

PART 3 – INTERVIEWS

2.

Guru Gopi Krishna Behera

Attendees:

CM: Dr Chitta Ranjan Mallia (Interviewer)

GKB: Guru Gopi Krishna Behera

Also present:

LB: Guru Lingaraj Barik

RT: Dr Rekha Tandon

Gotipua:

Chandramani

CM: Guru Gopi Krishna Behera, *namaskar...*

I would like to ask a question...

Where did you spend your childhood and how did you come to the field of dance and music?

GKB: Problems at home during my childhood hindered my education...

CM: Your birthplace is Banki?

GKB: Banki Charchika...

And there, Neem Dada always said, 'May my child study a little more,' but I did not like their behaviour, so I would hide...

CM: Till which class did you study?

GKB: Till 8th grade.

CM: At the village school?

GKB: Village school...

CM: Then you quit studying?

GKB: Yes, I left studying.

CM: Then what did you do?

GKB: In the village, during any function, I danced and played with the children.

There was a Saukheen Theatre there.

The village was ruled by Brahmins.

In the Brahmins' colony they called me, and gave me a role, as I always sat there.

And they said, 'In this Rasa, you do the role of Subala.'

CM: Back then you were maybe 12-13 years old?

GKB: No, I was 10-11 years old.

I played the role of Subala, and it went well.

Because it went well, I was called to Kalibabu's theatre.

His brother stayed and was here with us.

CM: Is he from Banki?

GKB: Yes, from Banki.

He asked me, 'Do you want to go to our theatre at Cuttack?'

As I wanted to see Cuttack, I agreed. So they took me in a boat.

CM: Back then, Cuttack was the state capital, and you must have been curious to see a new city!

GKB: Cuttack city – 'White as Tagara flowers!'

I wanted to see Cuttack, so I went.

But when my father dropped me there and left, I cried.

I did not want to stay here. Only if my father stayed, then I would.

'No, no,' they said. 'You stay.'

They carried me in their arms. Then I finally stayed at Kalibabu's theatre.

Back then, Hari Rout taught us dance steps and *sadhana* of the feet.

And Durlabh taught us *abhinaya* and singing.

CM: How many people were learning with you? Or were you alone?

GKB: No, no. There were a few of us...

CM: Who were there?

GKB: Mayadhar was there... and...

CM: Mayadhar Raut.

GKB: One person called Dadhia, one Ganga... No, I never met them.

CM: Was that a person called Gangadhar Nayak who stays in Cuttack?

GKB: Maybe.

CM: He does many *bandha nrutya*... Was it he?

GKB: No, no... He was a farmer.

CM: Then what did you do?

GKB: We stayed there and learnt.

CM: You learnt to sing and dance?

GKB: Yes.

CM: Who taught you music?

GKB: Music was taught by Durlabh...

CM: Durlabh?

GKB: Durlabh Sir. And he taught *abhinaya* as well. Then we did parts from small books.

I did the role of a servant.

In a book called Chumbana, I did this role. The whole of Cuttack was in turmoil!

Wherever I went, people called out, 'There goes Ratna!'

I felt happy that I did well.

Doing this, I learnt Rasa.

There I did the role in Madhumangala. Then people said, 'When will Krushna come...?'

CM: Madhumangala was a comedy play?

GKB: Yes.

CM: Since childhood you were eager to do comedy plays as well?

GKB: Yes, and it went on like this. Finally, the (Rasa) Party broke up and I returned home.

CM: How many years did you stay there?

GKB: 6 years.

CM: So, in the Odisha theatre you stayed for 6 years? Kalicharan's theatre...?

GKB: Yes, for 6 years... The salary was 2 rupees. The monthly salary was 2 rupees.

Back then, my father used to walk down to Cuttack as his son had received his salary.

That was the situation then...

CM: Then what happened?

GKB: Then a National Odisha Theatre was built. They showed a film and said, 'Bring your people.'

I went there but I did not get any salary.

From there I moved to Sambalpur, Bargarh.

There a theatre party had begun. I went and lived there.

Staying there I did everything...

I danced, taught dancing, sang and taught singing,

I did my part, makeup and everything.

They did not want to let me go.

CM: Back then, were you already trained in dance and music?

GKB: Yes, we had a Guru named Padmanabha Sahu – Krishnaprasad Basu's Guru.

He used to always tell me, 'Teach this step to the children,' and I used to teach.

Even when he was there, I would teach.

By teaching, I gradually grew. I learnt how to teach.

CM: How long did you stay there, at Bargarh?

GKB: 2 years at Bargarh, then I returned.

After returning, I stayed at home and people from Annapurna Theatre took films.

CM: Annapurna 'A' group?

GKB: 'A' group.

They sent people to call me. They had a problem of who would do the role of Krishna.

At that time, Bhanu's daughter was unwell. So Bhanu could not do it. And Radharani was ill.

If Bhanu was to be Lalita, then who would be Krishna?

They said, 'Gopa is at home, bring him.' So they took me and I stayed there.

After a while, I told them, 'Now that the work is over, I want to go home.'

'No, no!' they said. 'Why do you want to go?'

'I have not brought anything...'

'But here there is everything...' The old man did everything for me, and I stayed there.

CM: Who was the manager back then? Bauribandhu Mohanty?

GKB: Yes...

Then, after a few years, I saw that my family always needed money, so he had a bad perception of me.

I told him, 'If you do not pay me. how will it work?' And so on...

Then someone from Delhi came, some Chattopadhyay. He was in Sangini Drama...

He had come to Cuttack to request that some children be brought for learning.

One day Mayadhar came. They called me, but I was at Balasore.

Then one boy from Nayagarh named Bhagabata - Kalibabu's nephew - he came.

Kalibabu's two nieces came.

One Bengali girl named Damayanti or Vaijayanti, she came from Cuttack.

Like this we were seven people.

CM: Which year was it?

GKB: Sixties...

CM: You went to Delhi?

GKB: To Delhi...

CM: And where did you stay at Delhi?

GKB: We lived at Nizamuddin...

CM: What did you learn?

GKB: There he was teaching ballet, Krishna *lila* in ballet.

First he taught us how to stand as a soldier – '1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8...'

Seeing this, I thought, 'I teach thousands of children, and now I come here to learn 1, 2, 3, 4?'

'I will not stay. I will resign.' So, I said, 'I will leave.'

They said, 'No, stay here, and let's see...' and so on.

At the same time saying in Hindi, 'Such filthy people have come from Orissa!'

As they were doing Krishna *lila*, I said, 'Everyone knows Gita, the whole world knows about the Gita.'

'But here you are shaking hands. What's this to do with the Gita?'

Two of the Master's daughters will be Arjuna and Krishna, and they will end the scene by shaking hands?'

I said, 'This is not right.'

He got angry and said in Hindi, 'Then go on! Show how it is supposed to be done!'

I went and told Ramashastry - who was writing the script -

'This is not working, and the Gita is something to be known.

He stared at me and said, 'What can be done?'

I picked up the Gita and gave him a quotation.

He asked, 'Can we act on this?' I said, 'Yes, we can.' And I sat and acted it out by myself.

(he recites an episode from the Mahabharata in poetic verse...)

Thus I showed him and everyone. We did the *abhinaya*, and I called Maya (dhar Raut) telling him, 'We will act on this.'

For fifteen days they watched us. Whatever music they had written, we tore it up and composed again, fresh.

They then called everyone from Delhi and said in Hindi, 'See how we have made this! See how we have made this!'

After all this, we travelled to Lucknow, Benares and Allahabad, Jaipur...

CM: You stayed at Delhi for 2 years?

GKB: 1 year only.

CM: Then you returned to Annapurna Theatre?

GKB: Then again I was back at home, and the people from Annapurna called me.

CM: Then for how many years did you stay at Annapurna?

GKB: I have stayed there till today.

CM: While staying at Annapurna Theatre did you come in contact with Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra?

GKB: At Kalibabu's Theatre I came into contact with him...

CM: Then Annapurna Theatre...

GKB: Then I came to Annapurna Theatre, and in the middle, when I quit, they were there... Kelubabu and Lakkhi. They taught dance and many other things. Then they fell in love and they left.

CM: When you joined Annapurna Theatre, who were the great and famous artists there?

GKB: In the field of music there was Kartik Ghose, Master Mania and Niranjan Satpathy.

In the field of acting there was Dukhiram Swain and Samuel Swain - Babi.

CM: Who was there in dance?

GKB: In dance there was no one.

CM: Who taught dance?

GKB: I did.

CM: Singing?

GKB: There was Balakrishna Das who used to come. He used to write songs in a book and leave.

CM: Harihara Panda?

GKB: Harihara Panda used to look after them.

Then... sometimes he used to do it himself as well.

Shyamasundar Das used to write...

Balakrishna Das would add a tune to it. Then...

Raghu Panigrahi used to come and add a tune... And Prafulla Kar used to do so, too...

CM: When did you start composing on your own?

GKB: To start composing on my own...

Bhagabata's house needed *bhajans*, where our Master's house is, at Banapur.

His brother used to come and say, 'Gopa, sing a couple of *bhajans* at Bhagabata's place.

Whatever *bhajans* I knew from other people, I used to write down and give them.

Then, when I couldn't remember anymore, he said, 'Why don't you write some more?'

So I wrote my own - a *bhajan* on Trinatha Mela - and he took that.

Everyone around highly praised it.

And I began writing *bhajans* to give him.

I would write an Odissi *bhajan* and sing it at the temple. And so it went on...

CM: Back then, who were the important figures in Odissi and Gotipua dances?

GKB: In Odissi there was... (*discusses...*) Mohan Mohapatra.

CM: He was a Gotipua Guru?

GKB: Gotipua Guru...

People used to learn *abhinaya* from him. He was living at Puri.

CM: Did you learn anything from him?

GKB: Yes...

CM: Mohan Mohapatra?

GKB: He would teach, but it didn't make much sense to us!

Durlabh used to teach us. Mohan Mohapatra used to instruct what all to do.

CM: In those days, Guru Pankaj Charan Das was there?

GKB: Yes, but he did not know how to dance.

CM: With Annapurna Theatre?

GKB: Yes, he had a good relation.

Gradually, while watching the dance, he said, 'These are things from the *mahari* family, why will not I do it?'

Little by little, he started performing. Sometimes he used to dance, sometimes something else.

And he went on to make this his profession.

Kelubabu too used to learn from him.

CM: From Pankaj Charan Das?

GKB: Pankaj Charan Das...

CM: Was Guru Debaprasad Das at Annapurna Theatre?

GKB: Yes, for a while...

CM: Around how long? A year?

GKB: More.

CM: What did he teach?

GKB: He did not teach much because Kelubabu was present.

Kelubabu made everyone dance – Mayadhar, Deba Das, me and other students practiced, and he played the *tabla*.

Then everyone went their own ways as the Party broke up.

In Cuttack, Jayantika was formed for Odissi dance, and for everyone to come together.

I stayed back at Annapurna. I felt tied to the place...

LB: At Jayantika, they had published a book, a long book, a good book. During the cyclone I lost it. All...

GKB: It was about all the Gurus.

CM: Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Guru Debaprasad Das or Durlabha Singh...

These people who were in the field of dance and music, especially dance, did you have a chance to work with them?

GKB: Yes, always.

CM: Did you compose anything?

GKB: Yes.

CM: Can you give an example?

GKB: For example, I did one at Ganga School where Pankaj Das used to go and sit.

It was called Parbani.

CM: It was based on whom?

GKB: It was based on Tapoi.

The step, which I was showing, was how Tapoi walked. I had included such steps in that.

There, someone had written something. I said 'No.'

'Where and what is required, can I write that myself?' He said, 'Yes, you may.'

In various parts, I wrote certain things.

CM: Can you recite a bit?

GKB: I cannot remember anything.

CM: Okay, what else did you teach?

GKB: And... I did Odissi songs at various places.

And people always asked, 'Give some songs.'

Then... a friend, too, would always ask. He used to record it and take it to Delhi.

What I taught was this

(he sings 'Dekhili...')

CM: Can you sing with *abhinaya*? ... A little *abhinaya*?

GKB: It was a long time back!

(resumes singing and now acting...)

CM: Sir, when Odissi dance and music began, there was Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra – after Jayantika –

Then Guru Mayadhar Raut, Guru Hari Krishna Behera or Guru Pankaj Charan Das...

GKB: Hari Behera or Surendra Jena used to come and ask me to guide the children.

CM: Had you started your own creation... *champu*, *chhanda* and all this?

GKB: We did them all. We did Rasa in *champu*. I did Madhumangala... we did all this.

CM: What did you do in Madhumangala?

GKB: In Madhumangala, whatever was the role, I did.

Two songs were there and I used to sing them both.

The rest of it I do not remember...

(starts singing in 'Jha' champu...)

CM: 'Jha' *champu*...

GKB: Yes, 'Jha' *champu*. Then there was another part of Madhumangala...

I do not remember more. Back then I did...

CM: Anything in *chhanda*, *chaupati*, *chautisa*? *(different metres in Odissi songs)*

GKB: Yes, I wrote quite a lot.

A *daskathia* player *(a wooden folk instrument for holding the beat)* from Sambalpur wrote a letter to me: 'Sir, please write one song in Raga Chokhi on some subject.'

What is this? I knew nothing on the subject.

(sings) 'Listen to me... new things need to be done... Think about this.'

'You must hold love for your husband, so your lineage will prosper.'

'You must farm properly so that the country is replete...'

Like this I wrote 3 or 4 songs which I gave him, and that *daskathia* player performed well.

And many people from there said, 'Write for us as well.'

CM: So you have not left Annapurna till now?

When you get free time from Annapurna, what do you like to do?

GKB: What will I do... I have financial tension always. Whenever they called me for any fair or Party, I went.

CM: What was your experience in a Party?

What was more prevalent in the Jatra Party – Odissi dance and song or folk dance and song?

GKB: Back then there was more folk dance.

Odissi was such that children lacked ability, so it was not performed.

CM: When you taught folk dance or song, what was your opinion about it back then?

From where did you receive that knowledge?

GKB: I did not know from where it came. After I finished writing I used to wonder how I wrote that.

I wrote Janmaniyatrana, Nisanibarana, Solposanchayajona. I wrote various genre for the betterment of the nation.

CM: Back then in the fairs most subject matter of plays used to be for the welfare of the society?

Some were based on history, imagination or mythology.

When you composed folk dance and songs based on issues of the society, was it well received? People liked it?

GKB: Yes, a lot.

CM: Do you think people should receive enjoyment from performing arts, instead of other forms of pleasure?

Should performing arts be given more importance?

GKB: It is not that performances need more attention,

but the true soul, the true life exists in the folk dance and songs.

Other things are like chemicals for showing off.

CM: For example, in Danda *nrutya*, there are many styles of Danda dances.

But in dances like 'The Hunter', 'The Aboriginals', the comic discourses and family debates, these things give joy to people.

So, do you think there are other art forms that can be made presentable?

GKB: Yes, of course. Why not? These things...

CM: For example, 'The Snake Charmer', 'The Exorcist', 'The Dancing Bear'...?

GKB: Yes, you must be knowing, 'The Dancing Bear' is performed in a group.

There will be three bears: one person will be playing a *pakhawaj*, another a *dhole*, and another playing a trumpet.

With all of them...

CM: Sir, you have been associated so far to this field of art and culture, do you have any regrets?

If you had done anything more that would have given you peace?

Or if you could have contributed more to society, and the field of music and dance?

GKB: Yes, I believe even a little contemplation does good to an individual, village, nation and the world.

I always seek this within: 'What more can I do for the country.' I have done everything.

CM: In your opinion, what can be done for Gotipua to revive and improve this art form, so that people appreciate it more?

And it becomes an established tradition?

GKB: In Gotipua, they just dance, there is no link. It needs to be integrated with a plot.

CM: *(explains in English...)*

GKB: For example, I compose a story that is performed with Gotipua dance...

When there is a story, people can connect and better comprehend.

By just dancing, doing some stunts, standing and climbing on top of each other...

CM: So you think we should include the Rasa tradition?

There will be music, dance and *bandha* – acrobatics will be included too - and people will accept this?

Now what happens is, a music Guru plays the harmonium and sings, and the children dance.

In this tradition, the importance of music is reduced.

Whereas in Odissi music, there is *chhanda*, *champu*, *chautisa* and various *ragas*, here the musical importance is lost.

Here, only dance and acrobatics are prevalent.

GKB: And it spreads like this. People see such and such stunts happen.

CM: Nowadays in Gotipua, *sanchari bhava* is included, is it right and acceptable?

GKB: Yes, why not? Everywhere this happens. Gradually things develop and it becomes better.

CM: *(explains in English...)*

GKB: Puri's DCO (District Culture Officer) Samantaray was suggesting you should teach Odissi's 'Saptarathi' in Gotipua.

'Saptarathi' was done by the Ganga School.

I said, 'They have already done it. Why should we repeat it? We will take another plot.'

CM: Sir, do you think there should be a change in the subject matter of the current presentation in Gotipua?

GKB: Yes. Shouldn't there be a change?

If there is no change in the subject matter, if we just dance, then there is no value or correlation.

If someone asks, 'Why this?' They say, 'We don't know.'

CM: I have seen how the dance 'Ki Sobhago Kunje' begins with '*ekataali*', '*athataali*' or in '*jhulataala...*'

Then there is a long pause... It does not sound musically pleasing.

GKB: Yes, how would one like it?

CM: If it could be merged, then it would be good?

GKB: Yes. For example, in 'Ki Sobhago Kunje', when we say *kunje* - grove - if they could act like trees...

If they do that, and one person acts like Krishna,

and the other two are doing *abhinaya* – 'Ki Sobhago Kunje Madanamohana' – or whatever.

I did this, (*starts singing 'Dekhili...'*) I saw, Oh! I saw Krishna in the grove today...

How did I see Him? Standing on the Kalia serpent...

How did I see Him? Ripping apart the Bakasura demon...

How else? Stealing the butter...

In different ways I saw Him.

CM: In Odissi music there are three parts – *natangi*, *ragangi* and *bhavangi*.

Can these three be performed with Gotipua?

GKB: Yes, why not?

CM: *Natangi* can be done, and *ragangi* and *bhavangi*?

GKB: Yes.

CM: Is there more to *natangi* and *bhavangi* than *ragangi*?

GKB: Dance is one, call it whatever you want.

Like *hathi* is called elephant... water is called *paani*... ..

Water is water. Similarly, dance is dance.

CM: Sir, has the time come to present Gotipua with specific subject matter like *bandha nrutya*, *sangeeta* and *abhinaya*?

If we present by integrating all these, then it will be wonderful.

GKB: Yes. If five of us sit and analyse where what step is necessary, then it will work.

Why won't it?

RT: *(asks a question in English...)*

CM: Currently, if we integrate Gotipua, *sangeeta* and *bandha* – that we are thinking now for people to accept –

Can it be done under a *gurukul* system? Are there opportunities?

LB: Yes, it is possible.

It has been done too. Gangabhai told me, in Gotipua they do too many songs and *abhinaya*, and bore the audience.

If we improve it a bit, it will be nice.

I said, 'If I did 'Ki Sobhago', then Mali Sir and Jaya Sir, can't they do some other song, leaving this out?'

(he lists other songs) 'Whatever I do, you please don't repeat.'

'In the style that I am singing, you can't sing in that style.'

CM: Which song was it? Was it on Devi?

LB: 'Simha Vahini'...

CM: That was your composition?

LB: Yes, mine...

CM: In that, you combined *nrutya*, *abhinaya* and *bandha*?

LB: Yes.

CM: How is the melody?

LB: It was in Raga Ahir Bhairav.

(he starts singing 'Simha Vahini'...)

CM: This was the *mangalacharan*?

LB: Yes.

CM: And who wrote it?

LB: Ramesh Das from Kendrapada told me it was written by someone else, but sung by Arjun Syamal.

CM: There was another of your compositions, 'Ahe Neela Saila'?

LB: Yes, I had learnt it from Mahadeba Sir.

But it didn't have this *sanchari*, it had Odissi's *sanchari*. I set these *bandhas* in that.

CM: You set *bandhas* in 'Ahe Neela Saila'?

LB: Like the elephant's gait, the crocodile's gait...

CM: But 'Ahe Neela Saila' is performed in Odissi. Why did you choose that? Why not a Gotipua song?

LB: Yes, I composed 'Ehi Para Godhana Rakha' by Abhirama Paramahansa.

I said, 'Sir, give us a devotional song that speaks about the four *yugas*, and all that was done by God.

(he starts singing...)

One boy is taking cows for grazing, and Krishna is walking behind them.

This was not the system. In this music, children are walking and Krishna is following and guiding.

They point at Krishna and say, 'Here is the cow herder!'

CM: *(speaks in English)*

LB: We've composed in this part too *(sings this...)* In this part, Krishna stops and stands still *(shows this...)*

Two people are doing *abhinaya*...

'Krishna's end, even Brahma doesn't know.'

'He is the friend of his devotees. Here is the cow herder!'

'He eats curd, milk, cream and butter...' This remained...

When the song says, 'Curd, milk and cream', they make a human pyramid and Krishna climbs on them...

and snatches the bag full of... *(sings again)* 'curd, milk...'

As it falls to the ground and tears, from there all eat.

(sings again) 'Curd, milk, cream...'

'He eats butter, Oh He eats butter...' Here is the cow herder!' It ends here.

'He enters the river Kalindi and destroys Kalia Serpent's pride.'

I stopped here and enacted how Krishna entered the river, then how the Kalia serpent comes in...

(he continues to sing...)

'He enters the river Kalindi...' This happened. I set a composition here.

Then comes *(recites)* 'By lifting Shiva's bow, He (Ram) married Janaki (Sita)' and this is based on Ramachandra...

By touching His feet, Ahalya got liberation. I composed this with *bandha*.

(GKB and another are discussing indistinctly...)

In another verse, 'By killing the Murasura Demon, He got the name Murari...'

Here, two of them start fighting... this also I kept some music.

I gave this. For more music I found a flautist and a violinist. What will they do by coming with us?

Earlier we used to make music with harmonium and *pakhawaj* only.

Now that we have two additional instruments, the music...

(CM interrupts and speaks in English...)

(CM and RT discussing...)

LB: Today whatever exists in Gotipua...

(RT interrupts him...)

CM: The *apsara*... can you please show us Rambha's dance?

GKB: Alright... Back then I had a better posture and strength. But now...

LB: That is okay...

GKB: *(gets up)* Oh Jagannath!

(starts enacting the apsaras – Menaka, Rambha and Urvashi)

'With fluid limbs and a swaying gait like an elephant'

'Gait like an elephant, giving bliss...'

(repeats)

'Alert like a cobra am I, Meneka!'

'Very playful am I, Meneka!'

'A divine body have I, Meneka!'

And, what else...

'Highly accomplished in dance am I, and un-matched in *abhinaya*'

'My feet move as gracefully as a flowing river, and my glances flash like lightning!'

'With beautifully arranged hair like a bird's plumage, (I am) Rambha!'

'My voice is as melodious as the veena, (I am) Rambha!'

'I am an expert in the art of love, (I am) Rambha!'

And I used to do...

'With a gait like a king swan, and with heavy breasts and flashing eyes'

'... with flashing eyes, I am supreme!'

'Like the blossoming Spring, with its tender buds and flowers.'

'My gestures and movements are full of magic, and in dance and music I am expert!'

'I am Urvashi!'

'Full of riches and wealth am I, Urvashi!'

I forgot how it was, but it was Urvashi...

After these three *apsaras*, then there was dancing!

This is the way it was at that time...

'*Anga Bhangi*' – Whatever came into my mind, I used to move my hands and make some compositions...

But based on this text, many types of steps are possible.

The idea was to move the limbs with the melody, and that was the dance.

There is no set formula to it. It is not like preparing *paan*.

No, it doesn't work like that. So, I would teach a step...

(*he demonstrates...*)

And from folk, you could do a step like...

(*he demonstrates...*)

From Chaau... you could fit that in, too...

With these things, what you should use and when, so that it is appropriate and beautiful...

How to arrange what, this comes to me quite naturally.

In this *svara*, you use this step... that would happen...

After fixing the step...

(he demonstrates...)

You allow the hands to move, and follow *(the pulse)* ...

This movement is used a lot in our Odissi.

But I am doing it in a folksy way.

END