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The phenomenal growth and mastering the tradition of Bharatanatyam

S. Sophia

ratheeshsophia@gmail.com

Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced
Studies (VISTAS), Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Dr. S. Subbulakshmi

director.music@velsuniv.ac.in

Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced
Studies (VISTAS), Chennai, Tamil Nadu

ABSTRACT

A concept of framing work to approach the Bharatanatyam recital which incorporates a variety of dance composition set in Bharatanatyam is Margam. Through the element of margam the theme of evolution of the self/ spirit on the spiritual path is put forth. "The traditional order of the Bharatanatyam from alarippu to thillana is the sequence for revealing the spiritual through the corporeal. Typically a sequence of bharathanatyam recitals consists of an invocatory piece, a central piece, abhinaya piece and a culminating piece. Today this art evolving and changing the scenarios from a pure ritual art of the temple to the performance sequences in the stage

Keywords: Bharathanatyam, sculptures, Badami, Aihole, Vijayanagar, Halebid, Belur, Chinayya, Ponnayya, Shivanandan, Vadivelu, Tanjore quartet, Marga (format) to the Bharatanatyam, Jeti Taayamma, Kōlar Tradition, Mysūru tradition, Mūgur tradition, Nāñjangud tradition, Thodayamangalam / Pushpanjali / Mallari / Kautuvam / Allaripu Jatiswaram, Shabdam, Varnam / Swarajati, Padam / Javali, Astapadi, Kirtanam, Tillana, Slokam, Mangalam

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the forms of classical dance is Bharatanatyam which was practiced both professionally and academically from ancient days to till now in all parts of India. Karnataka was also not an exception in this case, as we can see many drawings, Inscription and literature regarding practices of dance. Chalukyan sculptures at Badami and Aihole proclaim was one of the best examples of practicing Bharatanatyam in Karnataka which was from 5th century. Talakadu, Talagunda, and Bulligaviwas are the places where Bharatanatyam has been practiced as a regular course in great universities in time period of 4th to 12th century. Vijayanagar Empire has built Madanika figures of the famed Halebid and Belur Temples and also patronized the art greatly which was considered as golden age of all art form.

The Great Trinity of Carnatic Music – Muthuswami Dikshitar, Shama Shastri, and Thyagaraja and also of the Tanjore Quartet consisting of the four brothers - Chinayya, Ponnayya, Shivanandan, and Vadivelu - who gave a Marga (format) to the Bharatanatyam solo recital that leads to emergence of new style of dance called Mysore Style Krishna Raja Wodeyar, the scholar-patron of the arts during Krishna Raja Wodeyar reign.

Standardization of Mysūru style

Bharatanatyam was standardized by Tanjore quartet likewise Mysore style of dancing was standardized by four people namely Amrtappa, Appaiah, Dāsappa and Jeṭṭi Tāyammā. Since they have their own Banis of dancing and wanted to familiarize their styles to the people who attended their schools namely Mysūru jeṭṭi Tāyammā's, Kolar Kittanna's, Nāñjangūd Rājammā's and Mūgūru School.

Subbarayappa was the guru of Jeti Taayamma for Bharatanatyam and learnt Abhinaya from Kavishvara Giriappa, Kaṣi Guru, Chandrashekhara Sastri and also under Karibasappa Sastri who was renowned for his abhinaya as Abhinayakalidas. The performance used to be packed with Slokas, Aṣṭapadis, Padas and Jāvaḷis, Amaruṣataka, Nītiṣataka, Mukundamāla and also many Kannaḍa compositions of rare beauty. It has an exceptional Abhinaya as their Matra by following Puvarangavidhi.

Kittanna's school was considered rich but relatively less in repertoire have been familiarized with traditions of temple, palace and other social performance. Their performance will always be related to place. Some of them are Saptatālēśvaravarṇas, Navasandhi Nṛtya, Ugābhōga, and Sūlādis, Cūrṇika, Prabandha, AṣṭadīpālakaĀrādhana, Svarajati, Svara Prabhandha.

The Nañjangūḍu Style of Rajamma's carried on by the late Guru Koushik, have given the importance to Bhava which include dhyaṇaśloka, raga-tāna-pallavi, bhajans and mangalaśloka.

Mūguru School was famous for its strict adherence to Nṛtta and various Aḍavus, Jatis. It also has a regular pattern which includes Melapraphi, Yekambareshvarashabda, Jatisvara, Varṇa, Tillānas, Padas and Jāvalis.

Tradition of dance sustained in Mysore Style

The successive rulers of Mysūru from eminent Nāṭyācāryas by their creative faculties had inspired by their support and encouragement which leads to evolution of numerous classical traditions and made each one of them a unique and dynamic in nature. However, four major traditions sustained themselves and stood the test of time. They are

1. Kōlar Tradition (Ālaya- Āstāna-Sabhāmēla),
2. Mysūru tradition (Rasābhinayapradhāna),
3. Mūgur tradition (Nṛttavaividyaupradhāna),
4. Nañjangud tradition (Nṛtta-bhāva-yōgasamanvaya)

Kolar Tradition - Blended Nṛtta With Abhinaya

Kōlar is the name of the place near Bangalore. Natyacharyajamān Kōlar Kiṭṭanna (1878 -1926) dedicated his life for art of dance. Kiṭṭanna learnt dance from Nāṭyācāryakañcisadāśivayya, an exponent of dance belonging to a family of musician from Kāñci and Venkatasubbayya. Nāṭyācārya – Yajamān Kōlar Kiṭṭanna stands tallest amongst Nāṭyācāryas of Mysūru considering the joint size of his troupe and his quality of managerial excellence. Features of the Kolar tradition is Kittanna successfully blended Nṛtta with Abhinaya to make his style dynamic and Vibrant. Kittanna trained his disciples in a special way by dividing them into 3 groups, based on their aptitude and talents.

Mysūru Tradition - Rasābhinaya Tradition

Mysūru style of Rasābhinaya tradition was evolved by Nāṭya Sarasvati Jaṭṭi Tāyamma. The title indicates 'Abhinaya' which is the soul of this tradition where the musical and the literary contents dominate. The mastering of the tradition demands excellence in Abhinaya, music and literary works of several languages. The trendsetter of this tradition Jaṭṭi Tāyamma had a dominating personality and robust physique. The daughter of a palace wrestler, she excelled in her studies of languages like Sanskrit, Kannada and Telugu. Also she was fortunate to get the guidance in music from Saṅgīta Kalānidhi Vāsudevāchār, a veteran musician and composer. Profoundly, impressed by her Abhinaya, Vāsudevāchār honoured her with a literary composition known as Vāmanastotra in Rāgamālika.

Mūguru Tradition- nṛtta vaividya pradhana

The Phenomenal growth of dance in Astana (royal court) Alaya (temples) was hampered by total ban on dance during the regime of Tippu Sultan, dazed by the sudden turn of events Nāṭyācharyas and dancers migrated and took refuge in Mugur, a small town in T.Narasipura near Mysūru . Tippadevi temple (Tripura sundari) was their meeting place where they kept the flag of dance flying. Tippu Sultan rule ended in 1799 A.D and Mummudi Kṛṣṇaraj Wodeyar III was restored by the British as the King. He initiated the Cultural Revolution by patronizing poets, writers and dancers. Mūguru duo Subbanna, a musical genius and Amruthappa, a dancer took this opportunity to establish a dance School in Mysūru. The two stalwarts Subbanna and Amruthappa gifted Nāṭyācharyas joined hands to evolve to new tradition now popularly called Mūguru tradition.

Nanjanagudu Tradition - Nṛtya, Bhava yoga pradana

A creative genius Nāṭyācharyas Subramanya Koushik was the creator of this tradition. At that time, the dancers faced a critical situation and some of them sought the patronage of drama companies one such was Nanjangudu Rājamma, a disciple of veteran Nāṭyācharyadasappa who was leading star in Gubbi Drama Company. Watching the rehearsals of dance sequences of Rājamma where Nāṭyācharya Dasappa was teaching, Koushik depicts ekalavya of Mahabharatha started replicating jatis and movements of Rājamma. Dasappa noticing Koushik's amazing talent took him as a disciple and later on Rājamma took him under her tutelage. Rajamma was a good natuvanar in that period.

The Tanjore quartets: creating the Margam format

The repertoire by the Tanjore Quartet was formally codified into a structured bharatanatyam performance Panchamurthi Kavthuvams and Navasandhi Kavthuvams which infuses the spiritual essence into the dance and will make the audience to travel into heaven of spiritual world. They were the first to formalize the Margam and codify the adavus.

Maratha rulers of Tanjavur like Serfoji Raja II, Pratapasimha Bhonsle and Amarasimha Bhonsle had received dancers for this Margam and some of them were received by other deities. Sivaraja was composed by Sivanandam who is a well renowned teacher for many aspiring dancers during that period of time. Chinnaiah, one of the brothers of Tanjore quartet has composed few songs for Krishnaraja Wodeyar who was king of Mysore.

Margam of the Tanjore Quartet

Thodayamangalam / Pushpanjali / Mallari / Kautuvam / Allaripu (in one of the 5 main Jatis)
Jatiswaram, Shabdam, Varnam / Swarajati, Padam / Javali, Astapadi, Kirtanam, Tillana, Slokam, Mangalam

This linear format of the traditional, secular recital, developed around the stem of Pushpanjali / mallari / Thodaymangalam, Alarippu, Jatiswaram, Shabdham, Varnam, Padam / Javali / Kirtanam, Tillana and Slokam, reflecting a marvelous scheme of aesthetic progression that paid adequate attention to physical endurance as well.

Sadir Format of Bharatanatyam

This system was adopted from different themes for the dance numbers according to ragas and Talas. The following will be the format for Sadir style of dance which was even patronized nowadays. Ganesha Stuti, Stuti to gods, Alarippu, Jatiswaram (pure nrta passage), Shabdham, Varnam, Pada, Thillana, Slokam, Kautuvam and mangalam.

The Tanjore Quartet's innovations are unique with artistic changes are of matchless exquisiteness to the tradition. With their next eight generations, the tradition of this family expanded and inherited. Their way of contribution towards art and dance was irreplaceable. Their way of dance composition was still a fish in the sky for many composers and also considered as a masterpiece of dance composition.

Nirupana Format of Dance (Single Raga)

The Nirupana is the setting of all the compositions presented in one raga and tala. The King Sarafoji had also composed 13 numbers of Nirupana. It can be observed that in the Nirupana both the meaningless syllables and meaning text were included. The dancer presents the Nirupana by employing both nrta and abhinaya. There is no reference about the cymbal player, the anklet bells of the dance, accompanying musicians or of the specific mode of drumming etc during the presentation of nrta and abhinaya. The Nirupana of king Sarafoji consists of 18 items through the dance presentation of which the story or the theme, based on tradition. The following lists are the Nirupana format which uses single raga for their dance performance throughout the function. Since it was difficult and also wants the composers to achieve it through their skills. The following pattern shows the Nirupana format

Jayajaya, Saran, Alaru, Solli, Shabdham, varnan, pada, swarajati, abhinayapada, tillana, abhinayapada, jakkini, gita, prabhanda, triputa, solkavarna, gauta, mangale. The distinguishing feature of this sequences of item was presented of the Nirupana by single dancer and the setting of all the compositions in one raga and tala.

Sadir Format of Dance (Multiple Raga)

This format was patronized by Tanjore quartet, as they use many raga and Talas. This was most suitable as it doesn't have time consumption and also relatively can perform in all temple and other functions. Even it was followed nowadays.

Ganesha Stuti, Swarajati, Pada, Thillana, Slokam, Gautuvam and Mangalam.

Though Tanjore Quartette did not bring seminal changes, but they effected certain qualitative and quantitative changes such as

1. Quantitative change - Reducing the number of the items, thereby minimizing the duration of the recital.
2. Item will not be repeated or duplicated in the format.
3. Qualitative change - Retaining the essentials of the format gave a new look without diluting its quality.
4. By adopting different themes, ragas and to the compositions, dispensed the monotony experienced

The refined format exhilarated the dance recital acclaiming the status enjoyed by the chamber music. Hence, it demonstrates that the Tanjore Quartette after examining and critically evaluating the format of Nirupana, have launched the Sadir format which remains with importance till date.

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