

## PART 3 – INTERVIEWS

### 6.

## Pandit Raghunath Panigrahi

#### Attendees:

- RP: Pandit Raghunath Panigrahi  
RT: Dr Rekha Tandon (Interviewer)  
MW: Michael Weston

RP: Actually, I am born at Koraput District, now it is Rayagada District, of Gunpur, but when I was a very small boy, 1936 I think, my father took all his family to Puri because we have a very big palace building there, a palace, called Jeypore Kuti, Jeypore House and there we used to live. And there I first started... my first education I started there in Puri. When I was very small, about 1934, so 1936 means I was only 2. I got a sense of understanding very early. By 5, I was very clever enough in my childhood, and I used to go every time with my mother to the temple to have darshan from Jagannath. She used to go morning and evening; both the times I used to attend. And Maharaja's family also, and Puri Maharaja's family was very much connected to us, because we are connected to the Maharaja of Jeypore. My father was his adopted Brahmin's son. That means all the (???) people they have a son from Brahmin, one who will do the last service of the king, who passes away. That was my father. He was there, Pandit Nilamani Panigrahi. He was very known also to public people, and Puri people used to respect him as Panigrahi Nilamani Babu. And I used to go along with him also to see a show, in the evenings, along with him, and just after that I used to go with my mother to have the last *darshan* of Singari – what is that? Bara Singhara... it's a very big thing when God gets new dresses and all that, and garlands and everything, and actually, people talk of *mahari* and all that, I have not seen anybody dancing in front of the Lord. But those priests they used to say at night they used to close the doors for some time and the *maharis* used to dance without any clothing. That was there. Then, nobody is allowed to see that, and after that they have got some understanding, then they used to clothe and then come out.

And outside of course, the *maharis*, they danced with *langar*, and with some ornaments like southern Indian, south Indian type of ornaments: the *suriya*, *chandi* and this type of hairstyle, and this, er, big sort of things (*gestures to his nose*), *noto* and *dandi* and so many other things, big things here, here and here (*gestures to his wrists*) ...

RT: And what sort of dance did they do?

RP: They used to sing Gitagovindam. But not in tuning - whatever they wished, whatever they liked. Whatever way they liked. They sing and they danced. But they used to keep the rhythm part. And I used to see that. But Gitagovindam, when my father taught me, after that I understand that this Gitagovindam is nonsense, that they are just narrating the songs and the words in front of the Lord, that is all. Actually, my father taught me Gitagovindam, and he spoke about Gitagovindam Jayadeva, about Jayadeva, he gave me all the knowledge. And he was the poet who wrote Gitagovindam, and the entire story he narrated that is all I know, and I started singing I think in 1948... '44, '46, like that. Of course, in 1946 I got a gold medal for Gitagovindam at the Berhampur Music Conference. That means by '44 I started singing. And slowly I have developed. My father taught me a few songs, just four or five, but after that, you know, I should say who taught me all the 24 songs, automatically it has come from inside me. That, I now believe, I strongly believe that nobody has taught but the Lord Himself. Jagannath must have taught me, otherwise, how could it come? Actually, if anybody was to question me who taught you all the 24 songs, I cannot answer. I can only answer that Jagannath has taught me. And automatically it has come. That I realised when we had been to Paris in... 1970... along with my wife...

RT: Tell me, coming back to the subject of the *maharis* ... (Were they ever an influence?)

RP: No, not that she (Sanjukta Panigrahi) has been inspired by them, never. She was never inspired by them. But she was inspired by her guru, Padmabushan Kelucharan Mohapatra. He and his wife used to dance in the theatre. At that time, odissi was not ... what is odissi dance? Nobody knows. Nobody knows what was the subject. Then her father, you know, her father and mother were very much after the theatre, and they used to take Sanjukta, and she has seen Dasavatar of her Guru and (wife), Guruji, both were dancing ...

RT: What year was this?

RP: I think... maybe '49, '48-49. Maybe, maybe exactly that time, because she was only 5 years old. She was born in 1944... '49 maybe. '49-50, like that. And inspired, and she used to see some, you know, south Indian pictures in Hindi dubbed. Once she has seen Chandraleka, the dancer was dancing and all that. She was inspired, and slowly she got inspired by this, er, another film, and she thought that she would dance. She said, no I should dance also. And very

soon, she was very quick in learning and keeping it in mind. She remembers, and she was very intelligent also. And she has learnt under her guru, Kelucharan Mohapatra. Then she had been to, I have seen her dancing at Calcutta when I was there, I was invited for singing Gitagovindam, in one of the conferences, she danced Dasavatar, only one item, that was only 10-15 minutes total duration. Odissi was not named as odissi dance. It was Dasavatar Nrutya. What is it? Dasavatar Nrutya. No other name. Then slowly this dance form became very popular. Then, I remember there was one Kalacharan Patnaik – he was very much interested, and he was also my father's great friend, and he used to collect all the Orissa art and culture, about art and culture, and he used to write books, and he was interested in Sanjukta's dance, and he introduced, and first he named it as odissi dance. Then...

RT: What year would this have been? Which year was this?

RP: That must have been ... after '50s only. It has come after '50-51, like that. Then he had been to Madras, when I was there in 1953... '52, he came in '53, or '54, like that, and she had given a demonstration about odissi dance but, you know, the kind of dance they are doing now, all the small boys they do, male gotipua – at that time there was no name called gotipua also. Actually, that name was given later by Direndranath Patnaik. He only wrote about what odissi dance is, and the story about that. And gotipua, Sanjukta also used to do. Then my father, I think, he had objected. He said no, no, no. Girls should not do that, boys cannot do that, that is why they were taught to dance like a girl, so gotipua is not meant for girls, and she stopped after that. And actually, today I can say that Sanjukta could come up, or this odissi dance style has come up, because of the encouragement of Sanjukta's mother and father, Smt Rakuntala Misra and Shri Abhiram Misra, both were very much encouraging people and teachers to teach this style and to continue this style, and collect more and more. They used to go to Konark, my father-in-law used to take Kelubabu along with Sanjukta, to see those poses and that Natya Mandap, slowly they made it everything after this. After this all the collections they had got it with them, and they have thought of what to do and what not. And Diren Patnaik used to help. Actually, the (*indistinct*) science of odissi dance has cleaned up, and it has been neat and clean, she made everything clean after she came from Madras.

RT: Who? Sanjukta Nani?

RP: Yes, from Kalakshetra. She was directly a disciple of Rukmini Arundale. And her *mata* taught her everything, and she was a most brilliant student of Kalakshetra. Up to now people even remember her abhinayas, her dance, some people would say that her dance part is good but her abhinaya is not good, but for Sanjukta, her dance as well as abhinaya, everything interconnected, and people used to say how wonderful, nobody else can compare with Sanjukta. That is up to now they still talk. That is true. And

after she came, she sat with Dhirendranath Patnaik and Guruji, and two other gurus also, Panku babu and another, they came to know how to teach odissi dance to the students.

MW: So, indirectly that came from Madras? Kalakshetra?

RP: Kalakshetra. After that she got very good knowledge also about Natya Shastra. How to use the *karanas* and mudras, *mudrabhava*, and hand gestures, and dancing, and we had many things, *tribhanga* was our tradition, this *chowk*, *chowk* is just like Jagannath sitting, these two parts are from Orissa. The rest, actually, according to our movement of gestures, they have used the mudras. It was not there before. For that I can say Sanjukta, as well as Kelubabu, both are responsible. Today, people are dancing in Kelubabu's style; but they both did a lot for Orissa, for odissi dance.

MW: The guru needs the disciple as much as the disciple needs the guru.

RP: Both. A good disciple is also necessary for a guru. Also, a disciple needs a very good guru, otherwise this dance, anything ... anything...

MW: Where did Kelubabu's ideas for dance come from?

RP: He was coming from Raghurajpur, where there were those small groups of people, they used to dance this, er, gotipua. He was also a gotipua dancer, first a gotipua dancer, then slowly he has improvised, and actually taught by his guru... was, er, actually they were having a theatre...

MW: Annapurna?

RP: Mohan Goswami. Mohan Goswami was his guru, and he taught, and he made it in that way that you have to do it like this otherwise it cannot be like dance, and he taught him, that is why he always says about Mohan Goswami, he's his guru, *adiguru*. And Mohan Goswami taught everybody, all this Pankaj babu and others, slowly they have developed. Now they are gurus, they are full-fledged things they have achieved; that is all the credit goes to Sanjukta. Because Sanjukta was ... at that time she was very much educated also. She read about the things, deeply she studied about that subject. She took a lot of time. She gave a lot of time to know about this. That is why further studies she could not do. Senior Cambridge that's all, she stopped. After that she would have gone for an MA or degree, that sort of thing, she didn't; she said 'No, my dance is my art, my education'. She has continued with that.

And slowly, I met her at Madras, when my father had been to Madras to see me in 1953... in 1952 I had been to Madras, invited by the music academy, Madras Music Academy Silver Jubilee Conference, so I had demonstrated Gitagovindam, I sang and my father spoke about Jayadeva and how they used to sing in a temple. Meekly he has spoke (said) that, and certain tunings also

he had given me, in temple they never used to sing that, but some knowing people they used to sing some type of tuning. After that, I was thinking this comes under some raga, let us see, so I have collected one of them and my father said, yes, we will take it to the raga. But original ragas, which are original no one can say, but only certain songs like Vasanth Vasanthe ... Lalita Lavanga Lata... ... like Mauri Gowda, that's true, some ragas have come up, so I have developed in this way.

So, I have seen her at Madras at Kalakshetra. My father called her, 'Oh' - someone had said she is an oriya girl from Orissa - so my father said: 'Hey girl, you come here. What's your name?' She said 'Sanjukta'. "From where have you come?' 'I come from Bhubaneswar'. Father used to say it was Bhubaneswar... Cuttack. 'What are you learning?' 'Bharatnatyam'. 'Oh good! Since how many days have you come?' 'Just I came two or three months back, and I am continuing...' And *amma* (Rukmini Arundale) came, 'She's from Orissa' and (to) my father, she said: 'Oh, very happy that ...very nice girl, she dances very well, very talented girl, so I am taking a special interest in teaching her. Other girls are learning from other gurus, but specially this girl I take, a special interest to teach.' My father was very ... because I was staying in Rukmini *amma's* brother's house. For ten years I have stayed, Subrayaya, young Subrayaya, one of the leading advocates of income tax at that time. So that is why I used to go, and welcomed there to Rukmini *amma's* institution, and once they have organised singing there, I have started singing continuously for four to five hours, continuous, people are not getting up; Gitagovindam. Then I have introduced Rama Gitagovindam... I have got another book from Madras. He said Jayadeva wrote another Gitagovindam, so I said: 'Let me see.' There they have mentioned Pandit Jayadeva of Madaradesa. I said: 'No, he is not from Orissa. This Jayadeva is another Jayadeva who just followed the original Jayadeva in writing Gitagovindam - Rama Gitagovindam, Shiva Gitagovindam, another two subjects he wrote. Those two books I have got. Here, one of our great persons, Gauri Kumar Brahma, he asked me (for) both the copies. He has not returned. Now he might be very old, at that time he was also an old man ... he didn't reply, he didn't give back those books, and actually not getting those copies nowadays, it is not available but I would say that, I can collect.

MW: How did the music for odissi develop? You might have had a part to play in that?

RP: No, music you know, Orissa is a very ... we had our own music; own music means we had our own style of singing, and ragas maybe the same, the Karnatic or Hindustani or whatever, but our style of singing is entirely different than the other two styles. That is why they have named it odissi music and odissi dance. Because of our style of presentation, of singing, of dancing, is entirely different than other styles, than Indian styles.

MW: But they would have come from the folk songs, and the background...

- RP: Even in folk, we have got certain classical ... music... Yes, folk songs also, you can get the sound of classical music, some songs, not all the songs. Many folk songs are there. Orissa is very rich in folk songs also, and we have got one subject called *chanda*, *chanda traupadi*. Those things you will get in raga, but that is only one raga, one style; and only one *pallavi*. No other *pallavi*. No *antara*. That would be repeated, repeated, repeated... very long songs. For one hour you can sing one song. Continuously, the wordings will end after one hour. Such a long... Full book!
- MW: And you mentioned that you created some of the abhinayas?
- RP: Yah. Sanjukta has done many things. Sanjukta created so many things...
- RT: How did you work together?
- RP: We used to sit together, and fight sometimes: 'No, this is not good,' and 'This is very good,' and 'This is nice...' Something! And out of that, we have got very good mangalacharans, and Sanjukta's first, er... (*indistinct*) with the Turidas's Ramayana, and Rabindranath Tagore's also, one song ...
- RT: Which one?
- RP: This was... what is that? The wordings I forget ... only once have we presented there ... because other songs they are not allowed to take and make dance, so strictly they have objected certain things ...
- RT: Who has objected?
- RP: They have got their Rabindranath Tagore authorities... Santiniketan. So, only one song that is, er... what is that song? I forget... Only once we have presented and that was very nice, and people appreciated. But those people, you know, the singing style is different. You cannot make this side or that side. Just like western music, note to note, playing, they used to follow the same thing. Now, of course, it has been stopped. Then I have objected. I said music cannot be tied with anything. Music can be kept under the notations, keeping under... writing and keeping ... notation keeps the tuning, as Indian music. We have to sing in the *gayaki*. Where is the *gayaki*? If the *gayaki* is not there, it is not song. I have objected. Most of the people supported me. Slowly there was very big fighting within themselves. They have decided ...
- RT: But this question of *gayaki* is so improvisational. How does it work with dance? How did Sanjukta work with...?
- RP: *Gayaki* is a style of singing. Sometimes ... (*he demonstrates a style of singing*) ... *gayaki* in that also some tan (*tone?*) we used to use, keeping up that timing for the dance movements, and in some places, we used to use also notations

... (he demonstrates using Sa Re Ga notation this time) ... like that. So, everything we had to compose.

RT: So, you get some loose structures, and so Sanjukta Nani would improvise whilst dancing to it...

RP: Yes. If she improvises, I also improvise! At this stage we can do that. But others cannot. Others never did. If I sing, nobody can dance. Because they cannot go forward. I can do something, they can't do. So, no necessity of singing. So, Sanjukta was ... after that, actually, the same thing happened. People would say that his singing and her dance were interconnected. That is true. We both used to understand, fully, how to synchronise both dance and music.

RT: Tell me, coming back to Guru Pankaj Charan Das, what do you think he actually... he is supposed to be the spokesman of the whole *mahari* legacy, and things like that. What exactly did he communicate?

RP: Actually, he comes from the *mahari* community. *Mahari* means dancers. He says *mahatnahari*, in his words. *Mahatnahari* you can say, but also, we used to say *daari* ... (he says some *oriyan* phrase) ... it used to sound very badly, that is why they have changed the name to *mahari*, *mahatnahari*, they say. He comes from that family, no doubt. I have seen at Puri dancing *maharis* in front of the Lord. They used to do like this ... (demonstrates a movement) ... and songs. They used to give more importance in singing. A little movement, and dance like this ... (he demonstrates again) ... like this, like this ... there is no ... you can count it how many movements, countingly. They used to dance. It is countable. There was not that much of development. But actually, they were dancing, so the present gurus they took the name, like *mahari*, *adi* dance, the first dance of odissi they are telling, it's all right. But actually, odissi dance comes from *gotipua*. *Gotipua* has developed more. *Gotipua* gave them more things to develop today's odissi dance. Not *mahari*. *Mahari* is just an encouragement, a name. And today also, they are saying it is *mahari* they are dancing; Panka babu, *adi guru's* composition they say, but what is it? Where is the composition? Same thing. A person who understands about dance and music, he will say 'Nothing'. He will say 'Zero'. Same thing. In front of me, they will do anything and I can say 'No, it's the same. You are not doing anything. Rather, you have spoilt it!'

RT: You know, when one listens to all the stories about how odissi was made, what impresses me so much is this wonderful sense of experimentation, creativity, synthesis, that everybody seemed to share, and it seems that it was really that, that allowed odissi to be born and to develop so much. What do you feel is the situation today where...

RP: Today it is ... what do you say that gurus without knowledge... Some gurus are there. Just they are... whatever they wish, they are doing. So, it cannot be ... slowly it may... one day it may fall down. But there are some students, like

Kum Kum Mohanty, she has learnt from her guru, Kelucharan Mohapatra, thoroughly she has studied, she has nice knowledge about ... some people may ... but still then, how many days we are? After that, who will look after? We don't know. The world is changing. Yesterday's world is not today.

RT: But do you think there are also too many rules in odissi, because of which dancers are not able to experiment and create and also the great devotion and love for Lord Jagannath that used to be so central to it, has that got diluted?

RP: Now... now they are doing for their everyday living, for their food. They want money now. Dancing girls are there, that also, there are great difficulties with this.

Nowadays, girls are not giving that much of time like previous, because now school timings are so bad, when they come, they are tired from school, and after half an hour they will start dancing, so what will they learn? How will they expose? And these people, they don't do anything because they don't have knowledge to make experiments. What kind of experiments can they do? If they have knowledge, they can do. A knowledgeable person can do that. A person who is having no knowledge, what kind of experiment can they do? They can't. Now they are not experimenting, it is just no development, nothing, just dance. And some dresses are there. Some dresses are moving here and there with some girls, some small girls, that is all.

MW: You went to Denmark, didn't you?

RP: Yah.

MW: In order to create a World ... or some Institute, some...?

RP: Yeh, yeh. That is, er ..., you know...

RT: Eugenio Barba.

RP: Eugenio Barba. Yes, he was ... actually he was experimenting with so many things, how it was done. And he has got many things about Sanjukta. He, as well as Dr. Fischer in Switzerland. They have some good...

MW: Recordings?

RP: Recordings, yes, because I am unable to collect them. Somebody should go there, or I will have to request ... but I found that Eugenio is not there now. Some lady is looking after. He might have, might be very old now, by now...

MW: So, your wife would go. She would experiment a lot...

RP: Yah.

MW: She would try different things...



RP: Yeh. Yeh. There we have done so much. Every year we used to go; very much inspiring. And actually, those people I should give more, er... (*credit*) ... responsible people they were. For them (*because of them*) the odissi could develop I can say. They have encouraged, yes...

**END**