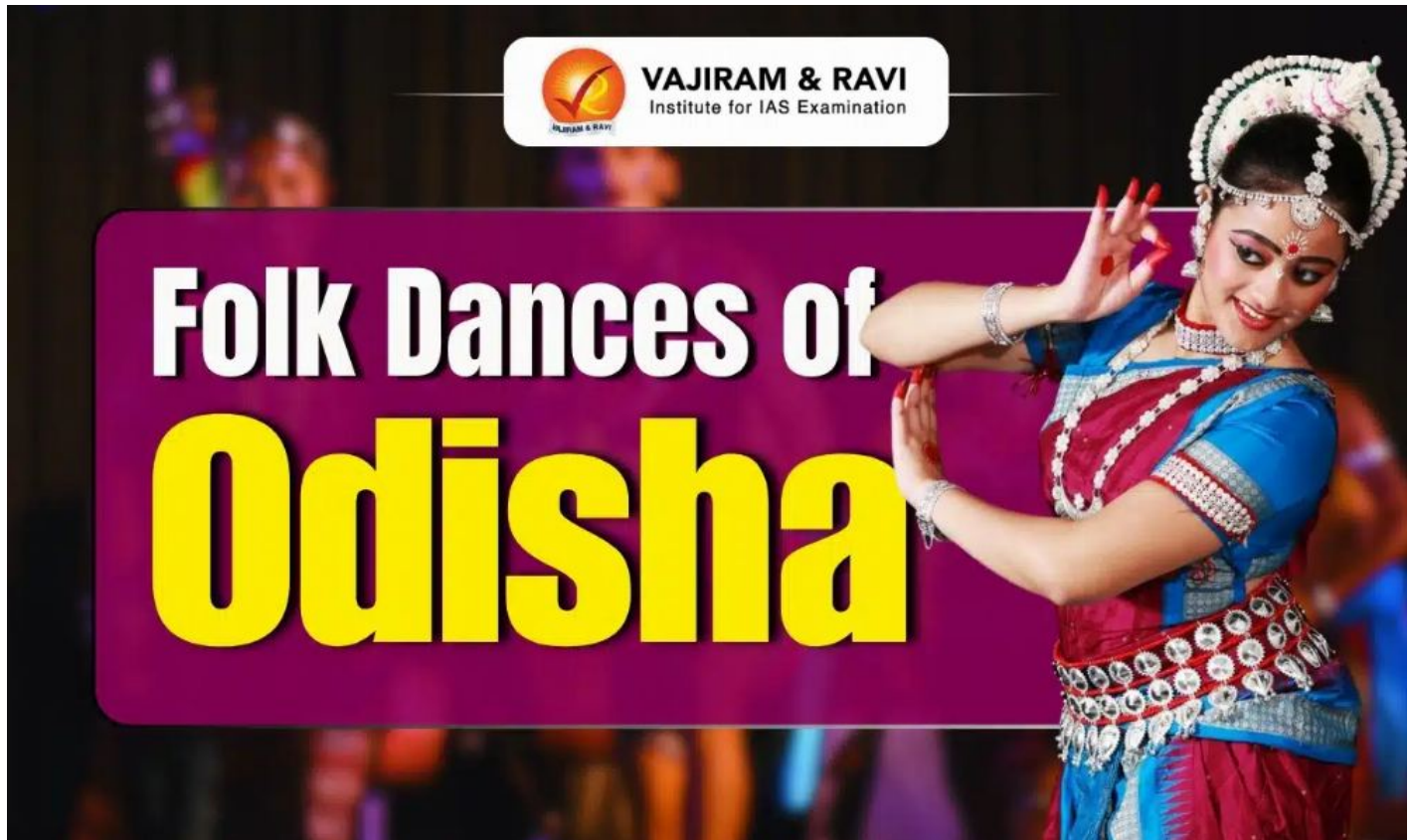


Folk Dances of Odisha, List, Features, Cultural Significance

July 25, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



Folk dances of **Odisha** reflect the rich **cultural traditions**, **religious beliefs**, and **community life** of the state. These dances are closely connected with **festivals**, **rituals**, and **celebrations**, making them an important part of people's lives. They are usually performed with **colorful costumes**, **rhythmic music**, and **expressive movements** that showcase both **joy** and **devotion**. Folk dances of Odisha represent the **simplicity**, **unity**, and **cultural heritage** of the region in a lively and engaging way.

Famous Folk Dances of Odisha

Famous **folk dances of Odisha** represent the rich **cultural diversity** and **traditional heritage** of the state. These dances have developed over time in different regions, reflecting the **local customs**, **beliefs**, and **lifestyles** of the people. Many of them are linked with **festivals**, **rituals**, and **community celebrations**, while others show elements of **devotion**, **martial traditions**, and **daily life**. Each dance form has its own **unique style**, **music**, **costumes**, and **theme**, making Odisha's folk culture vibrant and diverse. The major and most popular folk dances of Odisha are discussed below, highlighting their **features**, **significance**, and **regional variations**.

1. Gotipua Dance

- **Gotipua** is a traditional dance of **Odisha**, widely considered the **precursor of Odissi dance**, and it developed around the **17th century** when temple dancing traditions started declining.
- It is performed by **young boys dressed as female characters**, who beautifully portray stories of **Radha-Krishna** through **graceful expressions (abhinaya)** and **acrobatic movements**.
- The dance is especially famous in **Puri** and **Raghurajpur**, a heritage village known for preserving this art form and housing the **Gotipua Dance Academy**.
- The performance includes **singing and dancing together**, where dancers enact **devotional poetry** written by Oriya poets in a simple yet expressive manner.
- Musical accompaniment is provided by instruments like **Mardala**, **cymbals (gini)**, and **harmonium**, creating a devotional atmosphere.
- Over time, Gotipua influenced the **revival of Odissi dance in the 20th century**, and today it represents a blend of **tradition, devotion, and physical skill**.

Also Read:- Festivals of Odisha

2. Chhau Dance

- **Chhau Dance** is a famous **martial folk dance** of eastern India, with the **Mayurbhanj style** being prominent in Odisha.
- It reflects **warrior traditions**, depicting **battle scenes, attack and defence movements**, and is believed to have evolved from the training practices of the **Paikas (warrior clan)**.
- The dance is known for its **vigorous movements, strong footwork, and stylized body postures**, often resembling a soldier in action.
- It is usually performed during the **Chaitra Parva festival (March-April)** and narrates stories from the **Ramayana and Mahabharata**.
- The **Mayurbhanj Chhau** is unique because it is performed **without masks**, unlike other styles like **Seraikela and Purulia Chhau**.
- Musical instruments such as **dhol, dhumsa (kettledrum), and mahuri** provide energetic rhythms, making the performance powerful and dramatic.

3. Ghumura Dance

- **Ghumura Dance** is a traditional **drum-based folk dance** from regions like **Kalahandi, Sambalpur, and Balangir** in Odisha.
- The dance is named after the **Ghumura drum**, a **pitcher-shaped percussion instrument** made of terracotta and worn around the neck of the dancer.
- It is performed mainly by **men**, who dance in groups with **energetic steps** while playing the drum tied to their chest.
- The dance reflects **martial traditions**, with performers sometimes carrying **swords and shields**, symbolizing bravery and strength.

- Costumes include **colorful dhotis, jackets, turbans with peacock feathers**, and accessories like **ghungroo and waist bells (ghaagudi)**.
- It is traditionally performed during festivals like **Gamha Purnima (Shravan full moon)** and combines **music, rhythm, and group coordination**.

4. Ranappa Dance

- **Ranappa** literally means “**dancing on stilts**”, and it is mainly practiced in the **Ganjam district** of Odisha.
- Performers balance themselves on **long wooden stilts** and dance with remarkable **skill and coordination**, making it visually striking.
- The dance often includes enactments of stories from **Lord Krishna’s childhood**, adding a **mythological and devotional element**.
- It is usually performed in **villages during local festivals and fairs**, reflecting rural traditions and entertainment.
- The use of stilts symbolizes **balance, agility, and control**, making it both a **sportive and artistic performance**.

5. Chaiti Ghoda Dance

- **Chaiti Ghoda Dance** is popular among the **fishing community (Keuta community)** in the **coastal districts of Odisha**, especially **Ganjam**.
- It is a **dummy horse dance**, where performers appear to be riding a **decorated artificial horse**, creating a lively visual effect.
- The dance is performed during a **festival in the month of Chaitra (March-April)** and is associated with the worship of **Goddess Basuli**.
- It has roots in **local mythology (Kaivarta Purana)**, linking the dance to the origin and livelihood of fishermen.
- Music is provided by instruments like **dhol and mahuri**, and sometimes a **female dancer joins the performance**.
- The dance combines **devotion, storytelling, and community celebration**, marking the transition of seasons.

6. Sambalpuri Dance

- **Sambalpuri Dance** is a broad term for various folk dances of **western Odisha**, including **Dalkhai, Rasarkeli, Jaiphula**, etc.
- It reflects the **rural and tribal culture** of the region, with themes of **nature, love, and daily life**.
- The dance is known for its **colorful Sambalpuri costumes**, especially sarees with traditional designs, and **energetic movements**.
- It is commonly performed during festivals like **Nuakhai and Bhaijiuntia**, which celebrate harvest and family bonds.
- The music includes instruments like **dhol, nisan, flute**, and traditional songs in the **Sambalpuri dialect**.
- Sambalpuri dance represents the **vibrant lifestyle, simplicity, and cultural richness** of western Odisha.

7. Dalkhai Dance

- **Dalkhai** is one of the most popular **folk dances of Odisha**, mainly performed by **young tribal women** from communities like **Binjhal and Kuda**.
- It is associated with festivals like **Dusserah and Bhaijiuntia**, where women pray for the **well-being of their brothers**.
- The dance involves **rhythmic steps, graceful hand movements**, and group formations, making it visually appealing.
- Songs sung during the performance are in the **Sambalpuri language** and often describe **nature, seasons, and emotions**.
- Musical instruments like **dhol, nisan, and flute** accompany the dance, creating a lively atmosphere.
- It reflects the **social traditions, emotional bonding, and festive spirit** of tribal life in Odisha.

8. Karma Dance

- **Karma Dance** is performed by tribal communities in districts like **Sambalpur and Balangir** in honor of **Karamsani (goddess of fate)**.
- It begins on the **11th day of the bright fortnight of Bhadra month** and continues for several days as part of rituals.
- Both **men and women participate**, dancing together in colorful attire around a sacred tree or branch.
- The dance symbolizes **prosperity, fertility, and good fortune**, deeply rooted in tribal beliefs.
- Music is provided by instruments like **mandal (drum) and cymbals**, maintaining a steady rhythm.
- It highlights the **close connection between nature, religion, and community life**.

9. Paika Dance

- **Paika Dance** is a **martial dance form** performed by men dressed as **warriors**, representing the valor of the **Paika community**.
- It includes **sword and shield movements**, simulating real battle scenes with **energy and discipline**.
- The dance reflects Odisha's **military history and resistance traditions**, especially linked to the Paika rebellion.
- It is accompanied by **dhol beats**, which enhance the intensity and rhythm of the performance.
- The dance emphasizes **strength, courage, and coordination**, making it both historical and entertaining.

10. Dhap Dance

- **Dhap Dance** is a **Sambalpuri folk dance** performed by the **Kandha tribe** of Odisha.
- It is usually performed during **marriage ceremonies and social gatherings**, serving as a form of entertainment.
- The dance is named after the '**dhap**' instrument, a traditional percussion instrument used during the performance.
- Both **men and women participate**, dancing in groups with simple yet rhythmic movements.
- It reflects the **joyful and communal lifestyle** of tribal societies in Odisha.

Folk Dances of Odisha Cultural Significance

- Folk dances like **Gotipua** and **Chhau** reflect the deep **religious devotion** of the people, as many performances are based on **mythological stories** of **Radha-Krishna** and epics like the **Ramayana and Mahabharata**.
- Dances such as **Paika** and **Ghumura** highlight the **martial traditions** and **warrior culture** of Odisha, preserving the history and valor of communities like the **Paikas**.
- Folk forms like **Dalkhai**, **Sambalpuri Dance**, and **Karma Dance** are closely linked with **festivals and seasonal celebrations** like **Nuakhai and Bhaijiuntia**, showing the importance of **agriculture and community bonding**.
- Dances such as **Chaiti Ghoda** represent the **livelihood and beliefs of specific communities**, especially the **fishing community**, connecting culture with **occupation and local traditions**.
- Performances like **Ranappa** and **Dhap Dance** serve as a means of **entertainment and social interaction**, bringing people together during **village fairs, marriages, and gatherings**.
- Many dances including **Sambalpuri** and **Dalkhai** promote **regional identity and cultural unity**, as they use **local language, music, and traditional costumes**.
- Folk dances of Odisha act as a medium of **cultural preservation and transmission**, passing on **values, traditions, and heritage** from one generation to another.

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/folk-dances-of-odisha/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.