

The Vibrant Attire of Kalbelia: A Cultural Expression through Dance Costume

SIMRAN PREET KAUR*¹ AND BINDU CHATURVEDI²

¹Research Scholar and ²Head

Department of G.P.E.M., Govt. Arts Girls College (University of Kota), Kota (Rajasthan) India

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Kalbelia dance is the popular folk dance of Rajasthan. This dance was included in Intangible Heritage list by UNESCO in 2010. One of the most striking aspects of the Kalbelia dance is the unique attire worn by the performers. The garments are not only a visual delight but also a reflection of the community's identity, traditions and artistic craftsmanship. The clothing is designed to enhance the fluidity and grace of the dance movements, while also highlighting the cultural significance behind each element. This paper focuses on the traditional attire of Kalbelia dancers. Along with garments, jewellery is an important part of the dance as it enhances the overall visual appeal. Data was collected using a self-structured interview schedule and observation method. Data was also collected in the form of pictures and videos. The costumes were completely black in colour, representing cobra snake. The jewellery and costume worn by the dancers were made by themselves, which added to their extra income. The attire of the Kalbelia dancers is not just a costume; it is a living, breathing representation of a unique cultural legacy.

Keywords: Kalbelia, Folk dance, Rajasthan, Attire, Costume

Category (Theme): Revival of Traditional Textile and Craft

Preference for Presentation: Oral Presentation

INTRODUCTION

Rajasthan, the land of Royals, is famous for its hospitality. Rajasthan can also be called as cultural capital of India. Costume, food, music, festivals and folk dances contribute to the culture of the state. State has very harsh climatic conditions with scorching heat, where temperature soars up till 50°C in summers. People have to travel long distance to fetch water. Despite of facing such hardships, the people of Rajasthan have found their joy in vibrant costumes, rhythmic folk music and energetic folk dances. People have curated delicacies with whatever food products are available to them. Folk music is a large part of Rajasthan culture.

A folk dance is characterized as “a certain kind of dance with a distinctive style or some other distinguishing feature. It is not a universal genre of dance. When folk dances are compared from one culture to another, they

have in common no universal movements, figure, form, style, or function,” (Kealiinohomoku, 2016). Talking of folk dances of Rajasthan, they can be classified in following groups: Regional Folk Dances, Caste Based Folk Dances and Commercial Folk Dances. Kalbelia dance is performed by Samera tribe, hence it comes under Caste Based Folk Dance. Samera tribe is a nomadic tribe. Traditional occupation of Samera community was snake charming, extraction of snake venom. Along with this, they also used to entertain villagers, by carrying snake and making it dance on the tunes of “been”. However, after the enactment of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, they could not perform their previous profession of snake charming, hence they took up the profession of dance and music. This dance was included in Intangible Heritage list by UNESCO in 2010.

Samera tribe has taken dance performers as their occupation. These people were initially nomadic tribe.

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They used to live in makeshift homes outside the cities. This also throws the light on the fact that they were considered untouchables by people. Few of the respondents also accepted the fact that, in earlier days they were prohibited to cruminate their bodies at the common crinations place. Nowadays, their condition is not as such, they have proper *pucca* houses. Jaipur city has a proper colony known as kalakar colony, where most of the performers live, on the other hand Kota doesn't have any special colony designated to them, but they live in *pucca* houses. Now they are more acceptable as the mainstream population with their kids going to school. It was also noted that in spite of facility of school being available to the sapera tribe, they prefer to send their kids to school only for initial years and later they would train their kids for the performance, according to their gender.

Rajasthan being the tourist hub is exposed to outside world and due to this influences the chances of loosing away its traditional uniqueness is more. Moreover, with the popularity of folk dances, large number of people are choosing it as their occupation. Number of hotels are employing people who can perform number of folk dances. Dancers also tend to wear such costumes in which they can perform number of folk dances. Hence, with commercialization of folk dance, chances of its loosing its originality is more. Investigator was sensitive towards the present trend. Hence, documentation of the costumes was the felt need. It will serve as a source of inspiration to the designers who can adapt this to contemporary wear, theatre artist for reproducing and museum personnels for preserving the costumes and can serve as a teaching module to the academic institutions.

Therefore, the present investigation was conducted to study was costume worn by the Saper community, while performing the Kalbelia dance.

METHODOLOGY

A systematic and descriptive research design was followed to attain the aforesaid objectives. A questionnaire cum interview schedule was formulated and used for data collection. Information was collected through purposive sampling and snowball technique. Along with primary data, secondary information was also collected through libraries, museums and tourism departments. Observation method along with photographic and video documentation was also done. Three dance groups were

selected on the basis of their willingness to respond. Each group has six to eight members. Data was collected from Jaipur and Kota districts. Interviews of the dancers were conducted in Hindi language and the responses were recorded in English.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Kalbelia dancers mimic the movements of snake at the time of performance, as initially snake charming was their profession. Energy and flexibility are the two lifelines of the Kalbelia performance. Dancers bend at their back and pick up currency notes with their mouth and rings with eyelids. At the time of performance menfolk sit down to sing songs and play musical instruments and women stand in semicircle to dance.

The present study was conducted to document the traditional costumes worn by Kalbelia dancers at the time of performance. Three dance groups were interviewed, two from Jaipur and one from Kota. Total sample size was of 22 performers. Researcher had interviewed both male and female performers. Dance was performed by females and males used to play musical instruments.

The results of the present study have been presented under following sub heads:

Costume of female performers:

Upper garment:

Angrakhi:

Angrakhi was an upper garment. It was a short top reaching below waist. It was made up of black polyester fabric with lots of colourful satin ribbons, silver *gota*, mirrors and various colourful laces. The sleeves were little below the elbow, again with lots of ornamentation. At the hem and side slits a bright coloured fabric strip of around 1½-2 inches was attached, it was known as *magzi* in local language. The neckline was usually kept square so that ribbons can be placed neatly.



Fig. 1 : Kurti

Lower garment:

Ghaghra:

Ghaghra was a gathered skirt worn as a lower

garment. It had gathers at the waist which were secured by belt. The length of the skirt was till ankle of the wearer. The fabric used was polyester, same as used in *angrakhi*. The *ghaghra* was embellished with colourful satin ribbons and silver *gota* of different width along with mirrors. The width of the *ghaghra* was of 5 – 6 meters. At the hem of *ghaghra* same coloured fabric was attached which is used in *magzi of angrakhi*. The width of this border is of 1 ½ - 2 inches broad.



Fig. 2 : Ghaghra

Chudidar pajama:

This is the regular *chudidar pajama*, which is cut on bias and fits the legs of the wearer very nicely. It is secured by drawstring at the waist. This could be any colour and fabric. The purpose of wearing this is to prevent the display of performers legs when the dance. Now-a-days many dancers prefer wearing readymade leggings available in market.

Head dress:

Chunni:

This is a 2 ½ meter long piece of fabric. This is also black in colour. Fabric of the *chunni* can be of the dancer's choice. Researcher had discovered that maximum number of dancers had *chunni* of net fabric. This might be due to the fashion trend at that particular time. The entire field of *chunni*



Fig. 3 : Chunni

was decorated with silver mirrors and silver lace is attached at all four sides if the *chunni*. The center of the *chunni* is pinned at the head of the dancer and two ends are left freely at both the sides.

Ornaments:

Ornaments play an important role in the Kalbelia dance, as it enhances the overall performance. Most of the ornaments were either made up of colourful beads and cowrie shells, or were of silver. It was discovered that women of Sopera community sourced the raw material from local market and prepared their own jewellery. It was like another income generation activity. This helps them to sustain when the market for dance performance was low. However, raw material used for making jewellery was cheaply available in market, the ready jewellery pieces were sold very costly, as the amount of time consumed in making the jewellery was too much. Along with jewellery, Sopera women also used to make their own garments for the performance, and sell that also. This is like their side income generation activity.

Lots of ornaments were worn by dancers, such as *phatia* and *chapalki* as necklace, *punshi* as bracelet, *shoomar* as earrings, *kamar ka patta* as waist ornament, *mathe ka choga* at forehead and *jeebe* was attached on different places of the *angrakhi*. *Ghoongroo* were tied at the ankles.



Fig. 4 : Chapalki



Fig. 5 : Phatia



Fig. 6 : Punshi

Costume of Male Performers:

Male performers are usually vocalists or musicians. Their number can be from three to eight people. They sit at the back or at the sides of the women dancers and perform. Musical instruments played traditionally were *khanjari*, commonly known as *dufli*, and *been*. *Khanjari* is made from the skin of snake or monitor lizard, whereas *been* is made from bottle guard. However, now-a-days several other musical instruments are used such as, *dholak*, *ektara*, *chan*, *mer* and *harmonium*.

Costume worn by males were traditional Rajasthani attire, *i.e.* dhoti, kurta and pagri. Traditionally, dhoti and pagri were draped, but nowadays, many performers are preferring readymade options available in the market.

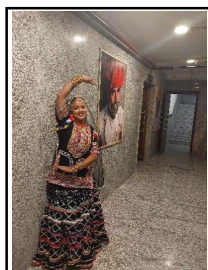


Fig. 7 : Female performer in traditional attire



Fig. 8 : Male performer in traditional attire



Fig. 9 : Ready to wear dhoti

Conclusion:

It can be summarized that Kalbelia dance has been the identity of the folk dances of Rajasthan and the intricately designed costumes for the dance attracts the viewers and increase the aesthetics of the dancers by leaps and bounds. *Angrakhi*, *ghaghra* and *chunni* are worn by the female dancers, while menfolk wear *dhoti*, *kurta* and *pagri*. Ornaments such as *chapalki*, *phatia* and *punshi* are worn by the women performers of kalbelia dance. Women usually dance and men are either vocalist or musicians. Several musical instruments are played at

the time of performance such as, *khanjari*, *been*, *dholak*, *ektara*, *chan*, *mer* and *harmonium*. It is understood that the traditional costumes play an important role in the survival of the sapera tribe and also is an important aspect of the performance.

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