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**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH & REVIEWS**

journal homepage: www.ijmrr.online/index.php/home

**RHYTHMS OF HERITAGE: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF FOLK INSTRUMENTS IN
WESTERN ODISHA'S FOLK CULTURE**

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How to Cite the Article: Mohit Kumar Swain (2026). *Rhythms of Heritage: Exploring the Role of Folk Instruments in Western Odisha's Folk Culture*. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews. 5(3). 343-353.



<https://doi.org/10.56815/ijmrr.v5i3.2026.343-353>

Different cultures have developed in different regions according to their geographical environments. Among them, the western region of the state of Odisha known as *Western Odisha* carries a unique and beautiful cultural identity. From geographical, historical, and cultural perspectives, this region is quite distinct from other parts of Odisha. The lifestyle, folk arts, folk theatre, folk literature, folk songs and dances, and folk instruments of this region clearly reflect its uniqueness. Around 70% of the people living here belong to tribal communities. Their traditional processions, social customs, festivals, worship of deities, music, dance, and instruments have greatly influenced and strengthened the cultural heritage of Odisha. All of them are bound together by a single cultural thread, which is known as *Sambalpuri culture*. In this region, the *Sambalpuri language* is widely used as the main medium of communication. It is the commonly spoken folk language of Western Odisha and is very melodious. The folk songs and music of this region are popular and appreciated not only across the state but also throughout the country and abroad. They create enthusiasm and excitement in the hearts of the audience and listeners.



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Percussion Folk Musical Instruments



WOODEN DHOL



NISAN



TASA



GHUMURA



MANDAL



CLAY DHOL

To understand the folk culture of any region, one must consider the commonly spoken language, customs, festivals, processions, local deities, traditions, rituals, and folk literature of the people living in that area. Discussions are also made about the region's folk songs, folk dances, and folk music. Its traditional folk music and folk instruments are included within the scope of research. The classical and modern music we listen to today are actually rooted in these folk traditions and instruments. Even in this modern age, the importance and respect for folk instruments have not diminished. Therefore, these instruments play an essential role in the development of the folk culture of Western Odisha. Over time, many types of folk instruments have been created. While some have been lost with the passage of time, others have evolved with modern influences in their design, leading to the creation of new forms of instruments.

The folk life, folk art, folk drama, folk literature, folk dance songs and folk instruments of this region are known to be unique. With the help of folk musical instruments prepared in their own style, they have been celebrating their festivals, pilgrimages and all the social institutions of daily life. It is natural to see differences in folk musical instruments depending on the region. From this point of view, the folk musical instruments of the original inhabitants living in western Odisha also bears the imprint of independence. Changes are also observed in the shape of musical instruments and the style of playing. Since ancient times, they used to create sounds by hitting wood, stone and leather to protect themselves from the clutches of wild animals. It is believed that they created sounds by hitting stones with stones, wood with wood, and clapping. In the later stage, clay pots, hollow wood, bamboo, various fruits and dried vegetables were covered with wild animal skins. Which was the first form of modern musical instruments that are seen today. The basic basis of classical music and modern music that we listen to today is folk music and folk musical instruments.



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Just as tea does not taste sweet without sugar, the sweetness of songs and dance cannot be enjoyed without folk musical instruments. Therefore, folk music is an indispensable part of Sambalpuri folk songs. The role of folk musical instruments is important in the development of folk culture. In Sambalpuri culture, folk musical instruments are involved in the folk life of the original inhabitants, starting from their own entertainment to their livelihood. Even in today's modern era, its use is sometimes seen in rural areas. Among the various folk instruments played here, *Gugunadia Dhol, Dhunkel, Wooden dhol, Clay Dhol, Ghumura, Devgunia, Bhalubaenshi, Mardal* etc. have created their own unique identity and have enriched the history of Western Odisha.

Although the use of another folk dance, *Nishan*, is prevalent in other districts, the sight of the dance of the dancer performing a spectacular leap with the antlers of a deer attached to the Nishan, demonstrates the uniqueness of Western Odisha.

folk musical instruments are deeply involved in the lives of the people in Western Odisha, from its own entertainment to its livelihood. Various folk musical instruments are used in the entertainment of the people living here, religious festivals, festivals, traditional professions and livelihoods, and some special activities. Even in today's scientific era, the demand for folk musical instruments has not diminished at all. folk musical instruments have been practiced by the people of the tribal communities in Western Odisha since ancient times. Among those tribals are *Kandha, Ganda, Khadia, Munda, Mirdha, Binjhal, Dam, Gartia, Ghoghia, Kela, Ghasi, Chamar* etc. They have enjoyed their festivals, pilgrimages and wedding ceremonies with great joy with the



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Percussion Folk Musical Instruments



MURDUNG (KHOL)



MARDAL



DHAP

GHUDKA

help of folk musical instruments. Some people of certain castes have been using folk musical instruments for their livelihood, while some people of certain castes use certain folk instrument in their specific activities. Since animal skins were used in these folk musical instruments, people of the upper caste used to forbid them in early days. Playing musical instruments was considered the work of the lower caste people. Those who played musical instruments had to be touched and bathed. Over time, tribals came into contact with other lower caste & upper caste people and established relationships. From this relationship, tribal culture was publicly accepted and imitated from generation to generation and became considered folk culture.

Later, with the development of education, human thinking changed. People of the lower caste who looked down on these musicians, inspired by them, tried to give stage status to folk dance, folk songs and folk music. Now folk music is being performed by people of different classes on stages and in theatres as well as on radio and television. Due to which it has been possible to develop and introduce our culture.

The folk instruments used in Western Odisha are: *Dhol, Nishan, Tasa, Jhanj, Muhuri, Mandal, Mardal, Ghubukudu, Ghumura, Dhap, Changu, Dambaru, Khanjani, Bhaluboyenshi, Bayenshi, Kahali, Singha, Kastal, Gini, Kathia, Gaurabadi, Ramkathi, Ramtali, Kendra, Brahmaveena and Dhunkel* etc. In Western Odisha, *Dulduli* (combination of five folk musical instruments) is used in Dalkhai (Rasarkeli, Maelajada, Jaifula, Janhifula, Jamudali, Chapakrati) and in Bajnia and Nachania folk dance. *Dhol, Nishan, Tasa, Muhuri and Jhanj*, known as *Dulduli (Gana Baja)*, are used in Western Odisha during marriages and other processions. Folk instruments like Gungunadia Dhol, Sarmangala Dhol, Kendra, Brahmaveena, Khanjani, Ghudka, Kathia etc. are used for begging. The people of Western Odisha are very religious. Devotees immerse themselves in devotion and perform folk instruments like *Dulduli, Dhap, Ghumura, Mrudanga, Mardal, Kahali, Kastala, Gini, Ghanta and Dhunkel* in various ritualistic ceremonies.



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Ghumura instruments are performed in “It is played during every ceremonial festival and procession in Kalahandi district. Preachers of “*Alekha*” religion play the Khanjani while singing the songs of Bhimbhoi. The dambaru instrument is performed for monkey games and snake shows.

For the propagation of *Vaishnavism*, mrudanga, kastal, jhanj, gini, and kathia are played while singing songs of Sanchar, Samprada, and Kirtan. Some folk instruments are played exclusively during special events. *Clay Dhol* is used to propagate *Shaivism* during Danda Nritya. *Mardal* is used during *Lilasuanga, Banibutal and Krushnaguru* performance. The use of *Dhunkel* is essential in Dalkhai and other goddess worship. *Mangan* is played during the purification of *Birtia or Mangana*. If someone is affected by witchcraft or evil influence, the *Brahmaveena* is played for blowing rituals (spiritual healing). Mandala and kastal are played and danced during Karma Festival.

The *Dulduli* (traditional musical ensemble of five instruments) of Western Odisha is famous across India. Whether in rural or urban areas, whenever the sound of Dulduli is heard, it is traditionally understood that some social function is taking place at someone's house. In the weddings of every community, the use of *Dulduli* or *Gana Baja* is essential, which is not commonly seen in other regions. In Sambalpuri songs or dances, when these folk instruments start playing, people wherever they may be cannot resist but begin to sway and dance to the rhythm. In Danda Nata (a traditional dance form), there are sixteen “*Suargas*” (acts), and in each act, sixteen types of rhythmic patterns or beats are played. These are known as “*Shulakhadi Par.*” The drummer

Blowing Folk Musical Instruments



MUHURI



BAIENSI



VEER KAHALI



BHALU BAIENSI



SINGHA



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(*Dhulia*) himself recites these rhythmic syllables while dancing and playing the earthen drum. According to the beats of the drum, different characters perform folk dances with various gestures and expressions. From the entry of the characters onto the stage, their introduction, to their final exit, the *Dhulia* controls and guides them. In tribal dance and songs, the *Mandal* is used as the main and sometimes the sole musical instrument. In tribal songs like *Karma* and *Jhumar* dances, young tribal men and women dance together in harmony to the rhythm of the *Mandal* holding hands, coordinating their steps, and performing various movements and gestures in perfect unity.

During the *Sanchar* dance performance, the *Mrudanga (Khol)* player hangs it around his neck and performs songs, dance and music together. Since the role of the *Mrudanga* is important in this, *Sanchar* is a major musical art. The *Mrudanga* player creates *Nadabrahma* from his *Mrudanga* which travels to *Brahmalok*. In *Sanchar songs*, along with poetic forms like *Chhanda*, *Chaupadi*, and *Champu*, humorous styles like *Dhaga dhamali* and *Sambalpuri* songs are included. The *Mrudanga* player plays the instrument, sings songs, and performs dance simultaneously. The *Samprada* is a folk dance based on *Mudanga*. The *Samprada* performance is performed during *Car Festival*, *Dola Purnima*, *Makar Sankranti*, *Chandan Yatra* and *Dhanu Yatra*. According to the lunar calendar (*tithi*), *Ghumura* begins on the day of *Amavasya* with rituals and it is performed from

Nuakhai until *Dussehra*. In *Ghumura* songs, along with heroic themes (*Veer Rasa*), subjects like love and separation, religious and social themes are included. Different poetic forms such as *Chhanda* and *Chaupadi* also have an important place in these songs.

In the final phase of *Danda Nata* (*Danda* dance), after the *sixteen "Shuanga"* performances, *Leela* or *Banibutal* is presented only in *Western Odisha* in the *Sambalpuri* language. During this time, the *Mardala* is played as the main musical instrument.

Solid Folk Musical Instruments



RAMTALI



GOURBADI



GINI



KHIDTIKHICHA



KASTAL



JHANJ



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Supporting instruments include the *earthen dhol (drum)*, *jhanja (cymbals)*, *ghungroo (ankle bells)*, *ghanta (bell)* and *bansuri (flute)*. Different song styles have been created for each character appearing in Banibatal. In those styles, the playing of the Mardal creates a joyful frenzy in the minds of the audience present. In the Sambalpuri language, the characters dance on different sides of the Mardal with beautiful and graceful gestures in the song style (according to the character). Another folk art based on Krishna Bhakti Rasa, the Mardal is also played during *Krushnaguru* performance. The sound of the Mardal along with the sound of the *Ramakathi* makes the devotees feel the joy of devotion and lose themselves in religious feelings. The devotees of Krishna become enraptured.

In western Odisha, the *Gungunnadia Dhol* is a folk instrument that is performed only in the religious tradition of *Gungunnadia* and *Saramangala* folk art. During *Gungunnadia*, the Dhol is played in praise of Shiva from the Shiva Purana. No dance is seen here. Even in *Saramangala*, the *Saramangala* herself plays the Dhol and sings the praises of Mangala Devi. In *Dhap* dance and music, Dhap is used as the main and group instrument. In the *Dhap* dance of the tribals, tribal youths are seen dancing in a rhythm, stamping their feet together, and dancing with various footwork and gestures. In *Dhap* dance, the youths sing songs and play the Dhap. During *Sambalpuri* dance, the *Muhuria* stands and during the song performance, the *Muhuria* sits on the floor and plays the *Muhuria*. Nowadays, along with folk songs, *muhuri* is also played in modern *Sambalpuri* songs. *Muhuri* is used in radio and studios. *Muhuri* plays an important role during the performance of *Dulduli*. There is no singer here. *Muhuria* sings various songs in the *muhuri* tone. In Western Odisha, the *flute* is played in *Karma and Jhumer*. The flute is also used in *Gaurabadi*, *Banabadi*, and *Dandanata*.

Without musical instruments, it is impossible to create a distinct identity for any song or dance. In Western

String Folk Musical Instruments



KENDARA



BRAHMAVEENA



GHUDKA



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Odisha, during *Sankirtan* and *Samprada*, the **Kahali** is played as a supporting instrument alongside the *Mrudanga* and in *Ghumura*, it is also used as an accompanying instrument. During Sankirtan performances, the Kahali player stands between the *Mrudanga* and *Gini* players, playing the Kahali while dancing in different styles according to various rhythms (*tala*) and poetic patterns (*chhanda*). On occasions like *Dola Purnima* and *Pausha Purnima*, people of the *Gaur* community perform *Gaurabadi* music in rhythm with various folk instruments such as *Dhol*, *Mandala*, *Bansuri* (flute), *Muhuri*, and *Jhanja* (cymbals). During their marriage ceremonies as well, *Gaurabadi* is performed, and both the bride's and groom's sides present group songs and dances. The folk instrument *Dhunkel* is played only in the shrines of goddesses. The *Dhunkelia* (performer) uses it to sing hymns in praise of the goddess, invoke her presence, and glorify *Shiva* and *Parvati*. The deep and resonant sound of the *Dhunkel* creates a spiritual atmosphere in the *Shakta* tradition.

Since ancient times, in Western Odisha, various communities including tribal groups have been performing folk music using traditional instruments. Among them are the *Kandha*, *Ganda*, *Khadia*, *Munda*, *Mirdha*, *Binjhal*, *Dom*, *Birtia*, *Ghogia*, *Kela*, *Ghasi*, and *Chamar* communities. With the help of these folk instruments, they celebrate their festivals, processions, and marriage ceremonies with great joy and enthusiasm. The *Ganda* and *Ghasi* communities are especially known for performing instruments like the *Dhol*, *Nishan*, *Tasa*, *Muhuri*, and *Jhanja*. In the regions of *Kalahandi* and *Balangir*, the *Kandha* community musicians play instruments like the *Dhap* and *Changu*. In districts such as *Sambalpur*, *Kalahandi*, *Bargarh*, and *Balangir*, the *Debgunia* community performs the *Brahmaveena* or *Lakshmiveena*. The *Dom* community is known for playing the *Dambaru*. Additionally, the tribal and *Paika* communities of *Kalahandi* have been traditionally performing *Ghumura*.

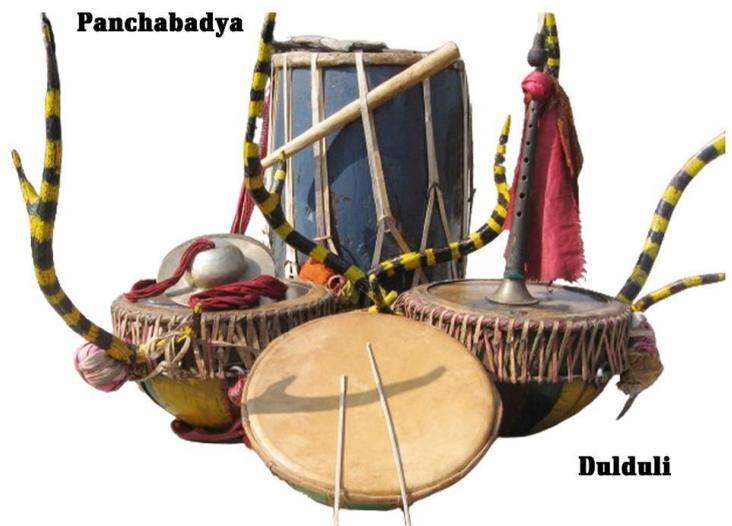
People of the *Birtia* and *Mangan* communities perform the **Mangan** instrument during their special rituals and ceremonies. There is also evidence that the *Mudgada Kela* community plays the folk instrument *Ghudka*. In Western Odisha, almost every tribal community such as the *Munda*, *Kisan*, *Mirdha*, *Oram*, *Kol*, *Khadia*, and *Binjhal* has the *Mandal* as their main popular instrument.



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Its use is essential in dances like *Karma* and *Jhumar*. The folk instruments *Gaurabadi*, *Dana* or *Banabadi* are performed by the *Gouda* community on various occasions. A sub-group of the *Gouda* community is known as *Parghania*, who are traditionally considered the bards (*Bhat*) of the *Gouda*. They play the *Kendra* instrument as part of their livelihood through alms-seeking. Another sub-group of the *Gouda* community is the *Ghogia*, who perform instruments like *Bhalu Bainsi* and *Bainsi* (types of flutes).

From the above description, it can be accepted that “*folk*” means the common people, and “*instrument*” is closely connected with them. Thus, *folk instruments* are the artistic expressions of ordinary people and form an important part of folk culture. In the vast region of Western Odisha, the tribal population is quite large. They are highly artistic and deeply fond of music. From birth to death, dance and music hold a central place in every aspect of their lives.



The identity of a country, community or region is reflected through its cultural history. Especially in Western Odisha, cultural unity is very rich, simple, and beautiful. In this extensive region, ancient centres of religion and culture still exist, strengthening national unity and integrity. Overall, the cultural unity of Western Odisha has been capable of creating a great tradition and heritage that is recognized across the world.

At present, we are living in a highly advanced age shaped by the contributions of science. With the flow of time, for various reasons, we are gradually moving away from our root culture. Due to globalization, industrialization, urbanization, migration for livelihood, and revolutionary changes in communication, our tastes and preferences have changed. The invention of new types



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of electronic musical instruments is distancing us from traditional folk instruments. Today's younger generation is forgetting its own folk music and is becoming more attracted to modern and Western music. Because of these reasons, many folk instruments that were once closely connected with daily life in Western Odisha have already disappeared, and many more are on the verge of extinction.

Now, the time has come to revive them. There is a need for more discussion, review, and advanced research starting from the grassroots level. It is very important to encourage the younger generation at the government level to preserve folk instruments and to motivate them towards research in this field. If folk instruments survive, then folk dance and music will also survive. Otherwise, a time will come when future generations will not be able to know or even imagine what these folk instruments which form the basic foundation of classical and modern music today once looked or sounded like.

AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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SOURCES OF FUNDING

The authors received no financial aid to support for the research.

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