

## Folk Dance in Asterio Festivals in Ethiopia: Exploration of Performance, Variants, Symbols, and Therapeutic Role

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**Abstract :** The present study explores folk dance, one of the folklore texts, its symbols, and its therapeutic role. As a case, the study concentrates on Astrio-Mariam and Merkorios Bera, celebrated on January 30 and February 3 at Deresgie-Mariam Church in Ethiopia. By taking a qualitative stance, the study analyses the meaning of folk dance, explains its role, and describes its types. The data gathered through observation, interview, and focus group discussion techniques are documented in field notes, audio, and video. The data obtained is analyzed using structural-functionalism, psychoanalysis, and semiotics. Accordingly, community members of all ages (mainly the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church followers) participate in the performance. While the folk dance is a type of small group dance and group dance, the group has no feature of using men and women performing together. The folk dance's role is a form of healing and spiritual fulfilment besides entertainment. The folk dance also has sword dance characteristics; the study confirmed this feature in content and form. Moreover, the folk dance characterized by frequent shoulder and hand movements Wancha likleka (Horn-mug spin), Doro metet (Chicken drink), and sword dance depict wealth, heroism, and warfare. The instruments used in the performances are also alive, with religious symbols reaching from the drum, incense, and cross to the suffering of Jesus Christ from Hanna to Qeyafa, and references to the 12 Apostles.

**Keywords :** folk dance, festival, ritual, symbol, therapeutic

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