

Classical and Folk Dance Forms: Analysing Jewellery in Performances

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Abstract

The primary objective of this paper is to comprehend the usage of jewelry in distinct dance forms in the Indian socio-cultural context, namely the Classical and Folk Dance forms of Mithila. An attempt has been made to offer a comparative analysis of how the usage differs in the mentioned dance forms while establishing at the same time that the presence of Jewellery is felt in each dance form, whether classical or folk in nature. The analysis is based on data collected from the field in Mithila in Bihar and other relevant materials mainly related to dance and Jewellery.

Keywords: dance, Jewellery, folk jewelry, classical dance, folk dance, Mithila

Introduction

The word jewelry is taken from Old French "joule," meaning something that gives joy, and the Latin word "locale," literally means a plaything. The meaning of the word Jewellery as an object for adornment has been redefined and modified over the years.

Jewellery can be perceived as an essential part of one's culture and identity, and its presence is felt within all cultures, irrespective of geographical variations. Thus, the meaning of Jewellery as merely a plaything is highly questionable, particularly at present. Jewellery can be recognized as one of the oldest forms of body adornment, as also suggested by Jewellery Researchers and writers.

Bholanath Bhattacharya, a Jewellery Researcher, and writer, writes:

"It is well nigh impossible precisely to indicate where, how, and when ornaments first came into existence, either by decorating the persons of human beings or to serve some other need or both. It is, however, universally acknowledged as a fundamental fact of the history of mankind that the use of Jewellery predates even the primitive man's quest for a garment to

wrap himself with. The recorded history of the existence of ornaments in the remote past.” Though the origin and time of Jewellery cannot be traced, it is believed that the tradition of wearing ornaments began even before humans started clothing the body.

Rebecca Ross Russell argues:

“Body decoration is a ubiquitous phenomenon that transcends time and space. There is not one civilization. However, limited its available materials may be, that does not practice self-ornamentation (Russell 1).”

Jewellery has been an integral part of Indian culture for countless years, and it has been discovered that though changes keep occurring every now and then in jewelry trends, the desire to adorn the body remains unchanged. Therefore, Indian Jewellery, though different in every region in its form, shape, and meaning, merges at one point as a binding force. Jewellery responds to our most basic urges, such as control, honor, and sex, acquiring a significant place in each individual's everyday life and existence. In fact, from Gods to animals and humans, Jewellery affects all, and it would thus be right to state that it is an inseparable part of the culture. Over the years, Indian culture has undergone several changes, which are reflected through Jewellery in how it is perceived, worn, and experienced today. Self-adornment can be viewed as a powerful vehicle for self-realization, at once subtle and firm, as argued by Jewellery Researcher and writer Pravina Shukla.

Indian Jewellery in the present socio-cultural context lies at the center of culture and directly influences how culture functions. It can also be said that the way culture accepts changes has impacted how Jewellery is worn and experienced by wearers. The classical dancers wear Jewellery to express their emotions, and the inclusion of Jewellery adds an aura to the performance. On the other hand, modern dance forms employ Jewellery as a style statement, and the kind of ornaments worn by classical dancers significantly differs from emerging dancers today. Nonetheless, Jewellery finds a place in all kinds of dance forms, whether folk or contemporary, classical or modern, because it is inherently a part of every element in culture, including dance, music, and other art forms. An impactful dance performance mesmerizes the audience and captivates them through emotions conveyed powerfully by the dancers and through the grace that flows in the steps. It is worth mentioning here that Jewellery plays its part in every dance performance as it adds an aura to the entire performance and, more importantly, highlights the expressions.

Classical Dance Forms

In the *Natyashastra*, Bharat Muni dedicates a chapter to *Nepathya* (costume and makeup), where he also mentions different types of ornaments, stressing that Jewellery is needed for every performance.

Types of ornaments described	Examples
Ornaments that are fixed by piercing the limbs (<i>avedhya</i>)	An example could be an ear ornament such as earrings, <i>kundala</i>
Ornaments to be tied up (<i>bandhaniya</i>)	Represented by girdles, <i>sroni-sutra</i> and <i>angada</i> (arm band)
Ornaments to be worn (<i>praksepya</i>)	Anklets, <i>nupur</i> as well as wearing apparels
Ornaments to be put around (<i>aropya</i>)	Golden neck chain (<i>hema sutra</i>) and necklaces (<i>hara</i>) of different kinds

Their jewel-girt arms and warm, wavering, lily-long fingers enchant through melodious hours, Eyes ravished with rapture, celestially panting, what passionate bosoms a flaming with fire!

-*Indian Dancer* by Sarojini Naidu

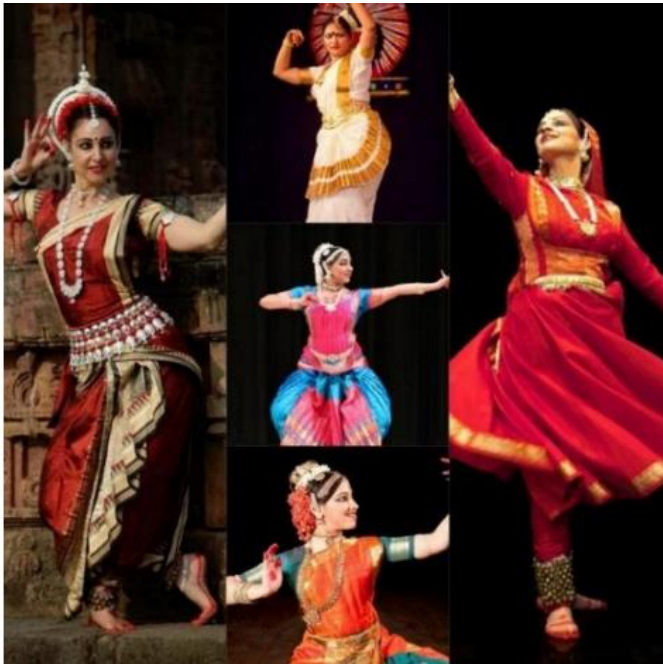
Sarojini Naidu, in her poem, *Indian Dancer*, glorifies dancing as an art form. Depicting the dancer with jewel-girt arms and warmth, she illustrates the passion burning like a fire within the heart of an "Indian dancer." Naidu beautifully captures the image of what an Indian dancer is like in behavior and appearance, combining the imagery of Jewellery with the dancer. Indian folk jewelry plays a crucial role in depicting the beauty of various Indian dance forms, including Kuchipudi, Kathak, and Bharatnatyam. Various jewelry items are used for different body parts to add grandeur to the performance. From the hair to the toe, Jewellery covers each body part of a human body. For classical dancers, the hungry, for example, is of immense value.

In Oddisi, dancers wear an elaborate head ornament called *must* or *market*, made in the city of Puri in Eastern Odisha. The *must* is made from dried reeds called *sola* and consists of two parts i) a part that sits around the bun on the back of the head called *global* and ii) a longer piece that stems out of the back piece, which is called *taqiya*. In Bharat Natyam, Odissi, Kuchipudi, and Mohiniyattam, dancers can also wear *maangtika* or a *matha patti*, an elaborate form of *mang tika* aided by elaborate chains. In Oddisi's dance form, however, *amatha patti* is not as elaborate as that used in other dance forms. The *matha patti* used is generally made from silver or sterling silver. For hair, *gajra* (made of white flowers) is a common hair ornament. In Bharat Natyam, the head jewelry can be identified into two types, the round-shaped hair accessory called *Surya* and the half-moon-shaped accessory called *Chandra*. These are adorned on different sides of the *matha patti*. (*Surya* on the right and *Chandra* on the left) The same pattern is followed by Kuchipudi and Mohiniatyam dance forms.

For the ear, Odissi dance jewelry includes a unique silver ear cover that resembles the shape of a peacock. In Mohiniatyam, a gold medallion is worn on ears that cover the whole ear and appear as an ear cover. An elaborate ear chain supporting the earring is also worn by the dancers, specifically by Kuchipudi and Bharat Natyam dancers. *Jhumkais* also an ear ornament that the dancers wear. Mohiniyattam dancers prefer large *jhumka* that cover most of

their ears. For the nose, dancers are supposed to wear nose rings and nose pins as ornaments. In Mohiniyattam, a single gold nose ring is worn on the left side of the nostril, while in Bharat Natyam, dancers are expected to wear two nose rings (one on the middle section of the nose side and another on the middle section of the nose). Both the nose pieces are made of gold and stones. On the neck, classical dancers wear a short necklace or choker made of precious metal, which is silver for Oddisi and gold for other dance forms. The dancers often adorn a long necklace to support the costume/attire, which without the necklace, looks incomplete. As for hands, Oddisi dancers wear silver bangles on each hand, while in Bharat Natyam, the dancers are supposed to wear colourful bangles matching the color of the costume chosen for the dance. In other dance forms, wearing gold bangles as hand ornaments is customary.

A dancer's waist is highlighted by *Kamar bandh*, an ornament for the waist. An elaborate filigree Kamarbandh supports the oddest costume. In Bharat Natyam and Kuchipudi, a golden belt-like Kamar bandh is chosen.



Usage of Jewellery in Classical Dance Forms

Folk dances of Mithila

When asked if they perform dances, the upper caste Maithils in the village of Karjapatti and the small town in Darbhanga, Leheriasari, replied in the negative. However, they know about dance forms and enjoy them as spectators, but they refrain from participating when it comes to performance. The lower castes have more agency and freedom in this particular space as their dance forms are primarily popular in the region. Women, especially, have more access to freedom when it comes to these dance forms as they can finally narrate their stories through them. Some dances are exclusively for women, like *Sama Chakewanach* and *Jhijhiya* dance. Lower caste groups have exclusive dances such as Chamarnature, Kanalamainach, Dampha- Basulinach (for the shoemakers), etc. A mixed

group dance called Saturi dance is influenced by the tribal culture. A family dance called Bakhonach is another popular dance form in which the husband and wife participate on the occasion of the birth of a child or on any other auspicious occasion.

The folk dances of Mithila are also religious in nature. In religious dances, Gods and Goddesses are invoked through dance, while folk songs are played with musical instruments employed as supporting aids. Some musical instruments are the *dhol* (drum), *pipahi* (an instrument almost similar to *shenai*), and *danka*. The *Ram Leelanaach*, *Bhagatnatch*, *Kirtaniyanach*, *kunjawinach*, and *puja artinach* can be enlisted as some important religious folk dances of Mithila.

Jhijhiya

Jhijhiya is performed by women who carry lanterns made of clay on their heads, balancing them while dancing. Primarily performed during Dusshera, in dedication to Durga Bhairavi; this dance form allows women a space to express themselves. A popular *Jhijhiya* song is dedicated to *Brahm Baba* (the God protector of the village) and performed numerous times by women in both Bihar and Nepal. While women performing can be seen with Jewellery, it is noticed that the amount of Jewellery is hardly visible. The Jewellery is very simple, and the material is mostly silver or other artificial stones.

Domkach

Domkach is performed across North-East India by women to stay awake at night. Although the name varies in different districts and regions, the purpose remains the same. In Mithila, the dance form is called *Domkach*, where as in the Bhojpur region is known as *Nakta*, *Naktora*, *Jalua*, or *Ratjaga*. Women gather in groups, implying that in a group, women gain strength through female solidarity. Mostly, it is performed on the wedding occasion of the boy when the friends and relatives, along with the groom, march towards the bride's house. Traditionally, women are not allowed to participate in wedding processions. Things have begun to change as women, especially younger women, have started challenging norms. The significance of the dance form is that women would celebrate the wedding through it. In this space that belongs to them alone, they hurl abuses, make sexual jokes, and use lewd language. In the absence of men, women are freely able to articulate their sexual and other hidden emotions. Blending the dance with games and enactment, *Domkach* is one of Mithila's best-explored dance forms. Like *Jhijhiya*, women cannot be found wearing much Jewellery while performing *Domkach*. While women enter into a space of articulation, the adornment of the body is not grand or elaborate.

Jat- Jatin

Jat-Jatin is a couple's dance that involves gestures and deals with the theme of love. A dramatic dance episode concerns an evil boatman who breaks through the dancing ring and abducts the Jatin. The lovers face challenges but are ultimately united to live happily ever after. The people of Leheriasari in Darbhanga are familiar with the dance form and can be seen humming the song that supports the dance. Surbhi Kusum living in Leheriasari, Darbhanga, could sing *Bali Marina*, which supported the dance and shared the video. The *Jat* and *Jatin* are engaged in a dialogue, and here the *Jatin* makes a complaint to her lover. A

direct reference has been made to various folk jewelry items of Mithila, such as *insulin*, *Kangan*, *mangaka*, and *Payal*.

“Jatin-tikwa jab jabmangaliyo re jatta, tikwakahenalolen re? Arrey, baaliu mariya re jattatikwakahenalolen re?”

“Jat- tikwa jab jabaanaliyogejatin ,tikwakahenapehinileyge? Tora baliu mariyagejatin, nahirakiyagamalege?”

The woman demands answers and asks, "When I asked you to get me a *maangteeka*, why did you not get it for me? My youth and beauty would be enhanced with the *maangteeka*. Why, then, did you forget to get it?"

Her lover responds, "I did get you the *maangteeka*. Why did you forget to wear it? I know you are young, but it would have been better had you not gone to your parent's place.

In a series of complaints, the woman keeps demanding to know why her lover did not get her a *Bhansali*, *nathiya*, *Kangan*, and *Payal*. To the accusations, the lover retorts by saying that he had got them all, but for some reason, the woman could not wear them.

Conclusion

Jewellery enhances dance and, as a decorative piece, adds a tinge of glitter to the costume and performance. The continuous references to various jewelry items highlight the value of folk jewelry in a woman's life in Mithila who wishes to possess each item. However, the Jewellery is not luxurious or grand in dance forms. In contrast to the classical dance forms like Bharat Natyam, Kucchipudi, etc., the jewelry items used in the folk dances of Mithila (Domkach, Jhijhiya, and Jat-Jatin) are not very elaborate and lavish. The folk dances of Mithila are mainly performed by lower castes who cannot afford expensive Jewellery in most cases. While the Brahmins are rich farmers who have all luxuries in their homes, on the other end exist the lower castes fighting for survival on an everyday basis and doing menial jobs to run the family. In the village of Karjapatti, a separate living space has been assigned to the lower castes that do not even have a roof over their heads. It would be wrong to say that Jewellery is absent or unimportant in Maithili folk dances. In fact, the simple jewelry items used in the folk dances paint an accurate picture of the lives of the people that perform them.

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Sigrid Van Roode's Instagram page is dedicated to Jewellery. —Bedouninsilver. Instagram, 20 May, 2022, www.instagram.com/bedouinsilver/.