for Gotipua to survive vis-à-vis the popularity of Odissi and in that, it becomes antithetical in many ways to the latter, and therefore, to its own previous form. While Odissi is mainly a solo dance form, especially in its mode of teaching, Gotipua necessarily trains the body as part of a whole. As we see in the examples of recent Jhulan performances, the boys can no longer perform as solo dancers and the required finesse in terms of abhinaya only comes as they age. Secondly, the body is trained to be flexible and physically virtuosic and moreover, to be synchronous and disciplined. In the current Gotipua presentation, if the bodies are out of synchronization with the rest of the troupe, it greatly degrades the quality of the performance and is seen as incompetent. The gurus thus, ensure with a heavy hand in that they maintain discipline with regards to the wholesome Body of the tradition. Even in the presentation of Gotipua, the Body of the dance is especially highlighted as

compared to the individual bodies of the gotipua, in order to establish the uniqueness of this style. In this following chapter, I will discuss the ways in which the tradition trains the bodies in Gotipua and how the dance, or rather the tradition, is choreographed.

Chapter 4

Choreographing the Gotipua Body

My grandchild is learning Gotipua now. He wants to become a singer or a dancer or a choreographer. I only teach him. What is the point in going to these big places to learn? They'll teach violin, harmonium, ragas, talas, maanas, jaatis- but do they, really? Do they themselves know all this? Not at all! They only do circus nowadays- only bandha nrutya. While doing abhinayas, the kids do one thing while the song says something else. They're supposed to emote- 'Look! They are coming!' but instead they hold their hands out showing a flute and standing like Krishna, or sometimes as Radha. There are so many ways to show Radha… it is all possible through the mudras. When you have to show an arrow being pulled, you don't just show the arrow. You take the arrow, aim it, pull it on the bow and then launch it. There is a difference in holding the arrow and launching it. Tell me, am I wrong in saying this? But nowadays nobody understands these things. They will call me, get their work done, but they won't understand what I am trying to say. They do not know anything anymore. They just take money and become "guruji" but they don't know anything. Anyone can become a guru now.

I have taught at so many places, so many students, but I used to teach through the medium of mudras. In my opinion, only three people have done thorough work in Gotipua- Lingaraj Barik (my classmate), Maguni Jena and me… no one else was even from Gotipua. People got awarded with Padma Shri and what not, but they were not even from the field. We stayed in Gotipua. My guru Gopinath Das was from Konark…from the outskirts of Konark. He also taught me through mudras. Do you know how many ways there are to show a lotus? Ambuja, Padma, Kamala, Kamaley, Mukhi Kamala, Maala- see how many ways you can show it with mudras. Gotipua had this treasure. But can anyone do it now? They just took everything and made it "Classical". But we had the repository. In how many ways can you show an elephant? Haati, Kari, Kalara, Baarana, Saaranga, Gunjara- all are names of the elephant in Sanskrit. These were all written by the poets of yesteryears. We learnt

them all. My guru was a singer of Pala. He had a whole library in his head- there was no need for pen and paper.

- In conversation with Bhagirathi Mohapatra

Everyone adds a little modern touch to Gotipua now. It is not traditional anymore anywhere. Dimirisena still has the traditional practices, but they are dying. Raghurajpur schools are also dying. Although some elements are put in for the audience's benefit, but the audience is unpredictable. Between rough (rural) Gotipua and polished (urban) Gotipua, the audience sometimes prefers the former because it is different.

If you ask anyone, they will identify Gotipua with bandha nrutya because if we perform it outside on local songs, nobody will follow the language. That is why it becomes imperative to present bandha-nrutya as magnificently as we can. As far as the technique is concerned, we add quite a lot. We add almost 75% of the performance now, because earlier there were no techniques…

Abhinayas were called mudras. Students would be told to "display a mudra". If you ask a dancer of today to show a mudra, he will say "which one? Pataka, Ardhapataka, Tripataka?" But that is not what they meant earlier. 'Mudra' stood for abhinaya, because at that time there was no word exclusively signifying abhinaya; they were colloquially called 'mudra'. And there were hardly two to three mudras, not known by any name.

- In conversation with Bijay Kumar Sahoo

Gotipua, by virtue of being a tradition that has survived many centuries, has taken different forms to suit the needs of varied audiences. We do not have much available in terms of evidence to analyse this transformation over the many centuries, but it can be said with certainty that it has adapted its choreography and presentation to be a court dance[90], a festive, ritualistic dance and an entertaining proscenium performance. We saw in the last chapter the different spaces where Gotipua has been performed in the last few decades, and how the choreography of the performance changes with each space. Given the flexible nature of the dance, it becomes important

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[90] As per the reference in *Ain-i-Akbari* (Jarrett 1894). See Chapter 1 for detailed information

to detail the changes that it undergoes in order to study it thoroughly. This is especially important in order to analyse the body used by the performance and the politics behind the body in question, as we will in the forthcoming chapter. In this chapter, I will discuss the way in which Body of Gotipua as well as the bodies in gotipua are choreographed. Using example from the performances elaborated in the last chapter, this chapter will help chalk out the elements that play vital roles in the survival and propagation of the tradition. As we have seen, there are multiple stories in oral history that try to explain why cross-dressing became an integral part of the tradition. But along with the cross-dressing, there is also a peculiarity in the way that the body is used in that it promotes acrobatics as a part of traditional dance, which is quite unique only to certain traditional dance forms. I have tried to delineate the history of this acrobatic form through the available architectural and textual sources to understand its function as a choreographic element of the tradition at the beginning of this dissertation. In the contemporary style, the virtuosity of acrobatics is essential to the choreography and individual styles of the various schools.

As a tradition that gives utmost importance to physical well-being along with the propagation of a certain way of life, Gotipua follows an orthodox method of training. The gurukul mode of teaching ensures that the mind, along with the body, is disciplined to perpetuate not just the performance tradition but also the values attached to it. This mode has also helped in fostering the oral history from one generation to the next while shaping the distinct choreographic styles of the various schools, as we saw in the last chapter. The erstwhile mode of training, as we will see in this chapter, also inculcated a specific choreographic style that is absent from Gotipua today, mainly due to the training of many students at once and lack of time given to cultivate the style in the body. Also, the reconstruction of Odissi and the introduction of a specific Odissi module for training the body, as opposed to the oral or traditional model, have made a difference in how the body is disciplined ad sculpted to replicate Odissi more than what Gotipua was. Primarily, the loss of *bachika abhinaya* and the popularity of bandha-nrutya have been influential in altering the mode of training, the use of the body and the form of the dance.

Choreography: the parts of a performance

Susan Leigh Foster, in her essay "Choreographies and Choreographers" defines choreography as a "plan or orchestration of bodies in motion" (2009: 98). She also mentions that the term is currently used to denote "the act of arranging patterns of movement" (*ibid.*). These definitions help in understanding the use of the word in dance studies, and also denote the agency of the choreographer who wants to portray the dance or style in a certain way to the audience. Take the mating dance of the male birds, for example. Although different birds have different plumes which they display to woo their prospective mates, their biological intuition has a mould of choreography which tells them to dance in a certain way, while every bird has his own agency in making his moves, be it circular, linear, repetitive or innovative. Similarly in dances of humans too, generally there are a set of rules or choreographic moulds that one follows to showcase the peculiarity or tradition of the dance, but every choreographer will have a certain agency in how she uses the tools to create the composition that is to be displayed, whether rehearsed or impromptu.

Gotipua in this sense, like most traditional dance forms, has a unique language that passes down generations in terms of the face and hand gestures, basic steppings and movements. The choreography of the dance or how it is arranged to be presented to the audience though is of two kinds- traditional and modern. The traditional choreographies are largely fixed and are learnt by newer students from their masters who subsequently teach it to their students and so on. The original choreographers of these compositions are unknown and they are mostly abhinaya*s* or enactive choreographies set to the popular Bhakti poems of the medieval era. The newer choreographies are mostly seen in bandha nrutya compositions as it is a modern adage to the repertoire. The gurus choreograph these in their own style creating a distinctive identity which differs from school to school. Some gurus also like to tweak the traditional abhinaya pieces to suit their own aesthetic sense and distinct style by adding signature *bandha* movements or tableaus, but the basic compositions remain the same.

In her more elaborate work on choreography, *Reading Dancing*, Foster divides choreographic conventions into five broad categories, which are exclusive to Western concert dance tradition and especially to a contemporary perspective. I will try to use those conventions contextualised to the art form of Gotipua in light of the contemporary compositions, as I find these conventions quite useful in understanding choreography from a broader perspective. She divides them as

> 1) the **frame**- the way the dance sets itself apart as a unique event; 2) the mode of **representation**- the way the dance refers to the world; 3) the **style**- the way the dance achieves an individual identity in the world; 4) the **vocabulary**- the basic units or "moves" from which the dance is made; and 5) the **syntax**- the rules governing the selection and combination of moves. (Foster 1986: 59)

In elaborating, Foster explains that the frames of the art form entail the atmosphere that is built around the performance before the performance takes place. It starts with the announcement, the location/ site where it is going to take place, the nature of the programme, its duration, how it is begun and ended and lastly, the dancer's gaze. In Gotipua, the context of the performance is already presumed. Historically, the platform of the dance was the temple or matha courtyard or in front of the deity on the occasions that it was brought out, like we saw during Jhulan Jatra. The environment around the ensuing performance had a ritual significance, with the local audience aware of the place of the gotipuas in the temple-tradition. Even when the dance came to be performed on the streets and/or for entertainment, the atmosphere was largely devotional. This mainly has to do with the way the repertoire starts and ends, with invocations in the beginning and the end indicating the religious roots of the tradition. Even when talking of the "Classical" dances, we see that in spite of being performed (or even manufactured for) the stage, the invocation of God at the start and its historicity of temple dancing and such elements are used to evoke the traditional roots that it wants to identify with, as Ananya Chatterjea argues (2004: 152). The modern proscenium performances of Gotipua use these tropes of harkening back to the roots to evoke the erstwhile ritualistic nature of the dance even in places that do not identify with them, thereby creating a certain context for the performance.

The duration of the dance too, depends on where it is being performed and will thereby showcase different elements to different audiences. For example, in

today's time and age, it is more likely that one has seen proscenium performances of Gotipua and not the local one and hence will know of the tradition as an acrobatic form, identified with bandha nrutya. On the other hand, those who have only seen the local performances will see it as a dance in a historical context, and will probably refer to the boys as *sakhi-pilas* or *akhada-pilas*. For them, Gotipua has a certain history around the temple and an important role in upholding the religious tradition of the locality. The compositions presented at the two occasions are also drastically different and present the tradition to be different depending on the audience, thereby showcasing Gotipua as an acrobatic, cross-dressed form at one and a ritualistic, poetic form in the other, like the performance at Jhulan vis-à-vis one for television. Basanta Moharana describes the context by saying that "Bandha nrutya is an attraction and is in demand everywhere, irrespective of the audience… But, in order to attract the audience, the performance needs to be light as the audience mostly understands the dance rather than the songs…" (2013).

Lastly, Foster mentions the gaze of the performer or their "focal directives" (1986: 64) which ensure that the dance conveys who it is performed for, or why. For example, most of the Gotipua performances have the dancers directly look at the audience, thus making it a performance which seeks to evoke certain emotions, which Phelan identifies as seductive (1993: 165). In performances by solo or duet dancers, the boys were often trained to hold their smile while looking at the audience in order to please them and get *nazrana* or tips. But in some other compositions, the gaze is often upwards or into the distance, especially in devotional items thus indicating a more spiritual atmosphere, although this is rare. The gaze of the dancer also helps define the audience's role in the whole performance- as a spectator, a fellow devotee, a patron or an occasional onlooker. In contemporary Gotipua performances, the group in itself is trained to look straight and not specifically at the audience, as it helps highlight the synchronicity of the bodies rather than individual expressions. In traditional performances spaces though, like the Jhulan jatra performance mentioned in chapter 3, sometimes the older dancers do make eye contact with the audience, especially the patrons or *matha* heads, and look directly towards the idols in order to denote that the dance is being performed for their enjoyment.

The next convention Foster mentions is the 'mode of representation' in a dance performance. She delineates four kinds modes- *resemblance* "I am river", *imitation* "I am like the river", *replication* "I am riverness" and *reflection* "signifies movement, of the river or whatever else the viewer sees". (1986: 67) Her division of the modes are heavily dependent on the performances that she reviews viz. contemporary dance performances in the Western world. Thereby, in the context of Gotipua, and traditional or classical Indian dances at large, the dancer generally uses the modes of representation like that of a *narrator*, the *doer*, the *witness* or the *embodiment* of the event itself. Although similar in nature to the modes suggested by Foster, the representation of the event by a gotipua is often accompanied by the vocabulary and syntax of the tradition and hence impersonates via a fixed gestural language. For example, the categories of resemblance and imitation merge in what I call the *doing* of the event whereas a *narration* would be closest to what Foster addresses as "reflection". To elaborate, when the Gotipuas enact a scene from the *Rasleela* of Krishna, they can choose to narrate to the audience by way of indication, using hand gestures and chin and eye movements, that Krishna (*flute*) and the *gopis* (*mrigashirsha*[91]) are playing with each other (the hands intertwine). Alternatively, the gotipuas may enact or *become* the characters they are talking about, by two people taking the role of Radha and Krishna while the rest of them imitate *gopis*. In this, both the audience and the dancer are presumed to know the syntax of the dance and the context of the event. In this, the representation takes the audience to be part of the same tradition which the dance emerges from.

Sometimes, the dancer may assume the role of a passive *gopi* who, immersed in her devotion, is spellbound by Radha and Krishna's *leela* and is just a mute spectator and thereby witnesses the incident while the dancers assuming the roles of Radha and Krishna enact the episode. This is the position closest to the audience and herein, the dancer belongs to the same world as the audience they are showcasing to. This is a rare mode of representation not generally seen in the "Western concert dance tradition" that Foster studied. In terms of Gotipua though, this mode is not recent or unknown as even in the earlier days of it being a duet, one gotipua would often take a

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[91] The first three fingers are bent to be parallel to the ground, while the little finger is straight. The thumb sticks closely to the three bent fingers. This hand gesture is called *mrigashirsha* or the head of a deer and is used to denote a woman.

break to look at the other dancer and then join in when he deemed fit, in front of an audience that surrounded the dancers on an even plane and was also welcome to come into the performance space to gift them money from time to time. On the other hand, the gotipuas also engage in representing the occurrence by themselves becoming the event by *embodying* not just living characters but also non-living objects, similar to what Foster terms as "resemblance" but perhaps more imitative. For example, when describing Krishna advising Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra, the gotipuas may not just assume the role of the two persons involved but also *become* the chariots with its rolling wheels, thus embodying the event itself by impersonating as opposed to being a witness. In becoming the wheels, they not only resemble them but also bend their bodies in *bandha* posture becoming the wheels and move forward to almost re-create the scene.

Gotipua can have various modes of representation in order to establish the story or poem that is being enacted. Gotipua uses multiple modes in a single piece, multiple times in the entire repertoire. These multiple modes are useful, especially in contemporary Gotipua performances wherein the audience is often removed from the traditional context of the performance. Modes such as the witness and the embodiment of the event resonate more with the proscenium audience which see the performance from an 'outsider' perspective whereas another mode like the narrator would be more relatable to a person who understands the syntax of the performance as an 'insider'.

The next category of 'style' is slightly tricky in Gotipua's case. For Foster, she means to indicate the individual styles of the contemporary dancers she analyses in her book and hence, for her the dancer's personal style or how they represent the body or which parts they use and how makes a case for her study. But in the case of Gotipua, it is complex as the dancers may or may not have an individual style but the group's style is determined by the execution of the choreographies by the guru. The styles of Gotipua schools differ from each other, and depending on the influence of Odissi on their training, use the body to that effect. I have discussed in the previous chapter, the three main Schools of dance and how they have slightly differing styles. But bandha nrutya is where the individual gurus really have a free rein to compose and showcase their style as per their imagination, especially in the tableau formations.

To elaborate, as a stylistic marker, Nakshyatra Gotipua Gurukul uses lot of cartwheels and hand stands in bandha nrutya whereas Konark Natya Mandap uses more freeze-frames. Also the way that Sahoo (of Nakshyatra Gotipua Gurukul) showcases the body is highly masculine as compared to other schools. The Odisha Dance Academy is immediately identifiable by its costume but at the same time, its tableaus are noticeably more spread out and have lesser height than other schools. Similarly, the kind of tableaus made differ from school to school, and all the gurus have their own signature tableaus that they use in their compositions. To quote Foster, "choreographers define their individual styles by their characteristic use of space, quality, and parts of the body, but each also participates in a dance tradition that has its own style." (1986: 87)

The 'vocabulary' of the dance encompasses the basic movements which mark the choreography of the dance. Foster includes it as a choreographic element but in the case of Gotipua, it is a part of the process of training. They are mostly identified as *chauka, tribhangi* and *abhanga*. But as I will elaborate below, Gotipua did not have these fixed demarcations before the advent of Odissi and instead, had smaller sets of movements which were used both in training and in composing. In any regulated or "classical" styles, these postures form the backbone of the dance, like they do in Odissi. Along with these movements, the basic exercises and steps that are taught at the start of the training also become the basic moves frequently used in the choreographies. I have detailed them in the section below, while talking about the modules of training.

What is of utmost important though is the next category, of the syntax- the rules governing the use of moves and their combinations. In pieces like abhinaya or bandana, where there is a story that is being narrated using *natya* elements, it becomes easier to choreograph using the conventions that have been used in this tradition. As an Odissi dancer, I have seen the reverence with which older compositions are learnt and taught, as if paying respect to the original composer (mostly the main guru of a certain style) by embodying them. Not just the abhinayas but also the pallavis that have been practiced over decades are generally not interfered with while teaching, although minor stylistic changes may be made. But in Gotipua, the real composition, as I have mentioned before, lies in the choreography of bandha nrutya. Based on a

simple repetition of "tham thei ta kadataka ta ham ta hata thei", the song is a blank canvas on which each choreographer paints his own oeuvre. As we saw in the performances detailed in the previous chapter, the same bandha nrutya tune was choreographed distinctly by different gurus. Some gurus, like Swain, even introduce novel elements to truly individuate the general tone of the tune. The syntax therefore, even though basic in their frames of reference, provide for a lot of scope in a flexible tradition like Gotipua that is not shy of changing its form.

The cumulative effect of these distinctive parts of the dance helps describe the choreography of the tradition. From the context of the performance to how it is individualised and present in front of the audience, all contribute to understanding the choreographic conventions of the performance. For Gotipua, the most resonating code is that of a dance primarily used for the propagation of Bhakti, even in the contemporary performances. But, at the same time, it pronounces certain ideas of gender, especially with the help of the cross-dressed body of the child, as I will elaborate in chapter 5. The evocations of the ideas come through the execution of the body of the child as flexible and synchronic. The training ensures these two factors, and the compositions of the dances highlight them as well. The quality of flexibility of the body is showcased both by the performances of *bandha* and by cross-dressing. At the same time, a stellar feature of the child-bodies in Gotipua is the synchronicity and the use of the multiple bodies to form the single Body of the dance. As a dance that was a solo performance, the shift to a group performance helped it gain a distinctive identity, separate from Odissi that was emerging again as a solo dance. The inclusion of tableaus and group choreography helped create a new meaning for Gotipua outside of its typical ritual space. It gave the tradition the scope to be identified with the young bodies and the rigorous training they received. It is imperative, hence, to study this acrobatic tradition which not just shapes, but also symbolises the Gotipua tradition in contemporary times.

The Acrobatic Tradition

The use of the body in an acrobatic way is not unusual in Indian dance as we see from the descriptions of such forms in ancient texts like the *Natyashastra*, *Manasollasa* and *Samgitratnakara*. These texts stress on the importance of rigorous

training in such arts. This helps to make the muscles more flexible and the free the joints. Kapila Vatsyayan elaborates in her article on 'The Theory and Technique of Classical Indian Dancing' that,

> Like the Indian sculptor, the Indian dancer also does not lay much emphasis on the muscles of the human form, and takes the joints and the fundamental anatomical bone-structure of the human form as its basis: this enables the dancer to achieve the 'absolute form', and in so far as the whole process of dancing is considered a yoga this is inevitable, for the muscles cannot suggest absolute form and create abstract geometrical patterns easily. (1967: 233)

In Gotipua too, we see how the training of bandha relies heavily on making the joints more pliable. In fact, the displays of bandhas showcase the bent of the bodies from the joints, so much so that one can see the full extent of potential bents in the human anatomy.

Projesh Banerji also talks about the balance of the body maintained by the two main axes which work in tandem and support the joints to help create postures. He attributes Indian dance to be "a mixture of visible lines…either curved or straight" (Banerji 1985: 3). In talking about the lines drawn by the body, he explains that–

> The body, with hands outstretched, is composed of two lines. Both hands outstretched make a line parallel to the ground, and body, from head to foot, if stood erect, make a line perpendicular to the ground. The harmony between this parallel line and the perpendicular line is Indian dance" (*ibid*.).

He enumerates the seven joints in the body amongst these two axes- neck, shoulders, waist, hips, knee, heel and toe in the perpendicular axis and tip of the fingers, the three knuckles, the wrist, elbow and shoulder on the parallel axis. Like Vatsyayan, he attributes these joints to the formation of different postures of the body, while maintaining a balance amongst each other (Banerji 1985: 4). Accordingly, Gotipua training includes the massaging of the muscles and the constant rigorous practice of the joints. The youthful body is an ideal candidate for training the body as the joints and muscles are more malleable than in an older body.

Vatsyayan describes the aesthetics of Indian dance as being marked by the understanding of the human in the *vedas*. She suggests that it evolves from "the key concepts of *yoga* (introspection or an inward movement) and expression in a

systemised ritual i.e. *yajna* (or outward movement) and the notions of *arupa* (formless), *rupa* (form) and *pararupa* (beyond form)" (1967: 167). In this, the dancer is but an instrument of communicating with the superior power. Not only does the dancer herself communicate through her movements or iconography, but she also helps the audience to transmit their devotion through her, by way of imbibing the *rasa* of the art. As elaborated by Uttara Asha Coorlawala, the performer is seen as a *darpana* or mirror to the God and the *darshan* of the deity, or rather feeling the presence of the deity is projected on to the dancer, especially in "Indian devotional dances" (24). In Gotipua, the *darshan* was mainly symbolic in its previous choreographies, wherein the boys would portray deities or devotees and enact Bhakti poetry. But in the current repertoire, *darshan* is as literal as it is symbolic, if not more. The use of tableaus in bandha nrutya, similar to the *jhankis* in Raslila brings this *darshan* on to the proscenium stage. Bandha nrutya also displays *yoga* as the transcended potential of dance, denoting its spiritual roots. Moreover, while bandha tableaus provide a representative display through the iconic resemblance to the god, the bodies themselves go beyond form to symbolize the transcendence of the everyday.

The Basic Form of Gotipua:

Like the repertoire of the tradition, the form too has undergone some slight changes with the basic postures now being categorised as fixed and stipulated. These stipulations were not very prevalent earlier, as I will soon elaborate, as the dance was mainly enacted by one or two dancers and each body had a different style of interpreting the postures. But, since the dance has become more about virtuous synchronicity, the regulation of the form has gained importance, resulting in the cataloguing of the basic postures, the learning steps, and the order in which the items are to be learnt. In the current style of training, there are three main standing positions in Gotipua- *chauka, tribangi* and *abhanga*, following the Odissi systemization. *Chauka* is the most commonly used and identifiable posture of the Odra-Magadhi style wherein the two axes of the body are at right angles to each other. The knees bent towards the outside, 'like a pot' or 'kumbha' as it is named in the *Abhinaya Chandrika* (Patnaik 17). In order to give a stronger base, the hands are squarely kept

parallel to the ground and bent at right angles at the elbow with the palms facing the groubd. The other basic posture is the *tribhangi* which showcases the bending of the joints and balancing of the axes perfectly with the body bent at the waist. In *tribhangi*, the knees are bent but the feet are differently aligned, unlike in *chauka*. While one foot is kept similar to the foot position in *chauka* but pointing a little towards the front (say the left leg) while the other (right) foot faces perpendicularly to the outside, in line with the toes of the left leg. This enables the torso (above the waist joint) to bend towards the direction of the second foot (to the right) while the shoulders stay in line with the hip which is balanced towards the left. In taking this stance with the body, the head naturally tilts the chin towards the right in order to maintain the balance. The left hand is kept on the hips while the right hand rests on the right thigh. While the *chauka* denotes a more symmetrical posture which uses both sides of the body fairly equally, the *tribhangi* relies more on asymmetry with one foot (in the above case, the left) being more grounded than the other and allowing freer movement to the other (right) foot. The *abhanga* stance is used much lesser and generally to denote softer movements or in abhinayas. In this position, the body is at rest and one leg (say, left) is almost erect with a slight bend at the knees, kept with toes towards the front while the other leg is bent a little more with its toes bent and kept parallel to the toes of the other leg. The idea of the posture is to put more weight on one leg than the other, and not be absolutely erect, unlike the standing posture of say, Bharatanatyam. The body leans more towards the left with both the hands placed at the left of the hip-joint which prominently juts out. To maintain the balance the torso moves to the right only slightly in order to keep the shoulders parallel to the hips while the chin tilts slightly towards the right. This is the general standing posture used while dancing, especially in *natya*.
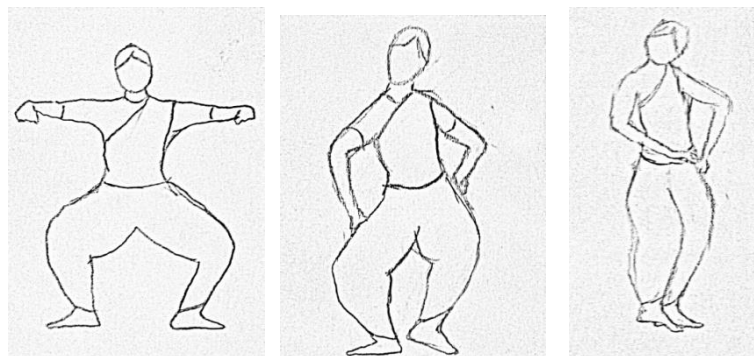

Figure 10: Chauka, Tribhangi and Abhanga

Although these are rigid distinctions in body postures, Gotipua started including these postures as basic only after the onset of Odissi's regulated training. In fact, the earlier system did not distinguish between them nor treat them as distinct. As I mentioned, the virtuosic synchronicity demanded by the current repertoire results in these stances being enforced by including the training of *chauka* and *tribhangi* steps[92] in the initial training regime. Earlier though, there was no such separate training in *chauka* or *bandha* and steps were taught more for teaching the dancer rhythm and beats. For example, my Odissi teacher in Delhi, Guru Kumkum Lal follows the old tradition that she had trained under for training her students. Instead of the commonly taught system of steppings which includes ten-stepped dance pieces in *chauka* and *tribhangi* respectively, she teaches the old 6 x 4 pattern of steppings. In the newer, ten-stepped process, the student is taught ten different 'steppings' in *chauka* and *tribhangi* respectively. In this, the number of the stepping coincides with the number of steps the feet take – the first step will only have one step, the second will have two, the third will have three and so on, till the tenth which has ten steps. To elaborate, the first step in *chauka* calls for the stamping of both the feet together to establish one step, achieved through jumping from the *chauka* stance with both the feet curling upwards (and ideally clapping in mid-air) and coming back to the *chauka*. In *tribhangi* though, because one foot is taken as more grounded than the other, only the free foot is stamped on the beats to establish the first step. This system of steppings was brought very recently and is generally attributed to Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra who used it as an introduction to the style and body movements of Odissi (Ref?). Conversely, in the old tradition taught by Guru Kumkum Lal (taught to her by?) there are six sets of steppings which follow the same logic of coinciding the number of steps taken by the foot to the number of the stepping viz. one foot movement in the first step, two for the second and so on till the sixth. But, unlike the ten-step system, the six steps are grouped in sets of four different steppings.

For example, the first stepping is done in four different ways and is based mainly on the *tribhangi* posture. The first (I.i) is the same as the first of *tribhangi* stepping described earlier. The second (I.ii) also starts with the *tribhangi* posture but involves the twisting of the heel towards the front after the stamp and lifting the body up accordingly to accommodate the shift of weight. In both these steps, the hand on

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[92] Steps are more recent inclusions, especially with the onset of Odissi and its set system of training.

the grounded side is at the waist and the other hand is a little lower on the thigh (ref fig.). The third (I.iii) step is what is called *bhasa* (elaborated a little later) and enacts the movement of a wave wherein the free foot (for example, left) is stamped in *tribhangi* posture, immediately followed by the dragging of the other (right), previously grounded, foot to the back of the stamped (right) foot. This step shifts the weight of the body from one foot to the other and starts teaching the body to move in a fixed direction (in this case, right). It also engages the hands wherein the hand to the side in which the body is moving (right) is kept at right angles (like it is kept in the *chauka* posture) and moves from the wrist with the movement of the body, while the other hand (left) is lifted up, palm facing upwards, and almost rounding around the sides of the neck and face and staying unmoved. The fourth (I.iv) step again sees some movement with only one stamp. Starting from the *tribhangi*, the heel of the free foot is glided towards the outside (eg. right foot to the right side) and keeping it some distance, the formerly grounded (left) foot is lifted to get it closer and then both feet are stamped together to create the tribhangi posture. In these steps, the stamp is considered the step and not the gliding or the lifting of the foot. Also, these steps were mostly based on *tribhangi* and not on *chauka* which became more symbolic probably after the evolution of the form into a Classical style and the identification of the *chauka* with the Jagannath idol. Nonetheless, this stepping system did not distinguish between *chauka*, *tribhangi* or *abhanga* as different postures and was more fluid in its understanding of the body movement. According to Guru Kumkum Lal, the old system lets the body learn how and when to shift to *chauka* and *tribhangi* on its own. Instead of enforcing the style on the body, the body develops the style as per the footwork. If we understand the nature of *chauka* and *tribhangi*, it is quite apparent that these postures make the body curve in a certain way, in order to maintain the balance. And hence, the earlier system did not insist on maintain *chauka* as a base posture or keeping the body at a certain level as is prescribed in the training nowadays. The usage of the feet and body in the older system of training varies vastly from that of today which is more akin to the Odissi body. Nuances like dragging the feet, gliding the toes, balancing on toes and heels alternately and such movements are almost replete in the Gotipua style now.

Along with such stepping, some exercises were also used to train the body into the Gotipua form in the earlier system of training. Although there seem to have been many exercises, only some have remained through the ages, owing to the oral nature of this tradition. One of the most commonly known couplets that is still used in Gotipua training says:

Utha Baitha Thia Chali

Buda Bhasa Bhaunri Pali

These two lines demonstrate the basic postures of Gotipua and are taught first to any student before the rigorous training begins. Even Guru Kumkum Lal teaches the exercises mentioned in this couplet to warm up the body before training. Chitta Ranjan Mallia, former secretary of the Sangit Natak Akademi, Bhubaneshwar, has written about this couplet in his essay on Gotipua, attributing them to Kabichandra Kali Charan Pattnaik. He writes,

Utha: It means to rise up from the sitting pose and then dance. The dancer at the Bol (Ukuta or Vani) of the Mardal rises up from the sitting pose.

Baitha: At the Bol or Vani of the Mardal the dancer bends his knees in equal measure and dances with the weight of his body set up his waist.

Thia: It is the standing pose of a dancer at the beginning or during the pauses or at the end of the dance. (At the beginning of the dance the dancer offers flowers to Gods in the standing pose). This is also called Sthai or more popularly Thai in Odia.

Chali: Odissi dance is accompanied by the singing of songs by the dancer. The dancer steps forward, while singing in a measured way, and is said to practice Chali.

Buda: Towards the close of the dance the dancer lifts his hands above his head and acts as if he is immersed in feelings.

Bhasa: This is a movement of the dancer by bending the body alternately to the right and the left sides and acting with the hands. It appears like swimming.

Bhaunri: While practising this, the dancer revolves in such a manner and so quickly that his body is not discernible.

Pali: This is the back-stepping of the dancer while dancing." (Mallia 2013: 56)

In defining these terms, my understanding differs a little from Mallia's and follows what I have learnt from Guru Kumkum Lal. *Utha* which literally means to rise up, is the most basic exercise in which the student learns to sit and get up in the *chauka stance* (with legs in *kumbha*), thereby getting trained in balancing the body. *Baitha* literally means to sit and with respect to the fact that it is an exercise and not just a stance, *baitha* indicates that the student sits in *kumbha* position, with the weight of the body on their toes, and then makes each knee touch the ground on either side alternatively. This exercise helps in strengthening the toes and also helps in learning to balance the body from the waist, in order to swiftly move from one position to another in a sitting posture. *Thia* means to stand and is an exercise in which the dancer stands erect with arms stretched up, parallel to the ears, and then tries to touch the feet with their hands without bending his knees, thereby helping exercise the muscles at the waist and make it more flexible. *Chali* indicates gait and is the teaching of the various walks that are used in the dance.

The next line of the couplet has more dynamic exercises which engage the entire body. *Buda* means to drown and involves stepping sideways with the hands going up (from the side) imitative of the body drowning under them. This exercise helps to get an idea of balance in movement, just like in *chali* and *bhasa* where they also learn how to place the torso and the heads while in transition. *Bhasa* means to float and can indicate more than one exercise which give the illusion of swimming. This again, is a movement practice which helps in bettering the use of the torso, along with the hands and the head. *Bhaunri* is the Odia word for revolutions made by the dancer on his own axis. This can be done in both *chauka* and *tribhangi* and gives the student an idea of how to maintain balance while in a revolution. *Pali* is a term that is often debated on as the meaning is not easily discernable but it is generally thought to mean covering an area, mainly that of the stage, with movements (Lal 2012, Basu 2013). This exercise helps to give a student an idea of how to use the available space with the help of movement.

In the bandha nrutya presented by the Aradhana Dance Academy described in the previous chapter, Swain utilizes parts of this couplet, as he also describes other elements of Gotipua. The choreography of this section in the dance had the dancers displaying the actions, corresponding to the words being recited. He used some terms like *chaari*, *bhaunri*, *utha*, *baitha*, *chauka* and *chira*. For *chaari* and *bhaunri*, the

dancers showed a gentle walk, followed by rotations on their own axes. The, to display *utha*, the dancers sat fully in chauka (or what is better known as *kumbha*) and then jumped up to sit in chauka and denote that they have risen. The dancers sat completely in *chauka* to enact *baitha*, and remained half-sitting in the *chauka* position to denote *chauka*. To show *chira*, they performed splits. There are several other elements too that Swain included in this composition, like the movements of the eyes and different steps, but these elements exists only as specific terms because the couplets that were used to pass them from generation to generation are now lost. The exercises from the couplet and the steppings encompass all the three postures used in Gotipua and stress more on the movement of the body rather than any rigid stance. These *belis* or exercises also do not necessarily distinguish between *chauka*, *tribhangi* and *abhanga* as they were not in accordance to any text but rather passed through oral history. Gautama Mohapatra (2017) also agreed to having used this mode of training during his studentship. Although he remembered only a few elements, he stated that "*uthak baithak*" was done by jumping and sitting in *chauka*. On the other hand, "*thia chali*" was used to denote standing and walking like a woman. According to him, these rhymes were used to teach abhinaya to the young kids.

It is generally said in Gotipua (and Odissi) schools that this sole couplet '*utha baitha…*' is the main rhyme which teaches the basic of the dance and helps introduce the movements to a dancer's body. Even then, most Gotipua schools do not practice these exercises any more, although most gurus consider them to be crucial to the training (Sahoo, B. K. 2013, Mohapatra, G. 2017, Barik 2013). The stepping system I have elaborated is also extinct now and in the new system, *chauka* and *tribhangi* have gained more importance. Those stances have gained priority in the showcase of the form as a synchronic group dance. The older system which indicated a connection with traditional modes, like memorising and ingrained stances dependent on the individual dancer, have now been replaced by a more regulated, refined mode which narrows the style and relies on discipline for training. As we saw in the training too, the learning is more mimetic and hence, the body has to be attuned specifically to the movements in order to establish the form. With the stress on group choreographies, it has also become important for the bodies to imbibe discipline during training. The

virtuosity of the contemporary gotipua dancer lies in his ability to merge with the group and create the bigger body of the collective.

In the earlier system, although there were many elements, not all of them had specific names. Many of the exercises and steps were known colloquially as they would be uttered while practicing. For example, the practice of foot-steps or *padasadhana* were known as as "chata kada tak, chauka kada tak, panjha kada tak, goithi kada tak" stressing on different movements of the foot (Barik 2013, Sahoo, B. K. 2013). As these exercises have been lost to time, there is no clarity on how they were performed but they were part of the now lost oral tradition. The steppings were followed by the practice of *arasa* which is the "movement of the body and limbs on a particular Ukuta [piece] of a Taal" (Mallia 2013: 58). An *arasa* has more than one cycle of a certain tala (beat) and has variation within the few cycles that make it. This give this short piece of dance depth and flavour as the footwork can be brief but varied. These *arasas* are for basic practice of the movements and they very often are part of pallavis. Again, Guru Kumkum Lal continues to teach *arasas* in the different talas used in Odissi in order to train the student's body, to learn rhythm, as per the older Gotipua tradition. But unfortunately, none of the Gotipua gurus could recall any typical arasas, although they knew the meaning of the term.

Apart from the basic exercises and stances that form the base of Gotipua, there are also certain hand denotations that are used in order to convey *bhava* or the emotion of the dance. By virtue of the fact that Gotipua transmitted orally as a traditional performance, it has to be noted that the hand gestures used did not have specific names, but are nonetheless consistent with the hasta-mudras enumerated in the Sanskrit texts. It was only after the reconstruction of Odissi that these mudras were found to have specific names and uses, as per the old conventions/nomenclature. But, in interviews with senior Gotipua dancers, I found that they did not know of hand gestures as having names other than what they were assigned to denote or how they were used (Sahoo, B. K. 2013, Barik 2013, Palai 2013). For example, to show a 'deep' or lamp, one hand would be a slightly cupped *dhwaja* (lit. flag- shown by keeping all the fingers of the hand next to each other) and the other would show the wick burning by means of using a *dhyanmudra* (lit. meditation- shown by touching the tips of the thumb and forefinger and keeping the other fingers straight). The names

'*dhwaja*' and '*dhyanmudra*' are found in the *Abhinaya Chandrika*. In fact, the mudras mentioned in the *Abhinaya Chandrika* resonate more with what is mentioned in the *Natyashastra* but nonetheless, nowadays the *Natyashastra* is used more as a reference.

These hand gestures[93] kept evolving from time to time depending on the stories that came to be told, like holding the *bansuri* (flute) with both hands on one side came to indicate Krishna after the advent of the Bhakti movement, or how the *abhaya-dhyanmudra*[94] (*Abhinaya Chandrika*) came to indicate Buddha after the introduction of Geeta-Govinda[95], how Ram came to be denoted by the bow and arrow after the introduction of Ramayana, and so on. Some hand gestures do not find mention anywhere except in dance choreographies. For instance, to show a thatched window of a hut, the two hands would be placed perpendicular to each other with the fingers (except thumbs) outstretched and overlapping. This hand gesture would be called a 'window' ('gobakhya') but there is no specific name for this particular hand gesture in Odissi or in the texts. Therefore, these hand gestures evolved depending on the text and hence could come to mean various things depending on the story that was being portrayed. Thus, to systemize such content in accordance to the canonical texts is an impossible task as they are more mimetic than prescribed. Nowadays, though the young dancers are very much aware of the names of the hasta mudras, especially the frequently used ones, many contemporary gurus refer to the theoretical dictate of using certain gestures for specific denotations, But by and large, the hand gestures are passed on from generation to generation just like the style, body movements and choreographies of certain items in the repertoire.

The purpose of Gotipua after the 17th century Bhakti movement was to spread the cult of Vaishnavism through songs and dances. To this effect, the dance was passed orally from generation to generation, not necessarily as an art, but rather as a service to god. As I have discussed in the first chapter, the body itself became a powerful medium for worshipping, especially after the coming of Tantrism. The

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[93] Most of these hand gestures were shown to me by Guru Gobind Pal (2013).

[94] The hand gesture used to show Buddha, with both hands in dhyanmudra but position in front of the body, perpendicular to each other.

[95] Although Buddha existed in the ancient history of Odisha, he was reintroduced by the Geeta Govinda in the 12th century CE as an incarnate of Vishnu.

tradition that was created thus, was both spiritual and entertaining, and both became a means to serve the god as also provide *darshan* to the audiences. The tradition then, necessarily likened itself to the religious functions of the local shrines and became inextricably linked to ritual proceedings. In the contemporary times, the boys not only showcase the gods they worship but also symbolise them by virtue of being the 'children of god'. In a space like Puri, where religious movements have been aplenty and part of the daily life of the locals, the Gotipua tradition helped to bring the temples out on the streets, and recently, on the proscenium stages, as I will explain.

Dance and the deity:

Gotipua was originally taught in a few districts in Odisha and it survives today in a handful of places, mostly in Puri district. The traditional roots of Gotipua are still revered and this is clearly seen in the attempt to maintain the gurukul system of training. As a practice that was started under the auspices of the Jagannath temple, there are several religious influences on its form. It would be wrong to say that it likens its movements to a certain religious practice or deity although the dance is still maintained and promulgated though tradition with utmost devotion to God, something that is absent in most commercialized dance forms now.

In Dimirisena, where the bandha tradition is believed to have commenced, the main deity is Shiva and He is revered above all. The Barala Balunkeshwar temple at Dimirisena is an important shrine of Shiva and it earlier housed gotipuas as sebayats (Pattanayak 2013). In Konark Natya Mandap, for example, the three shrines that adorn the gurukul are of Shiva, Parvati and Hanuman with Shiva being the presiding deity. In an interview with a student of the school, Prashant Kumar Sahoo, I asked why there was a Shiva temple but no Jagannath temple. He answered that because the founding Guru of the school (Guru Gangadhar Pradhan) was from Dimirisena, Shiva is worshipped. But Jagannath is revered greatly nonetheless and even at Konark Natya Mandap, Jhulan Jatra is celebrated with rigour inside the school precinct every year. The presence of a Hanuman shrine is also curious as Hanuman in the Hindu belief system is the God of strength and is the main deity associated to masculinity as Alter has shown in his work on The Wrestler's Body, where the main deity at the akhara is

Hanuman[96]. This overlapping of different belief systems showcases the nature of Jagannath worship although, as I have explained in Chapter 1, the dance is generally believed to have originated in a Shiva temple. In most of the schools, there is generally a pantheon of Gods kept in a homely shrine to pray to, with Jagannath bearing importance. The devotion to a certain God does not ascertain its influence in style but it could help in understanding the form. The dancer's body reflects the God's movements in order to showcase his/her Being or it, at the least, reflects the idea of the body and dance according to that deity. The influence of different sects of Hinduism on this dance contributes many structural perspectives to its style.

The influences of different deities propound various theories of corporeal identity. The ideas of masculinity and femininity as understood with respect to the deity, imbibed through the movements, present a perspective on how the body is choreographed. Cross-dressing here is a transcendental act, done in order to please the God for whom the dancer also sang. According to those who believe Gotipua to have Vaishnavite origins, cross-dressing manifests the female energy needed to get closer to Jagannath. Some believe Gotipua to be Shaivaite as women were disallowed to perform in front of Shiva and hence pre-sexual boys would dress as females and dance for him. But there are historical evidences that the *mahari* tradition existed in both Shiva and Jagannath temples (Banerji 2010: 164) and hence, it is not the absence of women in these spaces that was curbed, it is rather the disallowance of the female body in a specific performance tradition.

Many Gods in the Hindu pantheon are believed to have been dancers like Shiva, Ganesha, Kali/Shakti/Durga, Krishna and so on although Shiva as Nataraja is generally seen as the supreme dancer. In Bharatanatyam, for example, Shiva is believed to be the source of the dance and hence he plays an important part of the repertoire and is revered greatly. The form of the dance hence is more upright than say, Odissi. The torso in Bharatanatyam does not move with the waist and there are basic movements and postures which are erect. In Odissi, the presiding deity is Jagannath and an idol of His is placed at a side of the performance space to pay obeisance to Him, but in the construction of the dance on the female body, the *lasya*

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[96] See Alter, J.S. The Wrestler's Body: "Hanuman: Shakti, Bhakti and Brahmacharya".

element of Parvati is believed to have been incorporated which again works in a congruence with the masculine *tandava* form of Shiva. Odissi's basic posture-*chauka*- is hence, attributed to look like Jagannath, with stub-like hands although *lasya* manifests itself through more rounded body movements, like the ebb and flow of waves, constructed on a woman's body to make it lilting and more sensual, although the stronger, more energetic movements of *tandava* make its presence felt in certain parts of the repertoire. If we look at Gotipua with a similar lens, its clouded origins and foggy histories do not demarcate clearly the primacy of a specific God in its form and repertoire although some elements can be read formally to assess their origins.

In the Hindu conception of power, Shiva can only work with Shakti and vice-versa- the masculine and feminine forces have to be harmonized, although not necessarily in equal forces. For example, the portrayal of Kali takes Shakti to a higher show of strength where Shiva is inert whereas in the portrayal of Durga, she is invincible, full of masculine strength given to her by the male Gods, somewhere equating with the *tandava* of Shiva while as Parvati, she is subversive to Him. In fact, in Hindu ideology, the tropes of absolute physicality on the female body or character are acceptable only if the woman is angry or perhaps mad, be it in Kali's mad dance as a wild wanderer in search of blood, as the powerful Durga aided to fight the wrath of the demons or even as female demons out to avenge wrongdoing done to them like Surpanakha or Hidimba. The show of strength is acceptable as a masculine trait and is expected to be used very minimally on feminine bodies more agreeable as sensual. In the case of Gotipua, because the body is unsexed, the show of masculinity is repressed. The form, as we have seen, is like Odissi but not as sensual because it is done by younger, less mature dancers without the complete understanding of sexuality. But the form is an emulation of women dancing and hence, masculinity is not a demonstrative trope, femininity is. The dancers are supposed to be like Radha and the other gopis or female devotees who dance for the entertainment of Krishna. At the same time, the *bandha* movements and choreographies are reminiscent of Shiva but it is important to keep in mind that it is and has always been choreographed by male teachers on male bodies although the other parts of the repertoire emulate the woman's repertoire (*mahari*).

When Barbara Browning talks about the dancing body in *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (1995), she says that the body is moved in accordance to the gods that are being appeased in that ritualistic dance. Similarly, the body in Gotipua seeks to emulate but also represent the god that it entertains and this intersection of the spiritual and corporeal manifests itself in mystifying ways. As I will explain in the next chapter, this also results in the use of the child body in a way that is unique to the tradition. Not only is the body of the dancer a powerful entity, it is also made grander by the collective of bodies. The single body displays the virtuosity of the physical form become more effective as the collective Body which creates tableaus that display the virtuosity of the tradition. The individual dancers displaying typical movements are appreciated by the audience but the moment they come together to create religious and patriotic tableaus (waving the Indian flag on top), they become revered and respected. This quality of the choreography of being able to create an extraordinary form, likening itself to the manifestation of the spiritual, from ordinary bodies of the dancers, is possible due to the disciplined training of young bodies.

Structural Bodies:

In her work 'Dance and the Distributed Body', dance scholar Anurima Banerji explains how "*mahari* dance represents an intersubjective encounter between the ritual performer, the material space, and the religious icon, producing a distributed body" (2012: 8). She sees the *mahari* tradition as a distributed body that is a triangle of corporeal power, constituted by the deity, the temple and the dancer. According to her-

> The distributed body was one expression of the subject that lives among a range of other conceptions in Hindu thought. It distributed spiritual properties into the live dancing body, and animated the still body of the deity and temple, allowing the spiritual presence to materialise in the world; and it distributed itself across different bodies through the "restored behaviour" of transmitting and replicating movement and gesture. (Banerji 2012: 30)

Although her work is on the *mahari* tradition, something similar can be said about the Gotipua tradition as well, although the space of the gotipuas is different

from that of the *mahari*s. Nonetheless, the dance form can be seen through a similar lens because, like *mahari*, Gotipua too is a ritualistic dance and in its efficacious form, it carries the weight of a tradition, living in a space that was outside the temple, for the public, but connecting the audience to the deity nonetheless. In Gotipua though, the body is very different from that in *mahari* or even Odissi in contemporary times.

Banerji (2012) compares the physical structure of a temple to a human body and sees it as a personified spiritual agent. Because the *mahari* danced inside the temple precincts, the personification of the temple becomes part of the nexus that forms the distributed body of the dance. The body of the *mahari* then embodies the temple structure, the sculptures and the Idol (in enacting His playfulness while doing abhinayas). In the case of Gotipua, the single boy who danced earlier may have been as intimately part of the distributed body but since the multiplication of bodies in the form, that identity has been compromised. The social perceptions of both the dances are also different because of their forms. As compared to the *mahari*s, the gotipuas are perhaps not seen as spiritual agents but they are sanctified as sebayats or the children of the gods by virtue of being in the tradition. But this identity of the gotipuas is of relevance only in the local imagination and not outside of it.

The displacement of Gotipua from its ritual space has affected the form in the same way as Banerji beautifully explains with respect to the transformation of *mahari* into Odissi. Although she stresses on Odissi's paratopic[97] nature, she also posits that in the displacement of the dance, although on the same body- that of the woman- from the temple precincts, "Odissi in its concert form loses the potential of producing and mobilising the distributed body, installing a fully modern subject in its place" (Banerji 2012: 32). Something similar can be said about Gotipua that has modernised itself over the course of time in order to be performed in front of a larger audience. But, it is interesting to note that in the absence of the ritualistic performance space Gotipua, quite literally, brings the space to itself through bandha formations. The shunting of the tradition towards a more commercialised and secular space has made it transfer its

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[97] "Performance forms which carry within them local histories and philosophies, and which sanction extraordinary enactments that are otherwise unsanctioned by dominant logics, qualify as paratopic." (Banerji 2010: 27)

very roots to its choreography. Through the use of multiple bodies, Gotipua seeks to fill in the absence left by its displacement from ritual spaces with structural bodies that legitimise the tradition. The form of any dance is related to the space it is performed in as both the movements and choreography are defined by it. On one hand, where in *mahari*, the choreography was done through the distributed body of the deity, the structure, and the dancer, (Banerji 2010), on the other hand, in Gotipua, the Body is further complicated by the new 'collective' of bodies.

Bodies as the Body:

The body in Gotipua is traditionally trained to be a part of a similar nexus of a 'distributed body' that Banerji mentions. In the way that this dance form was promulgated earlier, the *bachika abhinaya* would be reminiscent of the *mahari*s or sebayats. Even during short bursts of bandha, there would be another Gotipua singing with the dancer. The body of the dancer was more effectual because it constituted a leg of the spiritual nexus and once the form came out of that performance space, the presentation of the body became evocative more structurally. Banerji talks about how "Gotipua dance extended the contours of the temple by bringing ritual performance outside the temple precincts into the public sphere" and I propose that in its contemporary form, its recreates the contours with the dancing bodies (Banerji 2010: 282).

Bandha nrutya, by its nature, makes compulsory the use of multiple bodies in order to create structures. The identification of Gotipua increasingly with bandha nrutya creates a virtuosic space with the use of the child's body, but more importantly here, as a collective of bodies. Moharana sees the virtuosity of the form in the synchronisation of the bodies. He says "it should look like Gotipua, not *gothi-pua* (lit. crowd of boys)" (2013). The structural formations provide a glimpse of the ritual roots of the dance with the tableaus in a matter of a few minutes, instead of needing to elaborate it through abhinayas. The dance, as it were, condenses the form in order to connect with the audience in a better way, different from that of *mahari* or Odissi.

Banerji shows how the distributed body is an element of *mahari* by virtue of being a ritual dance breaks the notion of an individual body and dissipates into the space around it (Banerji 2010: 30). In its transformation to Odissi, this body has become a modern subject by displacing the form from its original space. In Gotipua, comparatively, the space of the dance was inside and, more predominantly, outside. The idea of the distributed body may have existed in Gotipua's earlier form, but in the contemporary times, with its roots decaying away, the form demands a new construct of the body- that of the collective. The body in Gotipua can be seen as part of a bigger Body, without which its purpose remains incomplete. The collective of bodies is emphatic of the idea of the body that is projected in the form- one that is not a fully formed individual subject, a child.

As we have seen in this chapter, the body of the gotipua in the earlier, ritualistic tradition was trained in order to be skilled in *bachika abhinaya* with the help of a module that stressed on singing and enactment. In doing that, the body of the goti-pua had an agency which allowed him to be identified as a virtuosic solo dancer. On the other hand, the current module that stresses on the collective of Gotipua, trains the body to be part of the whole and not as individuals, through its rigorous training module. The introduction of bandha nrutya to the repertoire has created a new identity of the dance that stresses on Gotipua being a Body in itself. Through more structured training modules, the young, impressionable bodies of the children are disciplined into learning synchronicity as an important element of the tradition. The bodies of the dancers in contemporary Gotipua have been overshadowed by the Body of Gotipua that is characterised by the essence of working together as a collective. Although it is true that the collective would not be possible without the individual bodies, it can also be said that, given the nature of Gotipua and the importance of bandha nrutya today, the individual dancers would also not be of much use without the collective.

While the purpose of a gotipua performance was to spread the religious ideas at the advent of Vaishanvism, the tradition has evolved such as to project its roots through its choreography. Within the categories of choreography suggested by Foster, we see how Gotipua still tries to emulate the religious ideology that once informed it. In the performances of the dance at secular space like the proscenium stage or on television shows too, we see that the religious identity of the Gotipua is harkened,

even though the tradition has long changed. To comprehend this, it was necessary to study the figures which Gotipua symbolises and portrays in its choreography, to see how much it uses its symbolic elements in the form. As a dance performed by young bodies, the dance is flexible in that it is easily influenced by the religious movements as well as audience demands. This is not so much due to the nature of the child-bodies but rather because they are trained by what I call 'master-choreographers' who have the ability to see the dance as an audience while at the same time, choreograph it to showcase his own aesthetic. We will see in the forthcoming chapter how the Body of Gotipua is affected by the child-bodies in the tradition and what role the young bodies have in its contemporary form.

Chapter 5

Illegitimate Bodies of Children

I have been learning from seven years of age. When the new kids come, we teach them the basics and then Guruji checks if it is right or not. Guruji leaves them to us as we are senior students and will also become teachers in the future. For a Gotipua, you have to be able to dance, make others dance, sing and play music. Only if you learn all four, will you be able to do something.

After Gotipua, I will learn Odissi, and the pakhawaj. Once you learn an instrument, your life is set. You have to keep learning, otherwise an artist dies. Like education, this continues as you grow older. As senior students, we teach how much we have learnt. Calling oneself a guru is not enough. Thousands can become gurus, but how many are students? Firstly, one must be a good student; everyone wants to be a guru but not a good student. If you're a good student, automatically people will recognise you as the guru's student because you have something.

This is a dance which has to be done in the get-up of a girl. It is not up to one's choice to be a boy or a girl for this dance as it is a tradition. There is no shame as it is god's dance. My hair has always been long since I have been learning Gotipua. I was teased earlier because of it but not anymore because they know we get angry. We tell them that we are dancers. But these small things should not affect as we should understand that it is our life, our livelihood; we choose to keep it.

I've gone abroad as I am a senior student… I've gone five times. I have been to many places, not all, obviously, but will eventually travel everywhere. There are so many kids in our village but you didn't go to them for interviews, you came to us- as we're dancers.

I've been quite naughty from childhood so my father told my mother to leave me at the ashram. They put some clothes in an attaché and left us at the gurukul. So over time, by getting disciplined and getting beaten by guruji, I got interested in it. When we went out for programmes initially, we were very scared, and also ashamed as we were younger and we would dress as girls. But now we realise that by doing this, we will have a good future.

- In conversation with Gadadhar Behera, 20 years old

I have been learning Gotipua for eight years. I was always been interested in dance so my father encouraged me to learn Gotipua. Actually, this group is from my village, Balipatna. In fact, two kids from my village have just gone to Switzerland for shows. There are almost ten to twelve kids learning in the gurukul. Some even come from as far as forty kilometres away. We all stay at the guru's house. We all belong to different castes; the teacher teaches boys from all castes. Only the Scheduled Castes are not allowed to enter the temple so they do not come for performances inside temple-spaces. But, they also grow out their hair and stay with us and learn. I too had long hair till about two months back but I cut it after the death of my father.

- In conversation with Buddhanath Bhuiyan, 20 years old

I stay twenty kilometres away from Puri. I had stayed at Guruji's house when I was learning. Now that I have finished, I stay at home and only come when there are programmes. There are three or four more kids from my village. I started learning when I was seven years old. I was not initially interested in dance, but my maternal grandfather was a big guru so he took me along to learn Gotipua. I stayed at the hostel, and over time, I got used to staying there and started developing an interest. No kid likes to leave their parents and stay alone in a hostel. Even my parents just left me there, but with nothing else to do I automatically started taking an interest in studies.

See, every child will say that they learnt out of interest but in reality, nobody really enjoys learning Gotipua as a kid. Gotipua has a lot of gymnastics which is very difficult. So many boys run away from the hostel as they don't want to endure the pains of training. Then Guruji has to go and fetch them from their villages. This one, for example, has run away twice! But he is comfortable with the dance now.

My grandfather was Padmashree Dr. Guru Gangadhar Pradhan. He was friends with Linga Sir. His hostel was more for Odissi so I was sent to Guruji to learn Gotipua. If I get into Odissi in the future, that would be good. But my parents won't support it as they would rather I start a school of my own with what I have already learnt. But I would like to progress further into Odissi. If I do not learn Odissi I cannot teach; how can one teach if they haven't learnt the art completely? Like all arts, we need to progress into the higher levels of learning as leaning never really

stops. Anyway, we have crossed our age of learning Gotipua, but we still come whenever Guruji calls for programmes as replacements for other boys.

- In conversation with Krishnachandra Biswal, 18 years old

I have always liked dancing and hence joined the school. I told my parents that I wanted to learn and they brought me here when I was five years old. My initial years were spent here, in this school, but when I passed my fifth class, I went to the Dhauli gurukul to stay.

I know that I want to become a dancer guru when I get older. Whenever my teachers ask in school- what do you want to be when you grow up? I always reply saying that I want to be a dance guru.

I have done so many shows that I have lost count. We were the costume, like a girl's, when we dance. It's not like we like dancing in them, but we have to wear for performances. When the costume come back after getting stitched, it is comfortable. But over time, it gets tighter and it becomes difficult to dance in it. It's not like I like the fact that it is a girl's costume either, because I like to dress up like a boy and not a girl.

- In conversation with Arupananda Pradhan, 14 years old

I am from Ghatakudi and my father is a farmer and mother is a housewife. I am in tenth class now, but started learning when I was five years old. My father asked to learn dance because of manasikaa. My father's health was deteriorating, so he prayed to Lord Balunkeshwar to heal him and promised to give me at his service in return. I don't know what happened to him because I was small, but his health improved so he put me here to and told me to learn dance.

- In conversation with Pinnaki Baral, 16 years old

The Gotipua tradition uses the qualities of a juvenile body to both manufacture and project itself as a virtuosic form. In its earlier form, the performance celebrated the virtuosity of a multi-skilled actor who also had a religious role to play, whereas in its contemporary avatar, Gotipua popularises itself through the acrobatic finesse of the performers. Irrespective of its form, we have seen how the tradition is choreographed through the utilization of the child body. Although not a unique dance form due to its

use of the child performer, cross-dressing or acrobatics, the combination of the three and the antiquity of its existence is what makes Gotipua stand out. Through the varying modules of training, the Gotipua body can take on various characteristics to suit the traditional at a given time and space. In the same decade, we can see both solo *bachika abhinayas* and thali dance, and two-minute modern performances and lengthy Jhulan recitals.

The virtuosity of the form in itself lies in its flexibility to cater myriad needs while the virtuosity of the artists lies in their ability to get easily moulded into the current state of the tradition. Although the training modules have changed, we see that the basic nature of the artists' body, that is, the child's body to get disciplined in order to fulfil the contemporary requirements of the tradition has remained constant. Although the dance is performed by young bodies who are its proponents, they do not hold the reins of the tradition. The current identity of the Gotipua Body as a collective of bodies makes this problematic even more prominent as the little agency which the child bodies had as solo dancers are now completely lost with them having no part in the performance of the tradition. In this chapter, I will unravel this problematic to study the implications of having the child-body in the tradition.

'Master-choreographers':

The process of becoming a gotipua is gruelling and exhaustive. It can also be said that it is a road that leads to nowhere considering one has to receive proper training in Odissi in order to be recognised as an adult dancer. While the tradition celebrates the young body that is integral to it, the contemporary performance celebrates instead, the guru, whose meticulous training creates virtuosic performers and whose choreographic abilities help display the bodies beautifully on stage. He is the most revered member of the gurukul, as also the most famous. These gurus, colloquially called 'master' in Odia are what make or break the popularity and success of the gurukuls. The gotipua boys learning the dance are well-aware of the implications of being a teacher and hence, they almost always aspire to be Gotipua gurus once they grow up (2017). When talking of the young dancers of the tradition, it is first necessary to also discuss the role that these masters have to play in the

tradition. The place of the "master" when juxtaposed with that of the student will propel the question of the child in the tradition.

The students of the gurukul are at the behest of their gurus who are not only their care-takers but also their sole guardians at the *gurukul*. There is an emotional bond that they share with the guru, especially as they live with them. In interviews with the students of Guru Kailash Biswal, there were repeated mentions of the guru being like parent or specifically, an adoptive father (Behera, Mohapatra, M., Palai, K. 2013). This intimate relation of the students with the teachers also produce a deep sense of gratitude for receiving the training of an art that one can cherish for life. It also deepens the emotional connect on has with their labour, and often produces a desire in the student to continue the tradition further despite hardships. In spite of the commercialisation of the form, it is no secret that running a residential Gotipua school is not a hugely profitable business, but many of the current gurus also continue investing in the tradition due to their sense of gratitude to their teachers (Swain, C. 2017, Moharana, Sahoo, B. K. 2013).

In the last chapter, I have discussed the way that Gotipua was disseminated through oral tradition in the earlier years. While talking about the training he received from his teacher, Guru Kailash Biswal mentioned that his teacher would seldom sit while teaching. He would rather show every step that needed to be done and the students would try to emulate him as much as possible (2017). Bhagirathi Mohapatra too, recalled that in those days, nobody knew the names of specific postures or gestures, they would simply learn by imitating their gurus who would enact the many songs throughout the training. He further goes on to say that the gurus of yesteryears were not as lazy as those today and would hardly ever sit during a practice session (2017). The gotipuas thus, would learn by mimesis. According to Mohapatra, the young and impressionable students would not only imitate the teachers, but also the women of the villages, in order to be convincing as women on stage. He talks about how his teacher would tell them to follow and study closely how the village women walked, fetched water, tied their hair and went about their daily chores (2017).

The training of the gotipuas today too, is mimetic but of a different body. Unlike before, the boys no longer learn songs as frequently and concentrate more on

the group compositions. The teacher too, makes do with the senior students teaching the younger students. In this, the body of the older students is what is emulated by the gotipua. With so many other students to refer to, a modern gotipua has many templates that he can see while picking up the steps and movements. Although this system works fine for bandha-nrutya and such nrtta based choreographies, it is a gross disadvantage for abhinayas as they boys pick up steps without understanding what they are meant to symbolise. This is the main reason for the depreciation of abhinaya in contemporary abhinayas.

The training of the gotipuas to become the Gotipua Body also posits another interesting element. The body, while it is in the tradition has not agency or control over the choreographies, whereas these are gained by the body once it moves out of the tradition. In the earlier tradition, the lyrics would be indicative of the movements the dancer had to do, and the gurus would help the dancer learn the art by helping to understand how to use the gestures while singing or how to improvise if faced with a new song. In the current system, the 'masters' are the sole choreographers, especially when it comes to bandha-nrutya. As a dance that is only possible by a group, the individual dancers can never know what the tableaus look like from afar. They can only know of their own movements and positions in the entire setting. Also, as I have explained before, bandha-nrutya choreographies are wholly dependent on and subjective to respective gurus. In a way, it gives the most space for choreography to the teachers. The bandhas-nrutya compositions are always created from the vantage point of the master-choreographers for the viewing of the audience, where the gotipuas are mere pieces in a puzzle. This gives a sense of a loss of agency of the young body by virtue of being a *goti-pua* in the choreography of Gotipua, indicative of the general perception of children in society.

Being a 'Child'

In his path-breaking work on children, Phillipe Ariès, A French historian studies artwork from over the centuries to discuss the emergence of the child-figure as central to the idea of a family in early modern France. His book, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962) was one of the first and most

influential works on children and childhood. He says that until the twelfth century, medieval art did not represent children. In fact, by the example of an Ottonain (sic) miniature, he shows how children were only smaller scale, reduced images of men (Ariès 1962: 33). The idea of the child as an entity distinct from adults in not just being young people but rather having "the personality which children were seen to possess" came about after the fourteenth century in the Western conception (Ariès 1962: 129). In fact, he goes on to say how by the 18th century, "the child had taken a central place in the family" (Ariès 1962: 133).

It can be assumed that although the conceptions of childhood differed in different parts of the world even during the same eras, the medieval European idea of the child being a young adult and surviving through toil resonates with the idea of the child in the Indian context. Apart from modern and mostly elite societies, the rural societies in India still rely on the child as a young adult who can start working as soon as they are physically able to, which is why the parents of gotipuas do not mind their boys becoming professional performers at such young ages, even if they need to stay away from home for years together. For some students like Mahendra Mahapatra, learning Gotipua is a means to fulfil his "parents' dream" that he becomes a famous artist who will make his parents and teachers proud, not just in Odisha but in the whole of India (2017). Like him, most gotipuas claim that it was on the insistence of their parents, mostly mothers, that they started dancing.

In a country like India where child labour is not uncommon in order to get an extra pair of hands to feed the family, the idea of the child as a young adult seems to be fairly prevalent. Of course, there are many fields which employ children but do not see it as child labour, entertainment being one of them. The idea of the child being a working individual but still having identifiable characteristics different from those of an adult helped create the 'child-figure' in films and advertisements. The most successful and famous child-artist of the Western silver screen was Shirley Temple. Entering films at barely three years old, Temple became known for not just her acting but also her trademark blonde ringlets and dazzling smile which supposedly helped millions cope with gloom as a "new emotional currency during the Great Depression" (Kasson 2014: 19). But, as Temple writes in her autobiography, behind that smile was a lot of effort, practice and hard work. It takes a lot of labour into producing

convincing performances of childhood. So much so that she admits that after her debut, she "worked for the rest of my childhood… I went to work every day… I thought every child worked because I was born into it".

Born into an economically weak family, Temple was the main breadwinner of her house, especially in such 'depressing' times. Her mother, Gertrude, ensured that she performed well even when not on set as the cameras followed her everywhere. What she thought was an extension of little Shirley's natural childhood, was actually a lot of 'mimicry' and practice of the performance of childhood that Gertrude herself taught her (Kasson 2014: 191). Kasson elaborates on how Gertrude coached her at home as best as she could, urging her to "sparkle" and teaching her how to arch her eyebrows, round her mouth in surprise, thrust out her lower lip, and cock her sideways with a knowing smile – gestures that would become characteristic in Shirley's later films (*ibid*.) Temple mentions how even after losing her "blond baby curls" her mother washed her hair in peroxide (that burnt her eyes) every week and put her hair in ringlets (which made sleeping uncomfortable) every night before sleeping to give a more convincing and unchanging show of childhood, so much so that the audiences questioned why Temple never seemed to age or even miss a tooth! (Black 1988)

The Performance of Childhood

In her essay 'Childhood as Performance' (2013), Robin Bernstein differentiates between childhood – "abstract and disembodied" – and children – "tangible and fleshy" (203). Using Butler's concept of performativity, Bernstein suggests a tension, if not an opposition, between the ideas of "real" children and "imagined" childhood. Like gender, she reads childhood as a performance, separate from and pre-existent to the juvenile body. She also alludes to Roach while saying that the "childhood…is best understood as a process of surrogation" (2013: 204). Roach describes the process by which "a culture reproduces and re-creates itself" as "surrogation" (1996: 2). Roach also suggests that surrogation is necessarily undertaken by an "effigy" which works to fill the void "created by the absence of an original" (1996: 36). He further elaborates by adding that

> Beyond ostensibly inanimate effigies fashioned from wood or cloth, there are
> more elusive but more powerful effigies fashioned from flesh. Such effigies
> are made by performances. (*ibid*.)

Bernstein sees childhood, or the performance of childhood, as the attempt to revisit the age of innocence which continues to pass away little by little as the child grows, and hence effigies like clothes, dolls, toys and such non-human things are often used to keep the memory of childhood alive (2013). Nonetheless, juvenile bodies are the most frequently used effigy for the performance of childhood. In the case of Shirley Temple too, she became the most sought-after effigy. As a young person who most closely resembled the notions of "imagined childhood", she undertook the performance of childhood for years on the silver screen.

In an article, 'Delicate Faces, Virtuosic Bodies' (2018), I have argued that Gotipua is an ideal effigy, not only for the surrogation of childhood, like Bernstein suggests, but also for the surrogation of the *maharis*. I elaborate this by saying

> In Gotipua, the child-body is used as the 'effigy' or tool to evoke a forgotten
> memory. The cross-dressing of the boy to make him appear female, and thus
> reminiscent of a temple dancer, could be seen as evoking not just the
> forgotten history of the *maharis* but also of the fall of, and the eventual ban
> on, the performance tradition of temple dancing. Here, the body of the child
> itself is a liminal entity, not entirely socially disregarded like the *maharis*, but
> still evading the question of legality. '[A]cts of rigorous prohibition produce
> alternative, displaced versions of the proscribed behaviours', writes Roach,
> 'incorporating innovations that would not have existed otherwise, creating
> routines of words and gestures on the margins of legal sanction' (56). The
> effigy of a child-body allowed for innovations that influenced the notions of
> virtuosity associated with the form, and, according to Bernstein, can be
> understood through the lens of 'imagined childhood' (2013).
> (Mondal 2018: 41)

For a gotipua to be the effigy for the performance of childhood and for the surrogation of the *mahari* tradition, the juvenile bodies are an important tool, as they are perceived with their own assumptions of qualities by the audience watching them. To quote James and Prout, 'the immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways in which it is understood and made meaningful [are] a fact of culture'

(Kehily 2008: 14). This is especially true in the case of Gotipua where the 'imagination of childhood' change in the local and global contexts, depending on the culture of the audience. For example, the notion of childness in Gotipua itself changes depending on the audience that sees it. The local audience that watches it in the religious context knows the roles that cross-dressing and bandha-nrutya play in the tradition even though they may not know the history behind it. Moharana trumps foreign audiences over the national one because he believes the former are more curious and patient with the performances, but at the same time, he says the he would always prefer to perform locally as "the audience comes with bhakti (devotion), and understand the *leela* (lit. play) and bhakti of the performers" (2013). The notion of purity vis-à-vis puberty is an important factor for the 'imagined childhood' of these audiences.

At the same time, in the context of proscenium performances, the acrobatics of the choreography are of more interest, along with the curious cross-dressing of the young bodies. To more globalised audiences (within and out of the country), the dance is similar to the better known Odissi and offers a more vigorous and energetic version of that. But, in the absence of the traditional setting, may often be read differently than what is intended by the dancer or guru. Peggy Phelan wrote about a Gotipua performance she witnessed saying,

> On a more complicated level, however, the excess and surplus encoded within Gautam's surface femininity reminds the spectator of the absence of the female (the lack) rather than of her presence. The choreography of gotipua is punctuated by a series of tableaux in which the dancer rests squarely in front of the spectator and smiles seductively. He gazes boldly at the spectator and holds his smile. The directness of his seductive appeal is disarming, and it is that directness which paradoxically illuminates the way in which the dance is addressed to the male spectator. No one forgets that the dancer is male; the invocation of the non-male is controlled by the security of the male's body. As a substitution for the female in the sphere of visual desire, Gautam's dance questions the function of erotic substitutions—what Freud called fetishes—in the incitement to desire which all performance exploits. The fetishized female *image* so perfectly encoded in Gautam's costume, make-up, and movement works not to bring "the female" into the spectacle of exchange between spectator and performer but to leave her

emphatically outside. In place of the actual female, a fetishized image is displayed which substitutes for her and makes her actual presence unnecessary. (1993: 165)

Although Phelan's views come from a certain understanding of the child body and the notion of using it as a surrogate in such a performance, she did receive criticism from Avanthi Meduri which opined that Phelan read the performance out of its ritual context, paying "too much attention to the formal aspects of the dance and too little to the effects of content" (Meduri 1992: 96). Meduri believes that in the case of "Indian Classical dance" it is important to take note of the element of "darshan" (lit. seeing, which according to Meduri is both outward and inward in a religious context) that informs the "Indian/Hindu spectator". Meduri, in saying this, concurs with what Moharana experiences with the local audiences, but at the same time, fails to acknowledge the fact that Gotipua, by virtue of being a popular art form, also caters to Phelan's reading of Gotipua's "incitement to desire" (1993: 165). Exemplifying this element, Mohanty Hejmadi mentions that an element of seductive was also used to attract to "the amorous taste" of the audiences and especially, the patrons, wherein "*they had been taught to play up to the* zamindars*, move seductively towards them to please them and extract some money*!" (2019: 25, emphasis in original)

Child-Bodies in Hindu Religious Performances

Meduri's contention of recognising the place of 'darshan' in Indian, especially Hindu, performances is crucial to understanding the idea of the body in Gotipua. In the Hindu belief system, the body of the child is seen as a potent, even ideal, medium to channel the 'darshan' of the gods. According to Uttara Asha Coorlawala, "*darshan* is a transformative experience where the mind becomes engrossed in an experience of the deity's presence" (1996: 24). The body of the child, by virtue of being unsexed is considered both innocent and pure, and hence an ideal candidate for the gods to channel their energies from the supernatural to the natural world. At the same time, Hindu belief systems largely see the combination or union of the male and female forms as powerful, for example in the conception of the Shiva-Shakti as Ardhanareshwar or the worship of Radha and Krishna. In this framework, the body of the child is seen as a pre-sexed entity that contains the potential to house both

masculine and feminine energies. Banerji posits that Gotipua, Odissi too in her study, affirms to the ideals of an "extraordinary gender" which "configure[s] sexual difference and ambiguity as auspicious" (2010: 25). She also discusses how Gotipua "reiterates and subverts gender norms through its spiritual inclination" (Banerji 2010: 122).

The pre-pubescent body of the child is used in many Hindu rituals and performances to retain the auspiciousness of the act. The most famous example of this is the practice of Kumari Puja in Nepal where an unmarked (physically or otherwise) girl goes through several endurance tests to prove herself fit to be considered a Devi or Goddess of the village. She has a divine status and is considered a living god, until the time that she happens to bleed, either due to an injury or menstruation (Allen 1996). More often than not, she loses her divinity due to puberty, as a natural and eventual process of blood-loss. But, the general belief is that the girl remains unhurt or unstained up until that point due to the divinity in her, the loss of which results in her bleeding. In India too, during the Hindu month of Ashwin, while the celebrations of the goddess Durga in various forms in different parts of India commence, some communities invite pre-menarche girls from the neighbourhood in order to serve them and get their blessings. The devotees invite them home, clean their feet with water, feed them a meal and then give them gifts to please them, and thereby earn the favour of the goddess. These are practices that are intricately linked to the social practices of the believers who see the girls as containing divinity. Gotipuas too, as sebayats of the temple, are believed to have sacred energies and are colloquially also called the 'children of god'. I have given the example before of how their naughtiness is often read as that of god, and they are never reprimanded or scolded by the locals for the same.

Apart from such social practices, the body of the child is actively used on stage to represent the purity associated with the gods in Hindu traditional performances. I will discuss here the two most famous and studied practices of such performances- the Ramlila and the Raslila. Both are very popular celebrations in North India, especially identified with the towns of Varanasi and Vrindavan respectively where they are celebrated with grandeur. Anuradha Kapur in her book *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings and Gods: the Ramlila of Ramnagar* (2006) discusses the

Ramlila in detail and while talking about the young actors playing the five main characters- Rama, Laxmana, Bharata, Janaki and Shatrughna. She mentions how "young brahman boys" (2006: 12) are selected based on "their physical attributes, their height, their beauty, their age, their voice" (2006: 6) to play the *svarūpas* (lit. form) of the five deities. She describes how the kids are specifically needed to play these main characters, and also extras in the armies of Ram and Ravan, while the other characters, including the antagonists are played by adults. Not only are the figures of the children considered divine by the masses, Kapur also suggests that that they induce the affect of 'tenderness' such that the devotees feel a sense of being caring, protective and responsible towards the gods when they see them as child-figures. In that, the quality of being the child is in itself complete for the devotees and audience to feel an endearment towards the gods, as opposed to the adults who play the demons. Kids are also used in the army of Ravan which was essentially an army of monkeys and hence, let loose on the stage, they perform imagined childhood which suits the needs of the characters they need to play.

In the nearby town of Vrindavan, the performance of Raslila too, engages young bodies as the main gods. In *Theatre and Religion on Krishna's* Stage (2009), David Mason talks about the children who play the role of young Krishna, Radha and the *gopis* or milkmaids. They are all played by boys between six to sixteen years old. As a Vaishnavite practice, the characteristics of the Raslila are closer to that of Gotipua. Among the devotees of Krishna, the young Krishan or Balagopal is hugely adored and is seen as being reflected in the kid playing him. The mischief of the boys on stage, giggling, fidgeting and forgetting lines are all seen as the manifestation of childhood, in accordance to the mischievous nature of Krishna himself. It is not that the children are seen as extraordinary beings or as divine, like the Kumari goddess is; they are rather seen to be performing childhood even when they are in the garb of the gods, because Krishna himself is identified with performing childhood. Mason reckons that children in general enjoy a "much favoured place in Indian society" because, as per a resident of Vrindavan, "pure bhav exists in the child in the absence of worldly passions and vices such as greed, jealousy, cruelty, and so forth" (2009: 112). These qualities are not really tangible characteristics of childhood but rather the expectations one has from imagined childhood, especially in the Hindu religious society.

In the performances which require normal humans to play supernatural beings, like in Ramlila and Raslila, the child-body is considered to be the ideal effigy to perform the imagined childhood which is pure and untainted. The usage of the child in religious performances like these is mainly due to the physical form of the young body and to some extent, their caste[98] and beauty. The primary reason for their selection in these roles wherein they have to imitate gods, are on the basis of how they look and whether they have any imperfections. They are already identified as natural effigies for the performance of childhood and are not expected to perform anything apart from that. The body of the person becomes more important than any other prerequisite in such performances, even though they may be required to enact, recite, or portray certain roles. The basic requisites of discipline and training are also requisites that, like in Gotipua, play a part in these performances. Interestingly, Mason also mentions the feature called *jhanki* in the Raslila, where the boys come together in a tableau like those in Gotipua's bandha-nrutya. Formations such as these need the young bodies to be obedient and willing to work together, another quality expected from an ideal performance of childhood.

Childness in Gotipua

As discussed above, the natural body of the child is often considered to be most fitting effigy for the performance of childhood. In order to understand the differences between real and imagined childhood better, it might be useful to discuss briefly about the emerging field of "cute studies". Although still in its infant stage, cute studies proposes that there are certain elements which help highlight imagined childhood through the idea of being "cute". The field is being cultivated at a time when the media is flooded with "baby videos" (just as it is with "cat videos"), especially documenting kids' reaction to certain things, or performing in ways that the viewers find entertaining. Such videos or acts are becoming increasingly popular, especially with the Japanese idea of "kawaii" (lit. cute) and the androgynous "flower-boy" fashion of Korean pop-stars, gaining global attention in recent times. In terms of

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[98]I do not delve into the issue of caste here as it is not relevant but Kapur explicitly mentions the boys being brahmans and gotipuas too, do not perform in the temples if they belong to the Scheduled Castes.

the effigies that surrogate childhood, cuteness is a quality necessarily imbibed by the effigies to highlight the performance of childhood.

Konrad Lorenz talks about the *Kindchenschema* (lit. infant schema) which proposes that characteristics like a large head, large and low eyes, a spongy elastic consistency etc. cause a cuteness response from adults and motivates them to take care of the infant (Lorenz, cited in Dale et al 2017). This schema is not dependent on the real child but rather an affect that is attached to imaginary childhood, resulting in a cuteness response. Even though Gotipua is not necessarily a "cute" performance (although I have heard the dancers being called cute in multiple occassions), I use the idea of the cuteness affect to propose the affect of childness, different from the performance of imaginary childhood. I believe that the inducement of the affect of childness uses some characteristics of *kindchenschema*, but more importantly exhibits "the qualities of vitality, strength, suppleness of the body and androgyny associated with the juvenile (non-infant) body" rather than an infant body (Mondal 2018: 42). The qualities expected in imagined childhood are used to manufacture the affect of childhood in the effigies. The property of being an affect is of utmost importance in the understanding of childness as the Collins Dictionary defines "childness" as 'the nature or character of a child' as opposed to 'childhood' which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as 'the state or period of being a child'. As I have explained elsewhere, "the *ideal* of childhood is brought to the fore by utilizing the affect of childness, just like the ideal of the female uses femininity as affect, and the ideal of the male uses masculinity as affect, and so on. Childness is, therefore, an affect attached to the process of surrogation, necessarily imbibed by the effigy" (Mondal 2018: 42)

> In Gotipua, the essence of childness is exaggerated
> through certain visual and choreographic elements. Along with the premise
> that the body is juvenile, and hence petite, it is made to appear even shorter
> by the dhoti and the folded leg positions of chauka and tribhangi (the main
> basic postures of Gotipua). Along with the postures, make-up also makes the
> performers' faces appear larger with the highlighting of the cheeks and the
> eyes, akin to Classical Indian dances. There is also the continuous reminder
> of childness, the smile that never fades from the faces of the performers,
> giving the impression that the body of the child and the idea of childhood is

pliant without much effort. This produces a curiosity in the audience regarding the potential of the child-body, repeatedly quenched by the virtuous display of divine tableaus and the virtuosic display of the multiple bodies. Multiple dancers, as opposed to a solo dancer, do not require one to focus much on the expression (or bhava) of the individual dancers. Rather, their multiplicity enforces the importance of the body as the choreographic tool on both the master-choreographer and the audience. Hence, the virtuosity of such bodies becomes crucial to Gotipua's display of childness and the performance of childhood. (*ibid.*)

This exaggeration of the elements can better be understood by Roach's theorisation of the 'performance of waste' (1996). He defines the performance of waste as "the conspicuous consumption of non-utilitarian objects and forms of all kinds, including theatrical productions and other incarnations of excess" (1996: 123). He posits that it is the performance of waste that creates the surrogates or 'effigies' by deflecting the anxiety 'produced by a sense of having too much of everything' (Roach 1996: 123). Gotipua enacts this performance of waste through the strict enforcement of the virtuosic body, through the process of discipline, training and choreography. The performance and popularity of bandha-nrutya highlights this performance of excess by creating the Body which is have discussed in the last chapter. Roach also writes that such performances of waste are especially created "whenever the sweet desire to assimilate or to be assimilated curdles into the fear of being replaced" (1996:173), which in Gotipua's case was the coming of Odissi. The predominance of bandha-nrutya at such times was therefore, bound to create the performance of excess. In Gotipua, "the effigy of the child-body becomes more physical and more androgynous than a real child, creating a spectacle of disciplined synchronicity." (Mondal 2018: 43)

The Cross-dressed Boy:

The flexibility of young bodies is desirable in Gotipua, not only in terms of their physical prowess, but also by way of their "extraordinary gender" as posited by Banerji (2010: 116). The passing mention of young performers in the Ain-i-Akbari indicates that the tradition seemed to have been popular in those years, but not novel

or extraordinary in any way. What is interesting is that the mention is not only of boys, but rather of cross-dressed boy performers. In societies that are so rigidly formed on the segregation of genders (especially as per the sex assigned at birth), it is surprising to see the explicit but non-explanatory mention of a cross-dressed performance. Perhaps patronage had to play a decisive role in the propagation of the style in the Mughal era, as there were similar performances in varied contemporary Islamic empires along the Silk Routes. In *The Dangerous Lives of Public Performers* (2014), Anthony Shay discusses public performances in the Islamic World from ancient Greece to the contemporary times, and mentions performances by cross-dressed or "ambiguous[ly]" (2014: 20) dressed young boys which have prevailed over the ages. He mentions that "the Ottomans (1300-1918), the Safavids (1501-1722), and the Mughals (1526-1868)" were contemporaries and elaborates on the performance of *köçeks* (lit. little) or *bachas* (lit. boys) which became popular in the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century AD (2014: 141). Like Gotipuas, köçeks too, were trained from a very young age completing the training by 13 or 14 years of age, as were the young performers of ancient Rome (Shay 2014: 25). According to Ruth Webb, this ensured that the dancer's body would become "powerful and attractive" (qtd. in Shay 2014: 25). This indicates a necessary prerequisite for such performers who would be trained in multiple talents - music, mime, dance, acrobatics - across these cultures; a prerequisite easily fulfilled by the flexible bodies of young people, especially boys.

The gender that the Gotipua tradition seems to project is effeminate but not feminine, boisterous but not masculine. According to Shay, the thing men feared in the *köçeks* is the effeminacy of these dancers and therefore, tried to dominate them sexually (2014: 14) which eventually led to the tradition of *köçek* into oblivion (never to be revived) and banning of *bacha* by the Taliban government in Afghanistan (although it still survives illegally). Interestingly, there exists a cross-dressed performance by boys in Kashmir which is called *bacha-nagma* which may be similar to the dance done by the *köçeks* or *bachas*. In the case of Gotipua however (or even *bacha-nagma* for that matter), there has been no known account of such sexual availability, possibly due to their religious connotations or ritualistic performances as opposed to pure entertainment, wherein the body projects more childness than specific effeminacy or machismo.

Patronising Childhood

The performance of Gotipua, although somewhat erotic at some point in its history, no longer invests in using seduction as a tool for gathering patronage. Even though using the excess of femininity in terms of the makeup and costume in order to highlight the cross-dressing, the main commodity in contemporary Gotipua performances is the physical virtuosity. As is discussed in the last chapter, solo and duet performances are almost extinct and Gotipua is now synonymous with group performances which excel at tableau compositions and acrobatic choreographies. This current form of Gotipua is, again, in response to the patronage it receives in the contemporary environment. In the dearth of singular patrons like *zamindars* and kings, Gotipua was forced to look for patronage outside of its ritualistic circles and alter its form accordingly. The changing nature of the education system and the commercialisation of art resulted in a shorter version of Gotipua, one that emphasised on the flexibility of the multitude of young bodies. It is curious though that while Gotipua shortened its repertoire to specially highlight what it thought was the most virtuosic display of the tradition, another tradition was blooming in the horizon of the national stage using the same lengthy repertoire that Gotipua had barely shed.

In 1954, when Odissi was first "discovered" by India and Charles Fabri in Delhi, Priyambada Mohanty Hejmadi was the dancer who performed a short piece choreographed by Singhari Shyamsunder Kar (MohantyHejmadi 2019: 7). It was the first time that dance tradition was displayed outside the state of Odisha. At that time Mohanty Hehmadi was unaware that she "not only danced items of the *gotipuas* but also dressed like them!" (*ibid.* emphasis in original). It is a well-documented fact that Odissi was reconstructed in the mid-1950s by mostly male gurus who were previously trained as gotipuas. Nonetheless, Odissi dance is constantly heralded to be an *ancient, Classical* form, the legacy of which was borne by the *maharis* and then given national status by its renaissance post-independence. The on-going revivalist movement of the Hindu nationalists in response to the Independence "vis-à-vis that of the west cleansing of the lowly practices and resurrection of the 'pure' upper caste practices" resulted in the birth of the 'purified' and dignified 'Classical' dance (Kumar 2013). While the male gurus took on the role of revivalists and choreographers, it was several "young women, educated in the western system, yet well versed in Indian

culture, who actively took on the role of cultural ambassadors" like Indrani Rehman, Sanjukta Panigrahi, and Sonal Mansingh (Kumar 2013).

Aastha Kumar discusses how for the revival of Odissi, many factors contributed to the female body being heralded as the symbol of the Classical dancer, including the "the notion of the feminine body". She suggests that the dancer's images were "propagated as the face of young, exuberant nation … [while] the codes and rules were still formulated by the Gurus, confining the role of the dancers to that of mere carriers of an ancient legacy" (Kumar 2013). Kumar proposes that it wasn't just the idea of a youth or exuberance that was as important as the idea of the "Bharat mata" who on one hand an ancient value system and philosophy and on the other was progressing towards modernity and global identity as a new nation. On similar lines, Royona Mitra talks about the classicization of Bharatanatyam wherein she calls it "a reformist and modernist project undertaken to re-inscribe Sadir into a 'respectable' high art form, by removing from it all traces of the liminal and the eroticism of its past" (Mitra 2006: 75).Sadir, like *mahari*, was the *devadasi* dance form in the Madras Presidency which was the nucleus of the anti-Nautch campaign.

Mitra's analysis finds semblance even in the case of the Gotipua body which, although not erotic in its being, was largely seen as corrupted by the vulgar influence of the Andhra *devadasis* in the form of *sakhi nata* (Patnaik 2006: 67, Mohanty Hejmadi 2019: 27). The question of liminality too, largely affects Gotipua as much as it did the *devadasis* as both are subject to the ritual parameters of the temple. The Gotipua body does not go through a rite of passage, but is in liminal state nonetheless by virtue of being a Gotipua. Scholars like Srinivasan, Shah, Mitra, Tandon and Kumar discuss the "revival" of Bharatanatyam and Odissi from the *devadasi* tradition as an act of 'rescuing', 'cleansing' and 'purifying' the form by new-age middle-class Hindu nationalists, further legitimised by the establishment of several national institutions which 'conferred' Classical status on certain forms while reserving its judgement on several others. Although no formal rules are laid out for the consideration of any dance as a "classical" form, the general understanding is a compliance to cannon and covertly, political privilege of the revivalists (Mitra 2006; Kumar 2013). In Mitra's words, "Dance became the property of [the middle] class

and Srinivasan (1985: 1875) astutely observes that since then 'the art has come to be preserved is that very section of Indian society'." (Mitra 2006: 75)

The Gotipua tradition could not be considered as a 'classical' form, I believe, due to a variety of factors. Firstly, the dance itself could not claim its evident scriptural and hence 'classical' roots due to the lack of knowledge in the oral traditional circles. By the time an eminent scholar like D. N. Patnaik got a scholarship to study the canons, Odissi had already been performed through the lithe, enchanting female body. It is quite possible that even though the tradition is rightly the custodian of a diminishing tradition, the body of the gotipua itself could never be considered ideal. The bodies of children in themselves are ephemeral, as pre-sexed entities which are visibly different from heteronormative 'adult' bodies. In retrospect, the bodies of even female performers as per scriptures are as ephemeral as child-bodies, considering they have to be youthful and energetic (*Natyashastra*, *Abhinaya Chandrika*). It is perhaps with reference to said scriptures that enlist the young, female body as ideal bearers of classical dance which prevents both older bodies like those of the *maharis* and younger bodies of Gotipua to be considered the true carriers of the performance tradition.

Secondly, the tradition around the time of independence was barely surviving in the hands of a few *zamindars* like Chandrashekar Patnaik. In fact, without the bandha repertoire it now has, Gotipua was barely surviving as a ritual tradition. By displacing it to the bodies of middle-class, educated, modern women, it was as if the "revivalists" breathed air into the stone sculptures of Puri. Even though the repertoire was identical, the "contemporization, refinement, sophistication, and ablution, in other words "classicization," of certain traditional regional forms meant selective furtherance of one dance at the cost of another, often its own precursor" (Shah 2002: 126). So, instead of uplifting the Gotipua tradition, the State and the gurus helped developed a more 'ideal' form of dance that would help solidify its claims to an ancient past better than the younger 'child' bodies.

The performance of childhood ensures that the performance itself is a constant reminder of the transitory nature of childhood. The fact that the tradition is borne *temporarily* by pre-pubescent male bodies that comprise a fringe of society, poses

another hindrance to its classicization. Not only is the body of the child seen as underdeveloped, the child as an entity in itself is considered to not be a part of mainstream society in that they are considered a 'minor' in society, incapable of taking their own responsibility. This is why when Kapur talks of 'tenderness' and Lorenz of 'cuteness response', what they really imply is the dominating role of the adult as a caretaker vis-à-vis the vulnerability of the child. But does that vulnerability then not contradict the labour invested by the child, especially in an intensive performance like Gotipua?

Labour and Legitimacy

The performances of childhood especially on camera or on stage are labour-intensive, in that the child body needs to perform even when it might not be up for the portrayal of childhood as energetic or effervescent. This boundless energy of the child should appear seemingly effortless in order for it to be convincing. For example, the audience does not expect "imagined childhood" to be filled with hard, physical activity involving labour or risks, even during a performance such as bandha-nrutya. The spectator may know that bandha needs constant practice but may not count the pain or the risks of injury while watching it. A performance like Gotipua has ample physical hardship and risks when the young bodies perform bandha. The essence of childness is foregrounded by shrouding the reality of rigorous training, labour in the gurukuls, separation from families and the fact that the children generally come from lower socio-economic backgrounds who perform in order to ensure free food and education (Moharana 2013, Pattanayak 2013, Sahoo B. K. 2013). The performance of imagined childhood in Gotipua is necessarily brought about by the enforcement of strict rules of tradition and discipline by the adult teacher. The multiple bodies, dispersing in space and coming back together to form tableaus create a display of discipline, in tension with the idea of playfulness in imagined childhood.

The State, in its role of the ultimate caretaker of 'minor' citizens, counts child labour as illegal, which brings out the question- what forms the ambit of 'labour' with respect to children. In the earlier, travelling days of Gotipua, the boys were paid a share from the earnings of the troupe which they would then give to their families

(Mohanty Hejmadi 2019). But in the contemporary situation wherein there are big institutes with multiple children in their troupes, the gurukul ensures free education, food and lodging to the child in return of their labour. There is no economic transaction involved as far as the child is concerned. Therefore, the child is now no longer a breadwinner, but rather is just a student-in-training complicit with the idea of the gurukul. This brings the question of the idea of the agency of the child in the tradition.. As group dancers, they have no agency over the choreography. They are merely used as bodies in the collective body of the Gotipua structure which performs to earn for the head of the structure, the guru. At the same time, they also perform household duties like cooking and cleaning which would have come in the ambit of child-labour, had it not been in the name of service.

The *devadasis* of the temple of Puri did not receive alms, but they did receive patronage from the kings in the form of clothes, shelter and food. Similarly, the gotipua of contemporary times is expected to comply with the same system of patronage, as a service not to their gurus but to the tradition itself. As a tradition that still falls very much in the ambit of a religious performance and not a commercialised economy, there is no space for the dancer to earn a living off their performance. The guru is considered more of a guardian of an extended family and never an employer, thereby making him the sole breadwinner. One can say that the agency of a child-artist is negotiated even in a family structure as, by law, the child's earning goes to their natural parents who are nonetheless responsible for the economic welfare of the child until they turn eighteen years old. In a tradition like Gotipua, the natural parents are still very much responsible for the economic welfare of the child whereas the profit of the child's labour is reaped by the guardian, creating a more complex economic network.

A gotipua, in his initial years of training learns the tricks of the trade diligently as any amateur artist would. The question of intensive labour at the start of any art form is often raised by artists when talking of the economic equivalent of their art, and, in most cases, there exists some payback in terms of money, recognition or validation. In the case of Gotipua, this is where the actual problem of labour comes in. In terms of payback, an average Gotipua does not receive anything more than a ten-second applause. And this unfulfilled validation takes the form of a desire to be more

than just a dancer of the troupe. More often than not, as a gotipua grows older, he harbours the desire to become a gotipua guru like his teacher in order to choreograph different tableaus and dance pieces to his own liking. Almost every male student I interviewed desired to be a guru after they grew out of this dance, and this desire is noticeable in the growth of smaller schools and gurukuls in Odisha in last few years. The pent up artistic agency of the gotipua takes the shape of an ambition to start his own school or troupe. The Gotipua tradition creates an illegitimate performer whose labour fails to get the desired fruition. Although legitimacy and illegitimacy are generally understood in their political or legal term, I use it in accordance to the definition given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* of "the state of not being in accordance with accepted standards or rules" wherein the very nature of the body in Gotipua renders it illegitimate.

The child in being a surrogate for the 'performance of childhood' constantly labours to reach the ideal of the 'imagined childhood'. In the case of Gotipua, there is a huge amount of labour involved in realising that ideal of childness demanded by the tradition. The illegitimacy of gotipuas has become starker in contemporary times, I posit, because of the contemporary nature of labour and economy. In the earlier days of kings and *zamindars* as patrons, gratification to the performer was given directly to him as *nazrana*. It was completely up to the individual dancer to evoke eroticism (Mohanty Hejmadi 2019) rather than childness in order to get monetary appreciation which in turn indicated a validation. In the days leading to the formation of the troupe under the gurukul system, there was still a faint chance of appreciation in terms of immediate token gratis at public performances like the episode described in the performance at Jhulan Jatra. But with the performance taking a proscenium form, that gratis has now discontinued, although the physical labour has increased in terms of synchronicity and virtuosity.

The performance of childhood has been intensified in order to produce a more virtuosic affect of childness instead of femininity or even eroticism. Even though Gotipua's hyper-real performance of childness guarantees awe or astonishment, it is unable to ensure patronage in its current form. Contemporary Gotipua institutions are surviving at the behest of local or international proscenium performances with minimal pay. They are mainly also supported by the earnings of the institute as an

Odissi school. It is indeed curious as to why this traditional and popular dance tradition is suffering at the hands of commercialisation. Gotipua's existence today borders between the religious and the secular more than it has ever in the past. Although it was never wholly a temple form, unlike the *mahari* tradition, its association with the temple and especially the mathas gave a certain religious legitimacy to the form. But increasingly, the mathas are no longer able to render enough financial support to the Gotipua institutes or gurus. In fact, during the Jhulan Jatra in contemporary times, the gurus themselves refuse to perform for such long hours in exchange of the meagre fees given to them by the mathas. This not only shows a lack of patronage from the maths but also indicates to the depletion of devotion or the feeling of seva to the maths by the Gotipua gurukuls. The earnings made via short proscenium performances of twenty minutes long overshoot the meagre allowance given to them by the mathas for a night-long performance.

Gotipua's commercialisation does not legitimise the body in the tradition. With the momentary validation while being on stage or being considered 'god's children' when not on it, the young bodies do not get affected by the economic profits. In today's day and age, the only 'profit' from being a gotipua is having a prior training in the Odissi style which can be polished once older and used to claim a certain legitimacy. As Guru Satyapira Palai (2013) laments, "there is no advantage in being a gotipua. They learn for ten years, then learn Odissi and the become teachers. So, there is no future in Gotipua." More often than not, Gotipua bodies are illegitimate in that the liminal phase of being a gotipua does not ultimately result in a post-liminal transition. The whole, synchronous, disciplined body is the marker of the tradition, rather than the labouring, virtuosic individual body. The illegitimate, individual body of *a gotipua* is only legitimate as being a part of the Body of Gotipua. The lack of agency, recognition of labour, and the depleting patrons all contribute to the performance of an illegitimate child body.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I analysed Gotipua with a view to read the young body as a crucial element in the performance of the tradition. With the inclusion of bandha nrutya as a crucial item in the repertoire, the role of the young bodies in this tradition gains more importance as they become better surrogates for the imagination of childhood. The idea of the child as easily malleable and impressionable is projected in the choreography of bandha nrutya. At the same time, the imagination of childhood as being an age of disciplining as opposed to the real child who is difficult to discipline become highlighted in the Body of Gotipua. In the use of the bodies to create the collective, I have argued that the legitimacy of the child and his labour is compromised. As my conversation with Chitrasen Swain demonstrated, it is no secret that the labour that the dancers put into becoming gotipuas can be counted as child-labour, not just due to the effort they put into the tradition, but also the work they have to do while in the gurukuls, away from their families, that too mostly without pay. I do not wish to be patronising to the gurus who train these children but instead, desire to bring attention to an area that requires to be studied. As a dance tradition that is often neglected by academics, but is wrought with socio-political implications, my intention in working on this tradition was to bring it into the academic sphere.

I have analysed the tradition of Gotipua as having roots in the religious movements of the 7th century CE with the available historical evidences. As a chapter in this thesis, it was not possible to elaborate on this finding but I tried to, in brief, explain the reasons of my analysis. Although I read the contemporary form of the tradition, it was important to understand the history in order to read the body that this tradition projects and patronises. With an emphasis on the different styles of Gotipua which I segregate into the three schools- the Dimirisena Schools, the Raghurajpur School and the Bhubaneswar School- I have tried to hint at, not just the difference, but also the path of evolution that is seen through the three Schools in the contemporary times.

The inclusion of girls in this tradition was also an important element of this research as I tried to read the prohibition of female figure in a dance that was used to create a dance -Odissi- performed and made famous mainly by the bodies of women. Of course, not surprisingly, I found that the prohibition has no basis in the philosophy or the requisites of the tradition and is due to social perceptions of women, and there were teachers who challenged these perceptions. With the changing nature of the tradition, the form is still in the process of creating an identity for itself in the dance spheres today. With increasing popularity, this dance will perhaps gain more recognition and create a model of a tradition that can finally negotiate with the loss of its religious importance. In elaborating the different modules of choreography of the dance, I also tried to read it in a light that was more global, like the new identity Gotipua is trying to create. In that, I have also touched upon other such rare instance of performances which use the liminal body of a pre-pubescent male child, to discuss the prevalence of such a tradition in the world of performances.

I realise that this thesis is wanting of many finer elaborations which may have been overlooked in trying to collaborate the various factors that inform this tradition. For example, although I tried to involve the voices and opinions of the dancers in this tradition, keeping it attuned to the philosophy of Child Studies, it was not always possible to get them to talk to me. As a woman, many of the boy students, especially the younger ones, were shy to talk to me. Even those who spoke were limited in their dialogues. The barrier of language was also a factor as even though I have a working understanding of Odia, I do not speak it and the students did not always understand Hindi or English. The teachers, on the other hand, were elaborate in their answers to my queries and therefore have features as the main repositories of oral history.

I have, to the best of my ability, tried to cite as many sources and references possible in tracing the history of this form. in my effort to do so, I realised that it is a deep well of which I have just touched the surface. The history of the tradition which is popularly known has survived due to the religious philosophies underpinning it, but I am still curious to trace more roots, as I see them emerging through the analysis that I present. I am particularly interested in the role that Tantrism has played in the development of this form. Rekha Tandon has done extensive research on the influence of yoga in Odissi. Although I do not use much of her work in this thesis, it has piqued

my curiosity to warrant further analysis into the connection it might have to Gotipua and how the tradition has incorporated it.

My research on Gotipua hopes to provide a fresh perspective on Gotipua- one that is not shrouded in the reconstruction of Odissi. It is true that many Gotipua gurus themselves read the dance as part of the Odissi tradition, but I believe that the roots of this form go beyond the compartmentalised structure of Odissi and needs to be read with more depth. Of course, this thesis is in no way, inclusive of all the elements of this rich heritage, and I will pursue more research into the several loose ends provided by this work.

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