

## Bharaltoo Dance: A Reflection of Tribal Culture of Hattee Community of Sirmaur District of Himachal Pradesh

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### ABSTRACT

The present research paper is based on *Bharaltoo* dance of *Hattee* area of *Giripar* of *Sirmaur* district. In earlier time, sheep and goat rearing was a primary occupation in the upper region of *Sirmaur* used to live a nomadic life. They used to take their sheep and goats to *Churdhar* and its surrounding hills in summer and to warmer areas in winter. These nomadic shepherds had their own culture, lifestyle and traditions. An important aspect of their culture is *Bharaltoo* dance which was performed by these sheep herders of *Hattee* community. Earlier this dance was a type of *Swang* dance (dance drama) which gradually took the form of a traditional dance. With the passage of time, people reduced sheep and goat rearing and the nomadic lifestyle also began to fade away. As a result, the traditions of shepherds and this dance slowly became extinct. But in some villages of the *Giripar* region, people are still performing traditions related to *Bharaltoo*, among which *Bhadhali Sagarand*, *Badhale Re Shanol* and the winter festival of *Maghi* are famous.

**Keywords-** Bharaltoo, Hattee, Sirmaur, Tribal Culture.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Sheep and goat rearing was the main occupation of people in ancient times. If we look into our history, it is found that when humans lived in tribes, they gradually began animal husbandry and sheep and goat rearing became a primary occupation. In hilly areas like Himachal Pradesh, sheep and goat rearing has been the main occupation along with farming since ancient times. Sheep and goat rearing is done in the entire state, but the number of shepherds has been more in areas like Chamba, Kinnaur, Kullu, Mandi, Shimla and Sirmaur etc. *Bharaltoo* dance is especially related to the *Hattee* community of the upper areas of Shimla district and the *Giri Par* area of Sirmaur district. People still know them by the name of 'Gadariya', 'Gaddi' and 'Bhadhala'. These *Bhadalas* i.e. shepherds used to perform *Bharaltoo* dance for entertainment.

### II. LITERAL MEANING OF BHARALTOO

The word 'Sheep' has been derived from the word '*Bhe*' which is used by a sheep while bleating. The place where sheep live is called *Bhadal*. The person who rears sheep is called '*Bhed + Wala*' = '*Bhadala*'. Hence, this dance performed by sheep and goat rearers is called "*Bharaltoo Nritya*."

### III. MEANING OF HATTEE

*Hattee* is a tribal community of *Giripar* area of district *Sirmaur*. The word *Hattee* is believed to have originated from "*Haat*." In earlier times, people of *Hattee* community used to go in groups from upper areas to plain areas for *Haat* (shop) to buy essential commodities like salt, sira, cloth etc. that is why people of this community came to be called *Hattee*. People of

*Hattee* community used to take *ghee* and grains from their homes while going to *Haat* and after selling them in *Haat*, they used to buy essential commodities and bring them home.

#### IV. BHARALTOO: A TRIBAL DANCE OF HATTEE REGION

The *Hattee* area of *Giripar* in *Sirmaur* is a tribal area, so this dance performed in this area is also considered a tribal dance. Apart from this, if we look at the style of this dance, it also seems to be a tribal style dance. This dance was performed by nomadic sheep and goat herders in the forests of *Churdhar* and the sheep and goat herders lived a tribal lifestyle. The costumes of *Bharaltoo* dance were also made of sheep and goat skins. No modern materials and ornaments are used in this dance.

#### V. ORIGIN OF BHARALTOO DANCE

During summer, shepherds used to take their sheep and goats to the hills of *Churdhar*. During the day, they would move in different groups and at night, they would gather at a safe place. The shepherds would also come together and light a big fire (*Ghena*). The purpose of lighting this fire was to cook food as well as to protect from wild animals. Near this fire, everyone started performing *anibidh jhoori gayan* and *Bharaltoo* dance as a *Swang* dance for entertainment. With time, this dance became their main dance and it took the form of a traditional dance. This dance became a special attraction on the occasion of *Bhadhalti Sagrand*, a special festival of sheep and goat herders.

#### VI. LIFE OF SHEPHERDS

The shepherds of the *Hattee* tribal area lived a kind of nomadic life. In the summers, they would take their sheep and goats to the forests of *Churdhar*. They would start going to the upper regions only after *Bishu Ro Sajo* (*Vaisakhi* festival). On reaching the peaks, they would live in naturally formed caves or prepare temporary huts for themselves. In the local dialect, huts are also called *tathe* and *dere*. *Chapati* of *Ghena* (*Ghene ke Rot*) was their everyday food. These *rotis* were cooked directly in the fire instead of on a pan. Centuries ago, these shepherds used to use bedding made of sheep and goat skin and goat hair to sit on. These beddings were called in the *Pahadi* dialect as *bakrathe*. For covering themselves, they used *pattu* (a shawl) made of sheep wool which is called *Pakhi* in *Sirmauri* dialect. Similarly, for covering the body, they used handmade woolen *pattu* and soft skins of sheep and goat. Before the onset of winter, after the *Ashouj Sankranti*, these

shepherds used to leave with their sheep and goats for warm areas which are called *Noira*. It used to take many days to go from the plains to the cold areas and to return from the hilly areas to the warm areas. Hence, it is clear that their life was difficult and diligent.

#### VII. BHADHALTI SANKRANTI

*Bhadhalti Sankranti* is considered a special festival of shepherds. This festival is celebrated on the *sankranti* of *Ashouj*. At night, all the shepherds would gather, collect wood for the *ghena* and burn the *ghena* in the name of *Shirgul Devta*. Everyone would sit around it and here, they would perform the *Bharaltoo swangan* dance, while holding a night vigil in the name of *Shirgul Devta*. These *rotis* were cooked in *ghena*. In the morning, they used to worship lord *Shirgul* and offer *bhog* and pray to *Shirgul Maharaj* for protection of themselves and their sheep and goats from wild animals while going towards *Noira*. Only after this ceremony of *Bhadalti Sagrand*, these shepherds started moving from the forests of *Churdhar* towards warmer areas.

#### VIII. BHARALTOO DANCE COSTUMES

Centuries ago, the shepherds of this tribal area used to modify the skins of sheep and goats to cover their bodies and used sheep costumes made from them. He also used to perform *Bharaltoo* dance in these dresses. As time progressed and cloth became available in the villages, they also started wearing those cloths, but for the *Bharaltoo* dance, these shepherds would use sheepskin and the traditional costume made from it, which were used earlier. Because, the dresses made of sheep and goat skins was the identity of these nomadic shepherds.

#### IX. THE TALE OF THE ORIGIN OF BANSHEERA FROM BHADALA

The story of *Bansheera* is still heard in the forests of *Churdhar* in *Sirmaur* and the upper regions of *Shimla*. It is also believed that *Sanjivani booti* (herb) is found in the forests of *Churdhar*. The story of *Bansheera* is also related to *Sanjivani booti*. *Bansheera* means a headless ghost. This is an interesting story. It is believed that a sheep herder suddenly cut his finger while cutting leaves for his sheep. While grazing the sheep, he was cleaning the blood flowing from his finger with leaves. Suddenly he saw that his cut finger had healed again. He was very surprised to see this. To know that the mere touch of the leaf of which plant healed the cut finger, he cut his finger again and started cleaning the wound again with the leaves lying on the way.

Finally, he identified that plant. The shepherd understood that this was the same *Sanjivani booti* which other shepherds used to talk about. He cut the head of a lamb and joined it by touching that herb. He wanted to surprise the other shepherds as well. He told his companions to behead him and he would join it again and become alive but no sheep herder was ready to believe him. Finally he beheaded himself but he forgot to tell his companions to apply *Sanjivni booti* (herb). Now he became a headless ghost (*Bansheera*) and started scaring the shepherds and the fear of the ghost named *Bansheera* increased a lot in the forests of *Churdhar* and the surrounding areas. Finally, all the shepherds prayed to *Shirgul Maharaj* for protection from *Bansheera* and as a result *Shirgul Maharaj* blessed them and all the shepherds got relief from the terror and fear of *Bansheera*.

## **X. BHARALTOO: AN EXTINGUISHED DANCE FORM**

*Bharaltoo* dance, a cultural heritage of centuries, became extinct with time. Because in the earlier times, like farming, sheep and goat rearing was also an important occupation of every household and life seemed difficult without sheep and goat rearing. With the changing times, farming became the main occupation and people's inclination increased towards cash crops, due to which people reduced sheep and goat rearing. They left the nomadic life and made farming their main occupation. *Bharaltoo* dance was a dance performed by nomadic shepherds in the forests of *Churdhar*, but as people left the nomadic life, *Bharaltoo* dance also became extinct. Gradually, this dance was limited to stories. People started celebrating *Bhadhalti Sangrand* in their homes as a *saji* and *Bharaltoo* dance became an extinct dance form.

## **XI. WORK OF PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF BHARALTOO DANCE**

Researcher and Padmashri Vidyanand Saraik decided to work for the preservation and promotion of this vanishing *Bharaltoo* dance, which is centuries old heritage of *Hatee* tribal community. It has been limited to tales and stories only. He collected information about this dance by studying it. After getting information about the ancient form of *Bharaltoo* dance, he tried to present this dance in front of common people in an attractive form. To prepare this dance, he also took opinion from some intellectuals of the area. The researcher had also realized very well that to make this ancient dance popular in today's era, some modifications are required in this dance. Therefore, while preparing this dance

again, he also made some changes in it. However, while modifying this dance, special care was taken to ensure that the dance remains traditional and its original form is not harmed. The work of writing the lyrics and composing the tunes for this dance was done by Padmashri Vidyanand Saraik.

## **XII. BHARALTOO DANCE TRAINING**

Based on the information obtained from the study, young artists were trained in the extinct *Bharaltoo* dance by the efforts of the researcher. An attempt was made to show glimpses of its ancient form. The style of this dance was made more attractive by preparing it like the *Bharaltoo* dance performed in the early times. Today, this extinct dance has become popular again.

## **XIII. COSTUME DESIGNING**

It is believed that *Bharaltoo* dance is a dance of that time when people of this region used to wear clothes made of sheep wool and soft sheep and goat skins. According to information obtained from the surveys, *Bhadalas* of *Hatee* community used clothes made of sheep and goat skins and sheep wool for this dance. In earlier times, shepherds used to wear these dresses and danced in these dresses. Later, when modern clothes started being used, even then the same clothes were used for *Bharaltoo* dance. Same as this, the work of making *Bharaltoo* dance costumes was done. To make costumes for this dance, sheep and goat skins are first cleaned. In this process, the skins are cleaned and made soft. Only after this, costumes are made from these skins. Costumes made of sheep and goat skins were made for male artists. Costumes of sheep wool were made for female artists.

## **XIV. DRESS MAKING AND DESIGNING**

Talking about the early times, these sheep and goat herders used to make the costumes themselves. The costumes of that time were also very simple. The help of shoe makers was also taken to make costumes from the skins of sheep and goats. In old times, the work of spinning the wool of sheep and making costumes was done by the sheep herders themselves. When the researcher started the work of recreating this dance, the costumes were made according to the information received. Due to the extinction of this dance, no artisan who makes the costumes of this dance is available today. Therefore, the researcher got the costumes of this dance made by Shri Gopal Singh Habbi, an artist awarded with *Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar 2017* by Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi. Some changes were also made in the original costumes of this dance to make

them attractive, but even today the costumes of this dance look like the costumes used centuries ago. These costumes were made under the guidance of researcher and Padmashri Vidyanand Saraik.

### **XV. THE RESULTS OF THE EFFORTS TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE BHARALTOO DANCE**

After the researcher and Padmashri Vidyanand Saraik recreated this dance, this dance again came in front of the common people in the society. This dance was made more attractive, as a result of which this extinct dance has become very popular today. As a result of the preservation and promotion of this dance, this dance is not limited to just one area, but today it has been performed in many places in the entire state and outside the state. Today the demand for the presentation of this refined dance on many state level and international platforms is increasing. Today artists of Sirmour district and surrounding areas have started preparing this dance for stage presentation. Today, even though the tradition of performing this dance by sheep and goat herders has ended, but today this dance is known in the entire state as the ancient dance of the *Hattee* tribal area. This dance form still makes us aware of the centuries-old traditions of sheep and goat herders of the *Hattee* tribal area.

### **XVI. CONCLUSION**

In the changing times, as man develops, he becomes disinterested towards his old traditions and culture. The

new generation finds it difficult to follow the old traditions. This is the reason why old traditions and dance forms become extinct. If these disappearing traditions are not preserved, they will vanish completely. *Bharaltoo* dance, which was once the main dance for entertainment of shepherds of the *Hattee* community, slowly started disappearing. Today this dance was limited to stories only. The promotion of this dance has made it popular again in the society. The traditions of sheep and goat herders may have ended today, but their *Bharaltoo* dance has created a new identity through performances in the state and the country and the demand for this dance is increasing day by day.

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