

A Study of Folk Dances of Maharashtra

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ABSTRACT: Folk dance of a nation is the nation's mirror in that it manifests to some extent the nation's temperament, art, culture, simplicity, social status and customs. Most of the Maharashtrian dances are traditional or folk dances, which are performed during festivals, marriages ceremonies, during celebration of birth, and during the harvesting time. The present paper aims to explore the popular folk dances of Maharashtra by investigating the present status of the dancing community. The sample was selected by convenient sampling technique and the sample size consisted of 216 respondents for the 6 popular dances. The main folk dances of Maharashtra are Lavani, Dhangarigaja, Lezim, Koli, Gondhal and Tamasha. Majority of the dancers were associated with these dances for the last 10 years, they got dance training from trained dancers and were motivated to perform dance due to their own interest. The study will transmit to the future generations the value of folk dancing as it is a wholesome form of entertainment which provides excellent platform for the development of creativity and critical thinking. Further, the knowledge about the dance community is vital as it has an important cultural role to play in preserving the tradition and strengthening the identity of the community besides linking them to other communities and people.

INTRODUCTION

India can boast of an innumerable number of dances, each dance forming a specialty of a particular region or people. Dance is the rhythmic physical movement which is spontaneous in animals and human beings. Dances of the hunters, the tribes and the agricultural communities are the chronicles of human progression through ages. There is hardly a civilization or culture where in the awareness of human movement as a vehicle of expression of joy and of sorrow is not evident. The art of the dance in India, as evolved and elaborated in this ancient land and coded in that classic, *Bharatiya Natya Shastra*, is a very complicated science with a history as old as Hindu civilization itself (Venkatachalam, '59). Folk dancing is that dancing which has developed among the peasantry and is maintained by them in a fluid tradition without the help of the professional dancers, *South Asian Anthropologist*, 2014, 14(1): 25-33

teachers or artists and is not, at least in its particular form, observed and practiced in town on a stage. Folk dance was made for the sheer pleasure of the performers. Folk dances are of even greater significance in that they are direct expression of the innermost spirit of India. The Indian folk dances are a creative work, the artistic steps and postures being accompanied by the rhythmical movement of vocal or instrumental music (Banerji, '59). Theatre in India has its origin in the villages. Many believe it is an art that is total having within, its real music, dance, movement, and dialogue and of course acting. The audience of a folk play usually participate in the play. Folk performance grows out of rites and rituals going back to antiquity. They are part of the lifestyle of the village or tribal community, intimately linked to agricultural cycle of the life, whether it is showing reaping or harvesting. Folk performances are not just New Series ©SERIALS 25

presentation of skill, dance, music or song. They are a part of the life function of the community (Kanungo, 2006).

In Britannica Encyclopedia, folk dance has been defined as authentic traditional dance of a given society, handed down from generation to generation in the manner of all traditions, customs, beliefs, superstitions and folkways without alteration. Folk dance is the most natural and spontaneous expression of exuberance and celebrity of life. Folk dance is simple instinctive and vigorous in nature and allows to a large measure, abandonment and freedom of expression (Sodhi, 2001). Folk dance studies are an essential part in any scheme of study dealing with the evolution of people's social, emotional and cultural life and is also an index to their ethical, aesthetic norms and sense of values. A study of the folk dances reveals – people's ideas and ideals, hopes and fears, aspirations and superstitions (Walia, 2008).

Maharashtra is bordered by the state of Madhya Pradesh to the north, Chhattisgarh to the east, Andhra Pradesh to the southeast, Karnataka to the south, and Goa to the southwest. Dance is the most important part of Maharashtrian culture and various folk dances are performed during festivals and on special occasions. Today, Maharashtra has a number of folk dances like Lavani, Dhangarigaja, Lezim, Koli, Gondhal, Tamasha, Povada, Dindi and Kala, Dashvattra and Muralibagdy some of which are performed by only males or only females and some by both males and females. But, Lavani, Dhangarigaja, Lezim, Koli, Gondhal and Tamasha are the most popular folk dances of Maharashtra. The present study was undertaken to identify the popular folk dances of Maharashtra. It also investigates the present status of the dancers performing these dances. The fieldwork provided significant knowledge about the folk dances which reflects rich Indian dance tradition transmitted through generations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Survey method was adopted to carry out the present research work and the data was collected by personally administering the interview schedules. A questionnaire was prepared to obtain desirable

information and objectives. Some photographs were also taken to support the information collected. An interview schedule containing simple relevant questions were put in a proper sequence for the correspondent's convenience. From the total 35 districts of Maharashtra, 9 districts were selected by random method. These districts were Mumbai, Thane, Nagpur, Gondia, Aurangabad, Pune, Nasik, Sholapur and Kolhapur. A list of the villages of the above districts of Maharashtra was procured from the Department of Cultural Affairs and Public Relations, Nagpur. Out of the total 165 villages of these districts which were famous for keeping these folk dance practices alive, only 18 villages were chosen by convenient sampling because of the established background of various dances in these villages. The sample for the present study consisted of 216 dancers comprising of 108 males and 108 females for the 6 popular dances. This was the most efficient sample because not every individual of the selected villages practices these dances. 25 % of the selected sample, i.e. total 54 respondents comprising of 27 males and 27 females were taken up for the pre-testing to check the validity of questionnaire. The data was collected by administering the schedule containing questions in English to the selected sample. But the questions were asked by the investigator herself in Hindi and Marathi to respondents for their convenience in understanding. Their responses were noted down in the space provided against each question by the interviewer. The purpose of the study was explained to all the respondents to satisfy their curiosity and to obtain good response before the questions were put. The data was subjected to statistical analysis in which the data were classified according to the dance, with 36 respondents each representing specific dance form. The data from schedules were then tabulated after coding, which had particulars of each question. The frequency of units, respondents and percentages were then developed to find out significant findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected for the present study has been analysed and presented in the form of frequencies and percentages to find out information about dances and the results of the survey are discussed below:

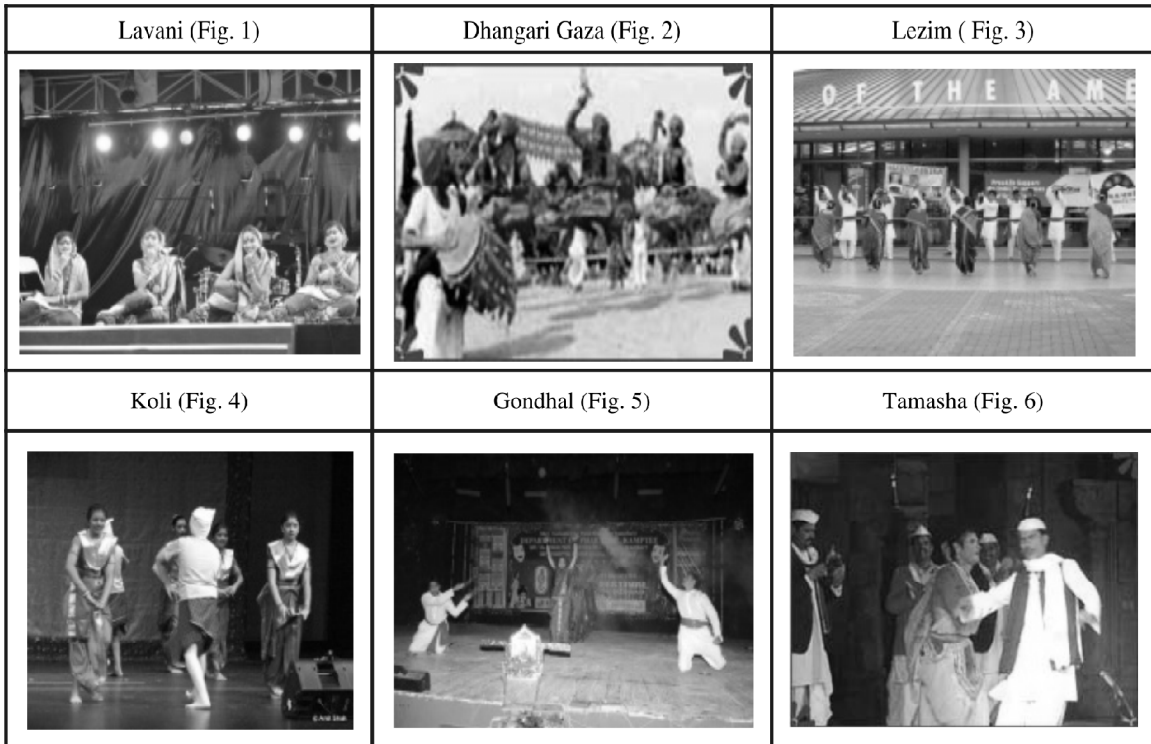
TABLE 1
Information regarding different dances of Maharashtra

| Dance | Region | Performed by |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Lavani | Malwa | Only females |
| Dhangarigaja | Malwa and Marathawada | Only males |
| Lezim | Konkan | Males and Females |
| Koli | Konkan | Males and Females |
| Gondhal | Malwa and Marathawada | Males and Females |
| Tamasha | Malwa and Marathawada | Males and Females |

It is evident from Table 1 that different dance types are popular in different regions of Maharashtra. Lavani dance (see Fig. 1) is performed only by females of all the castes and it was found to be very popular in Malwa region only. Dhangarigaza dance (Fig. 2) is

performed by only males of Dhanger community, and is much popular in Malwa and Marathawada regions. Lezim dance (Fig. 3) is performed by both males and females of all the castes and it is popular in Konkan region only. Both males and females performed Koli dance (Fig. 4) which is famous in Konkan region. In olden days, this dance was performed by Koli community but now a days it is being performed by mostly all the castes. Gondhal dance (Fig. 5) is performed by both males and females and is popular in Malwa and Marathawada regions. In earlier time it was performed by persons of Gondhal community only but now-a-days it is being performed by almost all the caste communities of Maharashtra. Both males and females of the all the castes perform Tamasha dance (Fig. 6) and it is popular in Malwa and Marathawada regions.

POPULAR FOLK DANCES OF MAHARASHTRA



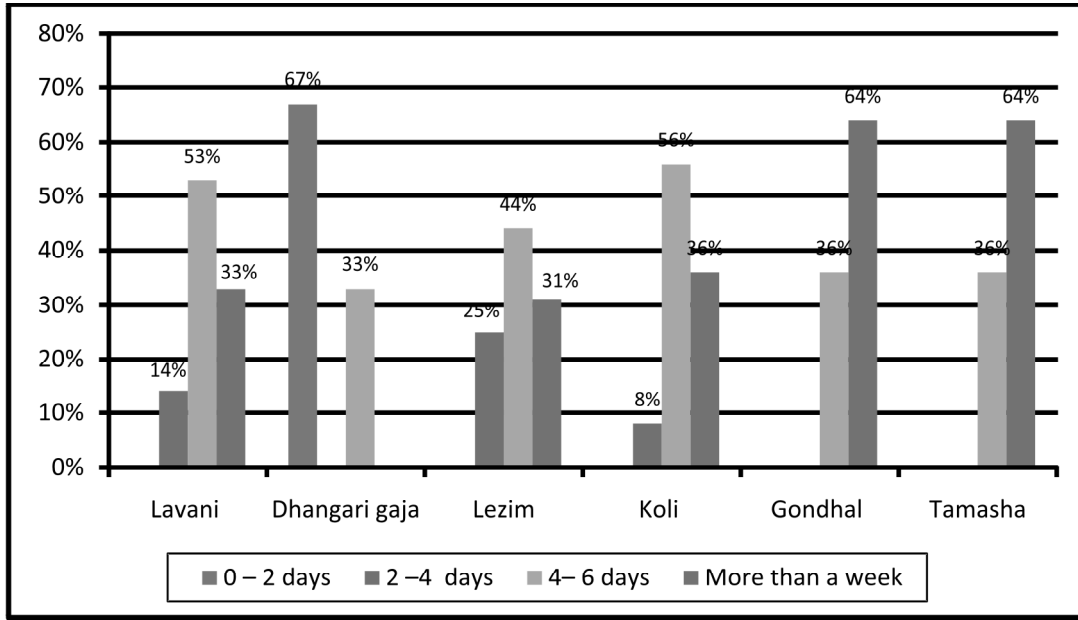


Figure 2: Showing the respondents (n=36) on the basis of their rehearsal time before dance performance

Fig 2 shows that out of 216 respondents, 36 respondents comprising 18 males and 18 females, each of Lezim, Koli, Gondhal and Tamasha dances, and 36 male respondents of Dhangarigaja dance besides 36 female respondents of Lavani dance gave different opinions regarding number of days required for rehearsal before the dance performance.

Rehearsals of 4 to 6 days was more common among majority of dancers i.e. 56% respondents of Koli dance, 53% of Lavani dancers and 44% of Lezim dancers followed by 36% each of the respondents of Gondhal and Tamasha dances and only 33% dancers of Dhangarigaja. Further, rehearsal time of more than a week was required by majority i.e. 64% each of respondents of Gondhal and Tamasha dances followed by 36% Koli dancers,

33% dancers of Lavani besides 31% Lezim dancers. 2 to 4 days rehearsal time was required by 25% of Lezim dancers, 14% dancers of Lavani and only 8% Koli dancers. Only 2 days rehearsal time was stated to be sufficient by majority i.e. 67% of dancers performing Dhangarigaja dance.

Table 3 shows that dancers performing different dances took various positions or made different arrangements while dancing. Majority i.e. 83% of respondents of Lavani dance quoted that no specific arrangements were required in the dance. Only 17% told that sometimes they made straight lines while performing dance. Further, maximum ie 72% male respondents of the Dhangarigaja dance revealed that no specific arrangements were made while dancing followed by only 28% dancers who stated that

TABLE 3

Distribution of the respondents (n=36) on the basis of the arrangements followed in dance performance for each dance

| Sr. No. | Arrangements while dancing | Respondents on dances | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----|--------------|----|-------|----|------|----|---------|----|---------|-----|
| | | Lavani | | Dhangarigaja | | Lezim | | Koli | | Gondhal | | Tamasha | |
| | | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| 1 | Circular positioning of dancers | – | – | 10 | 28 | – | – | 25 | 69 | – | – | – | – |
| 2 | Straight line | 06 | 17 | – | – | 17 | 47 | 11 | 31 | – | – | – | – |
| 3 | Dancers facing each other | – | – | – | – | 19 | 53 | – | – | 13 | 36 | – | – |
| 4 | No specific arrangements | 30 | 83 | 26 | 72 | – | – | – | – | 23 | 64 | 36 | 100 |

Table 4 reveals that majority of the respondents ie. 69% of Lavani, 67% of Dhangarigaja, 50% of Lezim followed by 44% of Koli dancers and 36% of dancers each of Gondhal and Tamasha dances mentioned that they required 12 to 16 min for completion of the dance. But, maximum ie. 56% dancers of Koli dance required 8 - 12 minutes for completion of dance as it was comparatively faster than other dances followed by 31% of Lavani respondents, 22% of dancers of Lezim and 14% of Gondhal respondents who also stated that they required 8 – 12 minutes for dance completion. Further, majority ie. 64% of Tamasha dance which was performed usually slowly revealed that they took maximum time ie.16 to 20 minutes for dance completion in addition to majority ie. 50% of respondents of Gondhal followed by 33% of Dhangarigaja dancers and only 28% of dancers of Lezim who also quoted that they required 16-20 minutes for completion of dance.

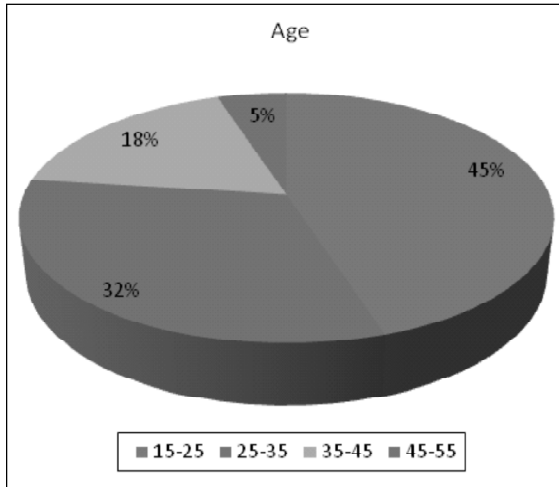


Figure 4: Showing the respondents on the basis of their age

Fig. 4 shows that out of total 216 respondents of different dances comprising of 108 males and 108 females, majority of the respondents i.e. 45% were in the age group of 15 to 25 years followed by 32% in the age group of 25 to 35 years. 18% respondents were in the age group of 35 to 45 years and only 5% were in the age group of 45 to 55 years.

TABLE 5

Distribution of the respondents on the basis of religion (n = 216)

| Sr. No. | Religion | (n) | % |
|---------|------------|-----|----|
| 1. | Hindus | 174 | 81 |
| 2. | Muslims | 26 | 12 |
| 3. | Christians | 16 | 07 |

Table no 5 depicts that majority i.e. 81% of the respondents were Hindus followed by 12% who were Muslims. Only 7% of the respondents were Christians.

TABLE 6

Distribution of the respondents on the basis of their qualification (n = 216)

| Sr. No. | Qualification | (n) | % |
|---------|------------------|-----|----|
| 1. | Illiterate | 15 | 07 |
| 2. | Middle | 12 | 06 |
| 3. | Matric | 56 | 26 |
| 4. | Senior secondary | 72 | 33 |
| 5. | Graduate | 55 | 25 |
| 6. | Post Graduate | 06 | 03 |

Table 6 reveals that majority i.e. 33% of both male and female respondents were having senior secondary as their educational qualification. 26% respondents were matriculates, 25% dancers were graduates followed by 7% of the respondents who were illiterate. Further, 6% were middle passed and only 3 % were post graduates.

TABLE 7

Distribution of the respondents on the basis of their marital status (n = 216)

| Sr. No. | Marital Status | (n) | % |
|---------|----------------|-----|----|
| 1. | Married | 151 | 70 |
| 2. | Unmarried | 65 | 30 |

Table 7 shows that maximum number of the respondents i.e. 70% was married and only 30% were unmarried.

It is clear from fig. 5 that the monthly income of most of the respondents i.e. 49% was in the range of Rs 5,000 - 10,000 followed by 44% of the respondents with income in the range of Rs 1,000 - 5,000 and only 7% were having monthly income between Rs 10,000 to 15,000.

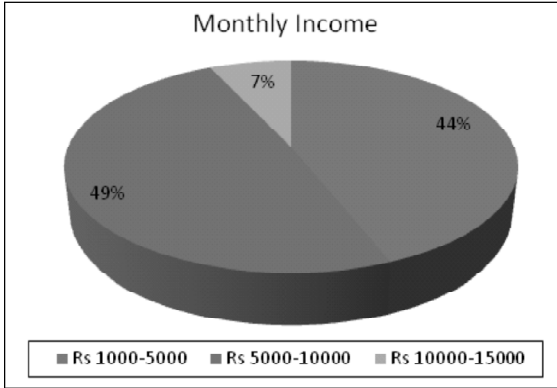


Figure 5: Showing the respondents on the basis of their monthly income

TABLE 8

Distribution of the respondents on basis of their motivation behind dance work (n = 108)

| Sr. No. | Motivation behind dance | Male | | Female | |
|---------|-------------------------|------|----|--------|----|
| | | Abs | % | Abs | % |
| 1. | Fame/Recognition | 37 | 34 | 40 | 37 |
| 2. | Financial need | 27 | 25 | 27 | 25 |
| 3. | Hobby/Interest | 44 | 41 | 41 | 38 |

Table 8 depicts that all the respondents performing different dances gave different reasons for joining the dance profession. Majority i.e. 41% of the male dancers and 38% of the female dancers considered that they performed dance due to their own interest or hobby followed by 34% of male dancers

and 37% of female dancers who were performing the dance for fame or recognition. Only 25% each of the male and female dancers took to this profession as it was their financial need.

TABLE 9

Distribution of the respondents on the basis of their nature of job (n = 108)

| Sr. No. | Nature of job | Male | | Female | |
|---------|---------------|------|----|--------|----|
| | | n | % | n | % |
| 1. | Part time | 41 | 38 | 47 | 44 |
| 2. | Full time | 67 | 62 | 61 | 56 |

Table 9 shows that majority i.e. 62% of the male respondents and 56% of the female respondents quoted that dance was their full time job whereas 38% of the male respondents and 44% of the females respondents were undertaking dance as part time job.

TABLE 10

Distribution of the respondents on the basis of interest of the family members in adopting dance as a profession (n = 216)

| Sr. No. | Interest of family members | n | % |
|---------|----------------------------|-----|----|
| 1. | Yes | 124 | 57 |
| 2. | No | 92 | 43 |

Table 10 reveals that majority i.e. 57% dancers told that their family members would continue with the dance profession followed by 43% respondents who informed that their family members were not interested in adopting this profession.

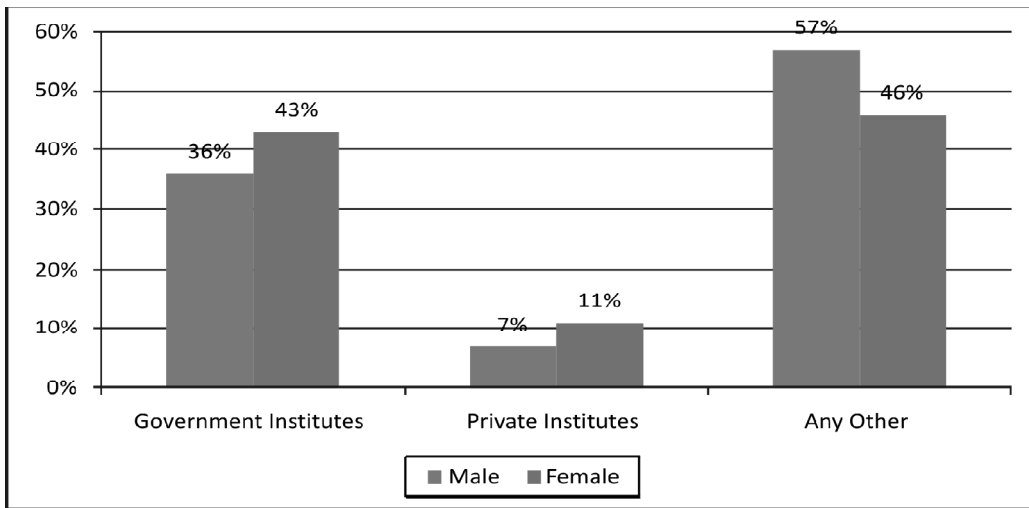


Figure 6: Showing the respondents on the basis of their source of training for dance

Fig. 6 shows that majority ie. 36% of the male respondents and 43% of the female respondents had got training for the dance from government institutions comprising of schools and colleges. Only 7% of male and 11% of female respondents had acquired dance training from private institutes like, Deshpandey dance academy and Nupur dance academies etc. 57% of male and 46% of female dancers got dance training from trained dancers with established dance background whom they called Gurus.

CONCLUSION

There are six popular folk dances of Maharashtra. These are Lavani, Dhangari Gaja, Lezim, Koli, Gondhal and Tamasha dance. Some of these dances like, Lezim, Koli, Gondhal and Tamasha are performed by both male and female dancers. Dhangari gaja dance is performed by only males and Lavani dance is performed by only females. The folk art of dancing should be kept alive with the efforts of govt. and private organisations by extending help to retain the lustre of these fading folk arts of India. The folk dances need unceasing monetary and structural backing to build and preserve our artistic traditions. The dancing community should also be supported by

these organisations through workshops to improve artistic skills of dancers, by providing dance training to kids, youth, organising tribal and folk dance festivals at school or college level and giving cash prizes or awards to winners in addition to launching specific schemes for the benefit of the dance community, otherwise they may lose trust in their artistic power and motivation. To achieve economic advancement, people need to work together and acquire skills for sustainable livelihood. Thus, strengthening of these folk art forms is very important as it is the heart of the culture of our society.

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