

“Tribal Dance” in India: a concept, a category and an ethnographic reality

SVETLANA RYZHAKOVA

Research fellow in Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Science, Moscow

Abstract: Definition of “tribe” in the Indian context is a highly complicated process or is made complicated because of various reasons. However, its application to the various ethnic groups in India is no less reflected in the artistic sphere involving the interest of the whole country. Distinction between “tribe” / “non-tribe” as reflected in today’s Indian social outlook has many conditions and dimensions, such as political, economic, linguistic, cultural. “Belonging” or “not belonging” to a particular group or a community in the form of a tribe sometimes depends on the outcome of a long process of negotiation, which may create contradictions at certain level. At the same time the *clieche* “tribal dance” is well known in the social and cultural world and is widely in use, though often in an extremely unclear way. The paper is focused on what it actually stays for a “tribal dance” in today’s India, what are its characteristics, what is its content. It examines the concept of “tribal dance” in India in opposition to “folk”, “classical” and similar such connotations, as well as in the context of its increasing use in the recent phenomenon of “neo-rural” and “neo-tribal”. Few cases (Santali, Kalbelia dances) show highly conditional, uncertain and loose character of the schemes adopted to classify dancing practice as an ethnographic reality in today’s India.

Key words : tribal dance, classification, performance, Santali dance, Kalbelia dance