

# Functional Shifts in Odishi Music: Ritual Practice and Concert Culture

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*Abstract- Odishi music, one of the classical music traditions of India, has undergone substantial functional transformation over centuries. Historically rooted in temple ritual and devotional service, the music gradually evolved into a public performance-oriented tradition shaped by urbanization, institutionalization, media expansion and modern concert culture. This paper examines the functional shifts in Odishi music from ritual practice to concert presentation and analyzes how changing socio-cultural contexts transformed its meaning, aesthetics and performance practices. Drawing upon perspectives from Ethnomusicology, Performance Studies and Cultural Studies, the study investigates the transition of Odishi music from sacred offering to aesthetic performance. The paper further explores the impact of modernization, technology, audience transformation and commercialization on the musical tradition. It argues that while concert culture contributed to the visibility and preservation of Odishi music, it simultaneously altered its ritualistic ethos and devotional functionality. The study concludes that Odishi music today exists within a dynamic continuum where ritual memory and performative modernity coexist and negotiate cultural identity.*

**Keywords:** *Concert Culture, Jagannath Tradition, Odishi Music, Performance Studies, Ritual Music, Sacred Music*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Music in Indian civilization has historically functioned as a spiritual, ritualistic and cultural practice rather than merely an artistic or entertainment-oriented activity. According to Deva (1995), Indian musical traditions evolved within religious and philosophical frameworks where sound was viewed as a medium of divine experience. In Odisha, the development of Odishi music remained closely associated with temple rituals, devotional expression and the sacred culture surrounding the Jagannath tradition (Mahapatra, 1990).

Traditionally, Odishi music existed primarily as ritual music performed within temple spaces and

devotional environments. Musical performance formed an integral component of worship, liturgical ceremonies and religious festivities (Das, 2007). However, the emergence of urban cultural institutions, nationalist movements, public concerts, broadcasting technologies and modern educational systems gradually transformed the social and functional contexts of Odishi music (Mohanty, 2014).

The twentieth century especially witnessed the movement of Odishi music from sacred ritual spaces into public concert platforms and institutional settings. This transition altered the purpose, aesthetics, pedagogy and audience relationship of the music. Qureshi (2008) argues that when ritual music enters public performance culture, its function shifts from participatory devotion to aesthetic representation. Such transformation is visible in the evolution of Odishi music from temple-oriented service (seva) to stage-centered artistic performance.

The present paper examines these functional shifts in Odishi music by analyzing the changing relationship between ritual practice and concert culture. It seeks to understand how sacred music adapts itself to modern public spaces while negotiating issues of authenticity, commercialization and cultural continuity.

## II. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ODISHI MUSIC

The historical development of Odishi music is deeply connected to the religious and cultural traditions of Odisha. Scholars such as Panigrahi (2002) and Das (2007) observe that Odishi music emerged through the interaction of temple ritual, regional literary traditions, Vaishnav devotional movements and folk musical practices.

The Jagannath temple at Puri functioned as one of the most important centers for musical development in Odisha (Mahapatra, 1990). Music within the temple tradition was primarily devotional and ritualistic in nature. Forms such as Bhajana, Janana, Chhanda, Champu and Gita Govinda singing occupied central positions in ritual performance traditions (Das, 2007).

The influence of Gita Govinda on Odishi music was particularly significant. Jayadeva's compositions shaped the lyrical, melodic and emotional dimensions of Odishi musical aesthetics (Bose, 1991). The devotional eroticism and musical structure of Gita Govinda became foundational to both Odishi music and dance traditions.

Historically, Odishi music was inseparable from ritual functionality. Musical performances accompanied daily temple rituals such as Mangala Arati, Mailam, Sakala Dhupa and Badasinghara (Mahapatra, 1990). According to Rath (2018), music in temple culture was conceptualized not as entertainment but as sacred offering directed toward the deity.

The Mahari tradition further contributed to the ritualistic dimension of Odishi music. Maharis performed devotional music and dance as part of temple service and embodied the spiritual aesthetics of sacred performance (Bose, 1991). The ritual environment therefore determined both the purpose and presentation of music.

### III. RITUAL PRACTICE AND SACRED FUNCTIONALITY

In ritual contexts, the primary function of Odishi music was devotional rather than performative. Sacred music within temple culture operated as a medium of worship, spiritual communication and emotional surrender (Deva, 1995). Unlike modern concert traditions, ritual music did not prioritize public appreciation or individual artistic display.

Qureshi (2008) explains that ritual music derives meaning from sacred context, collective participation and religious symbolism. In Odishi temple traditions, the deity rather than the audience occupied the

central position within performance structure. Music functioned as seva or sacred service.

The musical aesthetics of ritual practice also differed from contemporary concert performance. Temple renditions emphasized lyrical devotion, emotional depth and ritual continuity over technical virtuosity (Panigrahi, 2002). Repetition and meditative melodic structures were often employed to sustain devotional atmosphere.

Transmission of musical knowledge occurred largely through oral and hereditary systems. Families associated with temple traditions preserved compositions and performance practices across generations (Das, 2007). This mode of transmission reinforced continuity but simultaneously restricted wider accessibility.

Spatial context further shaped ritual music. Becker (2004) argues that sacred sound acquires meaning through ritual environment and collective spiritual participation. Consequently, music performed within temple sanctity carried symbolic and emotional significance distinct from secular performance spaces.

### IV. EMERGENCE OF CONCERT CULTURE

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought major socio-cultural changes that transformed musical culture in Odisha. Colonial modernity, urbanization, print culture, educational reform and nationalism contributed to the emergence of public cultural spaces (Mohanty, 2014).

Urban centers such as Cuttack and Bhubaneswar gradually developed vibrant artistic environments where music was presented through public conferences, theatre performances, festivals and institutional programs. Music increasingly moved beyond temple premises into auditoriums and concert halls.

The establishment of cultural organizations and academies significantly influenced the transformation of Odishi music into a concert-oriented tradition. Institutional training introduced formal curricula,

notation systems, examinations and standardized pedagogy (Das, 2007).

The role of All India Radio was especially transformative. Broadcasting technologies expanded the audience base of Odishi music and encouraged performers to adapt presentation styles suitable for radio and public listening (Sahoo, 2021). Concert duration, repertoire organization and vocal delivery underwent considerable modification.

Public performance gradually became central to the identity of Odishi music. According to Appadurai (1996), modernization converts localized cultural practices into publicly circulated cultural symbols. In Odisha, concert culture transformed Odishi music into a marker of regional classical identity.

#### V. FUNCTIONAL SHIFTS IN ODISHI MUSIC

The movement from ritual practice to concert culture produced several functional shifts in Odishi music. One of the most significant changes involved the transition from sacred functionality to aesthetic performance.

In temple contexts, music primarily served devotional and liturgical purposes (Mahapatra, 1990). In concert settings, however, performance increasingly emphasized artistic excellence, audience engagement and stage presentation. Becker (2004) notes that public performance often transforms participatory ritual into spectator-oriented aesthetics.

The concept of audience itself changed substantially. Ritual music addressed the deity and devotional community, whereas concert music targeted public listeners, critics, scholars and cultural consumers (Qureshi, 2008). Consequently, performers adapted musical structures to sustain audience attention and appreciation.

Improvisation and technical virtuosity gained increasing importance in concert culture. Artists began incorporating elaborate alap, rhythmic variations and ornamentation to demonstrate artistic individuality (Panigrahi, 2002). This differed from ritual performance traditions where continuity and

devotional sincerity were prioritized over performative display.

Another major shift involved temporality. Ritual music followed religious schedules and ceremonial requirements, while concert performances adhered to program duration and audience expectations (Sahoo, 2021). Musical presentation became more structured, concise and aesthetically organized.

Commercialization also transformed the functional nature of music. Sponsorships, ticketed events, recordings and media promotion increasingly influenced artistic production. Music became linked not only to spirituality but also to professional identity and cultural economy.

#### VI. INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND CLASSICAL RECONSTRUCTION

The twentieth century saw deliberate efforts to establish Odishi music as a recognized classical tradition. Scholars, musicians and cultural activists participated in codifying and institutionalizing the music through documentation, pedagogy and public presentation (Das, 2007).

Institutionalization introduced significant functional changes. Music was no longer transmitted solely through hereditary systems but through universities, academies and music schools (Mohanty, 2014). The guru-shishya tradition gradually coexisted with formal educational frameworks.

This process also involved reconstruction of musical identity. Certain folk and regional elements were selectively refined to align Odishi music with broader national concepts of Indian classical music (Tarlekar, 1972). Sahoo (2021) argues that concert culture contributed significantly to this classical reconstruction.

Public concerts became platforms for legitimizing Odishi music within national cultural discourse. Festivals and institutional programs positioned Odishi music alongside Hindustani and Carnatic traditions. As a result, concert culture functioned not merely as entertainment but as cultural representation and identity formation.

However, institutionalization also generated tensions between preservation and standardization. Excessive codification risks reducing stylistic diversity and ritual spontaneity (Becker, 2004). Thus, functional transformation simultaneously produced preservation and homogenization.

## VII. TECHNOLOGY, MEDIA AND CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

Technological developments further accelerated the transformation of Odishi music. Recording technologies, radio broadcasting, television and digital media expanded audience access and reshaped performance practices.

Platforms such as YouTube and Instagram have globalized Odishi music by enabling artists to reach international audiences. Digital dissemination has increased visibility but also encouraged visually oriented and shortened performance formats.

Amplification technologies altered vocal techniques and stage aesthetics. Public concerts increasingly incorporated lighting, costume presentation and visual spectacle. The modern performer became both musician and public cultural figure.

At the same time, digital media contributed positively to preservation and democratization. Archival recordings, online teaching and digital documentation have enabled wider participation in Odishi music traditions beyond hereditary communities.

Contemporary Odishi music therefore exists across multiple functional domains simultaneously — ritual worship, public performance, institutional pedagogy, media culture and digital dissemination.

## VIII. SACREDNESS AND MODERNITY: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY

The relationship between ritual practice and concert culture in Odishi music should not be understood merely as conflict but as negotiation. Traditional sacred values continue to shape the emotional and symbolic dimensions of performance even within modern concert spaces.

Many contemporary performers consciously invoke Jagannath culture, devotional repertoire and ritual symbolism in public presentations. Thus, sacred memory remains embedded within performative modernity.

At the same time, modern audiences consume music differently from ritual communities. Concert culture encourages aesthetic appreciation, intellectual engagement and artistic evaluation. This transformation reflects broader changes in cultural consumption and public art practices (Appadurai, 1996).

The challenge for Odishi music lies in balancing preservation with adaptation. Excessive commercialization may weaken ritual depth, while rigid traditionalism may restrict cultural relevance in changing times. Sustainable continuity requires dialogue between sacred heritage and contemporary creativity.

## CONCLUSION

The evolution of Odishi music from ritual practice to concert culture represents a major functional transformation shaped by modernization, institutionalization, urbanization and technological change. Historically rooted in temple worship and devotional service, Odishi music gradually adapted itself to public performance culture and modern artistic institutions.

This transition altered the purpose, aesthetics, audience relationship and social function of music. Sacred offering evolved into aesthetic presentation; collective devotion transformed into audience-oriented performance; hereditary transmission gave way to institutional pedagogy.

Yet, despite these transformations, ritual memory continues to influence contemporary Odishi music. The tradition today exists within a complex continuum where sacredness and spectacle, devotion and artistry, preservation and innovation coexist dynamically.

Understanding these functional shifts is essential for examining how traditional musical cultures negotiate

continuity and transformation within modern society. The future of Odishi music may ultimately depend upon its ability to sustain ritual authenticity while creatively engaging with contemporary cultural realities.

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