

‘The Characteristic Features of Dance Music of Bharatanatyam’

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Degree of

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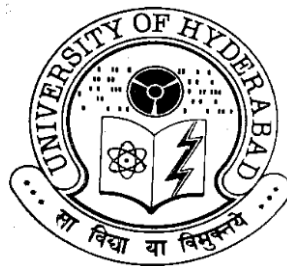
By

SMITHA MADHAV

(Regd. No. 18SNPD01)

Under the
Supervision of

PROF. M S SIVA RAJU



DEPARTMENT OF DANCE

Sarojini Naidu School of Arts and Communication

UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD

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C E R T I F I C A T E

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **“THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF DANCE MUSIC OF BHARATANATYAM”** Submitted by **SMITHA MADHAV** bearing registration number **18SNPD01** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Sarojini Naidu School of Arts and Communication in a bonafide work carried out by him/her under my supervision and guidance.

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A. Published in the following publications:

1. **International education & research journal** (E- ISSN Number: 2454-9916) Volume VI Number 12, 2020 (December Issue), Title: PandanallurBani, a delectable blend of tradition, musicality, aesthetics, and antiquity.
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1. Yatra of Music and Dance through Ages, by Department of Fine Arts, Alagappa University, 12th April 2021.
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Further, the student has passed the following courses towards the fulfillment of the coursework requirement for a Ph.D.:

Course Code	Name	Credits	Pass/Fail
1. DN 801	Advanced Research Methodology	4	PASS
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Dean of School

DECLARATION

I, **SmithaMadhav** hereby declare that this thesis, titled “**The Characteristic Features of Dance Music of Bharatanatyam**”, has been carried out by me independently in the Department of Dance, Sarojini Naidu School of Arts and Communication, the University of Hyderabad under the supervision of **Prof. M Samba Siva Raju**. I also declare that this work is original and has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship, associateship, or similar title of any University. A report on plagiarism statistics from the University Librarian is enclosed.

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PREFACE

This work speaks of an intricate art form that integrates into itself music, dance, and stylized dramatic techniques. Having originated in the southern parts of India, the journey of Bharatanatyam has been an eventful and fascinating one. As a student and lover of the arts, I have endeavored to steer clear of limited perspectives and instead see the big picture of Bharatanatyam and its music. I have also attempted to examine the dance itself through the lens of a musician and vice versa. This in itself has been a fascinating inward journey for me.

This work is also an ode to the great artists of an era gone by when the art was nurtured and practiced despite the most challenging circumstances. It is a tribute to the men and women who strived to connect the past of the art to an uncertain future through personal conviction and resilience. I have also made an attempt to distance myself appropriately if not adequately from my own understanding of the twin forms of music and dance, as required. It is my aspiration that this might lead to the uncovering of a fresh perspective; one that is free of personal bias.

I have sifted through numerous articles, and reviews and have conducted several interviews in my quest to create a narrative that is compelling yet coherent. Though it is now widely acknowledged that the history of Bharatanatyam is troubled, complicated, and problematic, I have tried to approach my study with the utmost respect for the past alongside a practical understanding of the present and optimism for the future.

Any study of Bharatanatyam inevitably touches upon gender, caste, politics, public life, ethnography, ethnomusicology, and other allied areas. As a musician myself, it is but natural that my approach to dance is strongly connected to my understanding of its music.

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This work is the culmination of a long-cherished dream; one that was inspired by my long years of training in dance and music at the feet of stalwart Gurus. The inspiring and intellectually stimulating discussions with my supervisor Prof M S Siva Raju created the bedrock upon which this work rests. For this, I will be forever grateful.

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I owe a debt of gratitude to the authorities of the various libraries that I visited in the course of my research. Primary amongst them are the Saraswathi Mahal Library, Thanjavur, Kalakshetra Foundation Chennai, and the Roja Mutthaiah Library, Chennai. Special mention must be made of Shri Ravi and Shri Maran who helped me at the Saraswathi Mahal Library. I must also thank Dr. Sujatha Mohan (head of the Natya department, Dr. MGR Janaki College & Guest lecturer, SASTRA University), and Prof S Senthamizh Pavai (Head of the Department of Fine Arts, Alagappa University) among others for giving me opportunities to present my work at conferences convened by them.

My sincere gratitude to the authorities of the state Sangeet Natak Akademi, Telangana, for providing me with platforms to publish my research work through papers published in their journals. I humbly thank the entire dance department of Sarojini Naidu School of Arts and Communication, University of Hyderabad for helping me in every step of the way. Lastly, but most significantly, I would like to thank my family for being the wind beneath my wings.

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The Characteristic Features of Dance Music of Bharatanatyam

by Smitha Madhav

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

That the idiom of Carnatic music is frequently utilized in other traditions such as Bhagavata Mela, Bhajana Paddhati¹, Nama sankeertana² etc., is well known and well documented. Dance forms like Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam also use this idiom in a way, albeit in a different avatar, which is indeed Carnatic music, but a unique and specialized form of it. While the thread of Carnatic music runs through the tapestry of many dance forms, especially Bharatanatyam, it is the aesthetic demands of the idiom that actually demand and dictate what part of Carnatic music it uses, in what measure and to what extent. For instance, even Kathakali and some branches of Mohiniyattam that use sopanasangeetham³ employ a certain amount of Carnatic music. However, there can be no one fixed yardstick to decide the quantum of Carnatic music to be added to the sopana blend. Thus, Carnatic music is like the life breath of dance- ever present but ubiquitous. This is perhaps why Dr Padma Subrahmanyam states- “music is the mother of dance”⁴. This statement and the ideals behind it are in no way meant to underplay the grandeur of the art and science of dance⁵. Instead, it is nothing but a nod to the inseparable nature of these twin disciplines. In all practical, performative and executional aspects, Carnatic music has retained all its original components in

¹Choral singing of devotional songs

²Repetitive singing of the holy names of God

³An exclusive style of music prevalent in Kerala

⁴Interview conducted by this scholar in 2021

⁵The Vishnu Dharmottara Purana declares that a proper understanding of painting or chitra is mandatory for a sculptor. Painting can be understood only by one who is well versed in nritya or dance and dance in turn can be understood only after proper training in vadya or instrumental music and vadya in turn can only be mastered after proper training in gaana or vocal music

Bharatanatyam. However, one has to ask the all-important question, i.e.: “Is the music of Bharatanatyam dance nothing but Carnatic music itself?”

The answer to this question can by no means be a simplistic one. While in use on Bharatanatyam proscenium stage, the ragas, talas, and most technicalities of Carnatic music do indeed remain unchanged. However, the very purpose of the music undergoes a humongous transformation. On the Kutcheri⁶ platform, Carnatic music is in a way “self-contained”. It is what modern parlance would refer to as art music. It is a work of art by itself and it is for the artist to deliver and the audience to relish in its bare and original form. The experience of music is direct and the only two stakeholders in this experience are the musician(s) and the audience.

The listener derives aesthetic experiences in a personalized way exclusive only to him/ her. The musicality of the art needs no aid to substantiate or give form to the aesthetic experience of the listener. When Carnatic music accompanies Bharatanatyam dance, it becomes in some ways an intermediary between the musical expression and its resultant aesthetic experience. Its primary intention and purpose itself metamorphosizes into a new identity. It is no longer a merely aesthetic communication between the artist and the audience, but an aid to the expressive urges of the dancer. The musical language is subsumed by and becomes subordinate to the dancing idiom. Even if the lyrical content of a particular piece happens to be identical in a piece that is part of the kutcheri platform and the proscenium stage, when danced to, the song assumes an altogether different meaning. This is why when the same piece is danced to by various dancers it impacts the audience in a different way on

⁶Musical concert

different occasions. This is because on the dance stage, the context of presentation dictates the overriding aesthetic expression. This phenomenon is even more pronounced and obvious when the dance form itself changes.

For example, when the raga Bhairavi is heard in Kuchipudi performances (as is it often is in the Bhaama Kalaapam), its gait is pretty different (the swing of the arms and the sway of the hips are far more pronounced in Kuchipudi than the in the Nadai or walk of Bharatanatyam) from what one sees when a Bharatanatyam dancer does, when she dances the Bhairavi pada varnam of the Tanjore Quartette. Dance music is certainly not merely a tweaking of a raga phrase here or modification of a tala usage there. In dance, music is entrusted with the all- important responsibility of creating the subliminal aesthetic fabric upon which the tapestry of dance can be created. While adhering to all the technical requirements of Carnatic music, dance-music subsumes into itself both the dancer and the viewer. In its form of “dance music”, the very purpose of Carnatic music stands refashioned, reimagined and represented. It ceases to be mere art music, but assumes the stature of dance music, thus entering a plane that it hitherto did not inhabit.

With the change in intent, the abstract nature of the music also transforms into an altered aesthetic with revised melodic and rhythmic structures. Carnatic music, when seen in the revised ecosystem of Bharatanatyam dance acquires an altogether novel dimension and meaning. This is not to say that the meaning of the lyrics or the rules that govern the technique change. The purpose of the music changes and with it most elements that surround the music also change. In dance music, the many variables such as the creativity of the musicians, the modes of creative expressions

and the rule of the dance techniques govern the scope and presentation of the music being used. In his book, “A southern music”, author and vocalist T M Krishna states that the fact that Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam dance are often viewed by a different set of Rasikas also plays a role in making dance music very different from Kutcheri music⁷.

The idea of melody as a conceptual and abstract, yet real and aesthetically pleasing experience is common to both dance music and Kutcheri music. Yet, as far as the practicalities of dance music is concerned, there is a certain gap between what the music is and what the music becomes when it reaches the music. The dance rules over this gap in all its variety and verve.

The interesting aspect of dance music is that its identity is often fused into that of the dance. Though it looks like the music is being danced to, in reality the music integrates itself into the dance. The music is not providing musical content or accompaniment. Instead, it creates a foil for the dance; a medium through which the dancer can communicate his/ her creative expression.

Though Carnatic music has a clear auditory identity, when it becomes enmeshed in the physicality of Bharatanatyam it becomes something else altogether, even as its essence remains unchanged. It is this shift that in many ways forms both the need for and the basis of this study. This subtle yet unmistakable intertwining of Carnatic music in the context of Bharatanatyam dance makes it a remarkably interesting subject to investigate. This study aims at crystallising and articulating these complex and sometimes difficult relationships.

⁷Krishna TM, A Southern Music P 213

Questions to be addressed

As seen already, the music of Bharatanatyam is a niche and exclusive zone. Its uniqueness and exclusivity form the crux of this study.

Through this research, an attempt is made to raise a few critical questions and answer them in the best manner possible. A few questions raised through this study are:

1. Is the music of Bharatanatyam nothing but Carnatic music?
2. What are the distinguishing features of the dance music of Bharatanatyam?
3. How does the music of Bharatanatyam vary from baani to baani?
4. Do the musical variations between one baani and the other cause the changes in the styles of dance?
5. What is the relevance of the term “baani”⁸ in the current scenario?

Aims and objective of the research:

By answering the above questions, the investigator endeavors to shine a better light on the music of Bharatanatyam. It also wishes to delineate the status of the musicians of a dance ensemble, as that of being equal collaborators if not motivators in the creation, execution and delivery of dance. It also tries to give some kind of quietus to the persisting debate on the status of the idea of “baani”, its antecedents and its future. The aspiration is that by doing this, the widening bay between the dance and music of Bharatanatyam may be bridged to a certain extent, even if to a small extent. It is also hoped that by doing so, some kind of cohesiveness may be brought

⁸The various styles of Bharatanatyam

about in the practice and technique of dance and the communication between the grammar of dance and its music may become a more real and reciprocal.

Hypothesis:

This study is based on the presumption and hypothesis that the music of Bharatanatyam is a somewhat specialized and unique discipline. In this, it relies on the experience of the investigator as performer of both Bharatanatyam and Carnatic Vocal music. This study rests on the bedrock of the idea of reciprocity and interdependence between Bharatanatyam and its music. It believes that Bharatanatyam's music is as much an expression of musical ideas as it is of the dancing creativity of the performer or nattuvanar. It builds on the multi-layered nature of dance music and the delicate balance that is constantly maintained between the dance and its music. This work believes that the musicians of a dance ensemble are a dynamic yet irreplaceable part of the dancer's journey. Irrespective of the content of the music or the dance, the piece believes that the music is a major motivation for the dance and steers the dance, albeit in the most unobtrusive and subtle manner.

Review of previous scholarship:

Given the conjoined nature of Bharatanatyam dance and its music, it is quite understandable that any piece of writing on the dance has in some way been a piece of writing on the music too. Writing about Bharatanatyam dance without writing about its music is next to impossible. Yet, there are a few works that stand out in their significance in terms of forming the basis of this work. These works have given considerable weightage to the study of dance music, as against art music or kutcheri

music. These works may thus be considered the previous scholarship that paved the way for this piece of writing. In some ways, this investigator endeavors to build upon the said previous scholarship.

From the standard dance related treatises of the ancient period down to the more contemporary writers on dance, most scholars and writers have devoted some part or the other of their writings to the music of dance. Needless to mention, not all ancient treatises on dance or theatre / dramaturgy are devoted to Bharatanatyam and thus the onus is on the reader to place the contents of these writings in the appropriate context and connect it to the art and practice of Bharatanatyam.

The Natyashastra attributed to Bharata stresses on the importance of a thorough understanding of music; i.e. vocal music and instrumental music, through the path of vocal music. The chapters 28 to 34 deal with the role and usage of instrumental music. However, since the Natyashastra is by no means an exclusive work on Bharatanatyam, the tenets laid down in these chapters can be taken as broad-based pointers and not as specific instructions to the student of Bharatanatyam.

The Narada Siksha (of undecided date) is another fund of knowledge regarding the modes and methods of music. Though it enumerates the various methods of samagana, ⁹, such as archika, gadhikam Samika etc, since many of these methods do not find their exact corollary in the current practice of Carnatic music, it cannot be considered as a direct basis of the practical execution of Bharatanatyam dance and music.

⁹Methods of rendering samaveda

The Dattilam of Dattila is considered an authority on music; albeit not precisely of dance music, but of the larger idea of art music, as against sacred music alone. It must be noted that though the Dattilam uses terms like “Gandharva” music etc., it recognizes that music is a source of fulfilment and also deals with the practicalities of art music such as Tala, swara, pada, avadhana etc.

The Brihaddesi of Matanga (attributed to him in the 6th-8th century) also speaks of the Srutis and the practice of raga. This work is not one on any form of dance per se and thus the tenets laid down in this work can be interpolated into contemporary expositions of Carnatic music. However, it is obvious that concepts such as the twenty-two shrutis are basic concepts that govern raga-based music even today and thus works such as the Brhaddesi will always enjoy a pride of place in the study of music.

Parshwadeva’s Sangeeta Samaya Sara is considered an authority on dance music as it speaks of concepts such as nadOrpatti, nAdabhEda, dhvani Swaroopa, sareera lakshana, geeta lakshana etc, even as it deals with descriptions of Vadyas¹⁰ and Hasta Mudras¹¹.

The Sangeeta Ratnakara or Saptadhyayi and its many subsequent commentaries (including those of Kalinatha and Simha Bhoopala) offer a fund of information on the artistic practice of dance, music and in many ways the music for dance. The author’s profile as a court musician seems to have led him to think of music and dance from a rather practical and performative angle rather than a purely pedagogical one. Sruti, jati, tana, grama and many such concepts are described in

¹⁰Musical instruments

¹¹Hand gestures

vivid detail. The lakshanas or salient features of as many as two hundred and sixty-four ragas along with their prescribed timings are also described in detail.

The Swaramela Kalanidhi is considered a standard Sanskrit treatise on the science and art of music. However, the “Bharatacharya” title conferred on its author Ramamatya speaks volumes of the oneness of music and dance. Apart from providing a classification of instruments such as the Veena, in more recent times, the Sangeeta Sudha of Raghunatha Nayak (who ruled between 1600 and 1634) offers plentiful knowledge pertaining to the Veena. It is interesting to note that though the Nayak rulers were known to be serious patrons of Bharatanatyam (the term Bharatanatyam is used here without going into the discussion pertaining to the so called renaming of the existent dance style), this work is more of an authority on music and literature, than on dance.

The twin nature of music and dance or dance as a logical extension of music is seen in the writings of King Tulaja of the 1700s. His Sangeeta Saramrta is a work on music (as the title indicates), but also has a chapter dedicated to the nuances of music as seen in the times of the author. The independent study of dance and its various mores and practices can be seen in a handful of treatises apart from the Natyasastra. These include the Abhinaya Darpana and the Bharatarnava of Nandikeswara, the Nrta Ratnavali of Jayaprasenani, NartanaNirnaya etc. In Tamizh literature, the Silappadikaram (ostensibly) of Ilango Adigal is a major source of information connected to all arts including music and dance.

Other works like Yagnyavalkya Siksha, Panineeya Siksha etc., provide detailed instruction on the handling, chanting and execution of Vedic swaras and

other such allied elements. However, since these are quite removed from the current practice of Carnatic music of Bharatanatyam dance, these need not be considered as direct sources of previous scholarship.

Sangeeta Choodamani of Pratapa Chakravarthy and Lochana Kavi's raga tarangini speak of the tenets of Raga, Tala Vadya, Prabandha, Nrta etc., but are of more interest to the student of music than to an investigator of dance- music owing to the prioritization of art music seen in these texts. Likewise, the Raga Vibodha of Somanatha contains abundant music- specific technicalities in its Vivekas¹².

In more ways than one the writings of modern-day authors have formed the bedrock of this work. Writers and scholars such as Kapila Vatsyayan and dancers such as T Balasaraswati and Mrinalini Sarabhai have contributed immensely. Since their writings are steeped in the immediacy and practicalities of technique, they may be considered to be very valuable scholarship in the realm of dance-music. A few of their works have directly and indirectly been a foil of sorts to launch this work.

In this context, an especially valuable work is that of T Balasaraswati and Dr V Raghavan, bearing the ubiquitous title, "Bharatanatyam". This work is of unique value mainly because Smt T Balasaraswati was not just a stalwart dancer, but also a formidable musician of great mettle. She hailed from a family of hereditary dancers and singers and thus her perspectives as an insider are most precious. This book gives detailed explanation of many dance related concepts from the basic to advanced levels.

¹²Chapters

“Indian Classical Dance” by Kapila Vatsyayan contains a fair bit of information regarding the technique of Bharatanatyam, its adavus and music. However, in terms of music, the writer focuses more on the repertoire of the dance rather than on the nature or style of the music. The author dwells on the history of the dance, the socio-political and religious angles if it, its evolution and its troubled history. However, as a study on dance-music in particular, it cannot be considered to be an elaborate work. The sorkattus of nr̥tta pieces such as aalarippu and the notations of melodic items such as the Jatiswaram are provided by the author. While these do not help in the direct assimilation or absorption of the nature and content of dance-music per se, for the student of dance, it gives an idea about the continuity and fair amount of standardization that has stayed with the dance and its music for over two centuries.

The sixth volume of “South Indian Music” by Prof B Sambamoorthy contains a detailed appendix on “Indian Dance”, its literature, repertoire, iconography, abhinaya, classifications etc. The writing of the author, who was a musicologist and professor of music, is highly descriptive in nature. Details are plentiful, but investigation is scarce. The writer however does allude to the close inter dependence of music and dance when he writes about luminaries such as Tyagaraja, SyamaSastri and others and their anecdotal references to dance through their music.

In her 1976 thesis titled “Contribution of Rukmini Devi Arundale to Bharatanatyam”, Jayanti Vaishampayan, the scholar devotes a small chunk of her writing to the music of Bharatanatyam as seen during the time that Rukmini Devi Arundale was making her forays into the world of dance. The musical ensemble of

that era, the maargam, its components and presentations are detailed in brief in her writings. However, these writings are also descriptive in nature and not analytical. The entire work is also a bit hagiographical.

In 1979, S Bhagyalekshmy submitted her doctoral thesis titled “Music in Bharatanatya” to the University of Kerala. This work seems to be rooted in her personal experiences as a performer. In her writings, she gives more emphasis to the practicalities of performing dance music as a genre and the implementational aspects of accompanying Bharatanatyam as a musician. She also makes suggestions regarding how the performative aspects of Bharatanatyam music can be polished and how the perfection in delivery can be enhanced.

P Anita, a research scholar devoted a small part of her writing to specializations within Bharatanatyam. Her 2001 thesis submitted to the University of Madras, titled “The semiosis of classical dance (Bharatanatyam) in Tamil Culture, from 1930 has parts of the work focusing on aspects such as Kuravanji dance dramas. She writes about the traditional approach to mythological themes vs the modern approach. She also writes of the entry of secular themes. She also analyses the effect of urbanization, institutionalization and westernization; all modern-day realities. In a similar vein, she studies trans culturalism and interculturalism in the sphere of Bharatanatyam and investigates the cause and effects of these influences. While these studies succeed in critically examining some angles to the Bharatanatyam narrative such as the rapid changes in the practicalities of the art, the results of changing demographic of artistic participation etc., this study does not involve itself

with the review of the baanis of Bharatanatyam, their salient features, so on and so forth.

In 1996, scholar researcher V S Radhika submitted her doctoral thesis to the University of Hyderabad in which, she has made a thorough study of directional swerves that Bharatanatyam has taken over the past three centuries. Her writings on the Cholas, the Nayaks and the Marathas is rather detailed. The modi¹³ records pertaining to Bharatanatyam, dance in the court of Serfoji, the techniques and format of Sadir, comparisons between the adavus mentioned in the Sangeeta Saramrta vs those currently practiced- all these are rigorously examined.

From a musical standpoint the scholar also notes the contribution of the court composers, the hagiographical compositions in praise of Serfoji II and the present-day scenario are all described. However, one observes that the writings of the scholar do not concern themselves much with the study of the individual baanis of Bharatanatyam.

In 2017, singer and activist T M Krishna authored “A southern music” which he states to be a “panoramic exploration” of Carnatic music. Though the book mainly contains the author’s views on “art music”, it also dedicates a fair share of space to the music of Bharatanatyam, retracing its roots and sources and the role of literature and religion in the landscape and soundscape of dance and its music. The author ponders over whether the music of Bharatanatyam is the same as that of the Kutcheri platform.

He concludes that though the basis of both kutcheri music and dance music is the same, when music is used to accompany dance, its role and presence undergo a

¹³Official language of the court

sea change and thus it assumes a very different persona from that of its kutcheri counterpart.

Another research scholar whose writing hovers around the music of dance in an obtuse way is Divya Patel. In her 2019 thesis submitted to the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, titled “The hanging dynamics of a traditional art form- Case study of the Bharatanatyam Maargam”, the scholar declares in her title that this work revolves around the maargam. It is indeed a broad based work on many aspects of Bharatanatyam. Interestingly it devotes a fair amount of attention to the precursor to the margam, ie the prabandhams and nirupanas. It describes in details dance forms seen in the Prabandhams and others prevalent in the Tanjore court of the Marathas and in the period prior to this, such as alaru, sharanu, jayajaya etc. Later day additions like tillana, Padams, Swarajatis, Varnams etc are described but not analyzed. She also writes in detail about what she calls the “temple repertoire”. In this, the writer describes the socio-economic status of the dasi women of the ChinnaMelam, the repertoire they practiced etc. She writes in great detail about items such as alarippu, jatiswarams, shabdham etc., taking great pains to describe the structure of these pieces, the varieties and types within them, their general duration and other such details.

After a thorough perusal of the above literature and a fund of other material, this scholar came to the conclusion that while there is a fair amount of scholarship on Bharatanatyam and a moderate amount of writing on its music, a thorough inquiry into the content, intent and delivery of the music from a baani perspective, may be in good order. This would also help practitioners understand their artistic roots better, analyze their own performances in appropriate perspective and tweak their outlook

towards the musical and performative components of dance with a certain sense of balance and proportion.

Research methodology

Being a performative tradition with a huge corpus of performing work, but not as much documentation, in the practice of the art, any research on the music of Bharatanatyam hangs by a delicate balance. However, this scholar has the benefit of being not only a practitioner of Bharatanatyam but also a performing artist in the tradition of Carnatic music. Thus, the approach taken up for the purpose of this research is rooted in practicality. The ethnographic performance observations of various senior practitioners of the different baanis were carried out. In some cases, it was a kind of “participant observation”, as this researcher is a student of Bharatanatyam herself. During the observation of certain performances of different baanis (apart from the ones in which the researcher is trained), the point of view has been more of an outside view.

A visit to Melattur in March 2019 enabled the scholar to watch multiple dance dramas including the famed Prahlada Natakam. These performances were witnessed, observed and documented with consent from the performers. Many of these observations form the basis of Chapter V, viz: Characteristic features of Bharatanatyam’s dance music (Comparative study with other South Indian Classical dance forms). This researcher had an opportunity to witness many talks, seminars etc. which gave new inputs and opened up different vistas within the realm of research. Primary amongst these were the Natya Kala conferences of Sri Krishna Gana Sabha.

A major source of information and inputs for this researcher was the interviews conducted with senior dancers, musicians, dance-musicians, nattuvanars, composers and accompanists. Most of these interviews have been documented by the researcher in audio/video form. The interviews covered both questions of information as well as inquiries about corroboration, interpretation, perspective and approach. The questions put forth in the interviews were sometimes open-ended, thus enabling the interviewee to put across a more precise and personal opinion. The inputs obtained through these interviews have been classified and utilised based on factors such as the specialisations of the interviewees, the social backgrounds of the interviewees etc. The goals and objectives of the researcher were clearly explained to the informants prior to the interview.

Secondary Sources:

Apart from the extensive and exhaustive interviews, copious amounts of literature were reviewed in order to grasp the scope and variety of the dance music of Bharatanatyam. Primary amongst these were books containing notations of major dance pieces including the compositions of prolific composers such as the Tanjore Quartet and later day veterans including Shri Lalgudi G Jayaraman, Shri Madurai T Srinivasan etc. Videos and documentaries were viewed to analyze the performances of Bharatanatyam through the lens of a musician.

Internet repository of archived books, digitized content made available by the government of India and the Madras Music Academy, blogs, research articles, vintage articles and casual discussions amongst performers and students.

Chapters:

This work comprises seven chapters. They are:

1. Introduction
2. The concept of dance music and Bharatanatyam's dance music
3. Pre modern (from 17th century to 20th century) history of Bharatanatyam and its dance music (sadir and Carnatic music)
4. Bharatanatyam's dance music during transition from pre modern to modern (from "sadir" to "Bharatanatyam")
5. Characteristic features of Bharatanatyam's dance music (comparative study with other south Indian classical dance forms)
6. Bharatanatyam's dance music in its major baanis
7. Conclusion

The present one is the first and gives a bird's eye view about the ensuing parts of the thesis. In this chapter, a broad foundation is laid to explain in brief what this work endeavors to do. The purpose of research, the hypothesis, review of previous scholarship in the area, the methodology used to pursue the research are all dealt with in this chapter. This chapter serves as a curtain raiser for the remaining pages and clearly delineates the flow of thoughts, ideas and concepts that can be expected by the readers.

The second chapter is titled “Concept of dance music and Bharatanatyam’s dance music”. It is a critical chapter that in many ways sets the record straight and aids in taking this research forward. The reciprocity of Bharatanatyam and its music is studied here. In this chapter, the investigator’s personal profile and acumen as a performer of both genres, viz: Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music play a vital role in delineating the unique perspectives of dance-music in its myriad tones and notes. The available literature on the music of dance is placed in perspective to draw the contours of the music, its aesthetic, structure, content, intent and delivery.

The third chapter is titled “Pre modern (from 17th century to 20th century) history of Bharatanatyam and its dance music (sadir and Carnatic music)”. As the name of this chapter indicates, this chapter attempts to give a clear idea of the music and dance mentioned in the said time period, i.e.: from the 17th century to the 20th. As is widely known, the abovementioned period was one of feverish activity and major growth. In many ways, the happenings of that era laid the foundations of the dance and its music as we know it today. It was also a time when various parallel events occurred at multiple locations and converged to give concrete shape and form to the art form, thus making it a bright and vibrant one. The cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Tanjore court and the brilliant presence of a large number of nattuvanars and dancers was a major contributor to the growth of the art in this era. In this chapter, an attempt is made to summarize all these happenings, contributors and consequences in a precise and logical manner.

The fourth chapter, i.e.: Bharatanatyam’s dance music during transition from pre modern to modern (from sadir to Bharatanatyam), is a logical extension of the

previous one. It speaks of the all-important transition era. This work does not wish to limit itself to the nomenclature or name-based terminology of Bharatanatyam and Sadir. Instead, it chooses to study and comment on the dance and its music, from the point of view of its content and the ethos in which it thrived. This investigator is aware of the fact that it is widely perceived that it was Sadir that got renamed into Bharatanatyam. This investigator is equally aware of the fact this theory has been disproven multiple times and thus has chosen to refrain from entering the “name debate” vis a vis the Sadir vs Bharatanatyam debate. The reason this chapter forms an inextricable and critical part of this study is that, this period was an extraordinarily vibrant one in terms of changes and transitions. While on the one hand it is viewed as a period of rebirth and renaissance, on the other a certain section of the dance community views this period as the time when the old order was trampled upon in the name of reconstruction. The role played by the so-called revivalists is a controversial one and thus warrants critical evaluation. It must also be noted that most contemporary dancers’ knowledge of the history of Bharatanatyam is based on the common narrative of the “old” dance having been crude and lewd and thus was sanitized by the new crop of revivalists. However, this being a study on the music of dance; an attempt is made to view the changes that occurred in this period through the prism of music. The repertoire, techniques and modes employed during this phase forms the basis of this chapter.

The following chapter, i.e., the fifth one is titled “Characteristic features of Bharatanatyam’s dance music (comparative study with other south Indian classical dance forms). This is an attempt to debunk and demystify the many contrary and at times confusing views surrounding the views pertaining the music of Bharatanatyam

vis a vis that of other south Indian dance forms. The fact that Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi and many other dance traditions have their origins in geographical areas that enjoy proximity to one another makes it easy for both the lay student and the audiences to view them all through the same lens. Many a time, even practitioners understand and appreciate the differences between one style and another from a strictly performative viewpoint. Their training in one art form helps them grasp the technicalities of that form and thus they are able to tell it apart from the other. This is in stark contrast to the approach taken up by an investigator or researcher. The perspective and approach of an investigator is much more pointed and holistic. It is entwined into the subtleties as well as the realities of the dance forms and their respective musical disciplines.

The “what” and “why” of every element becomes as important as the “how”. In this chapter, the dance forms taken up for a comparative study are Kuchipudi, Mohiniyattam and Melattur Bhagavata Mela. The reason for this choice is logical and simple. These three forms have a lot in common and thus the scope for overlap in perspective and a better lack of understanding is plenty. These similarities are seen in terms of geographical proximities, repertoire, techniques, aahaarya¹⁴ etc. All these elements are analyzed threadbare in this chapter, studied in detail and placed in appropriate context and perspective.

The sixth chapter is the penultimate one and is in many ways an all-important one in this work. It concerns itself with the musical aspects of Bharatanatyam dance, in the various baanis¹⁵. This chapter is an elaborate one in which due importance and

¹⁴Costume and accessories

¹⁵The various styles or schools of Bharatanatyam

weightage is given to all aspects of the study of the idea of “baani”. The factors that go into the building up of a baani, the components that comprise it, the attributes that make a baani stand out- elements such as these are investigated into and examined. The main baanis such as Pandanallur, Vazhuvoor and the major baani of the recent past, viz: Kalakshetra are given their due importance in this study. Lesser known baanis including the Mysore Style, the Tiruvidaimarudur offshoot, the Baroda variety etc are also examined. The sheer variety of the various baanis which stems forth from one common ethos and aesthetic forms the bedrock of this chapter.

The final chapter of this work is the conclusion. It presents the multiple findings made by this investigator. The very relevance of the idea of “baani” is examined here. The views of this writer are presented sans bias. The popular baanis of the day are critiqued whilst keeping in mind their musical aspects. At the same time, the role played by music in giving form and shape to the baanis is encapsulated here. A systematic analysis into what goes into the making of a baani is conducted here. Finally, the plausible reasons for the apparent dwindling of the sacrosanct nature of the idea of “baani” are explored in this chapter.

CHAPTER II

The concept of Dance music and Bharatanatyam's Dance music -syncretic or inflectional?

The concept of “dance music” is in itself abstract one. The first thought of dance of any kind is usually accompanied by music of some kind. One seldom sees dance without music. Even the plain textbook definition of dance¹⁶ is “*the movement of the body in a rhythmic way, usually to music and within a given, for the purpose of expressing an idea or emotion, releasing energy, or simply taking delight in the movement itself*”. Music, on the other hand is said to be the “*art or science of arranging sounds in time through the elements of melody, harmony, rhythm and timbre*”.

In the Vishnu Dharmottara Purana, a conversation between sage Markandeya and King Vajra highlights this suzerainty of music in the creation of dance. In this dialogue, the king first requests the sage to teach him the art of sculpture. In response, the sage says that a good knowledge of the art of painting is a pre requisite for one to become a sculptor. To this, the king asks to be taught painting. The sage then says that one should know to dance if one ought to learn to paint. He then goes on to say that to be able to dance, one should be well versed in instrumental music and to be able to play an instrument, one should know vocal music. He then goes on to enumerate the components of good vocal music such as: prose, verse, poetry and lyrics .

¹⁶As seen in the Encyclopedia Britannica

What is the need to define terms as basic as “music” and “dance”? The answer would be that this is needed since this study is concerned with the music OF dance. In other words, this study is of music in its accompanying role to dance. In the Indian context, what makes the problem of research even more complex and interesting is that both music and dance are considered to be forms of art as well as subjects of science. Added to this are the plentiful social, religious, economic factors that have historically gone into the making of these art forms. In what may sound like a cliché, but is a rather accurate statement, the music and dance in the Indian contexts are scientific arts and artistic sciences.

The current chapter would go under the following flow of thought:

Music ⇔ Dance Music ⇔ Bharatanatyam dance music.

The larger subject of what music itself is, what the motivation for music is, what the foundation of music is, what its intent is, so on and so forth have been debated multiple times and need no repetition here. In India, religion has been a great catalyst of music. But even before religion, human emotion or feeling is the even more basic source of music. It has a capacity to move (both physically and emotionally) man and thus has a fundamental link to human existence. Whether music happens to fall under the categories of art music, folk music or more recently popular music, there is no doubt that it is one of the most real and concrete forms of expression.

While the west found verbose and elaborate means to explain the cause and effect of music, Indian wisdom seems to have encapsulated the sum and substance of the nature and purpose of music with the simple and well-known saying¹⁷:

“SishurvEtti – paSurvEtti vEtti gAnarasam phaNihi”

Loosely translated, this means that even child, an animal or serpent can relish good music. Even if one were to set aside these sayings as sayings soaked in hyperbole, one cannot deny the inextricable link between man and music, music and movement and the universality of it.

Music as a source of movement:

Movement is a key aspect and critical component of life. Not just human life, but any form of life. When we say movement, we immediately think of large movements of the limbs. However, even something as simple as speech is born out of the relation between sound and movement. In the words of Sri Srirali; “it is truly said that music leads to dance”¹⁸. In other words, music is the justification of dance. It is music that sustains the beauty of dance with its emotional and dramatic content. As said earlier, music has the ability to “move” a person. The most commonly observed way in which music moves a person, or rather motivates or makes a person move can be noticed when people involuntarily move their heads, tap their feet or click their fingers when they hear certain rhythmic types of music. Interestingly this is seen not just in adults and children, but in some kinds of animals and plants too.

¹⁷Subhashitam based on the works of Narada, Bharata and Matanga and other scholars

¹⁸National Music, London. Oxford University press 1963

Hearing a piece of music certainly activates specific areas of the brain and encourages the human body to move¹⁹. The kind of movement that the music inspires depends on a variety of factors such as the nature of the music, the nature of the listener, his/ her mood, the quality context of the music, its tone, timbre etc. These factors are too many to list and do not exactly fall within the scope of this research and hence shall not be delved into at this point. Apart from motivating movement, music is in itself a self-contained part of the bigger picture of movement. The music sets the mood, drops the beat and creates the motivation to start moving. It makes the listener or the subject feel in a certain way and thus is the fountainhead of movement. Interestingly, both music and movement are created by the body. Even instrumental music is in a way created by the body. At some level, it is the instrument that creates the music, it is the human body that stimulates the instrument. The body of the performer listens to and moulds itself into an appropriate vehicle for the transmission of the music.

In their essay titled, “*The corporeality of sound and movement in performance*”, Ako Mashino and Elina Seye state: The body of a performer is not anybody, but a cultural body, with particular physical skills and a heightened awareness of corporeality.” Both dance and music share a concept of perception and creation vis a vis movement. Technically speaking, even when a dancer presents a movement or a series of movements without any accompanying music, there is a certain sound that is present in these movements in an underlying manner. However, since this study is not concerned with the kinetics or physics of music and movement, we shall not delve into those aspects at this juncture.

¹⁹<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/why-is-music-good-for-the-brain-2020100721062>

Dance music as a specialized entity as against kutcheri music

As per Indian wisdom, both music and dance find their source in “Ananda”. Simply put, dance music is any music which is designed to support the conception of dance. During the creation of dance, music is the most influential component and hence, the reach or success of the dance is directly related to the musicianship and the musical content. Since almost every rasika bases his grasp of the artistic experience of the dance performance by *both* seeing it *and* by hearing it, both the music and the dance are capable of displaying the bhava or feelings contained in the dance with honesty, order and meticulousness. The twin concepts of Lakshana (beauty) and lakshya (perfection) both find perfect expression in both music and dance. In the “Dance dialects of India”, Smt Ragini Devi says²⁰, as having been said by PundareekaVittala:

²⁰According to PundareekaVittala

“The soul of the sadhaka passes from speech to songs and then flowers forth into the petalled harmony of dance; the transparent gesture of language. When even song fails to realise its desired ends, thoughts crystalize into emotion which bursts forth in the ecstasy of radiant codes, the mysterious symbology of limbs and poses.”

One wonders what the need for a specialised nomenclature called “dance music” is. However, since there is an ocean of a difference between music in general and the music of dance, it becomes imperative to understand the nuances of dance music in all its variety and grandeur. In an age and time when music and dance were but two sides of the same coin, the ideas of music and dance music would have been closely allied to one another. The art of the hereditary community was a composite one with music and dance flowing out of a common artistic pool. Even the sastras and texts that dancers venerate as the gold standards for the understanding of art clearly state that a good knowledge of music is absolutely mandatory for dancers. The bonhomie between the dancers and musicians created a strong base for the music and dance to grow and flourish. The familial ties and professional oneness of the fraternity as a whole was a major source of constant improvement. All dancers and their nattuvanars lived and worked in the same ecosystem and thus easily fed off each other. However, one must remember that even as the Tanjore courts were melting pots of the arts; i.e. music, dance and dance-music, there flourished in the very same Kaveri delta a culture of musicians and composers who composed neither for the kutcheri nor for dance or for anything else. They enriched this country with a rich treasure and a humongous repository of artistic compositions that were simply outpourings of their devotional fervour and artistic expression. Whether one thinks of the compositions of

the trinity, or those of the Tamizh trinity or the bhakti poets that preceded them, none of these genii composed with the specific intention of having their compositions performed in dance or concert format. The modern day Kutcheri format is a fairly recently young one. It seems to have been born out of the desire on the part of lay men and connoisseurs to listen to creative music. However, the music for dance grew and evolved with the evolution of the dance itself. In the days of yore, kutcheris were referred to as “vinikai²¹”. They comprise sacred songs and hymns, with raga alapanas developing around shlokas. With the advent of Sangeeta sabhas in the late 1900s, vidwans²² who were hitherto performing in the sabhas of royalty, found a new avenue to showcase their virtuosity in front of the lay listeners too. This in turn gave rise to the need to design the concert in a manner in which variety and virtuosity both received equal importance.

In the early concerts, the guiding principle seems to have been the concept of Ghana- Naya- Desya. While the artist commenced the recital with compositions in ghana ragas, they would be followed by compositions and the Pallavi in rakti/ naya ragas. The tail end pieces or tukdas would be in desya ragas. The unspoken rule of presenting (as the main piece) only songs with majesty and plenty of scope for manodharma still holds good. Just as the dance ensemble builds up the concert gradually by presenting small and brisk pieces before embarking on the elaborate varnam, kutcheri singers also begin with bright and racy pieces before presenting the challenging main piece (often the Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi). In fact, one artist, Bhikshandarkovil Subbarayar went to the extent of having his tambura artists play the

²¹Musical concert

²²Exponents of music

tambura even before he arrived at the venue, so that the stage reverberated with the sonorous naadam of the tambura, even as he entered the proscenium.

Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavata, Pudukottai Dakshinamurthy, Palghat Mani and Erode Viswanatha Iyer (violin) in a photo published in an advertisement for Broadcast records in *Swaadesamitran* (1936)



Plate 1

Typically, a music kutcheri opens with the tana varnam. This is rendered in 2 speeds. Vidwans desirous of displaying their mastery over laya may choose to render this in three or more speeds too. Sometimes tishram or any other gati bhedom also may be performed. The Tana Varnam may be in adi tala or in ata talam. We find some unique varnams such as navaragamalika varnam, ghana raga malika varnam, daru varnams etc too.

After the varnam, the kutcheri artist usually renders a composition on Ganesha. This is to ensure an auspicious start to the concert. Kalpana swarams may be rendered for this composition. However, it would be prudent to keep the Kalpana swarams short, brisk and devoid of much mathematical wizardry. After the Ganesha piece, some vidwans choose to render a composition in a vivaadi²³ raga. This is usually followed by a majestic chowkakaala²⁴ krti. The next piece begins usually

²³ A raga with vivadi notes or those which do not have harmonious relationships between them

²⁴ A composition in a slow tempo

begins with a raga alapana, followed by a kriti in which neraval²⁵ and Kalpana swarams are rendered. This piece is considered to be the “sub main” piece. The next composition is a racy one; sometimes with a chittaswara²⁶. The artist then moves on to the “piece-de-resistance” or the “main “number, which is embellished with an elaborate raga alapana, neraval. In both speeds, several volleys of kalpanaswaram, kuraiipu, thani avarthanam etc. Many a time, the main piece may be a Ragam-Tanam- Pallavi which affords ample scope for various forms of layavinyasam²⁷, such as tishram, trikalam etc as well as melodic variations such as ragamalika in the kalpanaswaram etc. The last part of the concert usually features “lighter” compositions or “tukdas” such as shloka, viruttam, tiruppugazh, devarnama, tillana etc.

Exclusive features of dance music:

While it is true that all music is based around the same seven notes or the saptaswaras, it is also true that the music of dance has its own exclusive and unique character and flavour. This uniqueness is seen in terms of its content, intent and delivery. At a very basic level, the motivation behind the music of dance is the movements of the dance itself. In a dance performance, the basic purpose of the dance is to give meaning and form to the ideas contained. While in kutcheri music, the vocalist/ main artist (who may also be an instrumentalist) is the leader of the ensemble, this is not so in dance. In a dance performance, the dance uses the music as a vehicle to reach the audience. In a music concert, the main artist can choose the

²⁵ An important improvisational aspect of Carnatic music where a single line is sung in different ways

²⁶ Passage of swaras

²⁷ Improvisation in the rhythmic aspects

items to be presented. The choice may be based on her comfort and mood. She is governed by Kutcheri Dharma, but is not in any way fettered or restricted. The main artist need not rehearse with her musicians / co artists before ascending the dais. He can change the “bill of fare” in the last moment or even midway during the concert. In concert music, the music itself of “Kutcheri dharma” plays a great role in determining the flow of the concert, in dance music the dance and music are equal partners. However, in a dance concert, the entire team of musicians is part of the “support system” of the dancer. The vocalist sings FOR the dancer, who in turn dances FOR the audience. Thus, the musicians have an INDIRECT connection with the audience and not a direct one. The musicians’ relationship with the audience is routed THROUGH the dancer. Thus, it is extremely important for the dancer and her musicians to be in perfect synchronisation. This “synch” has to happen at many levels. While many scholars and Vidwans have given their own versions as to what music means to a dancer and to the dance, one of the most succinct ones was given by T Balasaraswati. Though her words were said in relation to the Bharatanatyam Margam in particular and not to the music of dance in general, it does in many ways encapsulate the position of music in dance in a pithy and accurate manner. She said:

“The Bharatanatyam recital is structured like a Great Temple. We enter through the Gopuram(outer hall) of alarippu, cross the Ardha mandapam (half-way hall) of Jatiswaram, then the Mandapa (great hall) of Shabdham, and enter the holy precinct of the deity in the Varnam. This is the place, the space that gives the dancer expansive scope to revel in the rhythm, moods and music of the dance. The Varnam is the perpetuity which gives ever-expanding room to the

dancer to light in her self-fulfilment, by providing the fullest scope to her own creativity as well as to the tradition of the art. The Padam follows. In dancing to the Padam one experiences the containment, cool and quiet of entering the sanctum from its external precinct. The expanse and brilliance of the outer corridors disappear in the dark inner sanctum; and the rhythmic virtuosity of the Varnam yield to the soul-stirring music and abhinaya of the Padam. Dancing to the Padam is akin to the juncture when the cascading lights of worship are withdrawn and the drum beats die down to the simple and solemn chanting of sacred verses in the closeness of God. Then, the Tillana breaks into movement like the final burning of camphor accompanied by a measure of din and bustle. In conclusion, the devotee takes to his heart the God he has so far glorified outside; and the dancer completes the traditional order by dancing to a simple devotional verse.”



Plate 2:T Balasaraswati

In a performance of dance, at a superficial level, it may sometimes appear that the dancer and singer are running two almost parallel shows. However, nothing can be farther from the truth. The rapport between the music and the dance is a symbiotic one. Each gives the other space to soar and grow. Together they create the desired effect, which in traditional parlance is called Rasotpatti. There can be no gaps between the dancer and the music. A dancer who is knowledgeable and open-minded welcomes a flourish or two from the music, delves into it, accepts it and builds on it, thus refining the aesthetic experience for the viewer. The music is created solely with the intention of supporting the dancer, enabling her to deliver her best and, thus, is instrumental in presenting a successful recital.

The Dance Music of Bharatanatyam

“Music is the mother of dance” – this is an oft repeated statement. Most recently it was also reiterated by Dr Padma Subrahmanyam in an interview conducted by this scholar in 2020. The natyasastra also repeatedly states the reciprocity and inter-dependence between *Geeta* and *Natya*. The dance of Bharatanatyam is inseparable. It is perhaps why Nataraja is represented as the epitome of both dance and music. Kapila Vatsyayan, in “Dance in literature & Arts” of the Sangit Natak Akademi, P 380 states

“the relation between music and dance is so intimate that at certain moments it is difficult”.

In the Sangeeta Naryayana, it is said that dance follows instrumental music and the instruments themselves accompany the dance. It is said that the song is sustained in the throat, its meaning is shown by the hands, its mood is conveyed by

the glances and the rhythm is executed by the feet. The above sentences seem to be the most apt way of communicating the sum and substance of the dance music of Bharatanatyam. The link between the kinetic rhythm of Bharatanatyam dance and the auditory rhythm of Carnatic music has been refined, reworked and reinstated over the centuries in order to give shape to what we now as the dance music of Bharatanatyam. The movements of Bharatanatyam are spatial, but temporary and fleeting. Yet they leave a long-standing impact. The influence that the movements have on the mind of the viewer and mixed and complex. Thus, it is imperative that the music also mirrors this aspect. The dance music of Bharatanatyam is based on the idea of harmony of music and rhythm with great accuracy. It forms a strong framework upon which actions and gestures are built. The music of Bharatanatyam is a composite discipline in itself; replete with dance, word, narration and projection. It is the music which governs the moves of the dance and the dancer. The constant and perennial exchange of artistic expertise between the dancer and the musicians form the bedrock of Bharatanatyam dance music. One must remember that most of the music and dance of south India have been transmitted through rich and strong oral traditions. The fact that the twin disciples of Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam have been passed down over centuries with fairly low loss of form or content speaks volumes of the wholesomeness of these forms and the synergy between the two. The zealous endeavours of the dancers, nattuvanars and musicians have played a critical role in these preservations. Today, the music of Bharatanatyam dance is Carnatic music. It augments the attractiveness of dance and creates the apt ambience for it. It intensifies the mood of each movement and makes the dance shine in all its harmony. Used intelligently and judiciously, the music of Bharatanatyam plays a major role in

conveying and communicating the dance. It is not merely a tool of interpretation. When planned in a wise manner, the structure of the music unfolds in such a way that it serves as the perfect partner of the dance; neither above or below the dance itself, but instead matching the dance beat for beat. The inevitable unity and unison of Bharatanatyam and its music infuses vitality into each movement and into each adavu. The sound moulds itself in the hands of an expert producer to produce various sentiments and emotions not just in an aural way, but in a visual one too. The dhvani of Carnatic music and the technical elements of Bharatanatyam dance mirror each other in pattern, style, content and form. While it may be true that in terms of repertoire, the items seen on the concert (musical concert) platform are somewhat different from that of the Bharatanatyam recital, in spirit, flavour and overall appearance the music is one and the same. The languages used in both mediums are also generally the same. However, when one comes to the minute and technical nitty gritty, one sees many differences. These may be in terms of content, kala pramanam, repetitions, repertoire, way of rendition, so on and so forth. Whatever may be the minute and technical differences between concert music and kutcheri music the reality is that both are nothing but two different manifestations of the grand vision of Carnatic music. The bodies, appearances and forms of the two are the same, but the spirit is one. As William Shakespeare said: “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet”.

CHAPTER III

Pre Modern History Of Bharatanatyam and it's Dance Music – (From 17th century to 20th century)

Sadir and Carnatic Music

Introduction

Is dance depicted or discerned? Is music performed or perceived? Or these forms together represented or received? Depending on the lens that one uses to view art, art history, poetic legacies and cultural wealth, the nature and the scope of arts varies from time to time.

In the Indian context, music and dance are intertwined in myriad ways. One can seldom exist sans the other. They are symbiotic in nature. Be that as it may, A dancer needs to judiciously use music and understand its cadences cleverly. The musician must also be wise and generous in providing musical support to the dancer. The composite art form of the dance and its music is at once, literary, poetic and representational. Rasa is the guiding principle for this composite art form and this constitutes the rich intellectual legacy of these twin art forms. that shine with effulgence in the firmament of our cultural heritage.

There is a story about how the four primordial notes tha - di- thom and nam were created when a loose kinkini bell from the anklet of Lord Siva fell, and flew up into the air. As it landed on his head, shoulder, knee and foot, the four sounds are believed to have emanated, thus forming the basis of all laya.

While there are many such mythical and mythological stories connected to the origin of dance and music, historic figures have played a major and tangible role in the growth of the arts. While the documentation and validation of mythological stories, is not within the ambit of this study, a brief study of the historical growth of the dance and its music is attempted in the following chapters.

Down south, Raja raja Chola²⁸ was known to be a great patron of Bharatanatyam. He even got his own daughter Kundavai²⁹ trained in music and dance by Samu Nattuvanar from the hereditary Isai Vellalar community. Descendants of this Nattuvanar continue to hold on to the family arts and members of this clan are still performing and teaching dance. Raja Raja Chola also provided 400 dancing girls to the temple that he built.

MODERN PERIOD: FROM 17th century- 20th

Why is the history of Sadir so important to a student of modern-day Bharatanatyam? Perhaps because this history is our immediate legacy and perhaps most recent ancestry. Not just is the social history of sadir extremely engaging and appealing but it gives a dancer and her dance context and relevance. When studied and observed in toto, a thorough study of the sadir history is bound to hone the emotional quotient of a dancer and refine her sensibilities in a very subtle yet tangible manner.

Whether the etymology of the word “Sadir” points in the direction of Telugu, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Persian or Urdu roots is quite beside the point. What is of pertinence

²⁸ 947 AD- 1014 AD, one of the greatest Chola rulers

²⁹ Princess Kundavai was not only adept in matters of the state but was also an artist of fine taste

is the rise and progress of the dance and its music in the modern era. Between the earlier Cholas and later day Nayak- Maratha rulers, they ensured that Tanjore had a rather cosmopolitan and multi- lingual atmosphere. There was Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit Marathi, Saurashtra, Prakrit Urdu and English - apart from the official Modi script. During this era, the plurality of Sadir seems to have been its single most important attribute.

This multi lingual nature of the Tanjore court and the adjoining Tamil land also ensured that the dancing vocabulary had as much variety as the linguistic landscape. For example- the dance of this time featured both the Islamic salaam and its anglicized cousin- the salute.

Who wrote the history of this period? Was it the patron rulers? Was it the nattuvanars? Or was it the dasi women who actually performed Sadir? There can be no simple and straightforward answer to this question. While history is commonly studied in a chronological manner, while dealing with a matter as nuanced and multi layered as the history of Bharatanatyam / Sadir, one needs to study not just the genealogy of the nattuvanars or the family trees of the kings, but understand the vibrant relationship shared between the various players, viz; the dancers the kings and the nattuvanars.

Even a cursory examination of this period clearly indicates that this era was the golden era for the arts. The names of the Tanjore rulers may be etched in gold for their contribution to the arts. Stalwarts such as Kasinathayya (called BharatamKasinathayya since he was a formidable natyacharya), Veerabhadrayya,

Venkataramana Sastry etc. will be remembered forever for their sterling works in this area.

The 9 alarippus and numerous shabdams (including the dashavatarashabdam and mandookashabdam) created by Bharatamkasinathayya are considered masterpieces to this day. Many shabdams of his played an important part in the introductory part of dance dramas. Some scholars opine that the compositions of Bharatamkasinathayya formed the major part of the repertoire of the ChinnaMelam³⁰ troupes of Melattur and Tanjore.

The 17th century also saw the creation of other humongous works such as the ChaturdandiPrakasika by Govinda Dikshitar's son, Venkatamakhin, Tulaja'sSangitaSaramrita and Govindacharya's SangrahaChudamani came in this period. Together, these works provide much of the foundation of the music and dance that we see now.

This era also saw the mushrooming of multiple vaggeyakaras³¹, south of the Vindhya, each more competent than the other. The boundless genius of many of them including Arunachala Kavirayar and others have stood the test of time to this day.

For example, the Rama Natakam of Arunachala Kaviraayar, though not composed for dance per se, enjoys a pride of place in the Bharatanatyam repertoire even today. Compositions like Yaaroivaryaaro, eppadimanamthunindho, kandeynseethaiyai are favourites with dancers even today.

³⁰ The nattuvanar, dancer and accompanying musicians together formed the ChinnaMelam group

³¹ Composers who created not just the lyrics but also the music for a composition

This was also the time when the brilliance of Melattur Venkatarama Sastry led to the creation of many spectacular dramas, which live on even today. Elsewhere, near Mayavaram, Gopalakrishna Bharati was composing his *Katha kalakshepam*,³² *Nandanarcharitam*” along with dozens of compositions on advaita.

While no complete inventory can be made of the repertoire created at this time, one can safely say that almost 4/5th of all Carnatic music that was ever produced has come from tanjore and the nearby areas. Plenty of folk dances such as gujjari, sivaleela, perani also developed in this area, thus making it the cradle of culture.

The fertile Kaveri belt was also home to the prolific composer Oottukkadu Venkatakavi whose creations include hundreds of songs on Krishna and other deities. His compositions reflect a high level of knowledge and understanding of dance. He uses terms such as “KuthukaNatanam” and “ChalaachalaNatanam”³² in his songs. He also mentions the sapta talas and musical forms such as alapana, Kalpana swarametc, thus indicating that most of the musical and dance forms that we see today were already in vogue at that time. He also cleverly wove into his songs sollukattus, which make them a dancer’s delight even today. It is however not known if the compositions of Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi were danced to in his time.

³² What exactly these 2 dance



Plate 3:Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi

Dance and Music during the Nayak rule:

One can say that the level of sophistication that was acquired by Sadir during this time was truly staggering³³. The rulers themselves were great scholars and many of them composed full-fledged Yakshagana dance dramas for bharatanatyam³⁴. Dr Swarnamalya Ganesh, at the Natya Kala Conference 2019 stated: “The nayak rule stood at the fulcrum of a rich and diverse culture, that was sadir. It appears that the word sadir came into wider use around the Nayak time, replacing the old term “DasiAttam”. This view is corroborated by scholar Dr T S Parthasarathy. She stated that the repertoire practiced around this time has in a big way contributed to the corpus of what we now see as the Shuddha Paddhathi.

It is around this time that the dasi girls’ roles as courtesans and court dancers became more serious and well defined. Though they danced in the temples too, the sadir-kutcheris in the royal courts became full-fledged affairs thus inspiring them and their Nattuvanar masters to expand the scope of the repertoire and bring in more variety and verve. Sadir adopted, adapted and assimilated from many of its

³³kusumAbayi. K (2012)

³⁴Music- dance and musical instruments during the period of the nayakas (1673-1732)

neighboring and sometimes not-so-neighboring traditions. Some global influences are also seen in sadir.

For instance, Gondhali³⁵ music / dance result of Marathi influence. The Gondhalkars³⁶ of Tanjore were treasure troves of this musical form. It stands somewhere between what one would today call “folk” and “classical”. It is part of the shuddha paddhati.

Dancing techniques:

Dr Swarnamalaya Ganesh states that the desi lasyaangas brought life to the presentation of sadir. She says: “ *It is wrong to think of Sadir as the past bygone ancestor of the more modern Bharatanatyam* “ The nayak period stands at the fulcrum of such a rich tradition with variety that gives richness to dance. The sadir dancers and their nattuvanars may not have known the exact epistemological meaning of the laasyaangas mentioned in earlier works, but all these laasyaangas were firmly placed and incorporated into the dance, in the most practical manner,

Thirteenth century elements of the desi laasyaangas, such as sthaapana, or an attractive pose at the end of a sequence, tala, chaali and chaalivaal (slow, medium and fast tempos), ullaasa or sukhalaasa, ie suggestive flourish (something like the modern day arudhi), rekha or lines, oyyara or a heightened bearing of the artist (similar to the kulukkunadai), manodharma or improvisation, paadapaata or footwork, trikani or attami are seen in the sadir of this time. Though the adavu classification of Tulaja came much later, footwork or paadapaata was a big part of sadir of this time.

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzwliBwHNSM&t=22s> Dr Ganesh states that Gondhali was created in honour of a hunting woman by King Someswara

³⁶ Artists who performed the Gondhali

A generous dose of karanas was also found in the dance technique. The natyarambha³⁷ position of the arms was executed in “chaturashra”, ie the arms were bent at the elbow. The feet were also placed in the chaturashra or the square shaped placement. The current trayashra (fully stretched out position) of the feet and the arms were a later day modification.

Repertoire:

The repertoire of this time come either under the “ShuddhaPaddathi” or the “vichitra Paddhati³⁸” category. Many forms such as Shuddha, Desya, Perani, Pekkana, Kundali, Danda, Bahucharietc existed in the Nayak period.

Creativity in the Nayak Courts:

Though many of the Nayak rulers were patrons of music and dance, the contribution of Raghunath Nayak is the most voluminous. A polyglot and a musician, his court was adorned by many scholars, such as Madhuravani and Ramabhadramba. His achievements are documented in the work “Sahitya Ratnakara” by Yagnyanarayan (son of GovindaDikshita).

The king himself is believed to have discovered new ragas such as Jayantasena and talas such as Ramananda. He is also credited with the authorship of the Sangeeta Sudha. Some say Sangeeta Sudha was composed by his minister GovindaDikshita, and not by him; but it is a noteworthy work nevertheless.

³⁷ Outstretched arms

³⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFvDNaHJyxA>

Prabandhas and dance dramas like Parijatapaharanam, Valmiki Charitra Kavya, Raghunatha Ramayana, Achyutendrabhyudayam, Gajendra Moksham, Nala Charitram, Rukmini Krishna Vivaha Yakshagana etc. He is also said to be the creator of the modern Tanjore veena, also known as the Saraswati Veena. Most importantly, he established the palace library, which over time became the famed Saraswathi Mahal library³⁹.

The last of the Nayak rulers, Vijayaraghava Nayak was also a great patron and scholar. He was the author of over 30 books, including poems Raghunathaabhyudhayam eulogizing his father. The famous padam composer Kshetragna is said to have visited the Nayak court. Kshetragna composed many Padas in the deshi (non-classical) style in the Nayak court, many of which were performed by the palace dancers.

(Ref: Soneji, D. (2012). Bharatnatyam – A reader, p.xiv. 316 Op.cit. 262, p.43.)

These shringarapadams include:

1. Rupavati-Chaupada
2. Champakavalli- sabdacintamani
3. Murti-jakkini
4. Komalavalli-korvai,
5. Lokanayaki-nava pada,
6. Ratnagiri-darupada,

³⁹ One of the oldest libraries in Asia

7. Bharirati-perani.

The reign of the Nayaks was abruptly ended with the murder of King Vijayaraghava Nayak in 1675. After a period of brief unrest, the rule of the Marathas commenced. Luckily for the arts, the Maratha monarchs were also art enthusiasts and thus the arts continued to flourish. Scholar BM Sundaram states that upon the death of Vijayaraghava Nayak, many nattuvanars fled Tanjore fearing persecution, not returning until the rule of Tulaja⁴⁰; upon request of the king.

Dance and Music in the Maratha Period:

While most of the first Maratha rulers were more occupied with matters of the state, military conquests, commercial affairs, political alliances etc. the last three rulers, ie Tulaja, serfoji II and Sivaji were great patrons of the arts. This is not to say that the first rulers did not encourage the performing arts. However, the quantum of output during the reign of the last 3 monarchs was truly staggering.

The single greatest contribution of Ekoji is perhaps that he retained the use of the Telugu language in his court. While this seems like no major contribution per se, one can say for sure that if Ekoji had disrupted the use of Telugu, the vast repertoire that Tanjore boasted of at that time would have shrunk greatly.

Music and dance during Shahaji's time:

Shahaji was not just a highly accomplished composer and rasika but also an ardent devotee of Tiruvarur⁴¹ Tyagaraja⁴². Legend has it that he made a trip from Tanjore to

⁴⁰ 1738-1787

⁴¹ A temple town in the Kaveri delta

Tiruvarur every single day to have a darshan of his favourite deity. While the veracity of this legend cannot be verified, one knows for sure that Shahaji composed scores of compositions in praise of his favorite deity.

The village was Shahajirajapuram (previously known as Tiruvisanallur) was an endowment from the king and was a hub of literary activity. This hamlet became home to many Vidwans including SridharaAyyaval, Sadguru BodhendraSwamigal etc. He was known to be a prolific composer, whose ShringaraManjariShajeeyam (a natakam) was regularly performed at the Anandavalli shrine at Tiruvarur. However, some scholars contend that many works attributed to King Shahaji were in reality composed by his court poet- Giri raja Kavi.

Creativity in the Court of Shahaji:

The monarch himself composed the Ramayana sooladi which is a raga tala malika. In this, he employed many sollukattus. Some of these were quite long and ran into several avarthas. Many features like vilamba kala jatis, malaipu- jati, nilakatnajati, etc are used in this. A Tamil drama by the name of Vishnu SaharajaVilasa is also attributed to King Shahji⁴³. The script for this is written in Telugu.

His Shahaji Raga Lakshanamu, which is a lakshana Grantham on the science of music is of special interest to students and scholars of music. This is an important treatise that details the myriad aspects of various musical aspects and modes such as Raga, Alapana etc. He also composed many poems, padams, dramatic works and

⁴² A form or incarnation of Lord Siva

⁴³ 1672-1712

prabandhas. His padams are collectively known as the Tyagesha Padams. They are in three languages, ie:

8. Sanskrit
9. Marathi
10. Telugu

They cover various aspects such as Bhakti, hasya, vairagya, neeti, shringara etc. He composed almost 250 shringarapadams and about 300 Bhakti compositions on Tyagaraja.

The reign of Shahaji also ushered the growth of GeyaNatakas. These geyanataka are perhaps the first in south India. These musical operas led to the birth of a new era of growth in both music and dance, blending the music, dance and dramatic element in a happy union. King Shahaji blended the existing Yakshagana tradition with the new geyanataka style, thus creating a novel blend, which we know as DrshyaKaavyas.

In most of Shahji's geyanatakas, the plot is simple. There is ample scope for Nrta and natyam. Sanskrit and telugu blend seamlessly. Dialogues and the spoken word are used generously but in the most appropriate manner.

Though he is reported to have composed over 20 literary productions, the four famous Prabandhas are:

11. Sankara pallakiseva Prabandham
12. Vishnu Pallakiseva Prabandham
13. Pancharatna Prabandham

14. Tyagaraja Vinoda Chitra Prabandham

Features of the Prabandhas:

The Prabandhas are based on themes from the puraanas or ancient literature. They usually possess four angams or parts. It is characterized by 6 types of elements, namely:

- 15. Swara (musical notes)
- 16. Pada (lyrics)
- 17. Biruda (lyrical ornamentation)
- 18. Nata (rhythm)
- 19. Thata (beats)
- 20. Thaneka (meaningless, but decorative words)

(Sankara) PallakiSevaPrabandham:

Amazingly, not just the text, but also the music for this Prabandham is still available the exact same way in which it was composed. The hero of this work is Lord Tyagesha⁴⁴ while the heroine is Parvati.

Music of the Sankara PallakiSevaPrabandham- the background:

⁴⁴ The presiding deity of Tiruvarur

This prabandham is filled with rakti ragas and Ghana ragas and is in beautiful TtTelugu. The king's proficiency in dance is also evident in the choice of sollus and words; especially those used to describe the gait of the palanquin bearers., when they bear the Lord on their shoulders during his journey from Tanjore to Tiruvarur.

This opera uses 12 ragas, namely:

21. Ghanta
22. Punthagavarali
23. Nadanamakriya
24. Saveri
25. Saurashtram
26. Bhairavi
27. Sandhavi
28. Madhyamavati
29. Mohana
30. Shankarabharanam
31. Kuranji
32. Pantuvarali

Literature of the PallakiSevaPrabandham: According to the analysis of Ms, Gowri Kuppaswamy (In her 1977 work, PallakiSevaPrabandha – A Musical Opera of King Shahaji”)

The genealogy of the author and his musicianship may be summarized thus:

The core values of Bhakti and shringara are wellbalanced inthiswork. It reflects the king’s command over languages and his dexterity in using of lilting sahityam. The work is replete with rhetorical beauties. Folk melodies are also found in abundance. Songs like “laalilaalayyalaali” are embellishedwith antyaaksharaprasa⁴⁵. The highlight of thus opera is the song that describes the ornate palanquin of the Lord. Considering the title of the opera, this is not surprising.

Literary forms used in PallakiSevaPrabandham:

Many varied forms have been used by the king. They include:

33. Darus -22

34. Verses - 21

35. Choornika -1

36. Kanda padyas - 8

37. SisaPadya - 1

⁴⁵ Rhyming based on the last letter

38. Utpalamalas- 2

39. Champaka malas -3

40. Dwipadas - 4

41. Geetas -2

The lilting melody “KadalimpakurOyipallaki”⁴⁶ shines forth in the entire lyrics. Here, there is ample scope for dance, where the palanquin bearers urge each other to NOT jostle the palanquin much, since If that is done, Lord Sankara would get disturbed and if he is disturbed the entire universe would fall into disarray.

Vishnu PallakiSevaPrabandham:

This work, which has Lakshmi Devi as the heroine and Lord Vishnu as the hero is believed to have superior lyrics to that of the Sankara Pallavi SevaPrabandham and is longer than it too.

It is the view of Prof P Sambamoorthy that it is possible that the Sankara pallakiSevaprabandhm and the vishnupallakiSevaprabandham might have inspired HH Chandrasekara Saraswathi⁴⁷ and Ramakavi to compose Siva ashtapadi and Rama ashtapadi respectively. Thus, it is clear that the work of Shahaji was not only a success in its time but also a model for subsequent poets to build upon.

Literature of the Vishnu PallakiSevaPrabandham:

⁴⁶ Do not jerk the palanquin

⁴⁷ 1894-1994

The vishnupallakiSevaprabandham employs forms such as:

42. Shobhanam

43. Pavvalimpu

44. Daru

45. Melukolupu

46. Dwipada

47. Dhavalambu

PancharatnaPrabandham: A composition of extraordinary beauty, this work sees a band of five artists, ie: 2 dancing girls, a Nattuvanar, a chenchukurava and the dancing girls' helper visit the court of the Lord and are honoured there, in appreciation of their superior performance. The dance of this prabandham is replete with korvais and jatis of different talas. The novel sequence of Korvai- jati- ganapatikautuvam- daruetc is the highlight of this prabandham. Music and rhythm seem to have been given more importance than lyrical values in this work. Thus, it is a true reflection of the king's expertise in dance and music.

Tyagaraja VinodaPrabandham:

An ardent devotee of Lord Tyagaesha, the monarch composed this work as a sort of a dance face-off between the Lord and Bhadrakali. This work is conceived by the king as an offering meant to delight the Lord. Hence the word "vinoda" in the title. It is also known as the "Sankara kali NatanaSamvada Natakam". It is picturized as a debate between Goddess Bhadrakali and Lord Tyagesha.

Music and literature In the Tyagaraja VinodaPrabandham:

One can find a delightful variety of darus full of musical and lyrical aspects in this prabandham. A marvelous feature seen here is that the work is not just sacred and divine in nature, but also secular and social. One sees vivid descriptions of flowers, birds, animals etc. It also describes many facets of society such as the nature of people, occurrences in society etc. The darus describe 30 different talas and their usages. The swara shabdarthataaladiaavarthanaprabandha, with intricate mathematical rhythm score is a rare concept that has been incorporated into this work. It is set to the weighty and majestic raga - Todi.

Dance in the Tyagaraja VinodaPrabandham:

Amazingly, some remarkable dance elements are enunciated, not just in the form of prose, poetry or verse, but as a debate between the Lord and the goddess. They discuss forms such as Deva Natya, Raja Natya and Desi Natya. They finally conclude that the desi Natya is ideal, since it has ample variety and can be enjoyed by all.

The large variety in the darus gives the dancer ample scope for dance, since he/she can move away from the usual depictions of gods and goddesses and innovate in the display of secular and day - to - day life, such as nature, flora, fauna, people, social life etc. The variety in the Talas also pose a challenge to the dancer. The mathematical aspects of the shabdarthataaladiaavartanaprabandham can be richly

exploited by an able dancer and adept Nattuvanar. It is in the complex Dhruva Taala⁴⁸
(14 aksharas)

` The large corpus of work created by the court of Shahaji is really impressive. This was the time when works like the Dharmakuta, Tryambaka Raya Makhi's interpretation to the Ramayana, Venkatesha Krishna Dikshitar's Natesa Vijayam, Bhaskara Dikshit's Ratnatulika, Veda Kavi's Vidya Parinaya, Jeevananda etc. Other works such as Bhooloka Devendra Vilasam, SankaranarayanaKalyanam, Chandrika hasaVilasanatakam, AthirupavathiKalyana etc. are also all products of this era. Vasudeva kavi was a Poet in the court of Sahaji. He composed over a hundred padams with his benefactor- ruler as the hero. Another poet who eulogised the king through poetry was Ramabharathi.

Yet another poet - Anandaraya Makhi wrote "Vidya Parinaya", historical kavyas on the life of the king. These were performed during the vasanthotsavam⁴⁹ at the periyakoil. The king's military conquests were also eulogized in works such as the SaharajaVilasaNataka.

The interesting aspect of the compositions that were churned out at shahaji's court were that while some were lakshana Granthas, some were dance drama/ operas - while some others eulogised the king. Thus, the scope and variety of these works is huge.

Music and dance during Tulaja's time

⁴⁸ Contains a laghu, a drtam and 2 laghus

⁴⁹ Festival conducted during spring

The reign of Tulaja (1763 - 87) was also bustling with activity. In the words of scholar Priyashri Rao, around this time the focus shifted from the compositions adhering to ancient texts to creating compositions that suited dance presentation.

It is possible that this shift perhaps triggered a great deal of new changes, improvements, modifications and alterations to the art of dance. One can say that It was around this time that the science of dance made way for the art of dance.

According to dancer and scholar Lakshmi Viswanthan⁵⁰ king Tulaja invited Mahadeva Annavi to his court. Annavi was the scion of an old odhuvar family and was a nattuvanar who lived in Tirunelveli. In hindsight, this turned out to be a watershed moment, because Annavi happened to be the grandfather of the famed Tanjore quartet. Annavi was accompanied by 2 of his disciples: Vanajakshi and Mutthumannar. They presented the song “Bhosale tulajendra Raja” and this greatly enthralled the king. The contribution of the 4 grandsons of Mahadeva Annavi are known to all.

The ruler himself was the author of the Sangita saramrta, which deals with adavus, the basic dance steps, it is a landmark in dance literature. It was around this time that the adavus of Bharatanatyam were codified. The Sangeeta saramrta itself mentions many adavus. The chapter named “Nrtta Prakarana” deals with the codification of the adavus. The Shramavidhi or the practice module is systematically laid down by the author in this work. It is rather astounding that the author, though not a Nattuvanar took pains to create a manual of sorts to help dancers in their adage practice much before art education was institutionalized in India.

⁵⁰ Dancer, singer, scholar and author

At the Natya Kala Conference (of Shri Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai) of 2019, The Shrama Vidhi of Tulaja's Sangeeta saramrta was taken up by Lakshmi Parthasarathy Athreya and Uma NamboodiripadSathyanarayanan⁵¹ the salient points mentioned by them are:

The lakshana shloka (shloka that defines each shloka) postulates the main features of each adavu. Interestingly, the interpretation is left fairly open ended. This makes sure that the possibilities are many and the the individual dancer/ Nattuvanar can present the adage according to his / her creativity. This also helps hone creativity and this is perhaps why the nattuvanars of this period were master choreographers, even though they thought of themselves as "Natyacharyas", dance masters and singers.

Another surprising element is the author's knowledge of the importance of exercises and warmups. Long before Bharatanatyam dancers relearnt these terms from the west, King Tulaja dedicated a large chunk of his work to the preliminary exercises that a dancer ought to learn and practice regularly. These are similar to the body conditioning exercises/ warm ups that most dancers do nowadays.

DandikaaGrahanam:It is the simple, yet efficient process of holding a stick or a dandikaa for the purpose of exercising the body. It appears that this concept is inspired by the Sangeeta Ratnakara. In the seventh chapter of the Sangeeta ratnakara, we find mention of holding a "silambam / salambam". The dandika / silambam is held at the chest level.

The shramavidhi states that the dandika is to be held in the front, it however does not mention if it is to be held vertically or horizontally. One reckons that it can

⁵¹ Both disciples of Smt. Chitra Visweswaran

be held both ways and exercises like lunges, squats, leg raises, heel raises etc. may be performed.

Even though centuries have passed since the writing of this treatise, the practice of DandikaaGrahamam is still known to many practitioners of the traditional style. Based on the sayings of many veteran gurus, one can conclude that there are different ways of practicing the dandikaagrahanam. While Shri Kalyanasundaram Pillai⁵² of the Tiruvidaimarudur bani states that this is an effective tool to improve araimandi, Guru shri Herambanathan⁵³ of the tanjorebani opines that this is a ritualistic practice that marks the beginning of the training in dance.

Smt Nandini Ramani is of the opinion that this is similar to the “pattaiKattardhu”⁵⁴ practice recommended by her guru T Balasaraswati.

One observes that a highly advanced and sophisticated teaching methodology has been prescribed in this work. One also notices that; a high level of fitness and physical skill was starting to be expected out of a dancer. As stated earlier, this was the time when the role of a dancer as a professional performing artist got fleshed out in a more concrete manner than before. Thus, it is not surprising that a high level of physical fitness was expected from her. From this time onward, the dancer was not just a performer of certain rituals or a lady artist in the service of a temple, but was an autonomous and independent artist with multiple social functions and commitments. This is perhaps why this text pays so much attention to the fitness and nimbleness of the dancing body.

⁵² Head of Raja Rajeswari Bharatanatya Kala Mandir

⁵³ Scion of the Tanjore Bani

⁵⁴ Tying or fastening of the belt/ strap

After the DandikaGrahanam comes the Shikshaarambham⁵⁵ part. Here the adages are classified systematically and explained in detail. This has been divided into three parts:

48. Kuttanam

49. Bhramari

50. Mandala

There are 16 kuttanam adavus. It is interesting to note that in many shlokas, sollus like thaiyyathaietc are mentioned; that is: the words of the sollu are intertwined into the words of the shloka. Similarly, the names of the adavus are also interwoven into the words of the shloka. An example of this:

*NathvakrthvaadOlahastamSthithvaabhuisarEkham
Shikhara vakshaseeKarowKrthvaagaarudapoorvakam
SavyaapasavyathOhastowpatAkAkhyowprasaaracha
BhraanthvaachashikarowpaschaathEkahastaamurum
SavyaapasavyathakrthvaaHastadwayamurumpunaha
UtpluthyabhramanamchaivaKrthvasavyaapasavyathaha
AntarBahsicha kamala pataakakaravarthanaaha
ubhayOrvartanaaKrthvaashuddhamandalamaasthaaya
Thayyathaiithipaatakaihipaadaabhyamkuttanambhoomow
bhavEthtattadavaahvayambhavEythsamakuttanam*

⁵⁵ Commencement of training

Scholar -dancer Lakshmi Viswanathan lists out adavus mentioned in this work in both Sanskrit and Tamil / Telegu. They are enumerated as follows:

Sl.No.	SANSKRIT NAME	TAMIL/ TELUGU NAME
1	Samapaadakuttanam	Thattadavu
2	Khanatha panda kuttanam	Kutthadavu
3	Paarshvakuttanam	Naattita adavu
4	Paadapaarshvakuttanam	Di dithai
5	Utplyuthoththana	Kudicchi-ezhumbardhu
6	Santhyaadhyapaasrhnikuttana	Thattnimettu adage
7	Mrdusparshana	Anukkara adavu
8	kaarshana	Simira adavu
9	Kaarshanapaada	Kadasakkal
10	Svastika	Thatti-kaattardhu
11	saarangathi	Parikkaraadavu
12	shuddhaanga	Sittangu
13	Akunchitapaadika	Endikaattardhu
14	Eka paadika	Visukkal
15	Nipadyaprasaarithapaada	Vishunduveesi
16	chakra	Chakkarachuthu

17	mOtitha	Mandi adavu
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According to the classification of king Tulaja, the adavus are classified into 18 groups. He also mentions our karanas. These are acrobatic in nature. Movements are classified under Bhramari and Pada sikshaavidhi.

Unfortunately, despite the extensive classification and description made by the author, many of the adavus mentioned by him are now obsolete. That said, many adavus seen nowadays in dance do not find exact mention in the work of Tulaja. Hence now can conclude with no doubt whatsoever that all adavus have been, are and will be highly dynamic and pliable in nature.

Another landmark composition of this era was created by a contemporary of King Tulaja- PapavinasamMudaliar. While the Sangeeta Saramrta was more of a manual, the work composed by PapavinasamMudaliar- the KumbheshaKuravanji, was a practical dance drama work with performative elements, thus making it most suitable for performance not just when it was composed, but for the years to come.

A very important figure in this era, was GangaiMutthu Pillai, also known as GangaiMutthu Nattuvanar, who was the paternal uncle of the famed Tanjore quartet. He composed the navasandhikautuvams⁵⁶ and the panchamurtykautuvam to be performed at the brahmotsavam⁵⁷ in the Tanjore PeriyaKoil, the Brhadeeswara Temple. He also composed few salaam darus in praise of his patron king Tulaja.

⁵⁶ To be performed in specific locations of the temple

⁵⁷ Annual festival

These were documented in his book “NatanaadhiVaadyaranjanam”. The NavasandhiKautuvams are perfect examples of temple dances, as they were performed by the dasi women at the various sandhis or junctions in the outer precincts of the temple.

KPK Chandrasekhar, son of Shri KP Kittappa Pillai states:

*“They are hymns, sung right at the commencement of
a temple festival, in praise of Ashtadikpalakas
(guardians of eight directions), seeking their blessings
for the success of the event. These hymns are in the
praise of Brahma, Indira, Yama, Agni, Nirutti, Varuna,
Vayu, Kubera and Isana. NavasandhiKauthuvams
were composed by Gangaimuthu Nattuvanar based on
the specific raga and tala that is relevant to the deity
being appeased. And to this date, our family sings this
during all temple festivals”*

In a documentary made by the Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts Shri KP Kitappa Pillai, has explained the provenance of the navasandhikautuvams, the pattern followed by his ancestors in the performance of these pieces and the exact shrines in the brhadeeswara temple in which they were danced.

Music and Dance In the period of Pratapasimha

King Pratapasimha⁵⁸, like many of his ancestors was scholar and a poet himself. He was the creator of many plays and padams. Interestingly, many of his plays were in Marathi. One must note that the Maratha kings were not bigoted in their attitude towards language. While Ekoji was magnanimous enough to retain Telugu in his court, his descendants went a step further. They nurtured Telugu, but also supported their ancestral Marathi.

In a gesture that proves that Sadir was not considered a lowly form but enjoyed a great deal of dignity and respect, Pratapasimha is said to have ensured that his own daughters princesses Sukanya and Sanya learnt dance themselves. Unlike many other royal houses, the Tanjore ruling family encouraged its women also to watch the sadir performances. While the nattuvanars trained the courtesans, many courtesans continued to teach the princesses. The ladies of the royal house however did not perform in public.

Building of the repertoire:

This period was one of feverish activity in terms of expanding refashioning and streamlining the Bharatanatyam repertoire. Before the advent of the Maratha rulers, though Bharatanatyam was very popular, the repertoire was very different from what we see in the post Tulaja period. It comprised of pieces such as “Sharanu”, “Alaru”, “Sollu” etc. It was during the period of Serfoji and Sivaji, that the alarippu got renamed into alarippu.

⁵⁸ Who ruled between 1739 and 1760

It is known that a few forms such as Alarippu (albeit with different names), kautuvametc were already in existence by this time. However, this period saw the gradual yet solid expansion of the performing repertoire. For instance, the the musical form of tillana gradually started to gain currency in the court of Pratapasimha. These exciting pieces of dance- music were further encouraged by the successors of Pratapasimha. It may also be stated that the Tillana is a perfect example of dance - music. As a form, it is almost made for dance. Yet, it sits beautifully and inconspicuously at the end of a music concert too; thus, proving the symbiotic nature of music and dance.

Though it is said that the first tillanawas created Melattur Veerabhadrayya, after being inspired by konnakkol recitation of the periyamelam⁵⁹ artists, the usage of the tillana per se really gathered steam in the court of pratapasimha. Constructed as a melodic structure with konnakkol⁶⁰sollus interspersed into, it is believed to be based on the “karnaprabandhas”.

There is an interesting story connected to the antecedents of the Tillana that occurred in the Nayak period. It says that Gopala Nayaka went as a captive from Tanjore up north and taught his captors (including the legendary Amir Khusro) the Karna Parabandha which resulted in the creation of the tillana and the tarana.

The first known tillana in south India is one in Pantuvarali raga and Adi tala, which was composed by Veerabhadrayya. Later tillanas in rare ragas and complicated talas including simhhanandana tala were composed.

⁵⁹ Troupe of nagaswaram and tavil artists, along with their accompanists

⁶⁰ A unique art form where sollus are recited orally

Another piece that made a majestic entry to the Sadir repertoire around this time was the ubiquitous swarajati. The creation of this form is attributed to Melattur Veerabhadrayya, who was a disciple of BharatamKasinathayya. The swarajati, as seen now seems to be a modified version of the format created by Veerabhadrayya. While some Swarajatis are part of abhyasa ganam (items taught as part of the learning process and not meant for stage performance) in the Carnatic music tradition, some others are created for dance. These ought not to be confused with the swarajatis composed by SyamaSastri. His three extraordinary swarajatis together came to be known as the Ratna-Trayam (three gems). They are:

51. Kamakashianudinamu- bhairavi- Mishra Chaapu

52. Rave himagiri - Todi - Adi

53. Kamakshi pada yugame- Yadukulakambhoji- Mishra Chaapu

Special mention must be made of the Huseni swarajati, which is based on the shringararasa, as against those of Shyama Sastry, which are soaked in Bhakti towards the goddess of Kanchi: Kamakshi. One also notices the use of rather colloquial words in the Huseni Swarajati.

While the Ratna-Trayam⁶¹ of Syama Sastry resembles the pancharatnam of Tyagaraja, i.e that have the format of pallavi, anupallavi and multiple charanams, with both swara and sahitya. However, the dance swarajati in huseni is unique in that, after the pallavi and anupallavi comes a sorkattu. This is in lieu of the etthugadaswaram. In

⁶¹ Three gems

the uttarangam⁶², the charanam portion is rendered in swara-sahitya format; ie the swara is first rendered. Then the Sahityam is rendered in the same tune as the swara.

Items like the opening “jaya Jaya” and sharanu were rendered as invocations to the chosen deities. The rest of the margam comprised of pieces such as jatiswaram, shabdam, and the all-important Varnam. However, the kala pramanam of the varnam was very different from what one sees today. In a short film made by the Public Service Broadcasting trust (PSBT)⁶³ produced in association with Doordarshan, titled: a journey from sadir to Bharatanatyam, senior dancer and one of the last members of the traditional hereditary performers Smt Indira Rajan states that the Varnams of her time were performed in a much slower tempo than. She demonstrates a small part of a pada varnam to clarify.



Plate 4:Indira Rajan

⁶² Second half

⁶³<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mD3RhhdavTw&t=241s>

Other pieces of the maargam codified in this period include Swarajatis and tillana. Other items performed in this period are jakkini, prabandham, shloka etc. There is mention of a piece Called tripitam, which falls under the category of desi nrta.

Dance and music in reign of Serfoji

In terms of music and Dance, one can say that Serfoji was perhaps the greatest contributor. While the contribution of Shahaji is also huge, the works of Serfoji are more real and relatable to the dancer of today, perhaps because he is the closest to modern history⁶⁴.

The king himself composed works like Kumara Sambhavachampu, Devendra Kuravanji etc. Apart from these literary contributions, his interactions with the British, gave him an almost global outlook that probably inspired him to introduce western instruments like clarinet, violin etc' into the realm of south indian music. Dr Rama Kausalya states that King Serfoji even introduced a "Tanjavur Band", with wind instruments; both wooden and metal.

The era of Serfoji is especially important, since his court was home to the famed Tanjore Quartette who were responsible for giving Bharatanatyam its proper shape and refashion the maargam in a definite style. The four brothers Chinayya, Ponnayya, Vadivelu and Sivanandam, the four brothers who were disciples of the

⁶⁴Ref:Raja Ś arabhōji-II and his patronage to the development of art. p.72. Retrieved from http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/1786/9/09_chapter%202.pdf

composer Muttuswami Dikshitar⁶⁵, one of the trinities of Carnatic music. They contributed to the growth of Bharatanatyam in a big way. They codified the adavus and put in place a proper sequence for learning and performance.

This helped in the laying of a strong foundation for dancers. According to one version, the system evolved by the 4 brothers had a 10 adavus, with 12 varieties in each. They simplified, remodeled and reused the adavus that were in existence before their time to come up with the format that they created. It is widely believed that it was the Tanjore quartet who designed the maargam as is seen today. However, scholar-dancer Dr Swarnamalya Ganesh is of the opinion that the margam designed by them was one of the margams that was prevalent at their times and not the ONLY one⁶⁶.

Sollukattus:

It may be appropriate to mention the use of sorkattus and the choices that the nattuvanars made toward this end. While there appears to be no hard and fast rules anywhere regarding how jatis ought to be composed, what sollus ought to be used etc., there certainly seems to be a strong aesthetic that guided the nattuvanars in their creative choices.

In the 2018 Natya Kala Conference, Swamimalai Suresh⁶⁷ a descendant of the traditional Nattuvanar family stated that the word “Jati” itself of recent origin and that back in the day, the act of performing nattuvangam was known as “reciting sorkattu” or reciting “nattuvangam”. Apart from the commonly used sollus such as Tha, dhi, thomnam etc., the Tanjore quartet often used sollus such as jekina, jam thari etc.

⁶⁵ 1775-1835

⁶⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFvDNaHJyxA>

⁶⁷ Nephew of Swamimalai Rajarathinam Pillai

Since the Periyamelam artists and those of the Chinnamelam lived and worked in the same ecosystem, it is not surprising that a few sollus from the tavil vocabulary were borrowed and adapted into dance sollus as well.

Mrdangist Dr Guru Bharadwaaj, states⁶⁸:

“The ancestors of Kitappa Pillai had used some “typical” Mrdangam sollus like Tham Kita ThakaThari Kita Thakaetc. in their jatis.”Tavilsollus like Ku Kuntha, dinggu, Plaangu, dhaneyku, etc. were also used. Tavilsollus were imported into dance more often than Mrdangam sollus. A few morsing sollus like janu-janu were also borrowed. In later days, KN Dandayudhpani Pillai used the sollu “deenku” very often. This may be a combination of the Mrdangam sollus “dheem” and “thalaanku”

Nirupanas- a novelty by Serfoji:

During the period of Serfoji⁶⁹, a novel format called “nirupana” was introduced. These nirupanas are narrations based on a plethora of themes. Some researchers are of the opinion that the nirupanas were inspired by the earlier keertans or kalakshepas of Maharashtra. The nirupanas of Serfoji weave together 18 different compositions such as:

1. Jayajaya

⁶⁸ In the Natya Kala Conference, Krishna Gana Sabha

⁶⁹ 1777-1832

2. Pada
3. Geetha
4. Saranu
5. Swarajati
6. Prabandha
7. Alaru
8. Abhinayapada
9. Triputa
10. Sollu
11. Tillana
12. Sloka varna
13. Sabda
14. Arjitapada
15. Kautta
16. Varnam
17. Jakkini
18. Mangala.

In the era of Serfoji, the entire nirupana was in one raga; ie all 18 pieces of a particular nirupana were in the same raga. One wonders how the audience sat through

an almost all-night concert rendered in a single raga. However, one ought to bear in mind that in those days, the audiences had good musical knowledge, and thus this mode of presentation probably passed muster. The names of the 18 segments of the nirupana (as mentioned above) are found in Serfoji's manuscripts. Though these Nirupanas are in Marathi, the ragas used are Carnatic and thus they ended up being good material for sadir.

The book "KorvayancheSahityache" / "KorvayancheSahityache Jinnah" by Acharya Parvati Kumar carries all the Nirupanas of Serfoji. A staggering 16 varieties of Nirupana are mentioned. This again indicates the sheer variety and range seen in the performing arts in Serfoji's court. While some of these are based on puranic kathas (mythological stories), other are based on Kalpithakathas (imaginary stories). While the Nirupanas commence with the invocatory piece "Jaya Jaya", the closing numbers are the sharanudaru and the mangalam.

Few of the Nirupanas of King Serfoji are:

Sl.No.	Name	Raga	Tala
1	parvatOpAkhYana	YadukulaKambhoji	Adi
2	Sari patachadavakalpitakatha	Poori kalyani	Adi
3	Dandaneeti nirupana	Sama	Adi

4	Mahadevachiprarthana	Shuddhasaveri	Ata
5	Sakhinenayaki	aarabhi	Ata
7	soolaadi	Saveri	Rupakam

As with his predecessors, Serfoji also seemed to have enjoyed adding to the corpus of the Bharatanatyam repertoire⁷⁰. as alaru / alarippu, sollu, sabdam, varnam, padam, tillana, jakkini, kautuvam and mangalam are found in the Nirupanas. King Serfoji also composed a soolaadi in raga tala malika and “salamachiChinnakalpitha” in athana raga and aditalam. The Athana song is an interesting one as it mentions the various kinds of salaams and namaskars performed in the court at time. Thus, it is not only an attractive piece to perform / dance, but also an account on the practices observed by the various communities of the Maratha Tanjore⁷¹.

Presentation and showmanship in the Maratha Tanjore

Both solos and group dances were very popular during the Maratha period. The Maratha rulers had the peculiar distinction of hailing from the north, but making the south their home. They embraced the traditions of the south with an open mind and a large heart, but also held on their Maratha roots in some quaint and gentle ways. This

⁷⁰ Raja Ś arabhōji-II and his patronage to the development of art. p.80. Retrieved from http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/1786/9/09_chapter%202.pdf

⁷¹Bhosle, PSR. (2017). 20 rare facts about King Ś arabhōji II in the field of dance andmusic

made sure that the arts that were performed and patronized in their courts had a mild pan Indian flavor to them and the scope of the arts widened. The colorful paintings on the walls of the palaces and temples of this era stand testament to the vibrant arts scene created and encouraged by the Maratha monarchs.

During this time, the nautch dances had both classical and folk elements to them. During the period of Serfoji pieces like Gondhal, jakkini, dhrupad nautch, Chitra natyam, perini, garbha, Sangeeta melam, desi navpat nautch, tipri, kanchi nautch and “ladies” nautch were in vogue. Even today, one sees garbha, kanchi nautch and tipri being performed in Gujarat and northern parts of India. Tipri resembles kolattam⁷² / pinnal kolattam⁷³ of the south.

Kuravanji Dance Dramas during the Maratha Period

The Maratha period may also be considered the golden period of Kuravanji dance dramas. By some accounts the 18th and 19th centuries saw the creation of over a 100 Kuravanji dance dramas. This is a staggering number considering the fact that the kuravanji dance dramas are long works with (sometimes) multiple languages and (always) several literary forms. The Kuravanji dance dramas are composite creations which cover the three all important aspects of iyal (poetry/ lyrics), isai (music) and natakam (theater / drama). Kuravanji dance dramas were sometimes referred to as Kuravanjichindhu, kuravanjisandham etc. The Sahitya of many of the Kuravanjis are still available in manuscript form, and many of them are performed regularly by

⁷² A dance form where the dancers bear a pair of sticks in their hands

⁷³ A dance form where the dancers bear a pair of sticks in hand and simultaneously intertwine three strips of cloth into a braid or pinnal.

various artists. Dr Rama Kausalya states that the first half of the Kuravanji dramas are very classical while the second half is filled with folk music.

Many dramas/ Kuravanjis of this then featured the king as the hero and his valour and attributes were eulogized. They were composed in Tamil, Telugu or Marathi. This period also saw the growth and flourishing of the yakshagana and Bhagavatamela traditions. While the Kuravanjidance dramas had characters like “kattiyakkaran” introduce the characters, the bhagavatamela and other dramas had a sutradhari playing this part. These characters are similar to the vidushaka of the Sanskrit plays.

Though the kattiyakkaran⁷⁴ is a silly and comical character, some Tamil plays like “Bhooloka Devendra Vilasa Natakam” have flowery poems in weighty ragas like Saurashtra such as:

VelliPirambumkayyilKonduVellaipallaiyumkaattikundu

VellainaamamsaattrikunduKullan Kattiyakkaran vandaane

to describe his entry. Needless to mention, the hero and heroine were described in even more regal manner with a plethora of superlative adjectives used to shower praise on him/ her.

The dramas of this era began with the todayamangalam, jayajaya and a song that began with the words “maheneeya”. Then comes a viruttam and a vinayakadaru, vandesivanutham. The vinayakadaru is a nod to the Maratha ancestry of the monarchs. Then come the padams, helapadams, shabdams etc. Interestingly, even in

⁷⁴ A variation of the sutradhari, he dances with a stick, staff or rod

the Tamil dramas of this period, the first three songs are in Sanskrit and Telegu. Each dance drama consists of at least 30 darus. The Tamil dramas of the period include:

1. Kaveri Kalyanam
2. Chandrahasa Vilasam
3. Bhuloka Devendra Vilasanatakam
4. Sahajiraja Kuravanji
5. Vishnu Shahraraja Vilasam

Lavani- a novelty:

The Maratha kings extended their support to not just sadir/ nautch but also to Lavani⁷⁵. The period between 1684 and 1855 saw Lavani also grow exponentially. The last Maratha ruler Sivaji II was believed to be a great lover of Lavani and encouraged this art form with great zeal and thus many Lavani songs of his era feature him as the hero. According to an article published in narthaki.com, King Shivaji II authored a marathi Drama by name Nateshavilasa, based on the tenets of ancient Sanskrit theatre. As a linguist (he was well versed in english, marathi, Sanskrit, Tamil and telugu) a scholar and a rasika of great taste, he did much to further the causes of music and dance.

The patronage of Sivaji II⁷⁶:

*“He continued the noble work of his father and enriched
the legacy left behind by his illustrious predecessors.*

⁷⁵ Derived from the Sanskrit word Lavanya

⁷⁶ Sruti Magazine, Issue 373

There are many compositions in Saraswati Mahal Library, Thanjavur, comprising varnams, svarajatis, salamdaru, and tillanas in praise of King Shivaji II. The Thanjavur Quartet (Chinnaiya, Ponnaiya, Vadivelu and Sivanandam) were his favorite court vidwans and they composed many dance compositions with King Shivaji II as the Kriti Nayaka”.

Sivaji II was a great patron of the art form Lavani, a popular Marathi genre, which combines music and dance. Believed to be derived from the Sanskrit word “Lavanya”, some scholars also say that the word Lavani means “offshoot”. Sant Samarth Ramadas was believed to be the earliest composer of Lavanis. Tukaram, Eknath, Anandpani, Amir tarai, Madhav Muni are other well-known Lavani composers.

Lavani is performed to the lively beats of the dholki, and has powerful beats. Though in a simple manner, Lavani addresses a wide variety of subjects, including religion, politics, history, devotion etc. Some adventurous Lavani composers have composed works on rather risqué subjects such as childbirth, adulterous passion, female health etc. Scholar Ayyappa Naicker is of the opinion that Lavani composers have sometime stepped out of the boundaries of social decency and control.

Some Lavanis have a humorous undertone while others border on the satirical. Sometimes, lavanis were performed as morale boosters for tired soldiers. The Lavani performances have a large element of extempore improvisational segments. Lavani

singing is a collective affair. From the Abhinaya point of view, the Lavani performances are wholesome and holistic as they offer scope for almost all emotions and expressions to be displayed. The Lavani singer not only sang, but also expressed and enhanced the meaning of the songs with suitable Abhinaya and hand gestures; thus, making a lavani artist a multi-faceted one.

Some scholars opine that Lavani has its origins in the Prakrit Gathas. It is of two kinds namely: NirguniLavani (philosophical) and Shringari (sensual). While some forms of Lavani were performed in public spaces, other were performed for small audiences in private occasions. While the former is called PhadachiLavani, the latter was known as BaithakichiLavani.

There are several popular Lavanis. They include:

1. SringaraLavani
2. Note Lavani
3. TunejSampatsaraLavani
4. BarakhadiLavani
5. PanchabhashaLavani
6. Vedanta Lavani
7. PalnaLavani
8. Serfoji's Teertha Yatra Lavani
9. Mangala Lavani

10. NowkaLavani

It is believed that the NowkaLavani inspired Saint Tyagaraja⁷⁷ to compose the immortal musical opera, NowkaCharitram⁷⁸. Lavanis are performed by female dancers, along with some male back up dancers who are called “nat” or Kinnar. The Maratha courts of Tanjore had many “Geer s” or Lavani groups. One finds mention of at least six such geers such as Tukund Geer, Mukund Geer, Savayi, Mouja, Kalgi and Tura. While some of these groups sang the praises of Vishnu some were devotees of Siva. Sometimes, the royal courts conducted contests between the two. Being a great Lavani enthusiast, King Sivaji II himself presided as the judge for many of these Lavani contests.

The king also encouraged and patronized Lavani Venkat Rao, who composed a “BahattaraRagamalika”. The lyrics of this piece are in praise of Sakharam Saheb, the son in law of Sivaji II. This was set to music by Mahavaidyanatha Iyer. It was this piece that inspired Mahavaidyanatha Iyer to compose his own mela Ragamalika in Sanskrit in praise of Sri Pranatharthihara Swami of Tiruvaiyaaru. This is mentioned in the book “Mela raga Malika of Mahavaidyanatha Sivan” by Brahmasri VSV Guruswamy Sastrigal. Though this book is out of print, a solitary copy of the same is available in the library of the Madras Music Academy. This work is of high literary value and even finds mention in the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Music of India.

Sivaji II commissioned literary, poetic and musical works to commemorate important occasions including pilgrimages. In her book Raja Serfoji II- Science, Medicine and Enlightenment in Tanjore, author SavithriPreetha Nair speaks of a

⁷⁷ 1767-1847

⁷⁸ An opera that describes a pleasure ride on a boat undertaken by Krishna and his gopi friends

special Lavani commissioned by the king. This resulted in the creation of “TristhalaYathreshaLavani” by one of the palace poets: ThundiShuddha Shiva. This 64-piece Lavani describes the 62 sthalas visited by the king during his pilgrimage, including Varanasi and culminates with his return to Tanjore, his receiving of blessings from his mother and his meeting with his son.

The tamizh equivalent of Lavani was Nilavani and was performed during Vasanta Panchami⁷⁹, Ranga Panchami and other auspicious occasions. Thirteen tamizh Lavanis were produced in this period and Lavani singing became a rather popular mode of entertainment in Tanjore and the surrounding areas, such as Trichy, Madurai etc.

Growth of Instrumental Music During the Maratha rule

Since the Maratha rulers were great patrons of music and dance, it was obvious that they encouraged instrumental music as well. Instrumental music used to accompany dance in the ChinnaMelam, Lavani as well as Sangeeta melam. Instruments like mrdangam, shankhu⁸⁰, veena, mukhaveena, talam and flute were commonly played in this era. The fiddle or violin was also brought to south India around this time, as was the morsing, Tunthina and deeh were also used to provide drone and rhythm accompaniment for Lavani performances. Prof. Indira Viswanathan Peterson of Mount Holyoke makes an interesting mention of Serfoji II having used the Veena in performances of European music, as he believed it to be a complete

⁷⁹ A festival that marks the arrival of spring
⁸⁰ conch

instrument and that it suited western music as well as it suited Indian music. The Morsing was used, possibly for the first time in this period. It was used in the dance drama Mohini – MaheshaParinayam , which was enacted during Serfoji II’ s reign.

Contribution of Kerala Kings to Dance and Music

Even as the Tanjore area was bustling with cultural activity, the neighboring Malayalee belt was no less. Hence, no study about the history of Bharatanatyam dance and its music would be complete without at least an honorable mention about the house of Travancore. The rulers of the royal house of Travancore did their bit to contribute to the arts, the brightest of the gems was Swati Tirunal⁸¹.

Born in 1813 into a household that could boast of the inimitable IraiyanThampi⁸² as none other than the child’s uncle, the young king received the best of oriental and western education. His first lessons in music were from Subramanya Bhagavathar and KaramanaBhagavathar. He was a prolific composer with more than 400 creations to his credit⁸³. Though the primary music of Kerala was sOpAna Sangeeta, this king composed in the Carnatic style, thus earning for himself a permanent pride of place in the legion of Carnatic composers.

Apart from patronizing Vadivelu Pillai, one of the four Tanjore siblings, his court was also abode to Shadkaala Govinda Marar, who received the honorific title “shadkaala” in appreciation of his mastery over rendering music in 6 speeds. KannayyaBhagavatar, a disciple of Tyagaraja also found

⁸¹ 1813-1846

⁸² 1782-1856

⁸³ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/173586/9/09_chapter%204.pdf

patronage under king Swati Tirunal⁸⁴, as did a Marathi bard Meru Swami, alias Ananthapadmanabha Goswami.

Other vidwans in his court included Srirangam Nagaratnam, TiruchandurRamanatha Manickam, Tanjore Neeral, Tanjore Kanakamala,SubbukuttiAyya, SankaranathaJosier, Vidwan Rajaraja Varma KoilTampuran etc.

The king himself composed works such as Padmanabhaashtakam, Kuchelopakhyanam, Utsavaprabandham, Navaratri krtis, Bhakti manjari, Syanandapura⁸⁵varnanaprabandham, AjamilOpAkhyAnam etc. The king's consort, AyikuttiNarayani Pillai Thankachi herself was stated to be an expert vocalist and vainika. It is said that the king's uncle IraimanThampi composed the noted Malayalam song "praana nathan enikku" to help the royal consort win over the king after a minor skirmish with the latter. To this day, this poem is considered one of the finest pieces of shringara poetry. The third Maharani of Travancore was also a fine dancer by name Sundaralakshmi.

Apart from encouraging the talent within his own family, the king also provided support to Bharatanatyam troupes, Mohiniyattam dancers and Koodiyattam groups. It is said that the king visited the Tanjore court often and was thus deeply influenced by the Tanjore style of music and dance.

⁸⁴Menon, A.S. (2011). Kerala history and its makers, p.185. 281

⁸⁵ Another name for Tiruvananthapuram

The presence of Vadivelu in the royal court influenced the raja in his dance compositions. As Vadivelu, was one of two vidwans responsible for bringing the violin to India, his presence influenced the nature and repertoire of instrumental music in the Travancore court too. Many padams, javalis and Tillana of the king are to this day very popular amongst Bharatanatyam dancers. Vadivelu composed many items with Swati Tirunal as the subject of his adoration; sometimes praising the king as Lord Padmanabhan himself (as in a varnam in raga Natta) and sometimes as an ardent devotee of the Lord (in the ata tala varnam samugamu)

Other Kingdoms

Even as Kerala and Tanjore grew artistically in leaps and bounds, the Mysore kings were not far behind. The 22nd Mysore Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III (1794-1868) was possibly the greatest patron of the arts in the history of Mysore. It was during his time that the ‘Mysore Style’ of Bharatnāṭyam” began to develop. The king himself authored multiple books in Kannada like Sowgandhikaparinayam and Sri Tattva nidhi.

Chamaraja Wodeyar (1868-1894 A.D.) was a great patron of arts and music. His court had an impressive lineup of numerous vocal and veena artists like K.Vasudevacharya, Veena Seshanna, Veena Subanna, Veena Padmanabiah, Bidaram Krishnappa, MysoreKarigiriRaoetc. The king himself was an adept violinist and enjoyed accompanying the veena recitals of Veena Seshanna⁸⁶.

Tanjore meets Mysore

⁸⁶ 1852-1956

The arrival of Chinnayya of the Tanjore quartet into the Mysore court triggered a major makeover in the classical dance of Mysore. Being a prolific composer and an ace Nattuvanar, Chinnayya molded and the Bharatanatyam of Mysore and gave it a sizeable body of work. This came to include many padams, javalis, tillanas etc. The local flavor was brought in through the shlokas and Kannada poems.

Growth of the repertoire

The Bharatanatyam performance in the Mysore bani would usually commence with a with a Mangala sloka and tattakāra sung by the Nattuvanar . The Mrdangam seldom accompanied the Tattakara. After the mood was set with the auspicious tattakara, the Ganeśha Prārthana was presented ; and this would usually be followed by mangala, also an invocatory song sung by the musician troupe.

After the conclusion of the two invocatory pieces , the patra / character/ dancer would enter , and circumambulate / perform pradakshina which involves the circling with devotion around the nattuva , tāladhārī the mārdangika and another instrumentalist if any. This particular event was followed by sthānika, sabhāpūja and a song rendered in admiration of dance . Then a Sanskrit verse or a śloka for the dance were usually verses from Kalidāsa which was introduced by JattiThayamma ⁸⁷ were performed.

⁸⁷ 1857-1947

The next monarch Nalvadi Krishna Raja Wodeyar (1894- 1940) was a multi-faceted man with prowess in as many as 8 instruments including the veena, nagaswaram, flute, piano, saxophone, sitar, mrdanga and violin⁸⁸. He patronised K Venkatalakshamma, disciple of the legendary JattiThayamma. His successor Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar (1940-1974) was no less a patron of the arts. Apart from being a great connoisseur of western music, he was the patron of B Devendrappa⁸⁹, Titte Krishna Iyengar, Mysore Vasudevacharya, HM VaidyalingaBhagavata, RN Doraiswamy, Veena Venkatagiriappa and others.

Role of the hereditary community

Family systems:

The devadasi community was essentially a matrilineal one. They are however unlike the Jogatis / yellama/ mathamma/ jogini communities, who come under the modern day “Dalit” category. Many men of the Devadasi community took on the surname “Pillai” and most women of the hereditary courtesan dancer community had the names of their villages and sometimes the names of their mothers as prefixes to their names. Women from this community who rose to fame with names such as these include Tanjore Balasaraswati, Madurai ShanmukhavadiSubbulakshmi⁹⁰ (who later was known As MS) and Madras LalithangiVasanthakumari⁹¹, who was referred to as MLV.

⁸⁸Sathyanarayana, R. (1969). Bharatnā tyam– A critical study, p.227. 371

⁸⁹Sathyanarayana, R. (1969). Bharatnā tyam– A critical study, p.228.

⁹⁰ 1916-2004

⁹¹ 1928-1990

In the traditional courtesan dancer community, the women controlled the finances. They were also the main artists of the ChinnaMelam troupe. The men were the nattuvanars and the dance masters. In many of these families, the men were considered to be inferior to women and were thus firmly under the control of the women. In a society that was primarily patriarchal, men such as these who controlled neither their women nor their property were often ridiculed.

As the agitation outlaw the devadasi system gained momentum, many writers and reformed openly rebuked these men. MoovalurRamamirtham⁹² in her book DasigalinMosavalai chides men from the traditional community for not being patriarchal. Factors such as these perhaps led to resentment amongst men of the community and towards the 1920s, they became vocal advocates of the Devadasi act and wrote letters requesting its abolition. Letters addressed to the editor of the Hindu newspaper in the 20s, attest this. This has also been verified historian V Sriram and dancer Nrithya Pillai at the 38th Natya Kala Conference in 2018. Nrithya, a member of the traditional community also states that her forefathers were brainwashed into believing that if they supported the abolition of the devadasi system, the lands and properties that were hitherto controlled by the women of their community would come into their control. Tempted by this offer, they enthusiastically supported the devadasi act, which eventually resulted in the disenfranchisement of their entire community enmasse.

At any rate, much before legislation and agitation spelled doom for the courtesan community, the families were headed by the senior most female member.

⁹²1883-1962

She was called the “*taaikizhavi*”⁹³ and was the matriarch of the families. She controlled the finances and took all major decisions related to all members of the family. Training of children started very young; with girls learning to be dancers and singers; even as they were taught mythology, languages literature etc. The boys learnt music- both vocal and instrumental. They also learnt most other things that the girls did, except they were groomed to become teachers of dance and not dancers themselves.

The role of the Chinamelam (a group of 5 artists including the dancer, the nattuvananar, the Mrdangist, the flautist and the thitthi player) in preserving and polishing Bharatanatyam dance as the rich oral tradition that it is today is unquestionable despite the apparent gaps in continuous and written documentation.

⁹³ Old woman who enjoys the status of a mother

CHAPTER IV

Bharatanatyam's Dance Music during transition from Pre- Modern to Modern

Since times immemorial, Bharatanatyam depended on the well-organized system of dedicated dancers, lifelong trainers, and royal patrons. All three came together to form a well-knit ecosystem in which the art, the artist and the Rasika thrived. Sadly, with the arrival of the European traders turned invaders, Victorian prudery and morality also crept in. This spelled doom for the entire community of dancers and their musicians. While the fight to destroy (by the reformists) and save (by the artists and their well-wishers) was a long, bitter and arduous one, since the current study is about Bharatanatyam and its music, we shall not delve into the social, political and legal happenings of this era. Instead, an attempt to understand what and how the dance and the dancers, the music and the musicians performed during these dark years will be undertaken. All through the period of eclipse, members of the hereditary families continued to hold on to their old repertoire. T. Balasaraswati repeatedly declared that she saw no need to change her repertoire or her technique. In her presidential address made at the 47th annual conference of the Music academy⁹⁴, she made a few points clarifying her views on the same and her family's commitment to keeping not just their dance treasures safe, but also safeguard the inter relatedness between the dance and its music. The very fact that she, a dancer received the coveted Sangeeta Kalanidhi, spoke louder than any of her words and declared that when understood in its purest form, music and dance are but two sides of the same coin.

Bala said:

⁹⁴ When she said: *"I have been asked to preside over a conference which has, in the past, been presided over largely by musicians, and I feel that by doing so the paramount importance of music in South Indian dance has been rightly emphasized. Bharatanatyam, in the highest moments, may be considered the embodiment of*

*“I have been asked to preside over a conference
which has, in the past, been presided over largely
by musicians, and I feel that by doing so the*

The study of the music of this era would be incomplete without an understanding of the music of Bala’s grandmother the inimitable Dhanam a.k.a Veena Dhanammal. A study of the music and dance of Bala’s family is most appropriate here, as this was one family that held the dancing AND the singing traditions aloft with equal devotion. Veena Dhanam’s music was unique. She had a huge repertoire, having learnt from many direct disciples of the trinity. She also learnt from many other greats. Though she gained fame as “Veena” Dhanammal, she was a vocalist par excellence. She considered the Veena to be a complete instrument, with laya and sruthi within its body and hence had no accompanying artists for her famed Friday evening concerts, though her own family was filled with musicians. She did not even use a Tamboora. She used the side (tala) strings for sruthi and not as tala strings.

Her grandson T Sankaran stated⁹⁵ that she had her instrument tuned to a higher pitch. This was because she often sang as she played the veena. She refused to wear artificial metallic nails or use a plectrum and instead chose to pluck the Veena with the flesh of her index and middle finger. This was possibly one of the reasons for the unusual sweetness of her playing. He also remembers that her plucking had an unusual continuity to it, which made her Veena playing sound almost like a vocal

⁹⁵<https://www.sahapedia.org/legacy-of-veena-dhanammal-conversation-ritha-rajan>

rendition. Her granddaughter T Mukta states that the kala pramanam of Dhanam's music was slow and relaxed. Her Raga alapanas⁹⁶ were elaborate and clearly elaborated the ideas contained in the song that was to follow. Her renditions were replete with gamakas. She disliked swara prastharas⁹⁷ with excessive mathematics and was especially filled with disdain for female artists who undertook such adventures. She also believed that when women artists performed, they should refrain from slapping the tala on the thigh.

T Mukta also states that her (Dhanam's) pathaanthara⁹⁸ was very different from all the artists of her time and this was the reason for her decision to have no "pakkavaadyam"⁹⁹. T T Vasu, former president of the Madras Music Academy¹⁰⁰ stated that Dhanam did not believe in multiplication of sangathis, but instead chose to bring out maximum raga bhavam through a fewer sangathis. The padam renditions of Dhanam were in sharp contrast to her Javalipresentations. While the former was soaked in raga bhava and squeezed the essence out of the raga, the javalis dripped with playful energy. Most of the javalis known and performed by artists today are those that were rendered by her and her family at some point. Sangeeta Kalanidhi Semmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer¹⁰¹ (in the Doordarshan documentary on Veena Dhanam) stated that Dhanammal's rendition of Kshetragnapadams could melt even a rock.

⁹⁶ Elaboration of a raga

⁹⁷ Elaboration

⁹⁸ Methodology or pedagogy

⁹⁹ Accompanying artists

¹⁰⁰ Former President of the Madras Music Academy

¹⁰¹ 1908-2003

Scholar V.A.K Ranga Rao points out that most javalis are either in Deshadi¹⁰² or Matyaadi Talas. This was revealed to him by a Devadasi woman by name Kalavardhini in Vijayanagaram. This view was also endorsed by Shri Chengulpet Ranganathan. However, in current times almost no dancer performs them in these talas nor do any musicians render them in these talas. V.A.K Ranga Rao also mentions that some Javalis are built in a way that the Pallavi line needs to be repeated thrice to fit into the tala¹⁰³. Prof RithaRajan states¹⁰⁴ that it was Dhanam who popularized the Navagraha kritis (known at that time as Vaara Kritis) of Muttuswamy Dikshitar. She also states that Dhanam and her family never rendered Taana varnam in multiple speeds. They always rendered them in the madhyama kalam, with plenty of “throb” and “accent”, which they believed was the soul of the tAna Varnam.

In the singing of duets, Dhanam ensured that one singer rendered the swara and the other rendered the sahitya during the chittaswarams and other segments that had a swara-sahityam pattern. For example, when Brinda and Mukta (Dhanam’s granddaughters) sang the AnandaBhairavikrti of Syama Sastri, Mariverigati evaramma, one sister would sing the swara and the other would simultaneously sing the Sahityam. This idea was given to Sundarambal, Dhanam’s mother by Annaswami Dikshitar. Prof Rajan believes that this system might have been inspired by some old tradition followed by the Bharatanatyam dancers. She recalls Tirukoranam¹⁰⁵ Ranganayakiamma, who made her (Prof Rajan) sing the song even as

¹⁰² An older version of aadi tala with specific eduppu or takeoff points.

¹⁰³ Stated by him at the Natya Kala Conference in 2018

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvRXFQIeW8I>

¹⁰⁵ A town known for the Gokarneswarar temple near Cuddalore

she recited the jati. This idea was perhaps modified and used by the Dhanam family in their vocal duets.

Dhanam and her family were also a storehouse of close to 500-600 shlokas all of which they knew by heart. She even sang the shlokas when she played her Veena concerts. She usually rendered these in rare and lilting desiya ragas. Special mention can be made of her rendition of “KulamTharum Selvam Thandhidum”, the azhwar¹⁰⁶ pasuram that she presented with a hindustani “touch”. As a lover of hindustani music, she allowed herself to be influenced by it. She even borrowed an element or two from it. For example, she included the Pratimadhyamamin in her rendition of the raga Paras; something that is not seen in other schools/ banis. Dhanam was also the first female musician to play the Ghana raga taanam. However, she played Varalias the 5th raga and Sri as the 4th one. She believed that this was a better way to arrange the ragas as it provided more contrast.

Prof Rajan also states:

“Many javalis were composed in Dhanammal’s house. And there is in fact one javali—you must have heard of it— Smarasundarangunishariyavare (who can be equal to my handsome Lord?) in Pharas. That javali is in praise of Veena Dhanammal, and way she plays Veena. It was all described in the jaavali and it was dedicated to Veena Dhanammal by Dharmapuri Subarrayar.

¹⁰⁶ Mystic poets of the Vaishnavite cult

One of the petitions received by the madras legislature read:

“Teach us the Thevarams¹ of the Saivite saints and the Nalayiram¹ of the Vaishnavite acharyas. Instill into us the Gita and the beauty of the Ramayana and explain to us the Agamas and the rites of worship ”

This would, they argued, inspire devadasi girls to model themselves after female saints like “Maitreyi, Gargi and Manimekalai and the women singers of the *Vedas* that we might **once again** become the preachers of morality and religion, thus reiterating the erstwhile status and the current ignominy of the arts.

Before long, dance / music became the favored hobby of the newly formed educated society. The past seven decades have seen more changes in the dance and its music than what the world of arts had seen in the centuries prior.

Role of the Madras Music Academy:

According to the Hindu (01.12.2006), even as the 1932 conference of the music academy was in progress at the People’s Park in Chennai, with Tiger Varadachari as president, raging debates on *sadir*, the devadasi system and the new legislation was happening all over the presidency. The act had ensured that the performances of the dancers and singers of the hereditary families were confined to private events, but the anti-nautch activists wanted to push them out of there too. While many resourceful Nattuvanar reinvented themselves and gurus to the daughters of the Madras elite, numerous hereditary dancers danced to newly composed pieces created by enterprising composers which comprised of phrases that would please their new patrons: the rich merchants and traders of George Town, the landed gentry etc.

Composer Sivaramayya created a javali or two with a smattering of English thrown in for good measure in Raga Kharaharapriya.

In response, a group art lover took it upon themselves to change public perception and rekindle the love and respect for the arts. The Music Academy provided an umbrella for this activism. In 1931, it arranged a performance of the Kalyani daughters (Rajalakshmi and Jeevaratnam) and in 1932 one more by Mylapore Gowri. From 1933 onwards, the Academy arranged many concerts of Bharatanatyam, beginning with Balasaraswati's recital on 26.08.1933, thus becoming an oasis for dance as much as for music. Interestingly and rather ironically, at this time though the Brahmin dominated Music Academy and the dancers of the dasi community were pitched as adversaries, many office bearers of the academy became lifelong devotees of Bala and the tradition that she represented including her famous "Yaarukkaagilum Bayama" (Why should I be afraid of anyone?) in Begada¹⁰⁷, which seemed like it was her mischievous retort to the ridicule and oppression that she and her community were subject to. Bala belonged to a family that ruled the roost both in music and in dance.

The 1933 conference further reiterated the inter relatedness of music and dance when the annual conference of the academy was presided over by Prof. K Ponniah Pillai, who was a descendant of Sivanandam of the Tanjore quartet. Scholar Dr. V. Raghavan passed a resolution stating "the Academy do represent to Hindu Religious Endowments Board that steps should immediately be taken to see that Tevaram, Vaishnava Prabhandams, Bharatanatyam, Nagaswaram and other temple

¹⁰⁷Talam Mishra Chapu

musicals are again made a part of the daily offering to the God in all temples” .Later, sabhas such as the Rasika Ranjani Sabha and the Indian Fine Arts society joined the fray and thus, the Sabha culture began to mushroom. Some of the exponents in those days were Pandanallur Jayalakshmi and Jeevaratnam, T Balasaraswati, Rukmini Devi Arundale, disciples of Pandanallur Guru Meenakshisundaram Pillai, Ram Gopal, Mrinalini Sarabhai and others.

When the terms Sadir and nautch made way for the term Bharatanatyam is unclear. The 29.12.1932 Hindu, while reporting the proceedings of the previous day states:

“The Experts of the Music Conference at their discussion today took up for consideration the subject of “Bharata Natyam” in respect of which a resolution had been given notice of by Mr. E. Krishna Aiyar¹⁰⁸.”

While this might have been the first time this name was used in the newspaper, the name Bharatanatyam is by no means a modern one coined by the revivalists. The name Bharatanatyam or Bharatam was in vogue since as early as the 15th century. In one of his devarnamas¹⁰⁹, Purandaradasa mentions that the celestial nymphs, Rambha and Urvashi performed Bharatanatyam. A letter written by a Dasi woman sometime in 1806 mentions that she (the writer) learnt “Bharatam”. This has been independently corroborated by scholars and descendants of hereditary families.

¹⁰⁸ 1897-1968

¹⁰⁹ Kannada bhakti songs

The Music Academy, Madras

Music Festival 1936-37

**PROGRAMME
OF
BHARATA NATYAM**

— BY —
**SRIMATI VARALAKSHMI
&
SRIMATI BHANUMATI**

— WITH —
**PAPANASAM VADIVELU PILLAI
AS
NATTUVANAR**

ON

Sunday 27th December 1936.

Ac the first
brochures for Bharatanatyam performance. One may note that the name of the
Nattuvanar is mentioned in a conspicuous manner. None of the other musicians are
named. Mutthaiah Bhagavathar¹¹⁰ stated that Nrithya or dancing was a part of Bhava
sastra and was a vital element of music.

¹¹⁰ 1877-1945

**Plate 5: 1936 Flyer of the Madras Music Academy's
performance of Bharatanatyam**

In his passionate speech, Dr. S. Krishnaswamy Iyengar stated:

*“Dancing and music were closely connected
with each other and if they destroyed the
former, the latter would also be damaged.”*

Repertoire in the new era:

Once the dance moved from royal courts to the proscenium stage, the numbers with Sahitya containing Nara Stuti¹¹¹ seemed a bit out of place. Gradually these songs made way for those which are in praise of deities. While some old compositions were jettisoned altogether, the Sahityam of some were altered and tweaked a bit to omit the Narastuti parts. A handful of pieces travelled to the auditoriums with their narastuti laden lyrics unchanged. The Paras Tillana in aditalam is a case in point.

Ironically, some composers of the new age composed songs with an element of narastuti in it themselves; except that this time around the object of praise was not the king or chieftain but a contemporary guru/ patron etc. The Kalakshetra tillana in raga Nata Bhairavi is an example of this.

¹¹¹ Praising of mortals

Conclusion:

Thus, one can say with conviction that the journey of music and dance from the temples to theatre has been an eventful one. Despite traversing tumultuous paths and enduring various hiccups it has stood the test of time and has brought glory and pride to India. Monumental modernist changes have been made which are consistent with the concept of traditionalism and therefore, with modernity. In addition to the removal of traditional nattuvanars and the focal shift from Krishna's romance to Nataraja's austere perfection, other changes including spatial, social and aesthetic have made Bharatanatyam what it is today. Indeed, the dance of south India has undergone a profound metamorphosis. It went from being a cherished part of the royal courts to untouchable to being reinstated as the pride of the nation. Today, many families consider it to be a "finishing school" of sorts for young women and give their daughters at least a brief brush with dance. In the words of scholar Matthew Harp Allen, it was equally a "repopulation, a reconstruction, a renaming, a re-situation and a restoration".

CHAPTER V

Bharatanatyam's Dance Music - Comparative Study with other South Indian Classical Dance Forms

Introduction:

It is well known that the physical form of any dance form gets its expression of creativity to a great extent from the musical techniques that it employs. The moving of the body, the expressions of the face, the dancing style, the emoting - many of these are motivated by the music of the dance. One could say that it is the dance of the music that governs the dance itself. India is a land of rich culture which has resulted in its having myriad dance forms. While some (like Bharatanatyam) of these dance forms owe their origins to religious practices and ritualistic modes of worship, some others (like Kuchipudi and the Melattur Bhagavata Mela) hail from the dramatic traditions of South India. Whatever be the nature of these performing art forms or their antecedents, they have a rich musical grammar, a well-formed syntax, and a definitive structure that forms the edifice upon which the dance form stands. To a great extent, the music of each form dictates the nature of the movements, the choice of steps, the repertoire, the modes of performance, etc.

To the lay eye, most south Indian dance forms may look and sound the same. This could not be farther from the truth. While one ought to concede that most of South India does indeed have a similar ethos, a similar socio political history (in many ways), a close and critical examination of the artistic lives of the peoples of South India and their performative heritage reveals that the musical sides of the

various South Indian dance forms are as similar as they are different. They have a plethora of commonalities, but they have an either longer list of dissimilarities; thus warranting the current study.

In the ensuing paragraphs, an attempt is made to critically examine the music of Bharatanatyam, in relation to a few other south Indian dance forms. The forms chosen for this purpose are:

1. Kuchipudi
2. Melattur Bhagavata Mela
3. Mohiniyattam

While there are plenty of other dance and dance-drama traditions in south India, such as Kathakali, Perini, Yakshaganas, so on and so forth, the above three art forms are chosen for a variety of reasons.

Kuchipudi:

Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam are in many ways sisters from the south. To many lay viewers and novice students, the two forms appear to be the same. This is perhaps the single most important factor in necessitating this study. At a more technical level, both use very similar sounding music; ie Carnatic music. The musical instruments used in both these art forms are also in many ways the same; ie: Veena, Venu, and violin for the melody section and nattuvangam and mrdangam for the percussion or laya part. However, there is much more than what meets the eye. These similarities and lack thereof shall be examined in the upcoming lines.

Melattur Bhagavata Mela:

The Bhagavata mela of Melattur has a rather peculiar and close relationship to Bharatanatyam. Yet in many ways, there is a huge bay between the two. Though the Tanjore belt is in many ways the cradle that bred and nurtured both these styles, in many ways, there ends the similarity. While Bharatanatyam is essentially a solo dance form designed with the female body in mind, the Melattur Bhagavata Mela is a dance drama in the Yakshagana tradition that was composed for and it performed by a group of men from a specific community. It is prayerful in nature and is a ritualistic art form. Interestingly while Bharatanatyam has a strictly codified adavu structure and a large pool of steps/ movements to choose from, the Melattur Bhagavata mela has a large repertoire of dance dramas, but no adavus or steps of its own. It borrows its language of adavus from Bharatanatyam and presents its Mela performances from year to year. This dichotomy itself makes this a fit case for further examination and thus an attempt shall be made to study the music of Bharatanatyam through the prism of Melattur bhagavata mela as well.

Mohiniyattam:

The dance of the enchantress, Mohiniyattam is the pride of Kerala. In many ways, it is a product of the same ethos that Bharatanatyam hails from. It is a dance form designed for solo presentation by a female practitioner. It has a strong sensual element to it too. In its previous avatar as Sadir attam, Bharatanatyam was the dance of the courtesan. The name Mohini itself means an illusional enchantress and thus Mohiniyattam is in essence designed to enchant and attract.

Over time, in the post renaissance period, Bharatanatyam has attempted to shed its tag of sensuality and eroticism, at least in parts. However, Mohiniyattam proudly retains its sensuous and erotic roots, even in its name. Though bhakti pieces are often performed in Mohiniyattam, the tag line “dance of the enchantress” has stuck to Mohiniyattam firmly. Kerala has a rich tradition of “Sopana Sangeetam” that runs almost in parallel to the system of Carnatic music prevalent in other parts of South India.

In the post-modern and contemporary period, though pieces from the Carnatic music repertoire are also used in Mohiniyattam performances, one cannot but help notice the strong and lingering presence of Sopana Sangeetam in Mohiniyattam. Another strong bond between the dance of Tanjore and the dance of Travancore seems to have been created by the departure of Vadivelu (one of the four Tanjore Brothers) from the Tanjore court and his assimilation into that of Maharaja Swati Tirunal. As a great patron of the arts, the king of Kerala used the prolific genius of the newly arrived Nattuvanar to enrich the music and dance of his court. Thus was born a delicate and interesting interplay and exchange. The subsequent results of these interactions shall be examined in this chapter.

Music of Bharatanatyam vs music of Kuchipudi:

In the context of today’s discourse, one could say that Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam hail from different geographical locations , i.e. one is the dance of Tamil Nadu and one is the dance of the Telugu speaking states, mainly Andhra Pradesh. However, this cannot be a major cause for difference. A major “compare and contrast” study cannot be carried out based on geography. This is because the

bifurcation of combined state of the erstwhile Madras state/ presidency occurred as recently as in 1953. It is another matter that the state that was thus created was later further divided and the new state of Telangana was created in the year 2014.

Both Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam belong to the large and prosperous southern part of India. However, in many ways, the common factors between these two forms end there. Since this study is dedicated to the musical aspects of dance, an attempt shall be made to compare and contrast the two forms, viz Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi from the point of view of their respective musical modes, mores and traditions.

Broadly speaking both Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi use the same form of music, i.e. Carnatic Music. However, the visual and aural impact of the same Carnatic music is very different when used in Kuchipudi and when used in Bharatanatyam. Why is this so? The reasons for this are many. To understand this better, one must examine the basic features of Bharatanatyam dance music as well as that of Kuchipudi and contrast the two from various perspectives.

Antecedents of Bharatanatyam:

The backstory of Bharatanatyam as we know it is quite well documented. Though the actual practice of Bharatanatyam as a performative tradition has passed down through an oral and unwritten human chain of practitioners, the dance itself adheres to most dance and dramaturgical treatises, thus making it a rock solid tradition with a hoary past.

In terms of the dance music, while one does not have a chance to listen to the exact kind of music was used in the pre Tanjore quartet era (barring later day recreations), plenty of information is available regarding the repertoire of dance in the Nayak period. Dance forms such as Perani, Jakkini, Pushpanjali, Mukhachali, Gondali, Durupada, Darusani, Padachali, Kautuvam etc. are known to have been presented in the Nayak courts. The Nayaks and the Marathas were both great patrons of art and thus spared no effort to ensure that the twin arts of music and dance not only thrived in their consolidated form, but also grew in leaps and bounds. The cosmopolitan nature of the Tanjore court thus made the dance of the courtesans and the handmaidens of God thrive in more ways than one.

Antecedents of Kuchipudi:

Kuchipudi, the dance of the Telugu country is also an internationally acclaimed art form and is the pride of the Telugu people. Said to have originated from the nondescript village of Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh, like many Yakshagana and dramatic traditions, it was originally performed by an all-male troupe. The entire dance party comprised men from the Brahmin community and their art flourished due to royal patronage. As an art form, one could argue, that the Kuchipudi dance tradition as we know it today is relatively younger than Bharatanatyam.

The dancers in the all male Kuchipudi troupe were known as Bhagavathulu. Today neither caste nor gender is a bar. The world of Kuchipudi is open to men and women of all communities, castes and nationalities. The themes used in the practice of Kuchipudi are religious, worshipful, coquettish, romantic, erotic, playful and

sometimes esoteric too. Pieces like Gollakalapam handle in a colloquial but refined manner themes revolving around social reform also.

Kuchipudi as a discipline may be broadly brought under the umbrella of the performances of Yakshagana/ Bhagavatam/ VeedhiBhagavatham, all of which are collectively and simplistically known as the Yakshagana genre. They are in some ways a south Indian tradition of folk theatrical performances.

Kuchipudi endured a long and arduous debate as to whether it ought to be placed under the folk art nomenclature or that of a “classical” dance form. After continued struggle and consistent efforts, it has finally been securely and permanently accorded “classical status”. The adherence of Kuchipudi to the tenets of the Natyashastra and many other ancient texts contributed to its being placed in the “classical” space.

It is known that the Natyasastra is a work on the composite art forms of dance, music and drama and the fact that Kuchipudi has robust elements of all these three helped greatly in elevating it to the classical pedestal. For instance, the Purvaranga which is described in great detail by Bharata is commonly seen in Kuchipudi.

Despite the numerous changes that have crept into Kuchipudi as a dance genre one still sees the unmistakable stamp of the theatrical origins of this dance form. Today many solo items in the Kuchipudi repertoire are not very drama based, yet the flavour of its dramatic and theatrical past cannot be missed, especially by the trained eye. For instance, even in a solo presentation of Bhamakalapam one observes small

passages of prose or the spoken word that are typical of dramatic presentations. This is not something usually spotted in other solo dancing traditions.

Repertoire of Bharatanatyam:

The repertoire of Bharatanatyam is a constantly evolving one. It is what one would call a perennial “work in progress”. There has never been a single time in the past or the present of Bharatanatyam when one can say that there have been no modifications or alterations to the repertoire of Bharatanatyam. Bharatanatyam is a very porous dance form, in the sense that it easily assimilates pieces, ideas and concepts from other disciplines and thus now has many “imported” items in its kitty. These imports are not necessarily from other dance forms alone. Some additions have been inspired by the Periyamelam, while some additions have come in from the Bhajanai Paddhati. Some aspects or pieces have been inspired by traditions from neighbouring lands too. Thus, there is no hard stop to where one can stop in terms of the ever- expanding repertoire of Bharatanatyam.

Be that as it may, one can briefly outline the repertoire of Bharatanatyam as we know it today in the following manner:

1. Pushpanjali
2. Alarippu
3. Jatiswaram
4. Shabdham
5. Kautuvam

6. Pada varnam

7. Padam

8. Javali

9. Tillana

While the above pieces typically make up the “maargam” of a Bharatanatyam recital, many other pieces such as swarajati, krti, keertanam, tiruppugazh, tevaram, shloka, devarnama, tarangam, abhang, bhajan etc also have slowly wound their way onto the Bharatanatyam stage and are often seen in danced to today. A brief description of the pieces featured in a Bharatanatyam concert is seen below:

Pushpanjali:

An offering of flowers made to the Gods, the Gurus and to the learned audience. Though this piece does not find mention in the maargam as codified by the Tanjore Quartet, it is quite a popular opening number nowadays. It is performed with Flowers in the hand, its lesser-known counterpart, the deepanjali is performed by holding lit earthen lamps in the palms. In the Bhagavata’s tradition, an item resembling the pushpanjali is known as Sabha Vandanam. are usually in Ghana ragas such as GambheeraNaattai, Arabhi etc.

Alarippu:

It is a brisk and short nrta piece, with a limited number of hastas. In the mArgams of most nattuvanars of the old order, the alarippu is the very first item. The Pandanallur baani is especially, known for its commitment to this ubiquitous piece. Even the

Vazhuvoor nattuvanaarssuch as Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai considered the alarippu to be the perfect opening number. While reminiscing about her gurus Shri Pandanallur Chockalingam Pillai and Shri PandanallurSubburaya Pillai, Smt Meenakshi Chittaranjan stated that pleasing her gurus in just the alarippualone was a herculean task.

In a 2021 interview, Smt Chitra Visweswaran recalled that her Guru Vazhuvooraar used to ask his students to NOT move their eyes to the sides in the first few avartanams of the alarippu. Apparently, this was because he considered the alarippu also to be a worshipful dance piece. He believed that the starting part of the alarippu ought to be performed in a serene and meditative manner, as one would be in the presence of the deity.

The extensive use of natyarambham is the hallmark of the alarippu. While watching an alarippu performance, one is reminded of a statue in a temple coming to life upon hearing the auspicious drum beats and sollukattus that resonate with the Omkaranaadam. Performed in three positions, viz: samapaadam, aayatam and muzhumandi, it also has a smattering of Mandi adavus towards the end of the piece.

In some ancient Lakshmana Granthas, the terms alarippu and pushpanjali are used interchangeably. This is perhaps because the word alarippu itself means “to blossom”. More recent variations of the alarippu include Mayura Alarippu, Hasta Alarippu, Vahana Alarippu, Gopura Alarippu, Garuda Alarippu etc. While the purists do not seem to appreciate these modifications, these new types of alarippu are certainly growing from strength to strength.

Jatiswaram:

Another nrtta piece, this song is also a melodic one. Also known as swarapallavi, it usually has a pallavi, anupallavi and multiple charanams. The Pallavi is sung several times, during which the dancer performs multiple korvais featuring simple mathematical patterns. In the anupallavi and the charanam, one finds a litany of adavus with various nrtta hastas woven together cleverly and seamlessly. Popular jatiswarams include ones in Saveri(RupakaTalam), Kalyani,Vasantha etc. Post-modern composers have composed jatiswarams in ragas such as Saraswati, Rasikapriya, Rasali etc.

Shabdam:

The Shabdam is perhaps the first piece in which Abhinaya and sahityam are introduced. The sahityam part is usually separated into stanzas and between each stanza, one finds a simple korvai or a sorkattu which is sung, rather than recited. The sahitya is either shrngara oriented or Bhakti oriented but is not repeated many times. One does not find elaborate sancharis or Abhinaya passages in the shabdam. The Shabdams are usually in Mishra Chapu tala and many traditional Shabdams are either in the raga kambhoji or begin with this raga (in case it is a ragamalika). The pace is not too hurried. The lyrics of the Shabdam usually extol the virtues of the Lord, the king or a nobleman and thus Shabdams are also known as Yashogeetams. A peculiar feature of the shabdam is the occasional use of the word “salaam” or salaamu, thus reflecting an Islamic influence on this piece.

Kautuvam:

A beautiful amalgamation of verse, prose, poetry (the word kautuvam itself is believed to be based on the term kavithvam that means poetry) and song, the Kautuvams enjoy a pride of place in the Bharatanatyam margam. Along with the shabdams, the kautuvams are perhaps the only musical forms that have not crept into the music kutcheri format. While GangaiMutthuNattuvanar composed most of the Kautukams in vogue today, a handful of other vaggeyakarashave also composed few others. Special mention must be made of the Navasandhikautuvams, ritualistic dance numbers that were performed at the different sandhis or junctions in the temple. These short kautuvams were meant to propitiate the directional deities or the dikpalas. Many nattuvanars of the hereditary community were loath to the idea of performing kautuvams on the proscenium stage. This was because that strongly believed that the kautuvams belonged to the KoilParamparai and ought to be left there. Shri Pandanallur Pandian states that it was through the enterprise and efforts of Shri Kitappa Pillai that the Kautvams became popular in the Bharatanatyam margam in the post revival period.

Pada Varnam:

The pada varnam is believed to be the soul of the maargam performance. A true test of the dancer's virtuosity and the Nattuvanar's genius, this item would typically give equal importance to both the nrta and the Abhinaya aspects. Also known as chowka varnams, they have all the requisite elements that a dancer needs to perform a variety

of Jatis, beautiful Abhinaya and elaborate sancharis. The lines of the pallavi and anupallavi are interspersed with jatis. In the past, the first Jati also was madhyama kala one. Over time, it came to be that the first Jati is in the trikalam format. The mode of performing the pada varnam has been crafted by the great masters with great care and thought. From the opening attami, to the jaati variations that are seen in the last part of many pada varnams each segment serves a distinct and attractive purpose.

Padam

Though the padams come across as pieces of erotic poetry, they are in reality a store house of musical values and literary ideas. Their leisurely pace allows the dancer soak in the Bhava of the pieces, even as she elaborates on the Sahityam. Popular padam composers include Kshetragna, Ghanam Krishna Iyer, etc. The concept of the Ashta Vidha Nayikas find ample scope for elaborate expression in this musical form. During the days of the sadir dances, while the Nattuvanar and / or his male supporting vocalists sang for items until the Varnam, the Padams and Javalis were often sung by female artists, in order to portray the high emotional content with more fervour. During the days of the temple dancers, it was customary for the dancing girl to sing and perform Abhinaya to a couple of padams each night in ekantam (solitude) for the lord, as one of the last rituals for the day before the lord retired into a sweet slumber. The family of Veena Dhanammal were considered to be an authority on Padam singing. T. Balasaraswati, a scion of this clan attained global fame for her enchanting abhinaya and sensitive portrayal of this genre.

Javali:

Experts opine that the term “javali” may have evolved from the Kannada / Marathi word javadior from the sanskrit term jya which refers to the bow string of cupid and aavali , which means a continuous string. Thejavali may have the pallavi and charanam(s). The anupallavi is sometimes absent. The vaggeyakaras used a brisk tempo, lighter phrases colloquial words, sometimes taking liberties with the melodies and the sahithya in order to make the javeli as attractive as possible. Some rare ragas like paras, saindhavi etc and lighter ragas, like khamas, behave etc are popular choices for javalis. The references are earthy and direct, and are sometimes even thought to be lewd.

Tillana:

The Bharatanatyam recital concludes with the Tillana. It is a brisk piece which is embellished with korvais and Mei adavus (also called ezhil adavus), in the Pallavi. The anupallavi is short and is not repeated too many times. The Abhinaya in the charanam is brief and devoid of elaborate interpretative sancharis. The breezy and sparkling tillana ensures that the audience leaves the performance on a buoyant note. One could say that the performance comes full circle –beginning with short nrmta pieces and ending on a similar note.

While some pieces are exclusively performed in dance recitals alone and some fall entirely within the ambit of “kutcheri” music, in present days, one notices that some pieces lend themselves to both these disciplines. It is pieces such as these that need to be handled with great care and caution. For example, alarippu, jatiswaras, kautuvams and shabdams, darus etc seldom make their way into the “kutcheri” stage.

Similarly, Ragam-tanam - pallavis and many krtis, keertanas, tana varnams, etc are rarely seen on the dance stage. However, in recent times, there have been several experimental works where dancers have attempted dancing to entire vocal/instrumental kutchcheris, but endeavours such as these are still considered an exception to the rule and not the rule itself. One significant example for this is the landmark concert of Dr Vyjayanthimala Bali where she danced to a traditional ragamtanam Pallavi, where she enacted the story of Sree Krishna Jananam (the birth of Lord Krishna).

Repertoire of Kuchipudi:

Like all old dancing traditions, Kuchipudi is also characterised by a large and variegated repertoire. A combination of a plenty of factors come together to provide Kuchipudi with the huge number of pieces that make this artform as colourful as it is. When one thinks of Kuchipudi, one of the first elements that comes to one's mind is the BhamaKalapam, which is in many ways the piece de resistance of Kuchipudi. To many, the Bhama Kalapam is the identity of Kuchipudi. It is a long dramatic piece that was performed over seven nights in the days gone by. Needless to mention, what one sees today is a heavily truncated version of the original piece. Though there is no evidence to suggest that the BhamaKalapam was thought of as the first item in the repertoire, it certainly is the first among equals, in the sense that it certainly has captured the imagination of many. The lines "Bhamane Satyabhamane" are particularly popular.

Since the performance of Kuchipudi was originally the sole preserve of men, the BhamaKalapam was also performed by a male performer who would impersonate

the character Satyabhama. Legend has it that Satyabhama was the second of Sri Krishna's "AshtaMahishis", or his eight principal consorts. She is at once possessive, yet emotional; vulnerable, yet coquettish and it is her multi-hued relationship with Sri Krishna that forms the crux of the BhamaKalapam piece.

Madhavi, the hand maiden of Bhama has a pivotal role to play in the BhamaKalapam. She has a conversation with Satyabhama in which the heroine's true feelings and her delicate yet complex state of mind are revealed to the audience. It is through this dialogue between Madhavi and Bhama that the audience understands the nature and mindset of Satyabhama. The conversation between Madhavi and Bhama is woven together in the form of a series of Daruvus. Though Sri Krishna is the hero of the piece, it is pertinent to note that he appears only for a few minutes towards the end of the act. The overall getup of Satyabhama, whether played by a man or a woman artist is very special. She is a child woman, who is both secure and jealous at the same time. Her self-assuredness and restlessness both surface every now and then. She is at once vain yet cannot bear to be separated from her beloved. All these complexities of her character find physical expression in the form of Satyabhama and in her on stage demeanour.

Large eyes, swaying gait, regal head gear and a long braid are all characteristic of Bhama. Her entry in the first act "Jadapattu" lends an attractive start to the piece. In the days of yore it was a veritable challenge for the male bhagavathulu to be able to impersonate Satyabhama in a successful and convincing manner. It was not something that came easily to all men. It is said that Vedantam Satyanarayana

Sarma was such a wizard at cross dressing, that his own wife could not recognise him in streevesham.

Another key item in the Kuchipudi repertoire is the “Sabdam”, a piece that is replete with both lyrical and rhythmic passages. The syllables are recited and are interspersed with lyrics that sing peans in praise of the deity or royal patron. The sabdam usually runs in a brisk to fast tempo. There is a consistent tempo to it. It is usually sans scope for much improvisation from the abhinaya perspective. Considering the formal atmosphere of the royal courts, it is obvious that the sahitya parts of the sabdams are filled with hyperbole, praise and adulation for the subject. The influence of the Mohammedan culture on south Indian poetry is seen through the generous usage of the word “salAm” every now and then.

An excerpt from the Bhosala Sabdam, runs as follows:

<i>"Dhaki</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>jham</i>
<i>ta</i>	<i>dhidhi</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>jham</i>
<i>ta</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>dhikijhanu</i>	<i>tari</i>	

tari tarijham tari ki da ta ka ta dhiki da taka takadhina torn , tehi da tta thorn. Raja sri bhosala kula candraratipatisundara raja Narendra raja tulaja Maharaja Tanuja pratapasimhasutramasalAmdhisalAmdhidhisalAm.

The lyrics of the above Sabdam may loosely be translated as:

Oh emperor!! Who is as resplendent as the moon that rises from the ocean (Here, the Bhonslelines from which the king hails from is compared to the ocean and the moon is used as a metaphor for the ruler himself), Oh handsome king, who would put Cupid to shame ! Oh son of Tulaja... Oh Pratapasimha!! I repeatedly offer my salutations to thee!

Another unmissable piece in the repertoire of Kuchipudi is the Tarangam, said to be an innovation of Vedantam Lakshmi Narayana sastry. These pieces owe their roots to the bhajanasampradaya tradition of south India. However, today the Tarangam is considered more a part of the Kuchipudi dance than of the bhajana paddhati. More often than not, the Tarangam includes a “plate dance” sequence. Sometimes lamps are held in the hands and pots are balanced on the head.

Though there is no evidence to suggest that acrobatic feats such as these are an intrinsic part of either Kuchipudi dance or Tarangam music, today the very thought of the Tarangam conjures in the mind the image of a dancer performing on a brass plate. The Tarangam comprises a series of the Lord’s names sung to tune. It is the belief of the bhakti saints that namasankeertana or the repeated chanting of the names of the Almighty facilitates liberation of the soul and thus the Tarangam follows this pattern. Every now and then the dance choreography deviates from the plain abhinaya and episodes from the life of Sri Krishna are shown in a descriptive and dramatic manner.

Yet another unique part of the Kuchipudi repertoire is the “Adhyatma Ramayana Keertanas”, songs that sing the praise of Sree Rama in a rather spiritual tone. The allegoric representation of the original text of Valmiki is presented as a conversation between Siva and Parvati. Adhyatma Ramayana is extremely popular in

Telugu culture and it is not common to hear it chanted or sung in many Telugu households. Thus, these are not exclusively “dance” songs.

Just like the Krishna Leela tarangini describes the DvAdasa Skanda (12th canto) of the Bhagavatam, the Adhyatma Ramayana describes specific episodes of the Ramayana. The tunes are in the Carnatic classical style suitable for Ata kutcheris. Suitable jatis are added at various junctures. The dancer portrays various parts and thus enacts myriad episodes from the Ramayana.

There are varied opinions on the question of how the Adhyatma Ramayana Sankeertanas made their way into the Kuchipudi repertoire. Prof Nataraja Ramakrishna was of the opinion that these songs were part of the Devadasi repertoire and were borrowed by the Kuchipudi dancers from them. With the passage of time, these songs seem to have gotten assimilated into the Kuchipudi repertoire.

The interaction between Kuchipudi Bhagavathas and Dasi artists was seconded and substantiated by Shri C R Acharya who was also of the opinion that there was a certain give and take between these two groups of artists, which led to some seamless transfers between the two. Another important, though not exclusive part of the Kuchipudi repertoire is the Ashtapadi. It is well known that Ashtapadis are performed in many dance styles in India, including Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Manipuri, Mohiniyattam, so on and so forth. The delicate texts and sensitive portrayals of the nayika-nayaka bhava in the ashtapadis gives dancers ample scope to portray the satvika abhinaya aspects of dance. The abhinaya display in the Ashtapadis is no

less than a study in psychology ; considering the various hues and shades of characters that shine

through in the lyrics.

The madhura bhakti nature of the ashtapadis make it convenient for portrayal of elaborate sancharis at various juncture. Radha's burning desire for union with Sri Krishna, the occasional straying of the hero, the misunderstandings that are thus born and the eventual rapprochement, all form the core of the Ashtapadis, thus making the ideal for portrayals in dance.

In the present chapter, the study of Ashtapadi portrayals is of heightened significance. This is because Ashtapadis are commonly performed in all the three styles that are being critically examined here, viz; Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi and Mohiniyattam.

Another significant part of the Kuchipudi repertoire is the padam. Padam compositions of Kshetragna are, like the ashtapadis are high on amorous content. The hero is usually MuvvaGopala, a manifestation of Sri Krishna, but the heroine is a mortal woman. She may fall under any one of the ashtavidha nayika classification. Since the heroine is a mortal, the romance between the two is more raw than what one sees in the Ashtapadis of Jayadeva. Even though the padams of Kshetragna are considered to fall under the Madhura Bhakti category, one can clearly tell that the romance in the padams are highly "human", with all the frailties of the human mind and the vagaries of human life finding frequent reference.

Though the compositions of Kshetragna are believed to have been composed for the dancing women to present at the royal court, they have smoothly transitioned

from their regal past to cultural present in a most seamless fashion. This is because the central theme of these poems is evergreen and a dancer's delight.

How the padams of Kshetragna made their way into the Kuchipudi repertoire is not exactly known. The physical proximity between Muvva (the native village of kshetragna) and Kuchipudi is one plausible cause. It is also possible that the padams of Kshetragna were performed by the Tanjore dancers and that the Kuchipudi dancers borrowed it from their repertoire and assimilated it into their own. It is however amply clear that Kshetragnapadams were presented as part of the Kuchipudi repertoire as early as the 17th century.

Early witnesses to the dance of the dasi women state that the padams were performed by the hereditary dancers in a seated position. The body movements were kept subtle. More emphasis was on the Satvika Abhinaya aspect. The face was extraordinarily mobile and nimble, thus heightening the display of the inner feelings and emotions. The kala pramanam was kept slow (viLambakAlam).

A pertinent aspect of the padams of Kshetragna is that many of these padams are in TriputatAlam / misrachAputAlam. The plausible reason for this is that the poet wished for the dancers to focus on abhinaya in general and on sAtvika abhinaya in particular. TriputatAlam usually offers the relaxed pace that is needed to be able to shine a spotlight on mukhaja abhinaya.

A study on the music of Kuchipudi is incomplete without a brief understanding of the meters and musical forms used therein. As a rich and bustling Yakshagana tradition, it employs plenty of different meters to keep the audience

engaged and to be able to convey the appropriate feelings with accuracy. These musical forms have unique and peculiar constructions and serve specific purposes.

Some of the meters employed are as follows:

Dvipada:

A unique style of composition that has a two-lined structure to it. It is a commonly used one. The meter is generally a five syllable one and many dvipada compositions tend to be wordy and long.

Sandhivachanam:

As the name indicates, it is used to bridge or link together two episodes. It is cleverly used to depict some situations that are either difficult to portray or inappropriate to portray in a literal way. Sequences involving war, death etc are frequently glossed over with the help of Sandhivachana compositions.

Daruvu:

Believed to have its origins in the Sanskrit term “DhruvagAnam”, the daruvus of Kuchipudi usually comprise a Pallavi, an Anupallavi and a couple of Charanams. There are of many types including the Pravesha Daruvu (usef to depict the entry of a character), SamvAda Daruvu (which runs in the form of a discussion), VarnanAtmaka Daruvu (which is descriptive in nature), NishkramaNa Daruvu (used

to portray the exit of a character) and nEpadya Daruvu (that which is sung in the background)

Kandardham:

A unique meter used in Kuchipudi dance dramas, this gives dancers a wide scope for performance. Its complex intertwining of rhythmic and free flowing sequence come together in an interesting manner, where in different rhythmic structures are used in the flow of this musical form.

Yalalu:

This is a form of speech used for a prolonged dialogue, usually in poems that are structured like conversations. Other forms like Seesamalika, Kaivaram, Geeta padyam, Kaivaram, Paraku vachanam, Mattakokila etc are also used.

Musical instruments used in the Bharatanatyam ensemble:

Being a south Indian dance form, it is not surprising that Bharatanatyam dance uses south Indian music to accompany it. Simply put, Carnatic music is used to accompany Bharatanatyam dance. In its earlier form of sadir, the dance troupe was called “Chinna Melam”, as against the Nagaswaram troupe which was called the

Periya Melam. The Chinna melam set comprised of the dancer and her musicians. The team was led by the nattuvanar, who himself played multiple roles and donned several hats.

He was not just the preceptor of the dancing girl, but also the chief vocalist. He rendered the jatis and wielded the cymbals. Though the concept of “choreography” as a separate discipline was probably unheard of during the sadir era, the nattuvanar was in all probability the principal choreographer of the dance items too.

Though the hereditary community was mostly a matrilineal one, the nattuvanar was given great importance. He enjoyed a pride of place in the ensemble and mentored the dancing girl in more ways than one. Though the nattuvanar was sometimes aided by an additional singer, he was undoubtedly the leader of the music ensemble of dance.

When the dancer offered her salutations to the cymbals (nattuvanga talam) of the nattuvanar, she was not merely showing her respect for the pair of cymbals. Instead it was a gesture through which she acknowledged the huge role played by the nattuvanar in the display of her art.

The respect for the nattuvanar was such that even the great T Balasaraswati stated that she never wielded the talam, even when she taught. She believed that it was wholly and solely the right of her nattuvanar and Guru Kanchipuram Ellappa

Pillai. After him, his son became her nattuvanar and led the ensemble. This says a lot, considering the fact that Balasaraswati herself was a formidable musician and hailed from a lineage of hoary musicians. Both her brothers T Viswanathan and T Ranganathan were eminent musicians, but yet did not dare usurp the position of the nattuvanar. Such was the haloed place occupied by the nattuvanar. The ensemble also comprised of a mrdangam artist. The role of the mrdangam artist was next only to that of a nattuvanar. In a 2020 interview, Shri Kuttralam Selvam (son of Nattuvanar Shri Muttusami Pillai) stated that it was customary for the nattuvanar to compose jatis in the company of the mrdangam vidwan. This ensured that the mrdangam artist was involved in the process from the very beginning. Hence there was no need to educate the mrdangists on the rhythm-scape separately.

There were instances where the mrdangam player and the dancer performed short passages of ritualistic dances during temple festivals. In a 2021 interview, Shri Pandanallur Pandian stated that his father told him about days in the Brahmotsavam of the Periya Koil in Thanjai when the dancer danced to the Navasandhi and the drummer or mrdangam player played when references were made to mrdangam playing in the course of the chanting. He stated that the dancer received an anna for her services and the drummer received a fourth of her remuneration. A fiddle Vidwan and a vainika and other melodic support was often enlisted. Needless to mention, the sruthi was provided by the manual methods (Thanjavur tambura in the earlier days and the Sruthi petti in later times). Interestingly the ensembles of some dancers of the hereditary community had a clarinet player in it. While it is unclear as to how, when

and why this instrument found its way into the dance group, it is possible that its tone and unique sound made it gain favour.

The musical ensemble of sadir attam in the nayak and Maratha period is believed to have the dholak and harmonium too. This was perhaps because of the cosmopolitan nature of the Thanjai court of that era and also due to the rich and versatile nature of the dance repertoire itself. When the dancer danced to Gujarati compositions and Parsee Javalis, it is not surprising that some of these “foreign” instruments were used too.

It is interesting to note that whether by design or instinct, the musical ensemble for Bharatanatyam dance has turned out to be a well-balanced one. It has scope to accommodate wind instruments and stringed ones; bowed instruments and percussive ones. Presiding over all these are the humble cymbals, which are small in size but lead and manage the entire crew of musicians.

Musical instruments used in the Kuchipudi ensemble:

Being a south Indian dancing tradition, it is but obvious that the music of Kuchipudi is south Indian too. However, one must remember that unlike Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi was neither a solo form, nor a worshipful one. The venue of a Kuchipudi performance was neither a parlour, nor the inside of a temple either. Thus, the musical ensemble of a Kuchipudi dance troupe was also designed with all these elements in mind. It is not only the choice of musical instruments that depends on the nature and intent of the concert, but all elements of the dance are influenced by these matters.

Traditionally, the Yakshagana performances are said to have used fewer instruments than the Nrtya Rupakas. While the Maddalam is set to have provided percussive support in the early days, today the go to choice for percussion support seems to be the Mrdangam. In the past, instruments such as harmonium, Titti etc were used too. Sruti was maintained in the traditional manner with the help of the tambura. In the later years, the harmonium was used. The clarinet was also sometimes used as an accompanying melodic instrument.

Today, the standard set of vocal, violin, mrdangam seem to have become the staple dance accompaniments. Veena, Tabla etc are used every now and then based on the requirements of the performance. Sometimes the harp, Pakhawaj and Ghatam are also seen as part of the ensemble.

Since performances of Kuchipudi usually happened in large and open spaces and were hardly “chamber performances”, the role that was played by the singer was special and challenging. The singer had to usually sing in a rather high pitch. This was to ensure audibility. Considering the absence of amplifying technologies, this extra effort on the part of the singer was both inevitable and mandatory. To aid in this effort, on occasion the backup singers and the sutradhara artists lent their voice to the singer for better amplification.

Another challenge for the singer was that he had to manipulate his voice in a manner by which it was suitable to all characters, viz: male, female and child. In the absence of a female singer to sing for female characters, the onus fell on the main male singer to assume a shrill voice for female characters and thus create the requisite rasa or emotion in both the artists as well as the audience. For instance, in the

Prahlada Natakam, all three pivotal characters, ie that of Hiranyakashapu, Leelavati and Prahlada appear together and converse with each other in many scenes. Such scenes are a test of the singer's mettle.

Melodic Aspects of Kuchipudi Dance Music:

On the question as to whether Kuchipudi has its own genre of music or not, all senior Gurus unanimously opine that this is not so. Instead they insist that it is nothing but the music of the Carnatic style that is adapted to suit the needs of the Kuchipudi grammar and vocabulary. A few commonly followed mores may be observed as follows.

The concept of "aadi Nata- antya suratti" is frequently followed in Kuchipudi dance drama traditions. The usage of the "Saaki" is also used cleverly to build anticipation with respect to some characters, especially demoniac rulers. One cannot but notice the bright start offered by the ever popular invocation "Amba Paraaku". One notices the frequent use of major Ragas like kambhoji, Todi, Sankarabharanam, Mohana, Anandabhairavi etc. Other ragas such as Khamas, Mukhari, Harikambhoji, Hamsadhwani, Bilahari, Athana etc are used often too.

Being a primarily dramatic tradition, utmost care is taken to ensure that the ragas suit the characters that they are used on. For instance, Pravesha Daruvus of Rajasic characters like Bali, Banasura etc are set in ragas like Purvi Kalyani, Saveri etc. Heroines usually enter in auspicious ragas like Kambhoji and Bhairavi. The entry of Bhami in Bhairavi is all too well known to warrant another mention. Sombre ragas like Aahiri, Ghanta, punnagavarali, Mukhari etc are used in the Viraha sequences.

A peculiar aspect of the musical side of the Kuchipudi Yakshagana is that certain liberties are taken with phrases within a raga. For example, the phrase “da ni sa” is used in the Kamboji raga, whereas the Kambhoji raga is said to have only “pa da sa” in the arohana krama. Such liberties are taken with other ragas such as Aahiri also. This habit of taking melodic liberties with the sancharas of a raga is one shared by the Kuchipudi practitioners with the Bhagavatas of the Melattur Sampradaya.

Talam, Gati& Kaala Pramaanam:

It is widely known that the commonly used talas such as Adi, Rupaka, Khanda Chapu, Msishra Chapu etc are frequently used in Kuchipudi. However, one sees specific portions of the dance in many Kuchipudi Yakshagana performances presented in specific tempos or tAlams. For instance, the miming of the making of the muggu at the start of the performance is done in khanda gati. The raising of the flag is done in the time signature of Mishra gati. The ever so popular tandava nrtya kari in praise of ganesha is in Adi Talam. By and large the kala pramanam of the repertoire of Kuchipudi as we know it in general is somewhere between the madhyama and Durita . The Vilamba kalam in its purest form is seldom used for long.

Apart from these, one notices that some Daruvus are rendered in the dwi-gati format, ie: the gati changes back and forth from Chatusra to Tisra. Prof Nataraja Ramakrishna was of the opinion that this was done to attract the attention of the audiences and maintain the tempo of the piece. Other techniques such as the use of the ettu jati and muktayimpu jati at the start and finish of the entrance passage, using of the ardhi are used for enhanced aesthetic and musical experiences.

Kalapramanam in Bharatanatyam:

By and large, the Kalapramanam in Bharatanatyam is either Vilamba or Madhyama. The Vilamba kaalam and the Ati vilamba kalam are seldom used. However, this trend is also changing gradually. In the newest productions of Bharatanatyam dance, one does notice nrmta sequences in break neck speeds and extraordinarily speedy jatis. This is however a recent trend and is not accepted by many old schoolers.

Performative Techniques of Bharatanatyam:

While it is impossible to compare and contrast the steps or the performative techniques of Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi literally step to step, one can attempt to broadly and roughly do so. A bird's eye view of the two reveals that the footwork of Bharatanatyam is precise and grounded. The steps are executed in the firmest possible manner and the arms are used in a linear fashion. The lines are sharp.

Performative Techniques of Kuchipudi:

Before entering the nitty gritty of the performative techniques of Kuchipudi, or any other style for that matter, one must spare a thought for the antecedents of the style. That would shine a light on the "whys" and "hows" of many aspects of the art form. In today's Kuchipudi, though we see many non-drama related solo pieces, the reminiscence of the dramatic past of Kuchipudi is clearly seen, felt and experienced. It is almost like an unmistakable stamp of the dance form. This is perhaps why dramatic

aspects such as prose sequences are still retained in many pieces of the Kuchipudi repertoire.

In the early days, since Kuchipudi dance dramas were performed in front of rustic audiences in open spaces, the movements were also designed in a way that afforded the dancers sufficient scope to move around during the dance and grab and retain the attention of every member of the audience. Though this need may or may not stand today, the dance technique of Kuchipudi still emanates from the same ethos.

Bharatanatyam Vs Melattur Bhagavata Mela:

Introduction:

Today, both Bharatanatyam and Melattur Bhagavata Mela belong to the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu. While the Tanjore court is believed to have been the cradle that nurtured modern Bharatanatyam, Melattur bhagavata mela has been reared and developed in the small village of Melattur. However, neither of these traditions can claim to be bereft of any outside influences. Both have been influenced by a plethora of factors over centuries and still continue to be influenced by many contemporary influences.

A comparative study between the music of Melattur Bhagavata mela and that of Bharatanatyam needs to be carried out with great care and caution. One needs to observe and study these two ancient traditions with a hawk eye and with a penchant for intricacies. One also ought not confuse the Melattur Bhagavata Mela with the Melattur baani or style of Bharatanatyam. While the former is a religious and

ritualistic dance drama style that has been created in full accordance with the precepts of the Natyasastra, the latter is a later day branch of Bharatanatyam that was propagated by Shri Mangudi Dorairaja Iyer.

Music of Melattur Bhagavata Mela:

The Melattur Bhagavata mela is known for its rich and grand music. Being an age-old tradition and one that eschews much change, the music is quite old schools and changes if any are minor and slow to be absorbed. It follows all rules of Carnatic music. Melattur Venkatarama Sastry, the architect of the Natakams was a stickler for protocol and followed all the old rules of composition including the Kala theory.

Language of the Melattur Bhagavata Mela:

Linguistically speaking, Melattur Bhagavata Mela is poised in a rather strange way. It is a Telugu treasure in the Tamil country. Though this may seem odd today, this is not a one-off case in medieval India. We have several examples of Telugu composers who lived in Tamil Nadu. Formidable composers like Sree Tyagaraja and Syama Sastri's works are in Telugu and Sanskrit, but they were born and lived in the Kaveri delta. Thus, the fact the Melattur Venkatarama sastry composed his natakams in Telugu is not very surprising. Of additional interest is the fact that Sastry lived during the times of the Maratha kings Serfoji (1800-1832) and Shivaji (1832-1855); and was a great Sanskrit scholar. Today, most performers of the Melattur Bhagavata mela are not fluent speakers of Telugu but manage to render, with remarkable felicity lengthy dialogues in extraordinarily chaste telugu.

Musical ensemble of the Bhagavata Mela:

The mela performances use the usual traditional orchestra, viz: vocal, violin, flute, mrdangam etc. However, one ought to remember that the Mela performances are considered to be an act of worship and are thus governed by the strict rules of gender and caste. The ensemble is an all-male and all the artists belong to the brahmin community. In the recent times, certain other kinds of drums (other than the mrdangam) are being used for specific natakams. In case the players of said drums happen to not hail from the brahmin community, they are not seated on the stage along with the other singers. They are seated in a designated spot in front of the stage.

Since all the natakams are considered to be acts of piety, the members of the musical ensemble are honoured in a quasi-Vedic manner at the start of the recital with sandal paste and garlands. Similarly, parents of young lads sometimes make pledges to make their sons dance the opening invocation in praise of Ganesha. Once the sons perform this dance, the religious offering is considered complete. Such is the religious fervour of the mela.

Since the natakams are long in duration and therefore strenuous for all the artists, it is customary to have more than one vocalist for the performances. Since the natakams are soaked in tradition and antiquity, the musicians for the natakams seldom change and artists who are familiar with the spoken and unspoken rules of the Natakam are engaged. Thus, it is common to see the same bhagavata artists on stage year after year.

Jatis of the Bhagavata Mela:

Venkatarama Sastry himself appended some Darus with appropriate Jatis. The jatis are usually two or four avartanas in length. The usual talas of Aadi, rupaka, Mishra Chapu etc are used. Gati Bhedas are also seen at appropriate junctures. P Sunil Kothari writes that Thanjai Shri Kitappa Pillai composed a set of jatis for the Melattur Bhagavata Mela and christened them as the “Melattur Jatis”

Musical forms used in the Bhagavata Mela Natakams:

Todayamangalam:

Beginning with the words Jaya Janaki Ramana Jaya Vibheeshana Sharana in Raga Nattai, the Todayamangalam is a Raga Tala Malika in which the essence of Vaishnava Sampradaya , which is Nama Sankeertana or the repeated chanting of names of the Lord is done.

Shabdham:

The Prahlada Pattabhisheka Sabdam is a unique gem of the Bhagavata mela tradition. Though many sabdams are presented in Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi, this shabdham is special in that it briefly outlines the whole story of the Natakam in a brief, yet evocative manner. This Shabdham is long and narrative unlike its Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi counterparts.

Darus:

Very many types of darus are used in the Mela Natakams. In many ways, they are similar to Krtis and give ample scope for exhaustive treatment. All of these are in full accordance with the Natyasastra. Pravesha Daru, SamvAda Daru (also called Uttara-pratyuttara Daru), SvAgata Daru all are used to carry forward the story and stabilise the scene. In certain places, “chindu” is interspersed into the Daru too.

Most of the darus are composed in Adi tala or In Chaapu talas. Some are in Jhumpe and Roopaka Talam too. Chaapu is a syncopated time measure and thus very suitable for dance. The use of chaapu talam creates a harmonious and free flow of melody and rhythm. The darus are embellished with a “mukha” and “antya” or start and end jatis in the time signature in which the daru is set.

Tarangams:

Interestingly Tarangams are seen both in Kuchipudi and in Bhagavata Mela. It is known that the basic intention of both Kuchipudi and Melatur Bhagavata Mela was to propagate devotion and piety amongst the masses, hence these 17th century bhakti compositions find a place in both these dancing traditions.

Other forms such as Daru tillanas, Kautuvam, Jakkini Daruvu Vachanam, Padyam, Choornika, Dwipada, KandArtha, Sandhi vachanam, sArdUlam,

Pada Varnam, Seesam etc are used generously based on the requirement of the particular scene.

Ragas used in Bhagavata Mela:

The choice of ragas used in the Mela performances are all products of the genius of Venkatarama Sastry. He has used many apoorva Ragas too. Most ragas are what one would call “Rakti ragas”. Ragas that many musicians dither to approach have been easily handled by Sastry. Examples include Ghanta, Aahiri, Punthagavarali, Malahari, Neelambari etc. However, as with the Kuchipudi tradition, it is customary for the Melattur Bhagavatas to use some sancharas that are not usually found in these ragas.

Compare And Contrast:

The above paragraphs list out the technical and factual details about the various aspects of Melattur bhagavata Mela’s music. However, the critical question as to how the music of Bharatanatyam and the music of the Mela are actually similar and dissimilar still remains unanswered. This ought to be answered in a qualitative manner. It is however a rather complex question to address. It is known that the Melattur Bhagavata Mela tradition does not have its own dance vocabulary. It borrows most of its adavus from Bharatanatyam. As a dramatic genre that belongs to the Yakshagana tradition, it also leans heavily on its theatrical cousins such as Kuchipudi, Terukkootu etc.

Histrionic and dramatic elements are in accordance with the tenets of the Natyasastra. So, this brings us to the most critical question- When the form itself uses the movements of Bharatanatyam and uses the same musical tradition (Carnatic music), how is it possible for its music to be “different” from that of Bharatanatyam? While a simplistic approach to this question would only yield a single word answer, one ought to critique this matter from a more subtle, layered, textured and multi dimensioned prism. Only this would shine light on the entire matter.

Firstly, the context, content of Bharatanatyam is completely at variance with that of Bhagavata Mela. Bharatanatyam was conceived as a solo form and designed for the female body; something that was completely the other way around in the Bhagavata Mela. Bharatanatyam, though believed to have divine origins, did in fact mould itself into the dance form of the hand maidens of God, who were in lay terms known to common folks as courtesans.

Hence, though at some point Bharatanatyam moved from the temples to the court and from there to the parlour, it was and still is quite an elitist form. It was and is not designed to entertain the common man or the simplest folks. It is for a rather niche audience and thus does not take steps to package itself as a “simple” or down to earth art. Hence, the music of Bharatanatyam also sits on a high pedestal. There has not been much need to “simplify” the music or any aspect of the dance in an orchestrated effort to make it accessible to the masses.

Bhagavata Mela on the other hand was designed as a ritualistic performance that could at once propitiate the Gods and elevate the masses at the same time. It had

twin purposes that were quite literally at the two opposing ends of the spectrum. It was not an art form meant for entertainment of the elite few. Even when topics like Valli Tirumanam (the marriage of Valli) are taken up, one hardly sees a shringara aspect in all its sensuality and eroticism. Thus, one could say that the Mela performances hang by a delicate thread; balancing at once its unshakeable commitment to tradition and its awareness of the need to reach out to the lay masses.

One wonders why an art form that wished to connect with lay folks would use weighty ragas like Aahiri, Ghanta, Mukhari etc. The rationale behind this perhaps lies in the fact that the audience in the time of Venkatarama Sastry was hardly like that of today. They were perhaps tuned to and welcoming of such ragas too. More pertinently, one must observe that the mela Natakams follow the tenets of the Natyasastra to the T.

The rasa and kala theories are fully adhered to. Hence, whichever raga is used, since it is in sync with the scene being enacted on stage and the rasa being created therein. Hence the weightiness or lack thereof is not of much significance. The music matches the dance, which in turn matches the mood and thus all together reach the audience as a single, composite, consolidated and comprehensive experience. The modes of music delivery in the Mela performances are significantly different from that of Bharatanatyam. The kala pramanam is brisk and the renditions are bold, loud and dramatic. Though all musical nuances and details are in place, one does not find much emphasis being given to the niceties, subtleties and graces in presentation. The rendition is raw and earthy, rustic and real. The fact that both groups (dancers and

musicians) are all male, does indeed reduce the scope for much feminine grace in the rendition of music.

The lack of sound amplification in the earlier days also must have been a cause for the seemingly unrefined style of high-pitched vocal renditions. An all-night performance in open Pandal opposite a temple with a group of rustic folk watching the performance is bound to make the musicians in the troupe give it their all to make the recital “reach”. It is thus, no surprise that a certain amount of rusticity has indeed crept into the music of the Melattur Bhagavata Mela.

The kala pramanam oscillates from the vilamba to the ati durita. However, one observes a frequent drop in the kala pramanam owing to the smattering of long dialogues and padyams every now and then. As a geya natakam format, it is not surprising that these passages are present. However, these do lead to the frequent ebb and flow of the kala pramaanam. When one assesses the qualitative aspects of any piece of art, one does so from three primary perspectives, viz: Content, intent and delivery. One cannot deny that the Melattur Bhagavata Mela is unique in all these three aspects. The content is religious, chaste and unaltered. The intent is to elevate and titillate by none. The delivery is earthy, down to earth, real and raw.

These factors give the music of the Mela also a rather peculiar and inimitable hue. It is like burnished gold; wherein the sheen if any is extremely subtle and not apparent. The nuances and intricacies of all the ragas chosen are very much in place, but one can find no kind of gimmickry in an attempt to decorate and embellish the

music. In that sense, it appears as though it is a true offering to the Almighty, honest and real; unvarnished and bare.

The disinclination of the Mela Bhagavatars to change the content of their dramas, but instead to practice and perfect them with each passing year shows their commitment to their craft and their belief in their content. No matter what the latest trend in the field is, the Mela seems to be impervious and oblivious to them. They exist in their own utopian oasis- a sublime hub of all things antique and ethnic in a fast-changing world of contrasting views and bustling novelty.

The music of Bharatanatyam Vs that of Mohiniyattam

The first and most striking aspect of Mohiniyattam that grabs the attention of any viewer, whether lay or otherwise is the swaying and gentle movements. When the movements are thus, it is but obvious that the music must also reflect these ideals. As with the earlier study, if one must be in a position to critique the music Mohiniyattam against that of Bharatanatyam measure for measure, a thorough understanding of the key aspects of Mohiniyattam, such as its antecedents, its journey, the innovations in the field, its music so on and so forth is essential.

Antecedents Of Mohiniyattam:

That Mohiniyattam's movement vocabulary is said to be inspired by the green environs of Kerala is an oft-repeated statement. That this dance form is said to have originated from the dance of Sree Maha Vishnu, in his Mohini Avatara is also widely

believed. Legend and presumptions apart, it is known that the kings of the ivory throne- the Travancore Maharajas (notably Swati Tirunal and Kartika Tirunal) played a vital role in shaping Mohiniyattam is well documented.

There are two primary opinions pertaining to the origin of Mohiniyattam. One, which is held by dance scholar Nirmala Panikkar is that it was the dance form of Kerala dasi, i.e the devadasi women of Kerala. Theatre artist and scholar holds a divergent view according to which it was developed from the other pre-existing dance forms of Kerala such as Kaikottukali¹¹², Nangaiyar Koothu etc.

Writings such the Vyavaharamala of 1709 and later day writings such as Ghoshayatra mention Mohiniyattam. Thus, one knows that a dance form by name Mohiniyattam was in vogue as early as the 1700s. The structure that we see today was obviously not in practice at that time.

The history of Mohiniyattam before the establishment of the Kerala Kalamandalam is easily traceable in a properly documented form. However, the post Kalamandalam phases is well documented. This period is also a busy time for Mohiniyattam, as many additions, deletions and changes were made to the style, repertoire and technique of Mohiniyattam in these decades.

The existence of Devadasi women in the temple has been a hotly debated topic. Articles like Devadasigal illatha Keralam (Soman) and “The Mohiniyattam”

¹¹²Dance form where women hold hands, clap their palms and dance

have vehemently denied the existence of this tradition. Be that as it may, while it may or may not be true that a dasi tradition existed in the temples, there certainly were groups of people who were engaged in temple related duties and chores. While some cleaned the articles of worship, some were engaged in singing of Ashtapadis. This view is seconded by the European traveller Buchannan (1807)

At the other end of the spectrum, we have Kalyani Kutti Amma, who insists that there was indeed a thriving devadasi community in the temples of Kerala. She records her views in the text, “Mohiniyattam: Charitravum Aattaprakaravum”. The basis for her views are the Manipravalam texts and the general existence of the Dasi culture in many temples across the country. Whether or not Mohiniyattam is a relic of the Devadasi culture of ancient Kerala, one thing that ought not to be ignored that the concept of dancing girls in temples was not viewed with disdain in ancient India. It was only in the past couple of centuries that Victorian prudery and the unethical behaviour of certain powerful groups of people lead to the fall in esteem of the Devadasi community.

Whatever may be the antecedents of Mohiniyattam, what one can say for sure is that the style itself has influences of other local dance forms such as Kaikottukali/Tiruvaadirakali etc. A large part of the Mohiniyattam repertoire as known to us today goes back to the Travancore courts of Maharaja Swati Tirunal. The texts of Kalyani Kutti Ammal refer to a letter written by the king to Meenachil Karta, a local chieftain requesting the latter to send some competent Mohiniyattam dancers to the royal court. The court records of 1815 (during the regency of Rani Parvati

Bayee) also show that salaries and allowances were paid for the maintenance of court dancers.

From a literary and musical perspective too, the ivory throne was known to be supportive. Iraiman Thampi¹¹³, the uncle of Swati Tirunal was also the poet Laurette. He was known to be a prolific composer of Padams and other songs.

Sopana Sangeetam Or Carnatic Music-The Big Debate

Kerala has the unique privilege of being home to two well-formed disciplines of music, viz: Carnatic music and Sopana Sangeetam. While the former is a widespread art form that is practiced all over South India and has spread its wings globally, the latter is a fairly niche art form that is more or less exclusive to Kerala. The question as to whether the regular system of Carnatic music is more suitable for Mohiniyattam or the homegrown style of Sopana is more apt has been an ongoing debate for decades now.

By the 1970s, as Mohiniyattam started to get popular outside Kerala, the buzz surrounding the proposed use of Sopana Sangeetam also gained momentum. The prime advocate for this cause was Kavalam Narayana Panicker. He was of the view that the music of Mohiniyattam that was a bequest from the Travancore courts (especially that of Maharaja Swati Tirunal) was not the most apt choice for Mohiniyattam. He was of the view that the indigenous Sopana Sangeeta was a more natural fit for the dance of Mohiniyattam. His rationale was that this would also give Mohiniyattam an exclusive identity. Since Carnatic music was already being used by

¹¹³Composer of the evergreen lullaby Omana Thingal

other performative art forms such as Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Melattur Bhagavata Mela etc., he was of the view that utilising Sopana Sangeetam for Mohiniyattam would give it a special and unique flavour; one that would become its distinct identity over time.

Though all practitioners of Mohiniyattam did not immediately accept this idea, some dancers outside of Kerala were surprisingly open to the thought. Early supporters included Dr Kanak Rele and Smt. Bharati Shivaji who not only welcomed the idea but also created alternate movements that would suit the cadences of Sopana music. It was their opinion that the way gamakas¹¹⁴ are executed in the Sopana structure was more apposite to the Mohiniyattam movement vocabulary. Sopana has a peculiar undulating manner of Gamaka singing and some senior dancers such as Dr Rele and Smt Bharati Shivaji were convinced that this mirrors the movements of Mohiniyattam in a very intimate manner.

As is widely known, music and movement motivate each other. Thus, the interaction and interplay between Sopana music and these newly evolving movement patterns resulted in an almost alternate repertoire for Mohiniyattam. Whether or not this newly evolving repertoire was an “alternate” repertoire or not, it certainly did help in broadening the vistas of Mohiniyattam dancing and brought in plenty of new ideas into the dance. Additions that thus made their entry include Padam, Mukhachalam, Niram etc.

¹¹⁴Musical oscillations

The piece “Niram” is an elaborate and important one in the Sopana branch. The word Niram itself means colour. Just as if the name “Varnam” in Bharatanatyam indicates a long and colourful piece, the niram too similarly has multiple hues. A figure of the Goddess Kali is drawn on the floor using five different coloured powders. These depict her key qualities and their contrasting nature. Speaking of the Bharatanatyam idiom T Balasaraswati one remarked that the Pada Varnam could be compared to the devotee’s attainment of the great and grand sanctum sanctorum. The same could be said of the piece “Niram” too.

Though the idea of using Sopanam for Mohiniyattam was slow to garner acceptance, it did gain momentum with time. Today, dancers from many schools including Methil Devika, Pallavi Krishnan, Kalamandalam Sugandhi etc use it. However, since it is high on the emotion quotient and its rendition is bhaava laden, it is believed to compliment Mohiniyattam perfectly well.

Another view held by the advocates of Sopana Sangeetam, including Gireesan, singer for Dr Rele is that the *vaythaa*ris (vocal rendition of the syllables in rhythmic patterns) of the Maddalam, chenda, and edakka are in perfect sync with the Gamakas of Sopana sangeeta. It is widely known that the literal meaning of “Sopanam” is a path or a journey. Thus, the structure of the Sopana style repertoire is also systematically structured. This is something we see in Bharatanatyam as well, ie in the form of the maargam. In the sopana structure, the opening number is the thyaani on Genesha; akin to the Kotipadi seva performed on the temple steps. It is performed to the accompaniment of the edakka and marks the beginning of the journey into the main shrine.

Another key piece in the Sopana pattern is the Mukhachalam, a pure dance or nrtta piece. These are usually built on a string of talas. The rhythmic pace of this piece builds anticipation and simulates the ascent of the pious dancer closer to the shrine. Eminent Mohiniyattam dancer Bharati Shivaji also worked on the idea of presenting Ashtapadis, which were sung in the Sopana style. While the singing of Ashtapadis in temples is not a novelty in Kerala (Ashtapadis are regularly rendered in the Guruvayur Temple), the singing and dancing of the ashtapadis in the Sopana style is certainly an important and unique step for dancers.

One also sees the “Jeeva”, that symbolises the union of the self with the supreme. The pace builds up from the ati vilamba to the durita, thus building anticipation and enthusiasm. Another piece that deserves mention in the Sopana style is the Mohini Purappadu, based on a 12th century poem by Damodar Chakyar, which details the story of Mohini enticing the asuras with her enchanting beauty. The name of this piece itself makes it amply clear that it matches the style of Mohiniyattam dancing with remarkable ease.

Later day creations based on the initial impetus provided by Kavalam Panicker include Chandrotsavam (based on a 16th century work), Geeta Govinda, which uses all the ashtapadis of Jayadeva and Towryatrikam (an amalgamation of song, dance and instrumentation). Other elements of the Sopana repertoire of Mohiniyattam include Padams of Maharaja Swati Tirunal, krtis from Manipravala literature, pieces from sangam poetry and ballads from the North Malabar area. Poems of Iraiyan Thampi, his lullabies and works of his daughter Kutti Kunju Thankachi, come together to give this form a large and colourful repertoire.

Despite the extensive work done by many dancers to transition the music of Mohiniyattam to Sopana Sangeetam, there are still many votaries of retaining Carnatic music as the music of Mohiniyattam. In the words of dancer Neena Prasad, “If Mohiniyattam is not to be branded as a regional dance form, its music should be systematised and diverse. The structure of Carnatic music fulfils these twin objectives. When it comes to the Varnam in Mohiniyattam, the framework of Carnatic music assures enough space for the vocalist to improvise in the first half, while in the latter half, he/she can close in on the *nayika-bhavas*.”

Her opinions are shared by C Madhavan Namboodiri, an eminent dance vocalist. He believes that Carnatic music is a suitable choice for Mohiniyattam dance. His belief is that Carnatic music may be used for Mohiniyattam, albeit with some changes in the method of executing elements like Neraval, brghas etc. He opines that as long as care and caution are exercised in these aspects, there is no need to discard Carnatic music in favour of Sopana Sangeetam. However, given the generally vilamba tempo of Sopana, its regular use does indeed put the dance into risk of turning tedious.

Nevertheless, after prolonged debates as to whether Sopana or regular Carnatic music must be used for Mohiniyattam, today the need of the hour seems to be discretion and aesthetic choices on the part of dancers and their musicians. Methil Devika, a supporter of Sopana opines that a blend of Carnatic music and the Desi tradition of Sopana helps retain the indigenous fragrance of Mohiniyattam. She uses a combination of the Edakka, Maddalam and Mizhavu to attain this fine balance.

Instruments of the Mohiniyattam Ensemble:

The musical ensemble comprises of the Nattuvan, a couple of singers and other instrumentalists. Instruments such as the Toppi Maddalam (a kind of drum), Mukhaveena, Titti (a bagpipe kind of drone instrument, which is hardly seen today) and Kurunkuzhal (a double reed instrument) are frequently used. On occasion, the mrdangam is used too. The nattuvan uses the kuzhitalam or a small pair of hand-held cymbals. In the pre Kalamandalam era, the Nattuvan used to follow the dancer around the stage as she danced.

This practice was changed and nowadays, the entire ensemble is seated on the right-hand side of the stage. Today, we seldom see the old remnants of the ensemble such as the pettikkaaran and the bhandakaarans, both of whom helped carry around the costumes and other belongings.

Technique of Mohiniyattam:

It is well known that Mohiniyattam is characterised by serpentine side bends, lateral bending of the torso and soft footsteps. It is an essentially feminine, lasya inspired style with a delicate blend of graceful, soft, calm and gentle movements. The footwork is delicate, yet strong; controlled and never terse. While the upper body

appears soft and lady like plenty of work happens in the core of the dancer. If one were to view the dance form from the point of view of dance treatises, one could say that Mohiniyattam follows the “Kaisika Vritti” of the natyasastra. The Tandava aspect is heavily underplayed and the lasya side is highlighted in every possible manner. The circular or spiral movement of all the limbs is an unmistakable hallmark of Mohiniyattam. The arms move within a limited circumference in close proximity to the body. This pendulum style swaying or “aandolika” resembles the sway of the paddy crop, the coconut trees and abundance of nature that is seen in Kerala.

The adavus contain a mild bobbing and the dancer alternates between aramandalam and kalmandalam positions. The knees are not straightened fully during the execution of certain teermanam adavus. The neck is held fairly loose and mirrors the movements of the rest of the angas. Many Mohiniyattam moves resemble those of Nangaiyar Kootu, kai kottu kali and thiruvathira Kali. In the basic posture, the feet are kept parted¹¹⁵ and knees are bent

outwards. The torso is erect. A gentle sideward sway of the hips is permitted, but it is extremely controlled. The relaxed pace of the dance is easy on the eye, but actually a great challenge to execute with finesse. The footwork is perfectly coordinated with the beats of the music. High jumps, leaps and heavy swaying of hips is firmly avoided. The style is challenging, but never athletic.

¹¹⁵ About two inches

In terms of abhinaya, one sees a delicate blend of Natyadharmi and Lokadharmi. The abhinaya is realistic, but not colloquial or crude. It is stylised and symbolic. Over realistic and distasteful gestures are completely avoided. As with all other traditional dance forms, the adavus and the mudras are the twin edifices upon which the dance is built. The basic units of the dance are known as “adavugal” in the Mohiniyattam style. (This nomenclature is shared with Bharatanatyam, wherein also the basic units are called adavugal).

The adavu groups are divided into categories such as Jaganam, Taganam, Dhaganam etc. This classification was made by Kalamandalam Kalyani Kutti Amma in the 20th century. The mudras used in Mohiniyattam are based on the HastalakshanaDeepika and aid in explaining and performing concepts and ideas enshrined in the song. Apart from the general mudras that are common to Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Melattur bhagavata Mela, Odissi etc, Mohiniyattam has a few special and unique hastas to call its own.

One might wonder what the need to examine the technique of the dance form in such detail is, when the intention of this study is to study the musical aspects of the dance. However, it is pertinent to note that no study in the music of dance can ever be complete without a study of the dance itself. Dance is nothing but the music of the body and music is nothing but a dance of the notes and thus, they are nothing but two sides of the same coin. No dance can ever be considered wholesome or complete without being viewed in conjunction with its music and vice versa. When it comes to dance music, every note that is heard from the musical ensemble has its equivalent move in dance and every step of the dance has its audio reflection in the music. While

it may not be practically possible to dissect and display each movement with its corresponding note or its matching brgha, gamaka, sorkattus or sanchara, it can be stated beyond all reasonable doubt that for each movement exists an equal and corresponding response from the musical side.

Dance is nothing but a response to a specific sound. In the Indian context we use the term “Dhwani”. Dhwani is not any meaningless or unesthetic sound, but one with a certain timbre, motive and measure to it. When this dhwani meets its match in the form of a corresponding movement, an aesthetic piece of art is born. The ideas of rasotpatti and sahrdayatvam (meeting of minds between the performer and the audience) is thus executed through this subtle yet perfect matching of music and movement. It is in this regard that the examination and understanding of dance as a result of the music and the music as the motivator of dance becomes pertinent.

Repertoire of Mohiniyattam:

A typical Mohiniyattam performance has a string of usual pieces such as Cholkattu, Jatiswaram, Varnam, Padam, Tillana, Slokam, and Saptam. Apart from these, a large body of work has been handed down as a bequest from Maharaja Swati Tirunal who not only composed many pieces, but also commissioned plenty of work. He also gave his support to many poets, musicians and vaggeyakaras whose creative output created a large corpus of pieces for the Mohiniyattam repertoire.

In the later part of the 20th century, Kalyani Kutti Amma composed a large number of Tillanas, slokas and padams in Sanskrit and Malayalam. She

also made bold to shed the limits of shrngara and embrace other themes, thus widening the scope of abhinaya in Mohiniyattam. The solkattu is an invocation that starts as an offering to Bhagavati and culminates with a prayer to Siva. The jatiswaram with pure dance and no lyrics is a nrtta piece that is presented subsequently. Other pieces like Varnam, Padam, Tillana etc come together to bring in a balance of nrtta and abhinaya.

In general mainstream ragas such as Shankarabharanam, varali, todi, Bhairavi, Kalyani etc are used in the dance of Mohiniyattam. Being ragas with scope for various types of sancharas and ample improvisation, the music is able to maintain its variety even in long and slow pieces. Manipravalam Texts, which are an amalgam of Sanskrit, Tamil and Malayalam for the basis of the lion's share of the Mohiniyattam repertoire.

Baanis in Mohiniyattam:

The period after the establishment of the Kerala Kalamandalam turned out to be a vibrant era for Mohiniyattam. Just like the Kalakshetra at Chennai made many modifications to Bharatanatyam, Kerala Kalamandalam turned the flow of the dance to a new direction. About eighty years after the advent of this institution, one began to see four distinct baanis or streams of Mohiniyattam. Multiple processes of creative evolution, deliberation, teaching and communication gradually led to the establishment of these baanis. A string of successful performers gradually gave shape, form and a voice to each of these baanis. Thus, came into being the styles of Kalamandalam, Kalyani kutti amma, Dr Kanak Rele and Bharati Shivaji.

Dr Neena Prasad penned an article called “*Traditions in Mohiniyattam- a closer look*”. In this she detailed the differences between these four styles. Since this is beyond the ambit of this study, these shall not be delved into here. However, since study concerns itself with the musical aspects of dance, it is appropriate to briefly evaluate the differences in the four styles from the point of view of music. In this regard, one can say that the styles of Dr Kanak Rele and that of Smt Bharati Shivaji lean more towards Sopana Sangeetam. The music of Mohiniyattam as practiced in kalamandalam seems more Carnatic music centric.

Compare & Contrast:

Comparing and contrasting the music of Mohiniyattam with that of Bharatanatyam is a challenging but interesting task. While one is the dance of the handmaiden of God, the other is the dance of the enchantress. Hence, in one way, it can be said that both dance forms share a common thread. However, when viewed from the prism of practicality, one sees many contrasting factors. Bharatanatyam is a linear form- crisp and taut with little room for rounded, curvy and swaying movements. The remnants of softness in the movements also seem to be a fast-vanishing feature of Bharatanatyam; what with dancers opting for extraordinarily fast nrta passages, breakneck speed jatis and lightning paced adavus.

In an attempt to appeal to the modern eye which is used to athletic and immensely complicated dancing, the average Bharatanatyam dancer is now rapidly changing the overall “look and feel” of the idiom. We now see more group productions and the

maargam is taking a backseat. Traditional items are making way for secular and sometimes unheard-of themes. While so much is happening on the dance side, it is but obvious that the music of Bharatantayam is changing rapidly too. As observed by senior dancer Ms. Leela Samson, the general kala pramanam of the music has shifted from vilamba- madhyama to madhyama- durita. One also observes that the sollus (syllables) used in jatis have shifted from those from the dance vocabulary to those from the mrdangam repository. Sangati renditions are also more brgha laden and neraval singing happens often.

On the other hand, Mohiniyattam seems to be an oasis of antiquity in an otherwise fast changing world. Though plenty of changes are taking over the world of Mohiniyattam too, there certainly seems to be a conscious effort to maintain the original and indigenous flavour of the dance form. Though new themes and ideas are being experimented with and implemented frequently, the overall texture and appearance of the dance form and its music is being retained. Changes if any seem to be slow and organic. Apart from the major divide pertaining to the suitability of Carnatic music over Sopana Sangeeta or the converse, one sees a general intention to stick on the tradition as passed down over the past century. Though the debate to bring in Sopana Sangeeta was a serious one, in many ways it was still a choice to be made between the old order and the older order and not a bid to discard the old in favour of the new. The use of traditional instruments like the Maddalam and Edakka also ensure that the music of Mohiniyattam retains its old-world charm. The physical structure of these instruments also ensures that the patterns or Kanakkus played on them match the traditional methods of musical rendition. Thus even “non-Keralite”

pieces like the ashtapadis of Jayadeva have a unique and local flavour to them when performed.

In a scenario as fast changing as the current one, it is not surprising that the Mohiniyattam dance and its music are also changing and expanding. Hence it is not uncommon to see Hindi Bhajans, Sanskrit shlokas, secular themes etc being brought into the fold. However even this cannot be called as a complete departure from tradition, considering the fact that the milieu in the land of Malayalam has always been a composite one with social awareness and familiarity with languages including Sanskrit and Tamizh.

Conclusion:

South India is a melting pot of diverse cultures and traditions. Though the three performative traditions examined in this chapter belong to provinces that are quite close to each other in geographical terms, there is much more to them than what meets the eye. Each of these art forms have their own distinctive geo political and socio-economic identities. Gender and the politics of it also play major roles in shaping the present and future of these art form.

Whatever may be the similarities and dissimilarities between these performing traditions, the fact is that each one is unique in itself. All efforts must be taken to preserve the uniqueness of these disciplines. At the same time, it is not healthy for any artistic form to stagnate. Preserving the art form does not mean pickling it and preventing change, growth and innovation. This would only lead to stagnation. The need of the hour is to sensitise students of art, educators, connoisseurs and critics on

the integrity of these forms and the speciality of their identities. Instead of indulging in any form of one-upmanship, the fraternity in general must bring itself to perceiving the music of every dance form for what it is, embrace it as it is and take it to its next logical milestone in its journey of growth and progress.

CHAPTER VI

Baanis of Bharatanatyam and their Musical Aspects

Bharatanatyam as a dance form has evolved over centuries. Over time, it has experienced changes in both style, substance and presentation too. Notwithstanding the fact that while the basic tenets of Bharatanatyam remain unchanged, it does assume a different sheen, when handled by different artists. Just as the vast waters of the ocean are called “Bay of Bengal” near Kolkata and the Indian Ocean in Kanyakumari, so too Bharatanatyam is known by various names or baanis¹¹⁶ in various places.

Baani is a traditional term used to describe the technique of dance and style specific to a guru or a region. Many baanis are named after the Gurus or institutions that pioneered them, while many others are named after the villages from where the gurus hailed. Many gurus came from villages like Kaattumannarkoil¹¹⁷, Vazhuvoor¹¹⁸, Pandanallur¹¹⁹ etc and worked in institutions such as Kalakshetra¹²⁰, Kalamandalam¹²¹ etc, thus giving their styles to these institutions. Hence the Kalakshetra baani may essentially be the Pandanallur baani, but with other auxiliary elements added to it.

¹¹⁶ Baani or baani means a style or a way. It is also known as vazhi or paddhati.

¹¹⁷ Kaattumannarkoil is a panchayat town and taluk headquarters in Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu

¹¹⁸ Vazhuvoor is a village in the Kutthalam taluk of Mayiladuthurai district of Tamil Nadu

¹¹⁹ Pandanallur is a village in the Tiruvudaimarudur taluk of Tanjavur district

¹²⁰ A Chennai based dance and cultural academy that is now synonymous with the Kalakshetra baani

¹²¹ A center of learning set up near Trissur by poet Vallathol Narayana Menon

Though every guru, teacher, musician and dancer has contributed to the evolution and progress of Bharatanatyam in their own way, some have left an indelible print on the form and thus created their own “baani”. Thus, sui generis baanis have been created (sometimes inadvertently) by pioneering gurus and has been handed down over generations.

In the context of Bharatanatyam, the word baani and school are often used interchangeably in common parlance. However, baani does not mean a “school” in the physical sense. It means a unique style or a way of performing.

What makes a baani?

Clear and distinctive features:

Marked stylistic touches or nuances help in making a style a distinct and separate one. For example, a tillana¹²² performed in the Kalakshetra baani will possess a certain way of projecting line and length, with an extraordinary firmness as seen in no other baani.

Myriad practitioners:

While mere numbers can never give strength to a baani, it certainly does help in establishing the pedagogy of the school or style. As Bharatanatyam is in many ways an oral tradition, a guru with multiple students and a baani with several practitioners naturally carve a niche for themselves and get etched in public memory. The lineage that one hails from and the values that one receives under the tutelage of their guru are clinching factors in determining the dancer’s progress and shaping his/her artistic

¹²² A brisk piece usually performed at the end of a recital

trajectory. A dancer may be exceptionally talented and the guru may be totally painstakingly meticulous in their efforts; but if the baani or the vazhi to which the dancer belongs is flawed, found to be wanting or lacks depth the artists evolution may well be chequered. The qualities that make each baani distinct from one another stem from the individualistic manner in which the dance and its alphabets (the adavus¹²³) are inter-woven together.

Moreover, it also relies on the specific ways in which the technical dimensions of the sastra¹²⁴ are interpreted and not divorced from the aesthetic principles, artistic ideals, and vision of the gurus who shape their baanis and direct their evolution. In the words of the leading exponent of the Pandanallur baani, Smt. Alarmel Valli:

In dance, each Baani is like a large and majestic Banyan tree. The gurus are the branches that send down many roots, so that the tree may grow and stay vital and vibrant

Bharatanatyam has about five main schools or baanis, such as the Pandanallur baani, the Vazhuvoor baani, Kalakshetra Baani. Mysore baani etc. The fountainhead for all these baanis is the all-important starting with the Tanjore baani. The study of any baani can be studied from several different angles. However, the critical points that need to be analysed, compared and contrasted are- its past/ antecedents, the techniques and finally the repertoire that makes up the baani. It is three elements that give, form, structure, continuity and originality to the baani.

¹²³Basic unit of dance. An abstract piece of movement

¹²⁴The science and theory of dance

Tanjore Baani:

Background:

Tanjore was the primordial seat of music and dance spanning several centuries. It was the cultural and political capital of South India for many years. Being the rice bowl of the region, with the bountiful Kaveri flowing nearby, this thriving area was prosperous enough to support art and culture effectively. Due to these factors, it is but obvious that this area was the cradle of culture; especially Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music.

The Tanjore Quartet Chinnaiah (1802-1856), Ponniah (1804-1864), Sivanandam (1808-1863) and Vadivelu (1810-1845) lived here and served mainly in the courts of the Serfoji II (1798-1832)¹²⁵. They were musicians par excellence and brought in definitive changes that codified and systematised the existing practices of dance. The abhyasa routine as well as the Sabha maargam that we see and follow today are gifts bequeathed to us by these four geni. The four brothers and their descendants married into families with similar backgrounds and professions (many a time their own cousins/ relatives) and thus became a force to reckon with respect to dasiaattam or sadir¹²⁶.

The Tanjore baani is in many ways the mother of all baanis¹²⁷. For example, though Pandanallur and Vazhuvoor baanis are known as separate baanis today, their

¹²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanjavur_Quartet

¹²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanjavur_Quartet

¹²⁷ <https://psbt.org/films/the-journey-from-sadir-to-bharatanatyam/>

genesis lies in the Tanjore baani and were created and nurtured by nattuvanars¹²⁸ who hailed from the Tanjore baani, but lived in other villages, such as Pandanallur, Vazhuvoor etc. This baani produced many singing and dancing stars including the legendary Veena Dhanammal¹²⁹ and T Balasaraswati

¹²⁸ Nattuvanars were the male gurus and teachers of dance. Many nattuvanars were singers and composers too.

¹²⁹ Veena Dhanammal (1867-1938) was a highly accomplished musician and veena artist.



Plate 6: Map Of Tamil Nadu

History:

While tracing the history of the Tanjore baani, a brief study of the role played by the Tanjore quartet in the creation and development of this baani is but imperative. Born into a traditional nattuvanar family, the quartet learnt music from Muttuswamy Dikshitar, one among the Carnatic music trinity. Hence, they were extremely adept in classical Carnatic music too. Their devotion towards their guru and their expertise in Carnatic music is evident in many of their compositions, including the Mayamalavagowla krti “Mayateeta swaroopini” in which Ponniah Pillai says “guruguha swami ki ne daasudaithi”¹³⁰, as an ode to his revered guru.

The quartet’s expertise in south Indian music made sure that the repertoire that they created for Bharatanatyam (known as sadir in those days) was entrenched and deeply rooted in Carnatic music. To this day this link remains firm and unbroken. The margam¹³¹ (configuration or sequence of items to be presented on stage) created by them started with the alarippu¹³² and ended with the tillana. This codification done by them gave a chiselled structure to sadir dance, which was appropriate and befitting for the concert platform. They also composed a vast number of alarippus, Jatiswarams¹³³, shabdams¹³⁴, pada varnams¹³⁵, keertanas¹³⁶ and tillanas, many of which occupy a pride of place in contemporary Bharatanatyam.

¹³⁰ I am a servant of Shri Dikshitar

¹³¹ A suite of items that typically constitutes Bharatanatyam recital.

¹³² Typically, the first item performed in a Bharatanatyam recital

¹³³ Typically, the second item performed in a maargam, it has swara passages.

¹³⁴ A simple item that has both expressive and abstract dance interwoven.

¹³⁵ The main item in a Bharatanatyam maargam. It is possibly the longest and most challenging piece in the maargam.

¹³⁶ Short songs with almost no nrta in them.

Though many aspects of Bharatanatyam pre date the quartet, they introduced modifications of matchless elegance and a high level of sophistication making the art form truly surreal and elevating. At the same time, they ensured that the maargam was also not placed in an ivory tower. It was designed in a way that made sure even the lay audiences could enjoy it. Dancer and scholar Dr Swarnamalya Ganesh states: “*the maargam created by the quartet was not the only one ever created and that other existed as early as the Nayak period*” ¹³⁷.

However, the maargam created by the quartet is now the best known one. Despite the innumerable changes that the dance itself has undergone; the pieces composed by the Tanjore quartet have never gone out of vogue. Such is their timeless brilliance. Most of the compositions of the quartet were based on the theme of shringara or madhura bhakti. This offered the dancers ample scope to display the charm of Bharatanatyam in all its splendour and variety. Many dancers and nattuvanars who hailed from the parampara of the Tanjore quartets went on to represent and adorn prestigious courts and kingdoms spanning across India, thus spreading the fragrance and flavour of the Tanjore baani far and wide.

Tanjore Kittappa Pillai (1913-1999)¹³⁸ was a descendant of the Tanjore quartet and perhaps the most well-known nattuvanar of the post-modern era. He was the son of Ponniah Pillai a great scholar and Nattuvanar himself. Though Shri Kitappa Pillai belonged to a Nattuvanar parampara, and was skilled at singing and the Mrdangam and possessed all the qualities required of a natyacharya, he faced stiff familial

¹³⁷ Stated by her in the Natya Kala Conference of 2018- Gondhali to Gujili

¹³⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K._P._Kittappa_Pillai

opposition when he chose to take up the tap-stick or thattukazhi and become a teacher of dance.

Technique:

The Tanjore baani treats dance like visual music. In fact, one can even say that the music precedes here. The relaxed pace makes it possible to execute adavus in a leisurely tempo involving a full body swing with curved movements that bring out the true charm of this baani. Kittappa Pillai had a unique method of composing jatis wherein the jatis are complex and precise but land easy. Musicality and expression shine through the sancharis¹³⁹ and have an inherent sparkle to them. They also possessed a unique “audio-visual” quality that perfectly match the movements that are composed, choreographed and taught to disciples.

The Natyacharyas of this baani believe that while Shastra and sampradaya must be strictly adhered to, all students must not be taught in an identical manner. Thus, alterations are made to the movements and each disciple is groomed in a manner that suits her/ his body language and emotional state of mind. This view was reiterated by Smt S Rajeswari who rendered vocal support to the ensemble of Shri Kitappa Pillai¹⁴⁰.

The rhythmic aspects and nuances of the song’s lyrics and words are given maximum importance. The belief is that each song has its own innate laya¹⁴¹ and that

¹³⁹Elaborate portrayals of a line or idea in the abhinaya segment.

¹⁴⁰Interview conducted by Smitha Madhav on 20.03.2022 at Chennai

¹⁴¹Rhythm

all embellishments and sorkattus¹⁴² must be strung together in a manner that honour *this* laya. The masters of this baani have had an impeccable sense of laya and the none of their kala pramanas¹⁴³ ever wavered. Kitappa Pillai for instance instinctively knew the perfect tempo for each song.¹⁴⁴ No jati (barring the opening jati of the pada varnam which was usually the trikala jati) is ever too long or too short. The jatis sparkle with catchy sorkattus and eschew any unnecessary complex mathematical embellishments.

Kitappa Pillai made ample use of the madhyama kala¹⁴⁵, thus making the dance equally delightful for both the dancer and the viewer. Sometimes, he used a phrase or two in the duritha kala¹⁴⁶ in an unexpected sequence, thus making it impactful and exhilarating. His sollus appeared to be having a beautiful dialogue with the adavu patterns. The jatis in the Tanjore baani are deceptively simple- when one hears them, they sounded soothing and easy to recite. But when one attempts to recite them along with tala, the true complexities of the composition unfold themselves¹⁴⁷. He believed that the beauty of dancing should be both seen and heard. Thus, he was considered the quintessential complete nattuvanar.

Repertoire and Musical values of the Tanjore Baani:

The repertoire of the Tanjore baani also has many precious gems. Many of these have been documented in the book *Tanjai Naalvarin Adi Sangeetha Bharata Kala Manjari*,

¹⁴² Oral renditions of rhythmic structures

¹⁴³ Tempo

¹⁴⁴ As stated by Smt S Rajeswari in an interview to Smitha Madhav on 20.03.2020

¹⁴⁵ Medium paced tempo

¹⁴⁶ Fast tempo

¹⁴⁷ Stated by Priya Murle in the Natya Kala Conference 2018- Aneka

brought out by Smt. Vyjayanthimala Bali, a disciple of Shri K.P. Kitappa Pillai. The book sheds light on some rare pieces of the Tanjore baani. Speaking about the book, she says¹⁴⁸:

“As their disciple, I am keenly interested in maintaining the pure and pristine form of Bharatanatyam and I strictly adhere to the Tanjore Baani. My grandmother Smt. Yadugiri Devi was instrumental in getting the book called Bharata Kala Manjari published by my dance academy in 1964”

Some of the ancient dance-music compositions such as Navasandhi Kautuvam, Panchamurthy Kautuvam, Prabandhams, Geetham, Dayam / Thayyam and Sooladhi found mention in books edited by Shri K.P Kitappa Pillai and his brother Shri K.P. Sivanandam. Their family carefully preserved the text with Sahityam and tala and had continued several musical practices as oral traditions. In recent times, Shri Sivanandam’s son: Shri Chinnayya Sivakumar has attempted to revive a few pieces of this lineage.

When a singer sings for the Tanjore baani, they are expected to ensure that the words are not twisted unnecessarily, in the name of sangathis¹⁴⁹. Bhrgas¹⁵⁰ are also meant to be kept to a minimum. The word, its meaning and its emotional content are

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/dance/rare-gems-of-thanjavur-quartet/article4833894.ece>

¹⁴⁹ Melodic variations of a line

¹⁵⁰ A specific type of embellishment for a musical phrase.

to be given utmost importance and care. This view has been reiterated by Shri Kitappa Pillai himself¹⁵¹. Though the music itself sounds a tad bit bland and unadorned by itself, it takes on a completely new and sparkling veneer altogether, when viewed and heard in unison with the dance.

It is observed that in the Tanjore baani, the kala pramanam is usually kept at the madhyama Kalam, with vilamba¹⁵² and madhyama being used once in a way, to bring in variety. In the jati portions, sometimes the sollus are uttered in duritha kalam while the adavus are rendered comfortably in madhyama kalam, thus enthralling the audience without unduly straining the dancer.

In the Tanjore baani the nattuvanars made it clear that certain adavus suited certain speeds only. This has been stated and demonstrated by Shri Kitappa Pillai in a documentary film about him and his ancestry¹⁵³.

Dandikaa Grahnam:

This is an ancient practice mentioned in King Tulaja's Sangeeta Saraamrta, in the Shrama Vidhi segment. According to Guru Shri Herambanathan of this baani, this ritual is practiced when the student commences the learning process. The child is made to hold a dandika / silambam/ stick with both hands. Both ends of the dandika are decorated with flowers. Paddy is spread on the floor. The child is made to stand on the paddy. The two decorated ends of the stick are held by two senior female members of the family, as the child stamps the first adavus on the bed of paddy, thus marking her initiation and rite of passage into dancing.

¹⁵¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1gI5EFvFeI>

¹⁵² Slow paced tempo

¹⁵³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1gI5EFvFeI>

The Tanjore baani has some unique pieces such as Daayam, Soolaadi etc. In her book titled “BONDING” Smt. Vyjayanthimala Bali enumerates the items that she learnt from her guru Shri KP Kittappa Pillai. This list, for the most part sums up the prized jewels of the Tanjore Baani. The list includes:

Alarippus:

1.	Rupaka Talam	3 Aksharas
2.	Chatushra Jati Eka Talam	4 Aksharas
3.	Khanda Chapu	5 Aksharas
4.	Mishra Chaapu	7 Aksharas
5.	Sankerna Chaapu	9 Aksharas

Jatiswarams:

1.	Saveri	Tisra Ekam
2.	Kalyani	Tisra Triputa
3.	Ragamalika	Misra Chapu
4.	Todi	Tisra Ekam
5.	Vasantha	Tisra Ekam
6.	Bhairavi	Tisra Ekam
7.	Chakravakam	Tisra Ekam
8.	Poorvi Kalyani	Adi (Sankeerna Nadai)

Shabdams:

1.	Srikara Sugunakara	Misra Chaapu
2.	Saami Ninne	Misra Chaapu
3.	Sarasijakshulu	Misra Chaapu
4.	Gokulaambudhi	Misra Chaapu
5.	Vennuda	Misra Chaapu
6.	Niratamu	Misra Chaapu

Pada Varnams:

Sl. No	Song	Ragam	Talam	Language
1.	Sami Ninne	Navaragamalika	Rupakam	Telugu
2.	Sakhiye	Anandabhairavi	Adi	Tamil
3.	Manavi Chekonara	Sankarabharanam	Adi	Telugu
4.	Ye Maguva	Dhanyasi	Adi	Telugu
5.	Suma Sayaka	Kapi	Rupakam	Sanskrit
6.	Saamiyai	Khamas	Adi	Tamil
7.	Mohalagiri	Todi	Adi	Tamil
8.	Mohamana	Bhairavi	Rupakam	Adi

Taana Varnams:

Sl No:	Song	Ragam	Talam	Language
1.	Chalamela	Sankarabharanam	Khanda Jati Ata	Telugu
2.	Chalamu	Purvi Kalyani	Khanda Jati Ata	Telugu
3.	Karunaakaruda	Atana	Tisra Jati Ata	Telugu

Swarajatis:

Sl. No:	Song	Ragam	Talam	Language
1.	Kaana Aaval	Kambhoji	Rupakam	Tamil
2.	Sadaya	Chakravakam	Aadi	Telugu
3.	Ye Mayalaadera	Husseini	Rupakam	Telugu

Tillanas:

Sl No:	Ragam	Talam
1.	Athana	Adi
2.	Bilahari	Rupakam
3.	Kapi	Mishra Chapu
4.	Kanada	Adi
5.	Hamsadhwani	Rupakam
6.	Dhanashri	Adi
7.	Behag	Mishra Chapu

Keertanams:

Sl. No	Song	Ragam	Talam	Language
1.	Amba Neelambari	Neelambari	Adi	Telugu

2.	Yekkaalatthilum	Purvi Kalyani	Adi	Tamil
3.	Sri Raja Rajeswari	Ramapriya	Adi	Telugu
4.	Tarunam	Gowlipanthu	Adi	Tamil
5.	Krupa Joodu	Anandabhairavi	Adi	Telugu
6.	Mangalapradambu	Madhyamavati	Rupakam	Telugu
7.	Kalyani	Ragamalika	Rupakam	Telugu

Rare works / ritualistic pieces:

1. Todayamangalam
2. Melaprapti
3. Navasandhi kautuvam
4. Panchamurthy kauthuvam
5. Geetham
6. Kaivara prabandham
7. Tayam
8. Sooladhi
9. Daru
10. Srivilliputtur Nachiyar Kautuvam
11. Tiruvalangadu Kali Kauthuvam
12. Vanambadi kauthuvam

Tanjore Baani- Balasaraswati / Kandappa Pillai style:

Background:

Although Kandappa Pillai (1899-19410) hailed from the same clan as Kitappa Pillai he was credited with ushering in a few stylistic changes into his pedagogy, thus paving the way for his own distinct vazhi. He was the son of Nellaippa Nattuvanar, who was guru to many dancers of the earlier generation and was a direct descendant of the Tanjore Quartet. Kandappa Pillai's close association with the family of Veena Dhanammal (fondly known as Dhanam) gave him an unparalleled sense of musicality. Both his ancestors and those of Dhanam were in the service of the royal courts of Tanjore and thus the exchange & give and take of artistic ideas between these two lines led to the creation of some outstanding music and dance. Kandappa Pillai's father taught music to Jayammal and Lakshmiratnam, the daughters of Dhanam though their mother herself was the grand old dame of Carnatic music.

Kandappa Pillai learnt the art of nattuvangam from his paternal grandfather Kannusami Nattuvanar (who went to Baroda with the trousseau of Maharani Chimnabai) and his uncle Ponniah Pillai. His style was close to the typical Tanjore baani in many ways but had a few aspects in which he made a distinct departure. For instance, he insisted that all the musicians continue to play / sing even during the jatis/sorkattus, even as the nattuvanar recited them.

His ideas and innovations were immortalised by his star disciple T Balasaraswati who attained universal fame and popularised the style of her nattuvanar and his family. Balasaraswati was a the grand-daughter of Dhanammal and a student of Kandappa Pillai (a 6th generation descendant of the Chinnaya Pillai of the

Thanjavur Quartet). She attained international repute for her abhinaya and was the only dancer to be adorned with the title of “Sangeetha Kalanidhi” by the Madras Music Academy, thus acknowledging in no certain terms the importance of music in dance and her command over music, despite being a world-renowned dancer.

Technique:

According to Balasaraswati’s senior disciple Nandini Ramani, Balasaraswati was not fond of the word “margam”. She preferred to call it the “kutcheri”¹⁵⁴. Nandini Ramani also states that “Kandappa insisted that the body-orientation and interpretative expansion blend well, each one continuing in an unbroken chain of action, having been moulded in a single sampradaya.”

Bala, as she was popularly known deeply believed in the maargam based performance. She firmly felt that the maargam, as promulgated by the Tanjore quartet was the perfect order and sequence for performance. She even drew a parallel between the maargam and a temple. This has been discussed elsewhere in this work. She opined that the maargam performance gradually revealed the spiritual through the corporeal. Her nrmta was fast paced but disciplined. The prescribed adavu groups were always followed.

The rhythmical segments had a simple set up, but were inherently rigorous in nature. The jatis were simple to hear, but gave scope for complex footwork, if the nattuvanar so wished. The linking of adavu patterns with musical segments was an interesting feature of Bala’s dance. Glossy poses and glamorous movements were

¹⁵⁴ Stated by her in an Instagram interview in 2020

eschewed. She believed that the visage ought to be serene and a broad smile was to be avoided at all times in order to retain the depth and seriousness of the tradition.

Bala believed that form should be neat and the back ought to be held up erect. She demanded anga shuddha¹⁵⁵ and neat araimandi¹⁵⁶ of all her pupils as well as clear hasta - pada distribution and properly defined adavu structures. Her style also sparkled with kala pramana shuddha and rhythmic patterns that contained intricate lays nuances sans outward display. Each adavu had to be clearly delineated and the feet stamped with just the right amount of vigour.

Even in the jatis, Bala was known to improvise. Senior dancer and scholar Rajika Puri states that she saw Bala dance in 1965 in New York, where she was accompanied by her brothers. She presented a piece in Rupaka Talam, where she improvised with the jatis and adavus extemporaneously. She switched swiftly from the khanda nadai to the tishra nadai to basic rupaka tala in a matter of seconds. Rajika puri spoke of this at the 2019 Natya Kala Conference. In bala's vazhi, the nattuvangam technique was shorn of any unnecessary showmanship and magic. The abhinaya is subliminal and subtle, not forceful. Even in shringara padas, while the passion of the heroine was conveyed unequivocally, the metaphors used were couched in poetic symbolism and were never "in -the face" thus making Bala one of the most elegant and sophisticated artists of all times. She was also known for her constant pacing back and forth on stage during the Abhinaya passages, thus allowing for a

¹⁵⁵ Neatness of the limbs

¹⁵⁶ Also known as aayatam or the ardha mandalam, it is the basic half sitting posture of Bharatanatyam.

fuller use of space. The hand gestures were unhurried and the Sthayi Bhaava was maintained in a poised and well-rounded manner.

The delineations of the hastas blended into the music and vice versa. Balasaraswati once famously stated that abhinaya cannot be taught and that it should come on its own¹⁵⁷. Maybe she meant that the dancer's body ought to respond instinctively to the gamakas, karvais and brighas in the music. This sentiment is echoed by Alarmel Valli, who though not a disciple of Bala, learnt to sing Padams and Javalis from T Muktha, who was a cousin of Bala's.

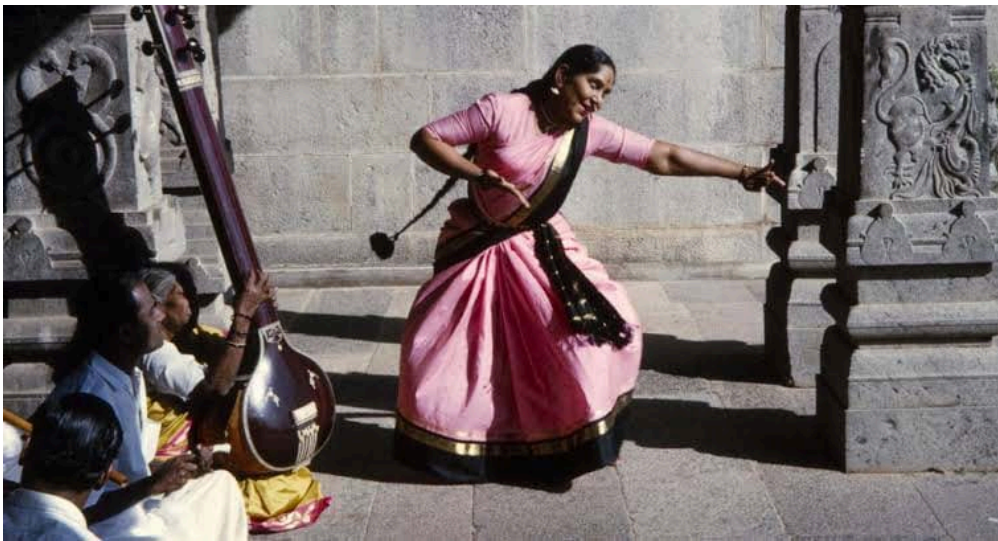


Plate 7: T Balasaraswati

Smt Nandini Ramani (one of the senior most disciples of Balasaraswati) says:

¹⁵⁷ As per the statements of her family including daughter, son in law and grandson

“No hand gesture was fixed and the abhinaya portions were never rehearsed prior to the performance. The rehearsal was only for the jati (technical) choreography, that too, just a day before the recital, for the sake of the mrdangam accompanist”

Though Bala was a staunch believer in the maargam, she did choreograph and present Kuttrala Kuravanji in which she played the gypsy woman and her disciple Hemamalini Arni (nee Vijayaraghavan) played the princess. This was confirmed by Smt Hemamalini Arni in her lecture demonstration for the music academy in December 2017 and has been recorded by historian V Sriram in his blog¹⁵⁸. Bala's baani is being propagated by her disciples Nandini Ramani, Priyamvada and her grandson Aniruddha Knight.

Pattai Kattardhu:

According to Smt Nandini Ramani, a senior disciple of Bala, in this baani, the process of tying or fastening a four-inch pattai or band at the groin/ lower back level was practiced. She states that her guru said that HER guru opined that this helped in improving saushthavam¹⁵⁹, elongating and protecting the spine, keeping the hips from swaying unnecessarily and tightening the core. This also helped in the flow of energy upward (from the mooladhara chakra) This practice was done for students aged 5 and above.

¹⁵⁸<https://sriramv.wordpress.com/2019/08/05/hemamalini-arni-her-lecdem-and-the-sanjaysub-concert/>

¹⁵⁹Bodily propriety.

Repertoire / musical values of Bala's Baani:

Bala was frequently accompanied to concerts by her family members. While her mother Jayammal sang, her brothers T Viswanathan and T Ranganathan played the Mrdangam and the flute respectively. The singing was leisurely and the and reflected the kutcheri style. This was possibly because all members of Bala's family and troupe (including Bala herself) were very talented musicians.

In her later years, her son in law Douglas Knight (who was a disciple of her brother) played the Mrdangam for her. Like most dancers of her time, she had her own guru perform the Nattuvangam for her at concerts and thus shared a deep personal rapport with each member of her musical ensemble. This perfect understanding and connect that she enjoyed with her musicians enhanced the beauty and excellence of her performances.

There was an exquisitely meditative quality to her performances, with the dance and the music flowing forth out of each other, making even the shringara pieces appear most polished and subtle. The abhinaya performed by the dancer and the sangatis¹⁶⁰ sung by the nattuvanar / vocalist matched and synchronised perfectly contributing to the magic woven on stage. The abhinaya was spontaneous and visualised musically, rather than visually. In this context, one may quote Alarmel Valli's impression of what she calls the perfect union of poetry and musicality in the dance of Bala. She recounts a time when she watched Bala display the Trivikrama Avatara, with nothing more than a gradual lifting of the gaze. Shorn of any elaborate

¹⁶⁰ Musical variations

moves that would describe the gigantic form of the Lord, she captured and conveyed the entire avatar in that one single movement.

Another noteworthy moment that showcased the perfect unison in which Bala held her music and dance was again recalled by Smt Alarmel Valli. This was in 1973 when she sang the lines “vaari mudindha koondhal” from the Ghanam Krishna Iyer padam “Unnai Thoodhu anuppineyn” in Raga saveri. Being an adept vocalist and the recipient of that year’s Sangeeta Kalanidhi, she sang a multiple sangatis for that one phrase, even as she performed the abhinaya for the lines with numerous variations. Smt Valli recalls how it was impossible to tell if the music was inspiring the movements or the movements were guiding the music.

However, she states that at one point both met in a beautiful moment of oneness. One observed an effortless ease in the kala pramaana¹⁶¹ that sprung forth from the deep camaraderie and friendship between all the artists on the stage. There was no need for any signs to be passed on between the dancer and the musicians. They understood each other perfectly well and seamlessly one took on from where the other left on. This took the audience to a plane of “sowkyam”¹⁶² rather than to a place of excitement.

In his blog, historian V Sriram writes an article titled “Hemamalini Arni- a lecture and a Sanjay Subramanyam concert”. In this piece he writes of a lecture

¹⁶¹ tempo

¹⁶² Ease.

demonstration by Smt Hemamalini Arni, a disciple of Balasaraswati. In this lecture demonstration, she mentions the following pieces as Bala's staples:

1. Mogadocchi¹⁶³
2. Adhuvum Solluvaal¹⁶⁴
3. Tiruvottriyur Tyagarajan¹⁶⁵
4. Neela Mayil Vaahanano¹⁶⁶
5. Theruvil Varaano¹⁶⁷

Needless to mention her evergreen and ever so popular Krishna Nee Begane¹⁶⁸ was also mentioned. At this juncture, it may be pertinent to quote from the presidential address of T Balasaraswati at the Music Academy in 1973. This speech appeared in the journal of the academy in 1974

Music and the Dance -T. Balasaraswati

(Presidential Address delivered at the Forty-Seventh Annual Conference of The Music Academy, Madras):

*It was my good fortune to have been born in a family
in which the traditions of music and dance have*

¹⁶³ A romantic poem alluding to the arrival of the heroine.

¹⁶⁴ A sarcastic song in which the defiant nayika flaunts her romance

¹⁶⁵ In reference to lord siva of Tiruvottriyur

¹⁶⁶ A poem about Muruga atop a blue hued peacock

¹⁶⁷ A song in which the heroine longs for a glimpse of Lord Siva if and when he were to pass by his street

¹⁶⁸ The kannada song in praise of Krishna for which Bala was renowned.

been the focus of life for generations. Although it is known to many that my grandmother's grandmother Kamakshiammal danced and sang in the Court of Tanjore, it is important to point out that my great-grandmother Sundarammal was a musician, as were my grand-mother Dhanammal and my mother Jayammal.

Tanjore Baani - (Bombay/ Tiruvidaimarudur Variation) Background:

Scholar and dancer Lakshmi Viswanathan states that at the start of the 19th century, when Tanjore was plagued by political and succession issues, a parallel court was set up in Tiruvidaimarudur. From here ruled Amarasimha who was followed by his son Pratapasimha. Both were great patrons of dance and music. Many padams of Ghanam Krishna Iyer¹⁶⁹ and pada varnams pay homage to these two kings. The Bombay School traces its lineage back to the nattuvanars who served in Tiruvidaimarudur and hence this baani is sometimes referred to as “Tiruvidaimarudur Baani”. With the end of the dedication of dancers to temples and the disenfranchisement of the community en-masse, many female members of the community sought the comfort of anonymity and marriage, the male members took different paths. Some reinvented themselves as choreographers for movies. Some moved to different parts of the country and set up dance schools.

One such Nattuvanar who was a pioneer that took Bharatanatyam to Bombay was Shri AT Govindaraja Pillai (1914-1984). He was the descendant of Shri Venkatakrishna Nattuvanar who was patronised by Serfoji II of Tanjore. The

¹⁶⁹ Ghanam Krishna Iyer (1790-1854) was a Carnatic composer famous for his padams

descendants of Venkatakrishna Nattuvanar were Veeraswamy Nattuvanar and his sister Chinnammaal, who were followed by Panchapakesa Nattuvanar, who was the Asthana Vidwan of the Tanjore and Ramanathapuram courts. Panchapakesa Nattuvanar was also feted and felicitated by the courts of Mysore and Baroda.

The son of Panchapakesa Nattuvanar Shri Kuppiah Pillai was the mentor of Sri Raja Rajeswari Bharatanatya Kala Mandir which was set up by his son in law Shri Govindaraja Pillai in 1945. He was assisted in his ventures by his wife Smt Karunambal. As this school grew, Shri Govindarajan Pillai's father-in-law, Shri TP Kuppiah Pillai also moved to Bombay to support his daughter and son in law.

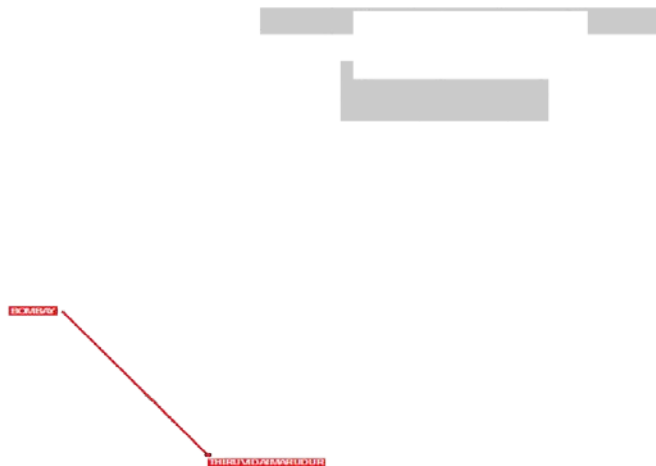


Plate 8 – Map of India

Though it began as a small institute with four students only, it grew from strength to strength and is a force to reckon with today. The next generation of nattuvanars and natyacharayas included TK Mahalingam Pillai (1960-2002) and K Kalyanasundaram Pillai (born 1932) who were the sons of Shri Govindarajan Pillai.

As inheritors of a baani that is more than three centuries old, the Raja Rajeswari gurus are doyens in the field of Bharatanatyam and are considered authorities in the Tanjore Baani. Being away from the bustling Chennai dance scene in many ways helped the family of natyacharyas preserve their art form in a rather pristine manner.

Technique practiced in Sri Raja Rajeswari Bharatanatya Kala Mandir:

Belonging to the rich and wholesome Tanjore Baani, the Gurus of this school abide to this strictly with pride. However, they do have a few special gems such as the "Kamala Chakram", a lotus wheeled compendium depicting the matra –based complex 108 talas, besides the popular 35 ones. This is invaluable to all students of music and dance. The adavus derive their distinctive aesthetic touch from the expansive extension of the limbs. The adavus are sharp and crisp yet feminine and gentle in execution. Symmetry and grace are carefully observed in each move. The kulukku nadai¹⁷⁰ is a speciality of the school - very graceful yet precise and well timed. Ungainly bending of the torso is avoided at all costs. No part of the body is ever over stretched. The movements of the head and neck are marked by alluring grace and are neither too stiff nor sloppy.

The school which has a large pool of adavus and thus nrta pieces like tillana, jatiswarams etc are delightful to watch with no redundancy or monotony. Various nrta hastas are used in novel and interesting patterns making it for interesting viewing. The presentation in general is not frenzied. The limbs below the waist are

¹⁷⁰ A signature gait of Bharatanatyam. Kulukku may be loosely translated as a pretty jerk.

used in a powerful manner, whereas those above it are used in a graceful manner. The abhinaya is subtle with more emphasis on the Natyadharmi¹⁷¹ aspects. The belief is that the dancer should merely suggest an idea and not bluntly display it. It is up to the audience to imagine and interpret it; hence subtlety is the mantra practiced by this baani. Overall, this style is very pleasing to watch.

A special feature of this baani is the deployment of Dandikaa Grahanam, an ancient practice of helping the student practice. According to Guru Kalyanasundaram Pillai, this is done by making the student sit in araimandi. The stick or the dandikaa or the silambam is placed above the knees. Gentle pressure is applied. This helps the inner thighs open up and stretch. The same exercise is repeated in the lying down / supine position too.

Repertoire and Musical Values of Sri Raja Rajeswari Bharatanatya Kala Mandir:

The present torch bearer of this baani, Shri Kalyanasundaram Pillai has gone beyond the traditional maargam and created some memorable thematic productions. These are based on the compositions of Purandaradasa, Adi Sankara, Mahakavi Bharathi, Tyagaraja etc. Their ekaharya¹⁷² pieces are also noteworthy. He has also explored the genre of dance dramas with works like Vasantavalli, Thyagabrahmanjali, Sri Aandal, Charanapaduka, Skanda Leela, Pancha Kanya, Sri Krishna Leela.

¹⁷¹Stylized and chaste mode of interpreting a line.

¹⁷²Solo acts

His predecessor Shri Marudappa Pillai was an excellent vocalist and Mrdangam Vidwan. Shri Govindaraja Pillai, one of the founders of this school was a vocalist par excellence. His brief raga essays before each of the dance pieces sent the audiences into raptures and left his orchestra awestruck. These short alapanas helped set the mood of the number that was to ensue and gave a major fillip to the dancer. As the saying goes “well begun is half finished.”

The singer is expected to sing with clarity and with emphasis on bhava. The natyacharyas of this school are all superlative singers. Hence, they lead the musical ensemble, just as their ancestors did. A YouTube video released on May 13 2013 has snippets of Shri Kalyanasundaram Pillai performing nattuvangam. The ebullience and *joi de vivre* that he brings to the stage is more than apparent in this video. One also gets to see how he used Hindustani music with elan and ease. The dance is traditional Tanjore style dancing, but blends beautifully and easily with the Hindustani music. This is perhaps due to his long stint up north and exposure to multiple styles of music. The jatis are usually short but do have Jaati variations every now and then.

Though challenging to recite and dance, they are delivered in a pleasant and facile manner. In general, the *kala pramaanam*¹⁷³ is relaxed. More of *madhyama kala*¹⁷⁴ is used as against *vilamba* or *duritha kala*. The Mrdangam is expected to be aligned with the Nattuvanar and the *sollukattus* and not the other way around. This may be because the Natyacharyas of this school hail from the hereditary Nattuvanar Parampara. This school (Shri Kalyanasundaram Pillai in particular) was the first to

¹⁷³ tempo

¹⁷⁴ Medium tempo

use musical preludes before padams and javalis. These preludes introduce the song, its mood, the

sthayi bhaava, the nature of the character etc to the audience. This practice was perhaps started since the Raja Rajeswari school was based out of Bombay and the local audience often had no idea about the Telugu or Tamil song that featured in the performances of the Tanjore baani that this school presented. The Raja Rajeswari school has presented full length programs of exclusive compositions of poets including:

1. Adi Sankara
2. Mahakavi Bharathi
3. Purandaradasa
4. Yagaraja
5. Papanasam Sivan
6. G N Balasubramanyam

They have also presented dance dramas including:

1. Vasanthavalli - Tirukuttrala Kuravanji
2. Sri Aandal
3. Skanda Leela
4. Krishna Leela
5. Charana paduka
6. Tyagabrahmanjali

7. Nandana charitram

Their thematic presentations include:

1. Om saravana Bhava
2. Jaya Jaya Sankara
3. Jaya jaya Krishna
4. Pancha kanya
5. Shakti
6. Bhakti Nritya
7. Mahatmanjali

Pandanallur Baani:

History:

A nondescript hamlet in the Tiruvidaimarudur taluk of the Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu, this village gained importance thanks to the genius of the natyacharyas that hailed from it. One of the stalwarts who belonged to this village but belonged to the clan of the Tanjore siblings was the inimitable Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai (1869-1954) who lived for the most part of his life in his ancestral village. Numerous early stars including Ramgopal¹⁷⁵, Mrinalini Sarabhai¹⁷⁶, U S Krishna Rao¹⁷⁷ were his pupils.

¹⁷⁵ Ramgopal (1912-2003) was an Indian dancer and choreographer

¹⁷⁶ Mrinalini Sarabhai (1918-2016) was a classical dancer and choreographer

¹⁷⁷ U S Krishna Rao (1912-2005) was a renowned dancer, choreographer and teacher.

He was a true old timer. He came from very old-fashioned ideology. Yet, he was progressive enough to accept male disciples and teach them in what was until then the exclusive domain of female dancers. Some scholars¹⁷⁸ opine that the Pandanallur baani is nothing but an offshoot of the main Tanjore baani. This is a plausible argument, due to the proximity between Pandanallur and Tanjore and the antiquity of the Tanjore baani. However, the formidable genius of the nattuvanars of Pandanallur village and the large number of students that they groomed contributed towards making Pandanallur a distinctive baani by itself.

Technique:

The Pandanallur baani has a diverse and rich and adavu lexicon. A chaste and orthodox baani, adherence to paddhati or tradition is seen in each minute of the dance. Linearity and lyricism, precision and poetry, symmetry and sinuosity go hand in hand. A range of interpretations is displayed through the simple flick of the eye or the turn of the arm.

Alarmel Valli, one of the prima donnas of this style states that the margam, as she sees it is an amalgamation of balance, cohesion and organic progression.

Commitment to anga shuddha and araimandi is tenacious and steadfast. The steps, as visualised by the Pandanallur Vadyars¹⁷⁹ have intricate laya patterns, with importance given to harmony and symmetry and intense musicality, purity, precision, and shuns anything that is extra or pretentious. The emphasis on clean lines is forever underlined. Anything that is gimmicky is shunned. The musicality and lyricism of

¹⁷⁸Including Kumbakonam A Gajendran

¹⁷⁹A term used as a synonym for the dance Gurus

this baani are intense. Melody and movement flow together hand in hand. The two are as inseparable as the word and its meaning, truly reflecting the phrase *vaagarthaaviva samprktow- vaagartha Prati patthaye*¹⁸⁰.

In the kindling of metaphor and mood the emphasis is on *natyadharmi* or the stylistic and suggestive mode of interpretation, rather than on *lokadharmi* the more colloquial style. Understated style is the hallmark of this *vazhi*, rather than any overt drama. The graceful gait or the *kulukkunadai* is apre-existing element and serves as the structure on which the Abhinaya sequences are constructed. Gradual progression and progressions are the guiding lights of this baani. It is an exquisitely graceful style that suits both the male and the female body intrinsically.

Clear display of hastas and the broad sweep of the arms are the highlights of this baani. Meandering digressions in the name of sanchari bhava are not encouraged in this style. The footwork is strong and each step is delivered with great precision and clarity. There is an undercurrent of a rhythm even in the most sedate and slow-paced movements. The jumps (utplavanas), spins (bhramaris) and lightning paced movements are delivered with ease and grace in a way that it gives the audience a feeling of calm and peace.

The Pandanallur baani is characterised by lucidity of hastas, wide sweep of the arms and softness in the delivery of abhinaya. The abhinaya is succinct and subtle, with the audience always left seeking more. Very many repetitions are seldom

¹⁸⁰ A line from Kalidasa's poetry used to describe the oneness of Siva and Parvati

performed for the “hands”. Vulgarly in any form is firmly dispensed with. The nattuvanars of the Pandanallur style were acutely aware of the ill repute that had been attributed to dance and thus ensure at all times that that no movement came across as crude or unrefined. The interpretation of *javali* and *padams* were as subtle and nuanced as possible.

The focus is always on content rather than packaging. Smt Alarmel Valli says that her guru would always insist in *sarakku* (content) over *minukku* (embellishments). One rarely finds unwanted prolonged poses and acrobatic steps in this *baani*. Holding poses for a long duration with the intention of eliciting applause from the audience is a practice that is abhorred by the Pandanallur seniors. *Adavus* with generous use of the *natyarambham* position are used frequently in this *baani*.

Some of the Pandanallur giants include Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai (1869-1954), Chockalingam Pillai (1893-1968) (*Periya vadyar*) and Subbaraya Pillai (*Chinna Vadyar*). Meenakshisundaram Pillai learnt from his cousin Kumarasamy Nattuvanar.



Plate 9: Pandanallur Subbaraya Pillai

They laid heavy emphasis on araimandi and anga shuddha. Even in his later years, Chokkalingam pillai insisted on guiding not just his senior students but also coaching the junior ones. He meticulously utilised the thattukazhi¹⁸¹ to maintain time, thus passing on to pupils a sharp sense of laya.

Grace in azhuttam¹⁸² and fluidity in force are few of the ideals of the Pandanallur baani. Utilising the stage is critical too. The dancer must dance in a congenial manner, avoiding jerky movements. Their approach to footwork is precise and gentle. The

¹⁸¹ A wooden stick used to maintain time

¹⁸² firmness

arudhis¹⁸³ are short, yet stirring enough to make the audience sit on the edge of the seat. Pandanallur Jayalakshmi¹⁸⁴, Pandanallur Pandian, Alarmel Valli, Meenakshi Chittaranjan are some of the torch bearers of the Pandanallur baani today.

Alarmel Valli's views on the Pandanallur Technique:

“The technique is always there. Without technique you can't be a dancer. So, as I said, you have to internalise it. Then you realise that it is a world which extends beyond just grammar and syntax and things like that. So, I can only say that I was given a very strong foundation. Then I was exposed to a great deal.

Pandanallur Repertoire and Musical values:

The Pandanallur gurus favoured the margam to thematic presentations. As worshippers of the ancient and traditional way of dancing, the Pandanallur nattuvannars preferred solo performances. Therefore, even today, most of the stars of this baani are solo performers. The maargam opens with the alarippu. The pushpanjali and todayamangalam are not usually performed, since it was not a part of the margam created by the four brothers. Jatiswarams are an integral part of the repertoire. The post varnam chunk of the recital features padams and javalis. Compositions of

¹⁸³ Short rhythmic segments used to link the nrmta and abhinaya sequences

¹⁸⁴ Pandanallur Jayalakshmi (1930-2017)

Gopalakrishna Bharati and Mahakavi Bharati, like Dikku Teriyaadha kaattil, Teeraadha Vilayaatu Pillai are sometimes performed.

A speciality of the Pandanallur baani is a pada varnam in the raga Vachaspati, composed by Shri Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai and performed by his disciple Pandanallur Jayalakshmi. This piece was performed in honour of the Maharaja of Ramanathapuram, Shri Shanmukha Rajeswara Sethupathi¹⁸⁵. The dance was supposed to be so beautiful that the maharaja promptly wed the dancer. This Guru-sishya duo was also credited with bringing the orchestra on to the stage, though many experts opine that this modification was made by Rukmini Devi Arundale.

Pandanallur Subbaraya Pillai¹⁸⁶ emphasised that music ought to be internalised fully before it could flow forth as a movement. He stated that the music was the

most important inspiration for the creation of dance (the old masters preferred not to use the word “choreography”) Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram pillai, like many of his illustrious colleagues used to compose the “hands” as they sang. Thus, music and dance flowed as one unit- music was visual dance and dance was music to theeyes.They believed that the dancer should hear the music with her whole body and not with just the ears. This is a view that has been stated by Smt Alarmel Valli in her Natya Kala Conference talk. She also quotes 2 examples to highlight the musicality of this baani:

¹⁸⁵ He was the head of the Zamindari of Ramnad.

¹⁸⁶ Pandanallur Subbaraya Pillai (1914-2008)

“Adhiyokka yugamu ; for its special eduppus and payyada in nadanamakriya in which the despondence of the heroine is highlighted in the karvais and sangathis of the songs even without the dancer having to portray and therefore embellish it. Music is given great importance and adavus are designed to suit them”. In this respect, one can say that the music is given as much space as it warrants and then the movements are set in a manner whereby, they embellish and enhance the music. The idea of fixing the dance sequence initially and then tailor making the music accordingly is strictly forbidden in this baani.

The jatis have complex sollukattus that are delivered in small and tight capsules. The rendition of the jatis is easy and free of any superfluous frills. *Vallinam – mellinam*¹⁸⁷ or the modulation is given a great deal of importance though. The adavus are matched precisely to the sollukattus. The practice of “*cross rhythm*”¹⁸⁸ is kept to a minimum.

In the Abhinaya pieces such as padams and javalis, if the sahitya of a particular stanza or charanam is lewd or vulgar, the entire charanam is dropped. The singer can sing comfortably, since the Pandanallur baani rarely superimposes complex korvais on top of the swara segments. Thus, the grouping of swaras, as imagined by the composer is retained in all its beauty. Some of the Pandanallur gems include

¹⁸⁷ Rise and fall in intonation

¹⁸⁸ Where the matching between the footwork and the jati utterances are hard to discern

compositions of the Tanjore quartet and their descendants including pada varnams like:

1. Sakhiye inda jalam- Shankarabharnam
2. Mohamana - Bhairavi
3. Swamini rammanave – Khamas

They also regularly perform the jatiswarams in raga Vasanta, Saveri, Chakravakam, Kalyani, Bhairavi etc.

Alarmel Valli's views on the musicality of the Pandanallur

Bani:

There is rhythm because you have to have a

natural sense of the rhythm of movement.

It is not literally just tala-oriented rhythm.

There is a rhythm in everything

Kaattumannarkoil Mutthukumaran Pillai's style:

Background:

Another doyen who carved a niche for himself in the world of dance and created his own baani or vazhi was Kattumannarkoil Mutthukumaran Pillai (1874-1960). He was the guru of many dancing giants who also went on to become

formidable nattuvanars themselves in the future like - KN Dandayudhapani Pillai who was adept at laya intricacies and introduced lengthier jatis and Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai whose Vazhuvoor baani became extremely popular. The fact that Guru Mutthukumaran Pillai taught in many cities such as Chennai, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad made his baani reach far flung places and get a wide shishya base.

Technique:

Smt Rukmini Devi Arundale recalled that her guru Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai owing to advanced age was unable to stand and demonstrate all the postures. Hence, she learnt from guru Kattumannarkoil Mutthukumaran Pillai who while well past his 70s was nonetheless was agile and fit. She pointed out in her Sangeet Natak Akademi monograph in 1964 that Guru Mutthukumarasamy Pillai's style of adavus was somewhat different from the Pandanallur baani. She opined that in his (Mutthukumara Pillai's) style there was more footwork and less utplavanas. Guru Mutthukumaran Pillai was not in favour of this. He also believed that keeping the spine erect was more attractive and appropriate.

His abhinaya was more detailed and he strictly adhered to the shastras. His style was pure, with clear arm movements and clean lines, which were neither too rigid, nor too soft. They were rounded but not sloppy. His baani was devoid of any unnecessary razzmatazz and was austere but attractive. He insisted that each movement should look smooth and not jerky and one movement should seamlessly blend into another without the transition being apparent and obvious. His dance reflected his personality and like him was tranquil and composed at all times.

These were the views of Mohan Khokar¹⁸⁹, the eminent art critic in his Sangeet Natak Akademi monograph of 1964. He groomed Ramgopal, Mrinalini Sarabhai, MK Selvamani, MK Saroja¹⁹⁰ and Rukmini Devi Arundale. Kumari Kamala¹⁹¹, who went on to be one of the dancing stars of her time also learnt from him, before moving on to Shri Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai and went on to become one of the most well-known names of the Vazhuvoor baani.

Vazhuvoor Baani:

History:

The Vazhuvoor artists state that their lineage can be traced all the way back to the period of Raja Raja Chozha. Their ancestor was the Nattuvanar who taught music and dance to Princess Kundavai Piratti (the daughter/ sister of Raja raja Chozha). In modern times, the Vazhuvoor Baani was popularised by the doyen Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai (1910-1979). Vazhuvoor is a small hamlet in the Kuttralam taluk, Nagapattinam district in Tamil Nadu. Close to Mayiladuthurai, this entire area is replete with shrines dedicated to Lord Shiva. Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai was widely known as Vazhuvooraar. He hailed from a traditional Isai Vellalar family; His mother was a lady by name Bhagyammal whose brother Manicka Nattuvanar taught a young Ramaiah the basics of dance. Manicka Nattuvanar and Bhagyammal were the children of a veteran by name Samu Nattuvanar. Samu Nattuvanar studied abhinaya at the feet of a devadasi lady by name Maduranthakam Jagadambal. It is believed that these

¹⁸⁹ Mohan Khokar was a scholar, historian, art critic and collector.

¹⁹⁰ Madras Kadiravelu Saroja is a star disciple of Guru Mutthukumaran Pillai

¹⁹¹ Also known as Baby kamala, she was a dancing star and the most famous student of Ramaiah Pillai

talents pre date the Tanjore quartet. This opinion has not been verified with historical evidence. During the 1940s, Ramaiah's Guru Kattumannarkoil Mutthukumara Pillai advised the young man to go to Chennai (referred to as "Patnam" in those times) and seek his fortune in the movies. Ramaiah also learnt from guru Kaattumannarkoil Mutthukumaran Pillai. Since both these Gurus had their own distinct styles, a young Ramaiah benefitted from the best of both. Thus, it is amply clear that Ramaiah Pillai was the inheritor of an ancient dancing and singing legacy. In his later years, he wrote a book named "Deiveeka Aadal kalai" about Bharatanatyam.

Interestingly, though the world of dance hails Vazhuvooraar as a maestro, genius and pioneer who changed the Bharatanatyam landscape forever, Ramaiah Pillai himself refuted to having created anything new. He believed that he had only packaged the existing style in an attractive manner and reintroduced certain forgotten elements. In an interview he stated that he had noticed the 108 karanas that were once in vogue had faded into oblivion and his quest had been toward bringing them to the forefront. Studying the sculptures in the Chidambaram and Tanjore temples, he incorporated them into his choreography and taught them to his disciples.

Technique:

It is a very feminine style and emphasises the Lasya aspect over the Tandava aspect. The Adavus flow very smoothly without any jerks. This baani uses static poses very cleverly; conforming to the tala, yet springing a surprise or two on the audiences every now and then, thus creating a scintillating effect. A critic once observed that it appears like the adavus of the Vazhuvoor baani reflect the graceful waves of the majestic ocean. In the words of the Leela Venkataraman, when they

struck a pose, the Vazhuvoor dancers looked as elegant as ballerinas. The dancer begins the performance by entering from the wings, unlike some other baanis where the dancer begins with a pose on stage. The Vazhuvoor baani gently breaks the monotony and rigidity of the adavus sections by featuring some gentle and subtle facial expressions. Though these movements of the face cannot be called “Abhinaya” in the traditional sense, they do augment and enhance the dance. The movements flow smoothly with rare abrupt movements.

The dancer’s body from the waist up is slightly bent forward and many jatis are peppered with leaps or utplavanas that make them very colourful. When the arms are extended downward (with one leg in aramandi and the other in a front prekanam) the fingertips are made to touch the floor. The 1988 issue of Sruti magazine mentions that when Kamala (the star disciple of Vazhuvooraar) danced, she sang the opening lines of padams herself. It is unclear whether this was practiced by all dancers of Vazhuvooraar’s lineage or was done by Kamala only. The Nrta is vibrant and has a remarkably musical element to it. Most of the Vazhuvoor nattuvanars were brilliant singers. They also ensured that their disciples learnt to sing, thus adding a special sparkle to their dancing.

The Vazhuvoor Nattuvanars were brilliant story-tellers. They ensured that the sancharis were short, but complete. A “hand” was never repeated. They used to interpret a single word in many different ways through each “hand”. The Abhinaya is in the natyadharmi style with nothing shown in a brazen or crude manner. They were more evocative than illustrative. Most of the Abhinaya is conveyed through the eyes

and hands. Care is taken to NOT to distort the face even while showing emotions like bhibhatsa, rowdra, bhayanaka etc. The abhinaya follows the music like a close shadow.

Vazhuvooraar, like most of his contemporaries believed that the purpose of dance was to showcase all that was best of our culture, arts, sculpture, lore, legends and mythology. Thus, he chose themes and songs that offered scope to showcase sancharis that would extol the gods, goddesses and nayakas and portray them in the best possible light.

Prosaic and literal interpretations which were provocative were avoided. Though some of the old compositions contained a word /gesture here and there that bordered on the crude and coarse, the Vazhuvoor baani diligently weeded them out, while retaining the other items, like how the swan is known to distil milk from water. The drshti or parvai is always kept in a soft and kind manner, without opening the eyes or making the eyeballs jut out in an ungainly fashion.

“Nalinam “or grace is the bedrock upon which this baani rests. Grace and musicality mark every step performed by the Vazhuvoor dancers. Shringara pieces are only taught to older students. The younger ones are encouraged to perform pieces commensurate with their age. Thus, the Abhinaya always appears natural and not artificial. Between jatis or stanzas, the dancer strikes a pose instead of walking back with hands on the waist. This adds to the beauty of the dance. This practice is observed mostly in the Tillanas.

While Vazhuvooraar introduced/ popularised the idea of striking poses in between the dance movements, the poses themselves were used judiciously. Acrobatic ones that involved too much lifting of the legs or bending of the back were given a pass. Only graceful and artistic ones were used. He also believed that karanas should be taught in a methodical fashion. Employing line drawings in the process of teaching Karanas, he also believed that if karanas were used excessively and unnecessarily the dance would look like a circus.

Even while executing the karanas, the Vazhuvoor dancers maintain the musicality, bhava and laya of the song. Thus, the karana does not look like a “force fit”. It blends into the fabric of the dance and shines like a motif that highlights the tapestry of the dance. It is possible that Vazhuvooraars stint in the films as a choreographer influenced his working style and creativity. The films of those times needed dance numbers that were at once sprightly, brisk, scintillating and graceful. He was able to effortlessly blend all these elements and deliver hit after hit. Since many of his disciples were the actresses whom he choreographed for on screen, his style of composing movements for them spilt on to the stage also. Thus, his choreography became very sought after both on the screen and in the proscenium. Working in films made him conceive and imagine movements with the visual aesthetic in mind.

Thus, he came up with large and sweeping movements for long shots and sprightly but static ones, for close ups. He used this blend on stage as well and the effect was grand and magical. As a choreographer for the movies, he mastered the art of communicating effortlessly. This art of subtlety was perhaps his greatest defining trait, one that many of his students imbibed over time.

Over the years the Vazhuvoor baani sparkled in its best form through the dance of Smt. Chitra Visweswaran. Her own charisma combined with her strict adherence to her guru's baani made her dance "speak" to her audience with grace and ease. In the later years, when K.J Sarasa continued the style of her guru, the grace ornamentation, sculpturesque poses, sparkling glances of the Vazhuvoor baani shone through the 50 odd group productions that she created. Some of them like Krishna Parijatam, Aditya Hrdayam, Silappadhikaram, Kundrakkudi Kuravanji, Desa Bhakti, Kuttrala Kuravanji etc were major successes.

Unlike the Kalakshetra style, where all students are taught the same items and in the same manner, in the Vazhuvoor baani (atleast until the time of Vazhuvooraar) each item is tailor made to suit the individual student's talent and aptitude. Thus, a student with a fine sense of abhinaya would be taught padams, javalis and keertanams, while those with a strong grasp of laya would be taught intricate jathis. Poses are designed based on the physique of the dancer. This flexible approach is perhaps one of the salient reasons for the success of the vazhuvoor baani, especially in the solo genre. This approach may not have been an asset in the area of group productions, but since vazhuvoorar mainly produced star soloists, it did weave its magic.

Vazhuvoor repertoire and musical values:

The Vazhuvoor Nattuvanars (especially Vazhuvooraar himself) were endowed with a superior aural aesthetic. This, combined with their music virtuosity made the Vazhuvoor style an extremely popular one. In his heyday Ramaiah Pillai had hundreds of aspirants pining to be his sishyas. Vazhuvooraar was the guru to many

prima donnas including Kamala Lakshman, her sisters Radha and Vasanthi, Kanaka Srinivasan, Chitra Visweswaran, L Vijayalakshmi, EV Saroja, Hemamalini Arni, the Travancore Sisters: Lalitha, Padmini and Ragini, Padma subrahmanyam, M Bhanumathi, Jayabharathi, Rajasulochana, Amala Shankar and Prema Jagadeesan. Vyjayanthimala also learnt from him in her younger days, but later on became a disciple of Shri Tanjore KP Kitappa Pillai.

The jatis in the Vazhuvoor baani were usually short but racy. The karvais are plenty, but add to the beauty of the jatis. Vazhuvooraar used the karvais intelligently to enhance the attractiveness of the jati. He believed that it was better to punctuate the sollus with karvais rather than to rain sollus one after the other. In the 2018 Natya Kala Conference Swamimalai Suresh, disciple of Swamimalai Rajaratnam Pillai demonstrated a typical Vazhuvoor jati. This is a fairly long one with plenty of kaarvais.

The trikalam was easily displayed without much ado. The choice of sorkattus used is very interesting, yet appropriate, vis: designed so that the jati sounds complicated and scintillating, but is also easy on the ears and eyes. The concert commences with a Thodayamangalam that extolls Gnana Sabesa (another incarnation of Siva), the presiding deity of Vazhuvoor town.

Vazhuvooraar introduced many new compositions into his baani of Bharatanatyam. Many of the became popular through his star pupil Kamala. She danced to Rama Natak keerthanais of Arunachala Kavi, songs of Swati Tirunal Maharaja, varnams of papanasam Sivan, Tyagaraja krtis, Bharatiyar songs, songs of

Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi etc. He himself composed many Shabdams, Keertanams, Padams, and Thillanas. His choreography of Bharathiyar songs not just came as an innovation into the field of dance but also instilled the spirit of patriotism during the freedom struggle. He also choreographed and presented the Kuttrala Kuravanji. The Vazhuvoor baani also has in its repertoire some beautiful thevarams and Divya prabandhams. They also take great pride in presenting songs of

1. Mutthu Thandavar Marimuttha Pillai
2. Vedanayagam Pillai
3. Gopalakrishna Bharati
4. Desikavinayagam Pillai
5. Ootukkadu Venkata Kavi
6. Papanasam Sivan

This baani has also been enriched by the pieces composed by Vazhuvooraar himself. These include a few tillanas, Jatiswarams and Tamizh Sabdams. The September 1988 issue of the Sruti magazine has written extensively about the dance of Kamala Lakshman. Though this piece is about the dancer and not exactly about her lineage, it does sum up to a large extent the repertoire of the Vazhuvoor baani. It mentions pieces such as:

SONG	RAGAM	TALAM	COMPOSER	STYLE
Nee mata	Purvi kalyani	Adi	-	Javali
Cheli nenetlu	Paras	Adi	-	Javali
Ka va va	Varali	Adi	Papanasam Sivan	Krti
Sakhi prana	Senjurutti	Adi	Dharmapuri Subbarayar	Javali
Alagu theerena	-	-	-	-
Daanike	-	-	-	Varnam

Mohamaana	-	-	-	Varnam
nee Indha mayam	-	-	-	-
bhavayami raghuramam	Ragamalika	rupakam	Swati Tirunal	Krti
kamalajasya	Ragamalika	Adi	Swati Tirunal	Krti
sadhinchane	arabhi	Adi	Tyagaraja	Pancharatna krti
Natanam aadinar	vasantha	-	Gopalakrishna bharati	Krti
Nadar mudi	punnagavarali	ekam	Find out	Snake dance
Aaduvome	-	Adi	Mahakavi bharathi	Patriotic song
Etthanai sonnalum	-	-	-	Padam
Innam en	Charukesi	Adi	Lalgudi Jayaraman	Pada varnam
Krishna nee begane	Yaman kalyan	Mishra chapu	Vyasaraya	Dasara padagallu
jagadoddharana	kapi	Adi	Purandaradasa	Purandaradasa
Anda rama soundaryam	kedaragowla	Adi	Arunachalam kavirayar	Rama nataka keerthanam
Karunai seidhida	-	-	-	Varnam

The legacy of the Vazhuvoor baani was carried forward by nattuvanars groomed by Vazhuvooraar. They include his children Vazhuvoor Samraj, Vazhuvoor Palaniappan Pillai, daughter Bhagyalakshmi, his son in law Swamimalai Rajratnam Pillai (1931-1994), KJ Sarasa (1937-2012), Patthamadaai Ramaswamy, Gopalakrishnan, Kameswaran. Of these, Swamimalai rajaratnam Pillai was considered a true inheritor of the vazhuvoor baani. He was an outstanding singer, who rendered Brigas with stunning ease.

Mysore Baani:

History:

Ancient Kannada literature and temple inscriptions mention dance forms and how they flourished in the soil of Karnataka. The Chalukyan sculptures of Badami

reveal a thorough understanding of the Natyasastra as early as the 5th century. Between the 4th and the 13th centuries, dance was taught as a proper discipline in the universities of Talakadu. The rulers of Mysore were not just patrons of art but fine artists themselves. For instance, queen Shantala was a dancer par excellence. Under the patronage of the Wodeyar rulers the various art forms thrived and grew in strength. Bharatanatyam also reached its zenith during the rule of the Wodeyars. While Kantheeraya Wodeyar set up a school of learning Bharatanatyam in Srirangapatna, Chikkadeva Raja Wodeyar wrote two dance dramas: Geeta Gopala and Saptodpaadaki.

During the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar (1799-1868), a distinct style of Bharatanatyam emerged, which gradually gained fame as the Mysore baani. Chamarajendra Wodeyar (1868-1901) who succeeded Krishnaraja Wodeyar invited Chinnaya of the famed Tanjore quartet to his court. Chinnaya brought with him the treasures of the Tanjore baani and thus gave the gift of Bharatanatyam to Mysore.

The Sadir margam created by the Tanjore brothers got assimilated into the already existing mode of dancing in the royal courts of Mysore and gave birth to a unique style of dancing. In Mysore since the dance was patronised more in the courts than in the temples, “court dancing” or parlour dancing was a big part of the Mysore school and the royal court of Mysore was adorned by many rajadasis. This is not to say that the devadasi system did not exist in Mysore. Many devadasis of great talent such as Jejamma, Rangamma, who possessed high level of virtuosity and technical prowess flourished in royal Mysore. The techniques used in the Mysore baani have

much similarity with the Tanjore baani. However as far as the abhinaya pieces were concerned, the works of extraordinary Kannada poets were included in the margam of the Mysore style thus giving it authenticity and local flavour.

Jatti Thayamma, an artist from Mysore was a great abhinaya artist. She was appointed as a court dancer when she was 15 years old. She specialised in the poorva ranga vidhi. Her disciple Venkatalakshma though from a non-traditional background, was a leading light of the Mysore baani and was appointed as a court dancer at age 22; a position that she held for more than three decades. Other exponents of the Mysore Baani were C Radhakrishna, his pupil Padmini Sridhar, Pulakeshi Kasturi and Veena Sridhar contributed to the propagation of the Mysore baani in no small measure. Key gurus of the Mysore baani include Keshavamurthy, Venkatalakshma, Nagamani, Amrtappa, Dasappa, Bangalore Kittappa, Gundappa, Kolar Putappa, Amrithamma, Coimbatore Thayee, Bangalore Nagarathnamma, Radhakrishna and others.

Technique:

At first glance, one can say that the Mysore baani lays more emphasis on Abhinaya than on Nrta. Hence the Abhinaya is more refined and elaborate. Yet, the adavus seen in the mysore baani are also lyrical with finesse. This is possibly because the dance flourished primarily in the royal courts before coming to the proscenium. Even today, this baani is known for flowery hand gestures. Well-rounded Mudras like alapadma and katakamukha are used more generously than linear ones like pataka , tripataka etc. Jaaru adavus are used beautifully (sometimes in abhinaya numbers) to make them lively and buoyant.

Sitting and performing the abhinaya is a common feature in this school of dance. Since the Mysore dancers were accomplished singers too, their Abhinaya renditions even as they sat and sang must have been a treat to watch and hear. Since the dancer herself rendered the song, the progression of the sangathis matched the improvisation of the Abhinaya interpretation thus leading to a very refined performance.

Interestingly, the Mysore baani pays a lot of attention to songs that are based on the lore of Sri Krishna. This is said to be because a king belonging to the Ganga dynasty of modern-day Karnataka won over kingdoms in Orissa. Jayadeva the composer of the Geeta govinda was patronised by the Ganga king Lakshmanasena and hence his ashtapadis found their way into the culture of Mysore and the rajadasis of the royal courts of Mysore incorporated them into their repertoire.

It is also said that there are plenty of similarities between the Mysore style of abhinaya and Odissi; one of the main points of similarity being the generous use of the tribhangi, by the Mysore dancers, akin to the Odissi artists. The open mind and adaptability of these dancers is remarkable. When Jatti Thayamma performed abhinaya to thumris she wore a ghunghat or veil in the north Indian style. Even if the performance happened to be in the royal court, the rajadasis would display their guru bhakti by commencing the recital only after paying obeisance to the Guru / Nattuvanar.

Repertoire and Musical Values of the Mysore Baani:

Chamarajendra Wodeyar was a great rasika of Javalis, and encouraged this form a great deal. Jatti Thayamma and her school introduced the concept of performing many shlokas. The artists of this baani also perform beautiful padams and ashtapadis, Neeti shataka, Amaru Shataka, Mukunda mala and many Kannada compositions. The Jatti thayamma school prides of a vast abhinaya repertoire.

The poorva ranga vidhi performed by Jatti Thayamma and her sishya parampara diligently respects the tenets of the Natyasastra. Choornikas in raga Arabhi were usually presented. This choornika would usually be sung by the dancer herself and would be in praise of the rangaadhi devata, or the presiding deity of the performance stage. This would be followed by Sabha Vandana shloka and a natya praarambha from the play Malavika-Agnimitra of Kalidasa would be presented. This segment would be wrapped up with a Pushpanjali shloka. The doyenne sometime performed abhinaya to thumris too. When she did this, she was accompanied by the sarangi and tabla.

The alarippu was replaced by a Ganapathy shabdam or any other shabdam. The rest of the fare included jatiswaram, varnam, thillana etc, just like most other baanis. As mentioned earlier, Jayadeva's ashtapadis are an important part of the Mysore repertoire. The Mysore kings greatly relished Sanskrit and the ashtapadis offer great scope for abhinaya and thus the ashtapadis fit in beautifully into the Mysore baani.

This school also performs shlokas of Amara, Krishna Karnaamrtam, Bharata Hari's Neeti shataka etc. Poems of the Dasara Koota composers and vachanas of composers like raja vilaasa are a hallmark of this baani. Some beautiful Kannada javalis are a speciality of this mysore baani. They include the spectacular Devarnamas and krtis of Mysore Vasudevacharya, Mysore Sadasiva Rao, Mutthiah Bhagavathar are yet another speciality of this baani.

Very often a shloka is sung before a padam. Sometimes a kandha padya is rendered. These tend to elevate the mood and setting of the ensuing composition.

Kalakshetra Baani:

History:

Kalakshetra baani is a relatively "young" one. Though "Kalakshetra" is the name of the institution founded by Smt Rukmini Devi Arundale, over time it also became the name of the Baani practiced by her and her students. Whether Rukmini Devi intended to create a new baani is not known. In all probability, she tweaked her own dancing to suit her needs, those of her students and her audiences and inadvertently sowed the seeds for a new baani, ie the Kalakshetra baani.

Though being one of the more recent Baanis, the Kalakshetra baani is one of the most popular ones today. This must be due to the very large number of students that Kalakshetra has produced and also because of their discipline and strict adherence to what was taught to them. Thus, the Kalakshetra baani has been able to ensure continuity and standardisation. Being one of the first places where dance teaching was

institutionalised, a lot of the Kalakshetra pedagogy has been documented carefully and diligently, thus ensuring an unbroken lineage of Kalakshetra dancers who dominate the contemporary dance scene in many parts of the world.

Kalakshetra technique:

Simplistically put, the Kalakshetra baani is a mixture of the Pandanallur baani with some elements of Kathakali added to it. Many scholars do not even accept the Kalakshetra baani as a baani, since many seniors taught at Kalakshetra and left an element or two of their own baanis at Kalakshetra, thus giving it its current form. Rukmini Devi's had early exposure to ballet and was influenced by the legendary Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova. Rukmini Devi's need to tweak her knowledge to of Bharatanatyam to suit the new crop of male dancers who joined Kalakshetra might have contributed to her making the alterations that ensued. The Kalakshetra natyarambham is stretched straight and the araimandi is expected to be as deep as possible. The feet are stamped with great vigour and all adavus are practiced in trikalam.

Though Rukmini Devi's was inspired to learn Bharatanatyam after seeing the performance of two devadasi dancers Pandanallur Jeevaratnam and Jayalakshmi, her dancing and pedagogy dropped many aspects of the dance of the devadasis. This earned her both accolades and brickbats. She learnt from masters of the traditional Pandanallur baani- Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai and Chockalingam Pillai but added several new facets to her own dancing and choreograph while jettisoning many parts of the traditional dance that she learnt.

Her attempts to sanitise the dance of what she saw as crude gestures and words made her the face of this new avatar of Bharatanatyam. This new and modified style appealed to the new class of educated middle class audience that formed a large part of the new “market” that replaced the old bourgeois, aristocratic and royal class.

She removed from the dance everything that she perceived as crude or objectionable. Certain movements of the lips neck and hip were erased from her dance vocabulary altogether. These changes were abhorred by the traditional dancers from the Isai Vellalar community including T Balasaraswati, who said:

"the effort to purify Bharatanatyam through the introduction of novel ideas is like putting a gloss on burnished gold or painting the lotus".

Thus, within a few years of her arrival on the scene, she (Rukmini Devi) began to be pitted against Balasaraswati and they began to be seen as rivals who stood at two ends of the spectrum, one representing shringara and the other representing bhakti. It is not as though the Kalakshetra style jettisoned shringara aspect altogether. They did and do perform it, but it is a rather sanitised version of the shringara. Some traditional practitioners found this modified shringara to be bland, staid and therefore bereft of soul. Rukmini Devi however argued that the only way to give some respectability to dance and to make the new educated middle class enjoy and consume it was to rid the dance of its erotic and coquettish elements. Hence, even the most intensely shringara pieces were performed in a manner that

did not reek of eroticism.

A good example of this is an old video of Sri Balagopal, Smt Krishnaveni Lakshmanan and Leela Samson performing the Jayadeva Ashtapadi, Yaahi Madhava Yahi keshava. While Shri Balagopal plays a contrite Krishna who has erred, Smt Krishnaveni is a livid Radha who is enraged at the wanton ways of her lover. Leela Samson is the meek yet sympathetic sakhi. Smt. Krishnaveni, being the Kalakshetra veteran that she was displays the rage and disgust of Radha in the typical Kalakshetra manner- measured, planned and quantized. The eyebrows are used in the typical Kalakshetra style: raised a bit, in the manner of the Kathakali dancers.

Despite it being an abhinaya piece, Smt Krishnaveni performs a brisk sollukattu, with perfectly choreographed adavus before proceeding to express her consternation in the abhinaya / lyric segment. Almost all Kalakshetra dancers have impeccable line and length. The Kalakshetra teaching methodology involves years of rigorous training in adavus alone, thus ensuring an extraordinary level of perfection in their rendition of the adavus. That said, the same cannot be said of students who learn from schools run by Kalakshetra graduates, outside of Kalakshetra.

The main focus of the Kalakshetra pedagogy is on the angika aspect. The linearity and geometry are more expansive and certain movements are exaggerated. It is characterised by crispness and precision of various movements, distinctive and

exclusive positions of angas, upaangas and pratyangas, very rigorous training and almost complete elimination of erotic and sensual elements.

The bhakti element is greatly emphasised upon. The posture in this baani is erect and shorn of any undue bends of the body. The shoulders are kept straight and are never raised or sloppy. Movements of the hands are usually aligned with the shoulder level and the positions of the hands and feet are usually balanced out neatly into a straight line. The elbows and the wrists are seldom bent. Rukmini Devi replaced the ekapada sthanaka in many places with the Aindra mandala position. The 8th naattadavu is a case in point. Another change brought in was the manner in which the Tripitaka or the alapadma hasta is held when the arms are placed in natyarambha positions.

In the old sadir-aattam styles, including that of Rukmini Dev's own gurus, when the arms were extended into a natyarambham the alapadma / tripataaka would face upwards. In the Kalakshetra baani, this was modified and the mudra is turned halfway, in a manner that the mudra was visible to the audience. It is said that Rukmini Devi believed that the hastas are meant to be seen by the audience and thus turning them upward was not preferred.

The Kalakshetra baani has a methodical and systematic approach to the teaching and rendition of adavus. Adavus are grouped under various heads such as: tattadavu nattadavu the tha Thai thai tha , Kudittu mettadavu, sarukkal adavu , so on and so forth, all adavus are practiced in the thrikala , ie vilamba, Madhya and durita . During practice sessions, a student is made to practice these adavus. That is, they end

where they begin. Rukmini Devi is credited with having introduced some atypical hastas into the group of nr̥tta hastas. For example, she commonly used the chandrakala hasta in the mei adavu of the tillanas. She also used the swastika pada position of the feet. Another peculiar feature of the Kalakshetra baani is the modified rendition of adavus to suit the characters that were being portrayed. This was seen majorly in the dance drama productions of Kalakshetra.

For example, in the Jatayu moksham, one sees that jatayu dances adavus with the arms held in dola while the fingers are bent into garuda hasta. Similarly, in Krsihnamaari kuravanji the adavus are modified to resemble the movements of a serpent. The dance of the apsaras has been tweaked to look like it appears as though they are floating in space and are not grounded.

Tattimettu:

The Kalakshetra manner of performing the tattimettu is rather peculiar. The legs are held in the aaleedha position during tattimettus. This is peculiar because the gurus of Rukmini Devi belonged to the pandanallur Baani and this pattern (of keeping the legs in aaleedha) is not seen to be present in the Pandanallur baani. If so, it is unclear when and why Rukmini Devi brought this change into her baani. Whatever the reason, this practice has stuck not only to all Kalakshetra dancers but also to the many disciples that they have groomed.

Teermanams:

As she expanded the repertoire of the Kalakshetra baani, Rukmini Devi felt the need for more jatis / teermanams. Thus, she and her team composed many beautiful jatis to suit these pieces. In the Kalakshetra baani, jathis are always referred to as teermanams. While these teermanams were inspired by the jatis or sorkattus that were present in the old dasiattam, she modified some of them to suit the needs of her dance works.

In a few of the Kalakshetra varnams, one finds that two teermanams are performed back-to-back. Whether this is an innovation brought in by Rukmini Devi or was a practice borrowed from some other baani remains to be verified. In some pieces, specific sollus were used to highlight certain emotions. For example, in the Ramayana series, surpanakha's paatra praveshas employs hard sounding sollus like kirra kitta etc.

Peculiar features of nrithya in the Kalakshetra baani:

Rukmini Devi brought in several changes in the sphere of nrithya also. Most important

amongst them are

1. Gestures and elements inspired from Kathakali
2. Creation of new gestures
3. Elimination of the erotic

Since Bharatanatyam was essentially a solo dance form, meant to be performed by female artists, when Rukmini Devi embarked on the choreography of her dance dramas, she needed to borrow certain elements that would

- a. Help presentation of group work
- b. Be suitable for performance by her male dancers

With this in mind, she drew upon a few elements from Kathakali. One notes that while the Bharatanatyam vocabulary has ample provision for the depiction of human and divine characters, few elements such as the description of forests, lakes, bees, flowers etc find better expression through the hastas of Kathakali. In doing so, Rukmini Devi and her Kalakshetra baani spare no effort and leave no stone unturned to ensure that the borrowed Kathakali elements merge seamlessly into the grammar of Bharatanatyam. Most elements of the Kalakshetra baani are loyal to the natyadharmi style.

Apart from borrowing from Kathakali, many Kalakshetra seniors state that Rukmini Devi created a few hand gestures herself. These were possibly inspired by her own study of sculptures and scriptures. The movements are standardized to such an extent that one observed that almost all Kalakshetra graduates' dancing styles look nearly identical to one another. This form of Bharatanatyam embraces stern and controlled angular movements of the body. Angular, straight, ballet-like kinesthetics are the hallmarks of this Baani. Rechakas are avoided as they constitute movements of the hip. The movements of all limbs are measured and accurate. In creating her baani, Rukmini Devi seems to have been influenced by Kathakali, Bhagavata Mela, Kuchipudi and Yakshagana¹⁹². These influences are seen primarily in her dance dramas but also in her margam presentations.

¹⁹² As corroborated by Shri Baroda Chandrasekhar in 2021

Pedadogy and theory:The Kalakshetra pedagogy believes in giving the dancer a firm rooting in theory as well as in the practical aspects. Since Kalakshetra was one of the first full-time academies of dancing (apart from the traditional families for whom dance was a way of life in itself) it made sure that the training imparted there was thorough. Students are taught dance, music, languages, dance theory, mythology and history. Learning of shlokas from the natyasastra and abhinaya darpana is mandatory.

Rukmini Devi was from a Vedic / Sanskrit background and thus her fondness for the language is understandable. Students thus learnt shlokas pertaining to the asamyuta hastas, samyuta hastas, greeva bhedas, mandala bhedas, devata hastas, charis, so on and so forth.

Another unique aspect of the Kalakshetra pedagogy was the habit of documenting and recording the choreographic and learning process. Drawing matchstick figures was something that has been done since the days Rukmini Devi and this ensures uniformity and continuity. Long before the days of audio recording and filming, Kalakshetra preserved all their creative output for their own benefit and that of posterity.

Repertoire and musical values of the Kalakshetra baani:

Rukmini Devi was a trained vocalist, having learnt under no less than Mysore Vasudevacharya and Tiger Varadaracharya. Thus, she had an acute sense of music while working on most of her choreographies. Rooted in classicism and traditional musical values, most of her work was committed to classical and austere ragas and

leaned towards the weightier ones. The vidwans who composed the music for all her dance drama productions were formidable musicians and vaggeyakaras in their own right: Mysore Vasudevacharya, Budalur Krishnamurty Sastry, Tiger Varadachari, S Rajaram, Bhagavthula Seetharama Sharma. Thus, the music of the Kalakshetra dance dramas is in itself a study in chastity and classism.

While Rukmini Devi borrowed many elements of Kathakali for her dance dramas, one clear departure made by her was that unlike Kathakali dramas where all singing portions of a particular character were in a single raga, in her dance dramas each passage was sung in a raga suitable to the emotion it conveyed. Thus, each dance drama employed several ragas. Mysore Vasudevacharya composed the invocation for the Ramayana series as a Pancha Ghana raga malika with the same ragas used by Sri Tyagaraja for his pancharatna krtis viz: Naatai, Gowla, Arabhi, Varali and Sri.

For the Maha pattabhishkem, Shri Rajaram and Shri Seetharama Sharma used majestic ragas like Nattai, Gangeyabhooshani etc to portray Ravana's qualities - rajasik , yet regal. The Seeta Swayamvaram dance drama has several flashes of genius. For instance, Rama is introduced with sollus reminiscent of the Navasandhi kautuvams' sorkattus. The song is in raga Latangi and it aptly suits his Dheerodatta character. When Ravana declares that the mighty siva dhanush is nothing but a mere blade of grass before him, the raga used is gambheera nattai. Though this Raaga is typically used in the opening numbers of Carnatic music concerts, it sounds most apt here. The progression of his might is brought out by starting the singing with slow

vilamba kala phrases and then building it up to a crescendo with faster duritha kala phrases.

In sharp contrast, Rama's acceptance of his new life as a renunciate is reflected in the use of Madhyamavati when he conveys his thoughts to Kaikeyi upon being asked to leave Ayodhya for the forests. When Rama gently tries to convince a resolute Seetha to stay back in Ayodhya, he does so in a calm Natabhairavi.

In Srirama Vanagamanam, the cunning and scheming nature of Manthara is aptly represented through a Simhendramadhyam with quick brigas. In contrast, Kaikeyi's newly acquired ambition and avarice come through in a deceptively pleasing Udayaravichandrika. The conspiracy hatched by these two ladies is effectively demonstrated in Kambhoji, with its blend of authority, conviction and softness. The numb pain of Dasharatha is eloquently portrayed through a soulful Vakulabharanam, thus leaving the audience with moist eyes. Interestingly the same Kamboji is used in a rather folksy style in the dance drama Paduka Pattabhishekam where Guha and his tribesmen dance to a song in this raga as they perform the Ganga Puja. Mayamalavagowla a somber and weighty raga is used rather surprisingly in yet another folk-dance sequence here. Bilahari which is used in various other parts of the Ramayana series to show a variety of sequences is also utilised to show Kaikeyi's myopic sense of victory when she brags to her son about how she secured the kingdom for him. In sharp contrast Bharata's sense of renunciation is sung in a pensive Sunadavinodini.

In Sabari Moksham, the songs that describe Sabari are set to a heart-wrenchingly soulful Mukhari. Here the inspiration was possibly from Sri Tyagaraja Swami who composed the immortal krti Entha ni ne varnainthunu sabari. When Sri rama confers upon sabari the ultimate bliss of liberation, she dances to a gentle yet sober Manirangu. This raga was chosen keeping in mind the age of Sabari's character and her pious nature.

In Choodamani Pradanam, Anjaneya's patra pravesham is in a sprightly Hamsadhwani. Brisk and masculine sollukattus pepper this patra pravesham in order to convey the masculine, valorous and simian nature of Lord Hanuman. One must note that though Vaali's pathra pravesham is featured soon after Hanuman's entry, the stark difference in the qualities of these two characters is clearly elucidated in the music itself. The Arohana phrases and the brigas of the Mohana raga pathra pravesham combined with the use of multiple gatis bring to life Vali's nature in such a vivid manner that one need not even see the dance to be able to differentiate between the two characters of Hanuman and Vali.

In Maha pattabhishekham, Sri Seetharama Sharma composed an exquisite piece in Kadanakuthuhalam to depict the construction of the bridge. Kadanakuthuhalam is a raga with several vakra prayogas and thus the choice of raga could not have been more appropriate to show the enthusiasm of Sri Rama's simian army, their adorable antics and their hurried pace of work. Adding to this is the intelligent use of sorkattus. This passage became so popular that to this day whenever choreographers or dancers visualise a scene connected to vanaras, the raga that is

most likely to be chosen is Kadanakuthoohalam and the composition that gets created for this sequence resembles the work of Shri Sharma in some way or the other. In keeping with their commitment to Sampradaya, Rukmini Devi her team ended the Maha Pattabhishekam with a traditional Madhyamavati.

Another passage that has proven to be a guiding light for many dancers is the Rama Ravana Yuddham. The contrasting combat styles of Rama and Ravana, their opposing natures and the long-drawn battle using different Astras or weapons are brought out through the creative and novel use of percussion instruments and sollukattus. Being an austere devotee of tradition, no modern or electric instruments were used by Rukmini Devi in any of productions. Thus, even the larger-than-life experiences were created only through the Mrdangam, tabla and other acoustic instruments.

Thus, one observes that in the choice of ragas, both Rukmini Devi her music composers have given utmost importance to bhava and the creation of rasa. However, the genius of the music composers lies in the fact that despite giving ultimate importance to rasa and emotion, they made sure that the rules of raga propriety were also maintained, followed and adhered too. Thus, one would never find an Arabhi followed by a Devagandhari or a Kalyani followed by a Latangi or a Shankarabharanam followed by a Hari Kambhoji.

Adherence to Kala Theory:

According to the kala theory of ragas, each raga has a specific time of the day in which it ought to be rendered. For examples ragas like Bhoopalam, Bowli , Regupti etc ought to be rendered in the morning Bilahari in the late morning , Saveri before noon, Madhyamavati around mid-day, Begada in the afternoon , ananda bhairavi in the evening , Kedaragowla in the night, Neelambari at bed time, so on and so forth . Being the purists that they were, Rukmini Devi and her music composers tried to adhere to this theory as far as possible. In keeping with this goal, the first morning of the exile is sung in an evocative Bowli. Many other such instances are seen in other dance dramas of Kalakshetra.

In Kumarasambhavam, Tiger Varadachari composed the music in such a manner that the phrases gradually built up from the mandara sthayi to the tara sthayi, thus depicting the majesty of the might Himalayas in the most vivid manner. The kala pramana also moves from vilamba, passes through madhyama and concludes in duritha, thus creating a grand effect. In Koodiyattam, the mizhavu is used in a unique manner to create a dramatic effect in sequences such as these. It is possible that Rukmini Devi was influenced by this. In the same drama, in the sequence where Parvathi extols the virtues of Siva, the naalu kalai chowkam is used to portray the extent of Parvathi's passion. The madhyama Kalam is employed to showcase the devotion of the apsaras' towards Lord Siva.

Creation of new ragas for the Kalakshetra productions:

Though Rukmini Devi and her music composers were purists in the strict sense of the term, they were by no means rigid or bigoted. Hence, when the need arose, they deviated from the traditional classical ragas and dove into the vast pool of Indian music and discovered new gems that suited their requirement. Thus for the boat sequence in Sri rama vanagamanam , Sri Mysore Vasudevachar came up with a new raga, which he named Gangalahari that was lilting and at once reminded the audience of the scene where Rama crossed the river with the help of the boatman, Guha.

Similarly, in Srirama Vanagamanam, he created a new raga called Chittabhamari to represent Dasharatha's state of mind when he hears Kaikeyi's outrageous demand. As the name suggests, this raga delves into the mind of the ageing king and the outpouring of his anguish, confusion and dismay is heart-breaking.

Rare Ragas used in the Kalakshetra Productions:

As mentioned earlier, all the music composers who worked with Rukmini Devi were vaaggeyakaras of extraordinary calibre. Thus, when the need arose, they easily incorporated rare ragas into their composing. For instance, Shoorpanakha's entry is in Dattuvardhini, while the dance of the magic deer is in Sukini. One must note the use of the rare raga Pratapasaranga to portray the entry of Ravana. Not only does this raga suit the character of Ravana from a melodic point of view, but the name of the raga

also suits the nature of the character (Pratapa means valour). Similarly, Vibheeshana's lament is portrayed in a poignant Charumati and Seeta's anguish before her Agni pariksha is sung in a heart-breaking Bhavani.

Departure from the margam:

Like many of her trailblazer contemporaries, Rukmini Devi set out to choreograph pieces that belonged to the carnatic kutcheri repertoire. She chose not to stick on only to the repertoire handed down to her by her gurus. To this end, she choreographed compositions of the trinity: Tyagaraja, Syama Sastri and Dikshitar. Ironically Tyagaraja, in many of his krtis has referred to dancing women in a rather disparaging tone. Yet Rukmini Devi portrayed Tyagaraja krtis in a very soulful manner. She also choreographed many krtis of Muttuswamy Dikshitar, Gopalakrishna Bharati etc

Folk Music and dance:

While Rukmini Devi was an ardent devotee of tradition and strived to preserve and propagate the dance bequeathed to her by her gurus, she was a true Indophile who had an abiding love for all things Indian. This was reflected in every aspect of her life and work. She brought to Kalakshetra the variety and verve of the folk dances from across India. These were at once vibrant and lively and carried with them the fragrance of the soil. As Kalakshetra grew and attracted students from across the country and the globe, this "variety programs "of Kalakshetra grew from strength to strength. The Kalakshetra folk dances have an exquisitely austere quality to them. Performed by

groups of well-trained male and female dancers and accompanied by the authentic ethnic music, these pieces of history are truly a feast for the eyes and the ears.

Changes in Aharya:

Rukmini Devi studied the bas reliefs and temple panels to seek inspiration for her Bharatanatyam costumes. The inputs she obtained from this study, combined with her own aesthetics and her experiences as a widely travelled theosophist helped her to come up with a graceful costume that many dancers follow and use to this day. She also discarded the colourful sceneries that were used as backdrops for dance on favour of plain blue curtains. She also moved the musicians from the back of the stage to the right-hand side of the dancer. Her interactions with the Kathakali artists had a bearing on her makeup and costume choices. For example, The Kalakshetra drawing the eyebrows is rather exaggerated. Similarly, Ravana's costume in Seeta Swayamavaram is not one that would usually be seen on the Bharatanatyam stage.

Melattur Baani:

History:

The Melattur baani of Bharatanatyam (not to be confused with the Melattur Bhagavata mela) was pioneered by Shri Mangudi Dorairaja Iyer. He was born in 1900 to Shri Mangudi Ramanathan Bhagavathar. Shri Dorairaja Iyer was a multi-faceted personality. He was a scholar of music, a Sri Vidya upasaka, and an authority on mrdangam. He studied mrdangam from Anganna Naickar and Tanjavur Vaidhyanatha Iyer. He was an accompanist to many well-known musicians. His Tamil drama "Mithra Pasam" in 1932 was later adapted to a stage production which he directed.

He learnt Bharatham and Nattuvangam under the guidance of Melattur Natesa Iyer who was a leading light among the Bagavatha Mela teachers of Melattur. He also authored two books- 'Mrdangam Swabodhini' which was co-authored by PK Murthy (1939) and 'Swabodha Bharatha Navaneetham'(1957).He established the "Chidanandha Natya Mandali" through which he started grooming a handful of pupils in his exclusive baani.

Melattur Technique:

Sri Dorairaja Iyer, was influenced by his spiritual outlook and thus endeavoured to bring an esoteric and divine touch to his dance pedagogy. Thus, elements of his Srividya upasana shine forth through his compositions. Shri Dorairaja Iyer abhorred narastuti as he believed that it went against his ethos as a staunch Srividya upasaka. Thus, all his items were strictly religious and did not glorify any human patron. He sought inspiration from the ancient temples and the temple dances and created a repertoire that extolled the gods, the goddesses and the sages.

This is not to say that shingara was jettisoned. The dance of the dasis was a major source of inspiration for this baani and thus shringara also played a major role in the Melattur repertoire. However, the shringara was subtle and symbolic. Crude and blunt interpretations were avoided at all costs and the shringara is clearly soaked in Bhakti. Thus, the minds of the audiences were never allowed to deviate from the underlying mood of devotion and piety. In the Melattur baani, the aim is for the footwork to sound musical and pleasing.

Thus, indiscriminate stamping of the feet is not encouraged. The dance pays attention to the use of the salangai bells and is supposed to master the art of using them in an elegant manner, so that there is variety even in the sounds produced by these bells. The accents heard in the percussion instruments and the rhythm embedded in the song ought to be reflected in the sound of the kinkini bells.

The Melattur baani is known for taut delivery of adavus, fluid variations and multitude of patterns in korvais. The face is trained to be mobile and each movement is presented with joy and verve. The influence of Bhagavatha mela is seen in the dramatisation of abhinaya and the exaggerated movements of the eyes. Yet the dignity and grace of Bharatanatyam are never compromised. Though the Abhinaya is exaggerated, it is not theatrical or melodramatic. Scope for individualistic improvisation is ample.

It is a very physically demanding style, owing to the deep araimandi and the arched way of holding the spine. The kala pramana also goes from Vilamba to athi duritha , thus challenging the dancer constantly. The artist is required to be able to switch from the natyadharmi Mode to the lokadharmi mode in a swift manner. This calls for a great deal of versatility and flexibility, both mentally and physically.

Repertoire and musical values of the Melattur Baani:

Dr Rama Kausalya states:

*“Actually, Melattur played a visionary role in
the development of Bharatanatyam.*

The first alarippu, first Shabdam, first Tillana,

and first Swarajati were composed in Melattur”

Shri Dorairaja Iyer resurrected the Suddha Nritham,

Bhattasa Natyam and Perani Natyam. The Melattur

style is said to be based on shri mangudi dorairaja iyer’s

study of ancient and rare texts such as “Kohaliyam”,

“Nagarjuneeyam”, “Bharatha Sastra Moolam”,

“Abhinaya Darpanam”, and “Natanadhi Vadya Ranjanam”.

Being a mrdangam vidwan, Sri Dorairaja iyer incorporated extensive panache nada and gait bheda sequences. In many of his varnams, gati bheda would be introduced in every jati. The melattur baani is famous for the rare item shuddha nrtha. It is said that Shri Dorairaja Iyer became interested in Shuddha Nritham after witnessing a performance by a devadasi woman at the Cheyyur Sengalvarayar temple. It is said that she who performed it along with no less than seventy one types of other items / musical forms such as items Kavita, Nritta, Vadya, Sangeeta etc. Replete with intricate footwork and musical tapping of the feet, it explores various time measures in different tempos. It is akin to a duet between the dancer and theMrdangist. A test of the dancer’s sharpness and mettle, this the crowning glory of the melattur baani. Other unique pieces of the melattur baani are the bhattasa Natyam and Perani Natyam (dance on the clay pot).

Aharya of the Melattur Style:

It is said that Shri Mangudi Dorairaja Iyer’s experience of working in Gemini studio influenced his ideas on dance; especially in the aharya aspect. He introduced the

practice of fastening a cotton belt around the waist to protect the dancer's spine as well as to ensure an erect posture.

Baroda Baani:

History:

Baroda's tryst with Bharatanatyam began in 1883 when princess Lakshmibai of Tanjore wed Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad. As part of her magnificent trousseau or wedding dowry, along went a troupe of dancers and singers. While the Chinna melam team comprised of three dancers Kamu, Gowri and Sarada, their nattuvanars Kannuswamy Nattuvanar and Kuppuswamy Nattuvanar, the mrdangists Vadivelu, Subrahmanyam and Sabapati, the periya melam artists were mutthukrishnan (nagaswaram), Karandai Ratnam Pillai (tamil) and Ramaswamy (Ottu).

The Maharaja of Baroda was a great patron of the arts and provided well for the Tanjore dancers adorning his court. Though the ensemble grew in number (it was a 48-member troupe by 1916) the Maharaja provided well for all members and ensured that they pursued their art comfortably. The Kalavanth Katha or the artists department of the government managed the artists and made sure they were paid regularly. Thus, the Baroda dancers were well nurtured and performed their arts freely and with imagination.

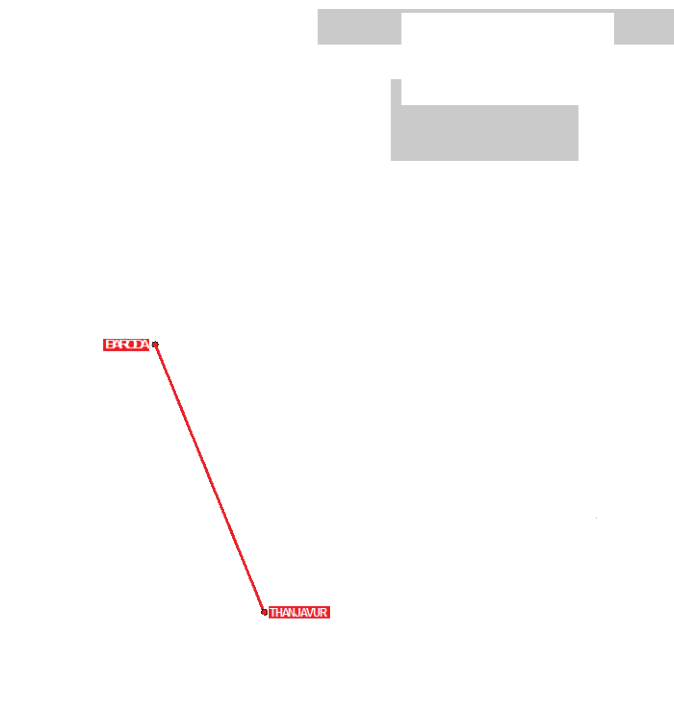


Plate 11 – Map of India

Technique of the Baroda Baani:

It is usually observed that the dasiattam dancers would adapt their repertoire and style of dancing to suit the tastes of their patron kings / audiences. However, in the case of the Tanjore troupe in Baroda, they did no such thing. They stuck to the original repertoire that they brought with them and performed the same pieces till the very end. They did not add any Gujarati items to their repertoire, nor did they allow any local influences to creep into their dancing. This was certainly due to the comfort

given to them by their royal employers and also due to their own conviction and pride vis-a-vis their dancing.

The 2002 edition of attendance states:

“Unlike the mix and fix, match and latch (to other languages) that came to dilute the form, these dancers presented only traditional margam, no deviation... not even to please the kings. They never composed anything in Marathi or Gujrati to curry favour”.

Repertoire of the Baroda Dancers:

Since the dancing girls from Tanjore stuck to their original repertoire, the Baroda baani is very similar to the Tanjore baani. Items performed traditionally in the Baroda baani include Pushpanjali, alarippu, Jatiswaram, Shabdham, pada varnam, thillana etc.

The concept of Baani today:

The debate regarding the validity and relevance of the concept of baani today is a real and a raging one. Until the advent of digital media and social media platforms, a sishya who learnt from one guru learnt exclusively from him/ her. The sishya was almost fully insulated from the influence of any other baani other than that of his / her guru. Thus, the transmission of the baani from a guru to the sishya was unadulterated by any outside influences.

In the past, the only source of learning for any sishya was at the feet of his/ her guru. Conferences, lecture demonstrations, seminars, workshops and the like did not happen as often as they do today. Even when such events did take place, many gurus were reluctant to permit their sishyas to attend the same. The dance world today is a much more open place with plenty of information exchange. Many students learn from multiple gurus, either simultaneously or one after the other. Oftentimes, a dancer learns the basics from a guru who follows one baani and then moves on for advanced training with a guru who follows another baani. Since dancing has so much to do with muscle memory it is near impossible for the dancer to unlearn what she has learnt from the earlier guru, when she moves on to the next guru. Thus, the dancer ends up performing a blend of what she has learnt from all gurus.

We also see many cases where a dancer who is faithful to baani, learns and performs a piece or two choreographed by a guru/ dancer of another baani. When she does so, does she dance this piece in *her* baani or in the baani of the teacher / choreographer? This question does not have a straightforward answer. More often than not, the dancer (either consciously or involuntarily) performs this piece in a “hybrid” style ie she blends few elements of her pre-existing style with few elements of the guru from whom she learnt the piece.

Nowadays it is also common for a student of Bharatanatyam dance to learn one or more other dance forms. Many Bharatanatyam dancers learn kuchipudi, kathak, Odissi etc. While this practice was frowned upon by the gurus of the olden

days, over the past few decades it has become an accepted practice. Many of today's stars, including Smt Alarmel Valli and Ms Malavika Sarukkai have studied Odissi. Almost all students of Kalakshetra undergo training in kalaripayattu and kathakali. While they may not perform all these styles professionally, it is very likely that the influence of these forms is seen on the Bharatanatyam performance of these dancers.

Thus today, many scholars opine that it is advisable to not take a dogmatic or puritanical view towards the idea of baani, but instead relish the dance as an artistic, aesthetic, uplifting, enlivening and enlightening experience. As William Shakespeare would say: a rose by any another name would smell as sweet.

Conclusion

Apart from the above baanis, there are many other "fringe" baanis that have evolved over time. However, since they do not have a large number of distinct features, they have not been discussed here. It may also be possible that they have not gained much popularity since they have not had a large number of practitioners. No baani is independent of the form (Bharatanatyam) itself, but gives identity and exclusivity to its presentation.

One must bear in mind that artists must not "start" new baanis in an irresponsible manner or just to attain fast fame and quick attention. The baanis discussed above have evolved over years and are the result of tireless efforts by numerous gurus and genius performers. Thus, one must not be reckless or rushed in one's approach towards understanding/ altering any of the existing baanis or carving

out a new one. Also, minor changes or differences between one's style and another's do not qualify to be called a separate "baani". These are only stylistic differences and individual choices.

That said, one can surely say that none of these great masters who created their own baanis planned on doing so. They simply made the changes that they thought would be appealing. While doing so, they freely gave and took from one another. Most of the pioneers of the various baanis had a great deal of respect for one another, thus this led to a beautiful process of synthesis and osmosis.

The great gurus and nattuvanars had no interest in creating turfs for themselves. They simply sought to teach their art and spread its fame. Having lived through a period of great darkness and uncertainty, many of these nattuvanars zealously worked towards restoring Bharatanatyam to its former glory. They did not pay much attention to nomenclature such as baani/ style etc. They were acutely conscious of the fact that the art was larger than the individuals that practice it and thus pursued it and honed it with love and passion. With the passage of time and the transmission of these stylistic peculiarities from one generation to the other, these gradually got crystallised into a baani or a vazhi.

Another view, albeit a rather cynical one is that individual baanis are nothing but manifestations of the weaknesses of artists, that got transmitted from one generation of their students to the other and got crystallised into a baani over time. Be that as it may, whether by plan or by accident, the world of Bharatanatyam has been

enriched by the variety brought in by the many baanis that flourish in the field today. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses. All these baanis are governed by the same tenets and share a common ethos and aesthetic. Just as the humongous Carnatic music repertoire is based on just seven swaras, so too the basic hastas, adavus and teachings of the Natyasastra combined with the ancient wisdom of our natyacharyas come together to form several different baanis with their magnificent repertoires. Just as the many rivers wind their way gracefully across the country and finally merge into the mighty sagara raja, so too do the various baanis flow in their own path but ultimately merge with and contribute to the richness of the large ocean called Bharatanatyam.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

The crux of this study is an examination of the music of Bharatanatyam and its manifestation in the primary baanis of the dance form. Although Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam have lived and breathed in the same atmosphere for at least over two centuries, today they are perceived, pursued, and performed as separate disciplines. While this may not be an altogether welcome phenomenon, it is the reality of the modern dance and music world. That said, this study endeavored to uncover the intricacies of Carnatic music as seen *within* dance. The fact that music is an intrinsic part of dance has been repeated time and again and thus needs no repetition. From Bharata to Dr. Padma Subrahmanayam¹⁹³, numerous sages, authors, poets, scholars, nattuvanars and dancers have reiterated this. Hence, this work dedicates itself to understanding the *nature* of music when placed *within* the ambit of dance.

As stated briefly in the introductory chapter, though the music of Bharatanatyam is nothing but Carnatic music itself, when used as an accompaniment to dance, the perception of the music undergoes a major transformation. With the change in the intent and context, the delivery and comprehension also change. In a Bharatanatyam concert, the music provides the base upon which the dancer, the nattuvanar and the dancing team build the “story” that they wish to reach to the viewer. Here the word “story” ought not to be understood in a literal way. It means the experience that the dancer wishes to create for the rasika. The music ought to

¹⁹³In an interview conducted by this scholar in 2021, Dr Padma Subrahmanyam stated that music is the mother of dance

remain within its scope of being the supporting act; i.e.: the entire musical ensemble comes together and works in a cohesive fashion only to aid in the creation of rasa by the dancer.

Again, this is not to say that there is no rasa in the singing of the dance singer or the playing of a flutist in a dance ensemble. It is just that the rasa created by each musician in the musical ensemble individually and the entire ensemble collectively is offered to and handed to the dancer, who in turn accepts, absorbs, internalizes it to create her/ his vision and then reaches it to the audience. This is why in a dance performance, though the rasika is parallelly watching the dance and hearing the music, the rasaanubhava experienced by him/ her is one unified experience. This is perhaps also the basis for the adage “see the music- hear the dance”. Interestingly, this was the motto of George Balanchine¹⁹⁴, who is revered as the father of American Ballet.

The aesthetics of both kutcheri music and dance music may be similar¹⁹⁵, but the experiences that they kindle vary. The acoustic dimension of dance music is also very unique. The usage of instruments peculiar to the dance stage plays a vital role in creating these dimensions. A simple example would be this: In a Carnatic kutcheri, the talam is maintained through the use of the singer’s palm, the mridangam artist’s playing and that of the upapakkavadyam (if there is one). This rhythmic acoustic experience is very different from that which is experienced in a dance recital, where the feet of the dancer, the mridangam player and vocals of the nattuvanar and his

¹⁹⁴1904-1983

¹⁹⁵From the viewpoint of technique and content

cymbals – all are executing rhythmic work in their own way. In the pecking order of contribution to the acoustic experience, each of these stake holders play different roles at different times. Hence there are times when the cymbals of the nattuvanar are guiding the aesthetic experience and there are others when the mridangist is playing this role.

The formulae for effective music for Bharatanatyam- Is there one?

Very often, the dancer has to extrapolate multiple layers of interpretation for the lyrical content of dance. When this is done, the musicians also participate in the process. This participation is ideally an active, conscious, and mindful one which is at the same

time instinctive too. Mere rendition of the line, albeit with sufficient sangati variations is not what is expected of the singer. Mere following of the singer with melodic fidelity is *not* considered ample cooperation from the instrumentalists. Mere playing out of the rhythmic patterns executed by the dancer's feet will not suffice. Each member of the musical party has to allow his mind and his musical instrument (or voice, in the case of the singer) to respond to the movement of the dancer. This involves major movements of the limbs, as well as the subtle ones of the eyes, eyebrows, etc. Only when an artistic meeting of minds is attained can it be said that the dancers and the musicians belong to one holistic artistic experience.

Hence, it is close to impossible to postulate a formula for the “perfect” music for dance. However, some real and practical pointers can be followed in order to

maintain a harmonious and fruitful relationship between the dance and its music. Many musicians claim that singing for dance is exhausting. This is noticed more so in the case of singers who are unfamiliar with the technicalities of singing for dance.

Many dance singers today are those who started out as concert musicians but eventually started singing for dance due to various circumstances. In such cases, if these singers can make a conscious effort to understand the dynamics of the dance, the sequences, and patterns, etc., it will pave the way for the music to become an equal partner to the dance. The dancers or the gurus guiding them also must take equal responsibility in helping the musician achieving this harmonious blend. To be able to do this, the dancer also must have at least a basic and working knowledge of music. If this knowledge is absent, the dancer often makes impractical requests of the musicians and the result is potentially disagreeable and sometimes unpalatable too.

This point was elaborated upon by Smt Radha Badri¹⁹⁶, an eminent singer for Bharatanatyam. She mentioned situations where a certain dancer requested her to sing nerval at points in the song where there was hardly any scope for it. One such instance was the line “Theydi Theydi Kodum Kaan adaindheyn adi¹⁹⁷” in the sahityam of one of the charana-swaras in the Navaragamalika varnam, Saamiyai Azhaitthodi vaa. She speaks of the near impossibility of neraval singing at this point, since the words are aplenty in this line and the Kala pramanam is also brisk. The words of the line are also stacked in quick succession, thus offering little or no deergham¹⁹⁸ phrased that can be used for improvisational neraval. These kinds of situations will not arise if the dancer

¹⁹⁶ Interview conducted on 21.03.2020 at Chennai by Smitha Madhav

¹⁹⁷ I searched for my lord in the dense jungles

¹⁹⁸ Sustained gaps

has a functional grasp of music. Her / his choices tend to be more practicable and a more comfortable musical surrounding is created.

Another aspect that is useful to bear in mind, is the choosing of dance friendly or dance appropriate pieces. Ideally, the numbers should have a good blend of a rhythmic accent, lyrical content, conceptual flow, compositional structure and should enable rasotpatti or the creation of rasa. With the absence of the nattuvanar paramparas and the giant steps being taken by dancers and choreographers in terms of “opening up” the field of dance to new ideas, there is hardly any barrier regarding what is suitable and dance and what is not. This is why the responsibility on the shoulders of dancers and their teachers is very great. They must take great care in choosing krtis, keertanas or other musical forms which can be interpreted without disfiguring *both* the dhatu¹⁹⁹ and the maatu²⁰⁰ content. If the dancer is able to abstract the content of the item both emotionally and visually, then even if the song was not intended for the purpose of dancing, it would be considered an appropriate choice.

Baani- Then and now:

The widely accepted view is that Bharatanatyam is practiced under a handful of primary baanis and a few minor ones. While the primary or major ones include the Pandanallur, Kalakshetra and Vazhuvoor baanis, the minor ones comprise the Mysore, Melattur, Baroda etc. Some other styles such as the Tiruvidaimarudur style, the Kanchipuram style etc. make their mark felt too. Needless to mention, no baani

¹⁹⁹The swara structure

²⁰⁰Lyrics

can be declared to be “major” or “minor” in a perfunctory manner. The factors that go into the making or popularizing a baani have been dealt with in the previous chapters. After a thorough examination of the style, content, intent, delivery, and technique of almost all the baanis, combined with interviews with senior practitioners of most baanis, this scholar is of the following opinion:

For as long as Bharatanatyam²⁰¹ was the sole preserve of the hereditary community, the stress on carving out separate baani based identities by thenattuvanars for themselves and their protégé dancers seems to have not been a very major one. The patronage offered to the Chinna Melam troupes by royalty was also not based much on geographical identity. This is possibly why we have references of Raja Raja Chola, the chola emperor bringing over a four hundred dancers to his court and to the Periya Koil (the “big” temple of Tanjavur) from not only his capital and his kingdom, but from neighboring areas also²⁰². This clearly indicates an enthusiasm on the part of the royal patron to encourage fine art and artistry sans geographical and topographical limitations.

We also know that the Nattuvan Chavadi premises²⁰³ were the birthplace of many dancing ideas and items which formed the basis for subsequent stage presentations made by artists of various baanis. The movement of nattuvanars and their dancer students from one court to another was a rather common phenomenon

²⁰¹we use the term Bharatanatyam here in lieu of “sadir”, since this study is about the content of the dance rather than its socio-political history and the etymology of its terminology and also since it is now widely accepted that the names Bharatanatyam and Bharatam were in vogue long before the “revivalists” coined it)

²⁰²S Poornachandran, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol 72, Part I P 240-245

²⁰³Davesh Soneji Unfinished gestures, Devadasis, Memory & modernity in South Asia

and these moves were affected by personal as well as socio-political reasons. Hence while some moved from one court to another after tiffs with their employers, others went to new courts upon royal invitation. Few others found new employment after the end of the old order or the defeat of their former employers. Be that as it may, as professionally employed artists of the court, the members of the nattuvanar parampara displayed great alacrity in getting down to the business of producing, curating and presenting dance performances of high artistic merit. While they did wear their ancestry and their pedigree as badges of honour, the focus did not seem to be on propagating or popularizing their dance creations as separate baanis.

Needless to mention, almost all nattuvanars, musicians, and dancers of the professional hereditary community seem to have acknowledged their common roots and links to the temples and courts in the Tanjore belt. We thus see that Papammal²⁰⁴, the ancestor of Veena Dhanam who lived and became popular in Madras was a dancer in the Tanjore court. Similarly, an ancestor of Vazhuvoor Manicka Nattuvanar and Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai was the dance master of Kundavai Piraatti, the Chola princess. This is despite the fact that the Vazhuvoor dancers were attached to the Gajasamharamoorthy²⁰⁵ temple in Vazhuvoor.

This common allegiance to a grand ancestry seems to have ensured that the Nattuvanars did not feel the need to carve out too much of a baani based identity. They did of course take every possible step to excel themselves and each other and

²⁰⁴ She lived in the 17th century

²⁰⁵ A manifestation of Lord Siva

bring name and fame to their clan. Being a hereditary community, since the parents or elder family members happened to be the preceptors too (for the nattuvanars, the dancers, and for most musicians), when a dancer or a nattuvanar achieved acclaim, that honor automatically reflected upon the previous generation too, thus fortifying the baani or the lineage.

Most of the abovementioned factors were to undergo a major upheaval in the problematic The period around the independence of the country, the controversial legislation pertaining to the hereditary community, and the end of royal patronage. Once the nattuvanars of the old order found themselves divested of their hereditary work and in the need to refashion their art to suit the needs and tastes of the young nation, they took measures, both small and big to reclaim and consolidate their position. In the new order, nattuvanars were no longer paid employees of a royal court or samsthaanam. Instead, they become self-employed professionals who had to train young women (and sometimes men too) from varied middle and upper middle-class families to propagate their art and earn their living.

With this new reality in place, the need for establishing a unique and individual identity seems to have crept in slowly but surely. Where in the old order, the nattuvanars and their dance students were flaunted as the pride of the royal courts, in the new order they had to forge into the new elite society as natyacharyas or dance masters worthy of respect and regard. One can presume that it was during this period that each nattuvanar started to take up a few elements of the dance and its music and polish them into unique highlights of their baanis. These choices were most often not pre meditated with the intention of creating anything sui generis, but were in all

probability just the natural high points and strengths of the nattuvanar that he reinforced and reiterated.

Unsurprisingly, the large number of students trained by these natyacharyas gave the strength of numbers and continuity to these baanis. This is possibly how Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai and his clan, Vazhuvoor B Ramaiah Pillai and his family came to be seen as the torchbearers and pioneers of the baanis that they represented. It must also be mentioned in this context that the trajectory of what we now known as the “Kalakshetra” baani was fairly different from the other baanis. While Rukmini Devi herself trained under Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai, Mylapore Gowri and others, she and her team at Kalakshetra added so many new and different elements to the dance and trained such a large number of students, that the Kalakshetra style of dancing quickly attained the status of a baani even without the benefit of antiquity.

The period between the 1950s and the 1990s seem to have been the decades during which the identities of the various baanis were at their strongest best. The digital boom had not yet hit and students of dance learnt from their gurus alone. Students seldom switched gurus and even if they did, they learnt from the Guru only. The sishya parampara²⁰⁶ of the great masters like Pandanallur Chockalingam Pillai and Pandanallur Subbaraya Pillai, Vahuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, Swamimalai Rajarathinam Pillai, Kanchipuram Ellappa, T Balasaraswati and others had the

²⁰⁶Lineage of students

privilege of learning directly at the feet of their gurus and were thus bequeathed with the best of what their baanis had to offer in the most pristine form.

With the exit of the dance from the temples and its entry into the proscenium stage, the aura of divine sanctity associated with many signature pieces also become diluted. For instance, the Vazhuvoor Todayamangalam²⁰⁷ on Gajasamharamurthy²⁰⁸ with the words:

Jaya Suddha Puri Vasa

Jaya Maha Gnyana Sabhesha

Jaya Gaja Samhaaresha

Jaya Kritti vaasesha

Jaya Jaya

had a certain charm when sung *by* the Vazhuvoor nattuvanars *in* the Vazhuvoor temple and danced to *by* women from their clan. When this piece was taken out of its nest (the shrine) and presented on a performance platform inside an auditorium in Chennai, it certainly was bereft of *that* charm. However, when heard in the voice of a traditional practitioner like Shri Ramaiah Pillai, retained most of its sheen, despite having been unceremoniously shifted out of its original abode.

With the further modernization of the dance field, today almost any dancer can learn any piece from any guru through workshops, short term courses etc. The

²⁰⁷ An invocatory piece

²⁰⁸ <https://vazhuvoorsamrajpalaniappan.com/natyacharya-vazhuvoor-ramiah-pillai/>

peculiar mix of a dancer learning from a teacher who herself has trained under multiple gurus from multiple baanis, then going on to learn a traditional piece from another baani and presenting the same at a social event, is nothing short of a motley mix.

Today, one observes two major changes in the dance, from the perspective of “baani”. The first is that we hardly have natyacharyas or nattuvanars as gurus anymore. What we instead have is dancers who have transitioned into the role of teachers. Whether such dance teachers can and should be referred to as “Gurus”, “Nattuvanars” and “Natyacharyas” is a hotly debated topic. However, it does not fall under the ambit of this study and we shall hence not delve into that matter here. The approach adopted by these teachers is in many ways vastly different from those of the nattuvanars of the earlier generation.

In many cases, one observes that these dance teachers perform along with groups of their students. Thus, they often tweak the movements and the choreography to suit the strengths and weaknesses of the entire group. Needless to mention this results in a fair amount of departure from what they (the dance teachers) might have absorbed from *their* gurus. The steep rise in the number of “thematic productions” have also made it increasingly challenging to adhere to the exacting boundaries of the baani.

Another major contributor to the dilution of the sanctity of “baani” as a watertight compartment is the increasingly porous nature of the modern dance world.

With the explosion of digitally available content, every dancer can easily watch, assimilate, incorporate and internalize aspects from as many baanis as she wants to. Often, this process of osmosis goes beyond the boundaries of “sister” baanis too. Many dancers are influenced by other dance disciplines, popular media, film music / dance and strive to incorporate those into their dancing too.

A noteworthy point here is that with the steep decline of the solo maargam, dancers feel an ever-increasing need for new movement vocabulary and thus look all around them for inspiration. This has resulted in an avalanche of influences making their way into the grammar of Bharatanatyam. In this melee, it is hardly surprising that the concept of “baani” is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain with fidelity.

This is perhaps why even many senior dancers are now of the view that it is no longer imperative to demarcate Bharatanatyam dance and dancers on the basis of the baanis they belong to. In the words of Shri V P Dhananjayan²⁰⁹ : “ *We (Smt Shantha Dhananjayan and I) want reiterate that Rukmini Devi and Kalakshetra always believed in the theory of having only two styles of Naatya tradition (Paani or Baana) GOOD STYLE AND BAD STYLE*”

Role of music- Shift from Baani based to Guru based:

²⁰⁹ Interview by Smitha Madhav on October 20th, 2020

With the departure of most of the nattuvanars (here we refer to nattuvanars who possessed *all* the requisites of that position, including the ability to sing, compose and choreograph), and the idea of baani becoming rather hazy, what we find in terms of the music of Bharatanatyam is not bound by the tenets of “baani”. Instead, one observes that the music of the dance changes from guru to guru. The tastes and convenience of the guru decides the way the music is used in the dance. While it is true that this is, in all probability exactly the same phenomenon to led to the solidification of these baanis in the first place, there is no guaranteed continuation of ideas that is passed on from generation to generation in the modern dance world.

This phenomenon is best explained through an example. For instance, the musical ideas used by Vazhuvoor Manicka Nattuvanar were in all likelihood used in the same fashion by his protégé, Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai. While the latter certainly expanded upon the ideas and ideals given to him by his uncle and mentor, the basic principles and intrinsic aesthetics were kept intact. In other words, the apple seldom fell far from the tree. With the “democratization” of the dance, every successive generation of students seems to enjoy an unprecedented level of freedom to create an identity or stamp for himself or herself.

Hence, very often the dance of the sishya looks nothing like that of her Guru. By extension, the dance-music of the sishya also often sounds nothing like that of her Guru. Two notable examples may be of pertinence here. Dr Padma Subrahmanyam is a disciple of Shri Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai. However her own foray into the Karana system, her personal musical ideas and family background led to her dance (and its music) assuming a sheen that is extremely different from what was at one point seen

in other disciples of Ramaiah Pillai. In fact, her dance was so filled with novelty that it was even called “ Bhaarata Nrityam” instead of Bharatanatyam.

Another notable example is that of the popular actress and dancer Kum. Shobhana. Though trained by Smt Chitra Visweswaran, who belongs to the sishya parampara of Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, the dance of Kum. Shobhana is very different from that of her guru. The differences are in terms of numerous aspects such as Kala pramanam, use of adavus, proportion of Natya Dharmi vs Loka Dharmi etc., to name a few.

Role of the dance singer in various baanis- then and now:

Traditionally and technically speaking, the nattuvanar was the lead singer of the ensemble. He was also the guru of the dancer. He was hardly a time keeper or a player of cymbals. As said by Smt Chitra Visweswaran²¹⁰: “*there is an ocean of a difference between a thattuvanar²¹¹ and a nattuvanar*” . The nattuvanar not only taught the dancer but also conducted all her classes and helmed practice sessions and rehearsals. He led the ensemble and provided appropriate clues to the musicians as and when required. The dancer danced to his music; rather than the nattuvanar singing based on the dancer’s instructions given to him.

As the guru of the dancer, composer of jatis and the choreographer of the dance, it was but natural that the nattuvanar knew every last detail of the dance, including all the strengths and weaknesses of his student. Today, we have a handful of

²¹⁰ Interview conducted by Prof Dr M S Siva Raju & Smitha Madhav in 2021 at Chennai.

²¹¹ One who merely taps or strikes the nattuvangam talam (cymbals)

“dance singers” who provide vocal accompaniment to almost all dancers, irrespective of baani. Many a time these dancers hardly have a rapport with the dancer. The team of musicians also changes constantly and thus almost every orchestral member relies on notes and cues of one kind or the other. Thus one observes that very often, the dancer is on tenterhooks and has to provide on-stage cues to the singer, the nattuvanar or the mrdangists (sometimes to all). Needless to mention any dance performance presented under such circumstances will be a challenge for the dancer as well as to the audience.

Due to the lack of a proper rapport between the dancer, singer, mridangist and nattuvanar, many singers find it limiting to sing for dance, since most of their attention is focused on remembering the dancer’s instructions, rather than letting her/his own imagination take flight. Smt S Rajeswari²¹² spoke of the delightful experience she had as an accompanist in the ensemble of Shri Kitappa Pillai as his vocal support.

The way forward:

In order for Bharatanatyam and its music to continue to have the inseparable relationship that they were always meant to, all the stakeholders must adhere to a few unspoken rules, a few of which are listed here:

- Dancers must and should learn music too.
- The musical ensemble must be led by the nattuvanar.
- Singers for dance must be aware of their role as accompanists and equal partners of the dancers
- Even if the singer happens to be a kutcheri artist, he/she must not try to

²¹²Interview conducted by Smitha Madhav in March 2020 at Chennai

accommodate *all* elements of concert singing into the dance recital. Only those which aid and improve the performance of the dancer must be included.

- Teachers of dance must not remain mere teachers. They must attempt to equip themselves with the multifarious talents possessed by the great masters. These include

singing, jati composition, literature, poetry and knowledge of at least one musical instrument (apart from the nattuvangam cymbals) Dancers must be judicious while including elements from other baanis into their own. While it is now a widely accepted fact that dancers do and will borrow ideas and adavus from other baanis, they must ensure that they do not mimic or copy any artists ideas. They can allow themselves to be inspired by artists of all baanis or even all dance forms for that matter, but restraint and integrity must be the guiding mantras.

Scope for further research:

This work examines the music of Bharatanatyam dance and the forms that it assumes in the various baanis. In the future, scholars of dance and music can build on this and investigate other allied areas too. This may include a study of the individual musicians and musical instruments of the ensemble, special pieces of the repertoires of each baani, instruments that are no longer part of the Bharatanatyam orchestra etc. Other interesting areas of research would be the role of recorded musical and digital media in the dance music of Bharatanatyam, changes in the laya section of Bharatanatyam dance, so on and so forth.

In conclusion, one can say that both Bharatanatyam and its dance have an inextricable link to one another. They must be cherished and nurtured in a manner befitting the grand and subtle nature of Indian fine arts.

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PANDANALLUR BANI, A DELECTABLE BLEND OF TRADITION, MUSICALITY, AESTHETICS AND ANTIQUITY

Smitha Madhav¹ | Prof. Dr. MS Siva Raju²

ABSTRACT

This article is about the Pandanallur¹ bani² of Bharatanatyam. In a world where old and authentic banis are fast fading, the Pandanallur bani sparkles as a gem in the firmament of Bharatanatyam even to this day. Nurtured with painstaking devotion by the great masters including Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai¹ and others, this bani has produced many dancing stars including several senior practitioners of today. Embellished with pristine musical values and extremely clean nritya³ aesthetics, the Pandanallur bani has brought name and fame to the small village that is its source. Shorn of any manner of jazzy gimmicks, this austere bani is a reminder of Bharatanatyam as imagined by the great masters - simple, classy and subtle. Characterised by an old world charm that is typical of vintage Bharatanatyam, the Pandanallur bani is at once challenging for the dancer, yet gentle on the eye. It is a natyadharmi⁴ based style with steadfast devotion to tradition and antiquity. The proximity of Pandanallur to Tanjore⁵ may have ensured that the Pandanallur Bani in many ways reflects the values and aesthetics that the Tanjore quartet stood for. The architects of the Pandanallur bani eschewed anything that was loud. Instead, they chose to keep the style mellow, subtle, tasteful, delicate and pleasing. In the recent past, they also swiftly moulded the repertoire, presentation, techniques in order to keep with the changing times, thus ensuring that the Pandanallur bani has stood the test of time and has been passed down even to the most recent of generations with no loss of values or aesthetics.

KEYWORDS: Bharatanatyam, Pandanallur. Bani, Tanjore, Tanjore Quartet, Meenakshisundaram Pillai.

INTRODUCTION:

The Pandanallur Bani is a proud offspring of a small village in the Tiruvadamurud⁶ taluk of the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu- Pandanallur. It rose to prominence due to the genius of the natyacharyas⁷ that it produced. One of the stalwarts who hailed from this village but belonged to the clan of the Tanjore quartet was the inimitable Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai who lived for the most part of his life in his ancestral village. Many first-generation star dancers including Ramgopal⁸, Mrinalini Sarabhai⁹, U S Krishna Rao¹⁰ were his pupils.

Technique:

The Pandanallur bani is nothing but an offshoot of the main Thanjavur bani. Thanjavur and the Tanjore quartet are for all practical purposes the fountainhead of all of Bharatanatyam dance. However, the formidable genius of the nattuvanars of Pandanallur village and the large number of students that they groomed contributed towards making Pandanallur a distinctive bani by itself.

The Pandanallur bani has a rich and diverse adavu¹¹ vocabulary. An orthodox and chaste bani, the adherence to paddhati¹² or tradition is seen in every moment of the dance. Linearity and lyricism, precision and poetry, symmetry and sinuosity go hand in hand. A gamut of interpretations is conveyed through the simple flick of the eye or the turn of the arm.

Commitment to anga shuddha¹³ and araimandi¹⁴ is steadfast. The adavus, as visualised by the Pandanallur vaadyars¹⁵ have complex rhythmic patterns. Emphasis is on symmetry and harmony as well as intense musicality, purity, precision. Anything that is extra or pretentious is shunned. The lyricism and musicality of this bani are intense. Melody and movement flow hand in hand. The two are as inseparable as the word and its meaning, truly reflecting the phrase *vaagarthaaviva samparkitow- vaagartha Prati pathaye*¹⁶.

In the evocation of mood and metaphor, the emphasis is on natyadharmi or the stylistic and suggestive mode of interpretation, rather than on lokadharmi the more colloquial style. Understated style is the hallmark of this vazhi¹⁷, rather than any overt drama. The lilting gait or the kulukku nadai¹⁸ is a constant element and serves as the scaffolding on which the Abhinaya sequences are constructed. Slow evolution and progressions are the guiding lights of this bani. It is an exquisitely graceful style that suits both the male and the female body naturally.

Clarity of hastas¹⁹ and the wide sweep of the arms are the hallmark of this bani. Meandering digressions in the name of sanchari bhava²⁰ are not encouraged in this style. The footwork is strong and each step is delivered with great clarity. There is an undercurrent of a rhythm even in the most sedate and slow-paced movement. The jumps (utpavanas), spins or pirouettes (bhramaris) and lightning paced movements are delivered with ease and grace in a way that it gives the audience a feeling of calm and peace.

The Pandanallur bani is characterised by a gentleness in the delivery of abhinaya. It is succinct and subtle, with the audience always left wanting more. Very many repetitions are seldom performed for the "hands". The nattuvanars of

Pandanallur were acutely aware of the ill repute that had been attributed to dance and thus made sure at all times that no movement came across as crass or crude. The portrayal of padams²¹ and javalis²² were as subtle and nuanced as possible.

The focus is always on content rather than packaging. Senior dancer Smt Alarmel Valli states that her Guru insisted on favouring sarakku (content) over glitter (minukku). One rarely finds unwanted prolonged poses and acrobatic pose in this bani. Holding poses for a prolonged duration with the intention of eliciting applause from the audience is a practice that is abhorred by the Pandanallur seniors. Adavus with generous use of the natyarambham²³ position is used frequently in this bani.

Some of the pandanallur giants include Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai (1869-1954), Chockalingam Pillai (1893-1968) (Periya vadyar) and Subbaraya pillai (Chinna Vadyar).

Though a purist who hailed from an extremely traditional background, Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai was broad minded enough to accept male disciples and teach them in what was until then the domain of the female dancer alone.

The Pandanallur masters laid immense stress on anga shuddha and araimandi. Even in his autumn years, Chokkalingam pillai insisted on mentoring not just his senior students but also teach the junior ones. He meticulously used the thattukazhi²⁴ to maintain time, thus instilling in the pupils a sharp sense of laya²⁵.

Beauty in azhuttam²⁶ and fluidity in forcefulness are few of the ideals of the Pandanallur bani. Covering the stage is important too. The dancer is expected to dance in a pleasant manner and avoid jerky movements. Their approach to footwork is gentle but precise. The arudhis²⁷ are short, but exciting and make the audience sit on the edge of the seat. Pandanallur Jayalakshmi, Pandanallur Pandian, Alarmel Valli, Meenakshi Chittaranjan are few of the torch bearers of the Pandanallur bani today.

The repertoire and musical values:

The Pandanallur gurus favoured the margam²⁸ to thematic presentations. As devotees of the old and traditional method of dancing, the Pandanallur nattuvanars preferred solo margam performances. Hence even today, most of the stars of this bani are soloists. The margam opens with the alarippu²⁹. The pushpanjali³⁰ and thodayamangalam³¹ are not usually performed, since it was not a part of the margam created by the Tanjore quartet. Similarly, Kautuvams³² were not presented on stage, since they are believed to be part of the Koil Paramparai (repertoire for temple worship). Jatiswarams³³ are a cherished part of the repertoire. The post varnam³⁴ segment of the concert features Padams and javalis. Kitis of Gopalakrishna Bharati³⁵ and Mahakavi Bharati³⁶, like Dikku theriyaidha Kattil, Teeraada vilayaatu pillai are sometimes performed.

A speciality of the Pandanallur bani is a pada varnam in the raga Vachaspati, composed by shri Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai and performed by his disciple Pandanallur Jayalakshmi. This piece was performed in honour of the

Maharaja of Ramanathapuram, Shri Shanmukha Rajeswara Sethupathi. The dance was supposed to be so beautiful that the maharaja promptly wed her.

Pandanallur Subbaraya Pillai emphasised that music ought to be internalised fully before it could flow forth as a movement. He stated that the music was the most important inspiration for the creation of dance (the old masters preferred not to use the word "choreography") Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai, like many of his illustrious colleagues used to compose the "hands" as they sang. Thus, music and dance flowed as one unit- music was visual dance and dance was music to the eyes.

Songs / music are given great importance and adavus are designed to suit them. In this respect, one can say that the music is given as much space as it demands and then the movements are set in a manner whereby, they embellish the music. The concept of fixing the dance sequence first and then tailor making the music accordingly is strictly forbidden in this bani. The jatis have complex sollukattus that are delivered in small and tight capsules. The rendition of the jatis is easy and free of any unnecessary fills. Vallinam - mellinam or the modulation is given a great deal of importance though. The adavus are matched exactly to the sollukattus. The concept of "cross rhythm" is kept to a minimum.

In the Abhinaya pieces such as padams and javalis, if the sahitya of a particular stanza or charanam is lewd or vulgar, the entire charanam is dropped. The vocal-ist can sing comfortably, since the Pandanallur bani seldom superimposes complex korvais on top of the swara segments. Thus, the grouping of swaras, as imagined by the composer is retained in all its beauty.

CONCLUSION:

One can safely say that the Pandanallur Bani is a delectable blend of tradition, musicality, aesthetics and antiquity. It is thus not surprising that it is still one of the most sought after banis of Bharatanatyam.

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NOTES:

1. Pandanallur is a village in Tamil Nadu.
2. Bani means way or style. There are about 4-6 banis in Bharatanatyam.
3. Guru Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai (1869-1964) is considered to be responsible for shaping the Pandanallur Bani in the post-modern period.
4. Pure dance. It contains abstract movements which are set to rhythmical timings
5. Stylized methods of portrayal vis a vis the Lokadharmi style which is more colloquial
6. A city in Tamil Nadu. Earlier known as Thanjavur or Thanjai, it was the capital of the Nayak and Maratha rulers and was a hub of music and dance.
7. It is situated in the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu. Its headquarters is the town of Tiruvaidaimarudur.
8. Dance gurus. They were also known as Nattuvanars
9. Ram Gopal (1912-2003) was an Indian dancer and modernist, who put Indian dance on the world map with his pathbreaking work
10. Mrinalini Sarabhai (1918-2016) was an Indian dancer, choreographer and instructor who founded the Darpana Academy of Performing arts.
11. US Krishna Rao (1912-2005) was a prominent dancer, Guru and author.
12. Adavu is the basic unit of dance. If dance is a language, the adavus are the alphabets that make up this language
13. Paddhati may be loosely translated as methodology
14. Anga shuddha is the neatness in body work. It means eschewing unnecessary movements and maintaining neat lines and firm stances
15. Also known as ardhra mandalam or Aayalam. This half sitting posture is the basic stance of Bharatanatyam
16. Dance gurus or mentors
17. This shloka by Kalidasa describes the oneness of Lord Siva and Parvati.
18. Another word for bani
19. A technique of walking where the knees are bent and locked alternatingly.
20. Expressive dancing

21. Hasta means hand. In dance parlance, hastas means the different ways of describing a word or a line using hand gestures.
22. Elaborations; sometimes stories are depicted to highlight the point being made in the lyrics
23. Slow paced songs which usually are erotic in content
24. Briskly paced love songs. The lyrics are usually colloquial in nature
25. Quite literally the "beginning of dance". In this position, the arms are splayed out at the shoulder level.
26. A stick used to maintain time, while teaching dance.
27. Rhythm
28. Firmness
29. Short rhythmic sequences performed usually at the end of a jati or kOrvai.
30. A collection of dance numbers that make up a standard Bharatanatyam recital.
31. One of the common invocatory items in Bharatanatyam.
32. Another common invocatory piece. It is believed to be a later day addition to the margam
33. A common piece in the Bhajana Sampradaya. It is a recent addition into the Bharatanatyam Margam.
34. Short items in which the lyrics are recited and then sung. They were performed as part of worship in the temples.
35. Nrta pieces were adavu sequences are danced to swara patterns.
36. The main piece of a Bharatanatyam margam. It is a long item with elaborate nrta and abhinaya.
37. Gopalakrishna Bharati (1810-1896) was a prominent composer in the tamizh language
38. Mahakavi subramania Bharati (1882-1921) was a revolutionary tamil poet
39. Rhythmic sequences with scope for nrta renditions.

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Bharatanatyam Dance Music - Then and Now

- **Smitha Madhav**

Research Scholar
Hyderabad.

The term "dance music" ought not to be simplistically interpreted as dance and music; or for that matter even as dance and its music. In the contemporary world of Bharatanatyam, dance music is a rather specialized branch of music; if not a separate discipline in itself. It has many unique and exclusive attributes and requires of its performers and practitioners skill sets that may or may not be common to the rendition of music on the "kutcheri" stage. The music of Bharatanatyam is at once distinctive in itself, yet rooted in the grammar and idiom of Carnatic music. Though Carnatic music has accompanied and, in some ways, shaped the dance forms of South India for several centuries now, the music that one hears on the dance stage is not identical to what one would hear on the concert platform. In this study, an attempt is made to study the nature, features, content, quality, qualities and manifestations of dance music over the past century. In the interest of brevity, the "then" in the title of this work may be considered the modern period and "now" may be considered as the postmodern and the current period.

Dance music as a genre?

If the music of Bharatanatyam is so well rooted in Carnatic music, one wonders what the need for a nomenclature called "dance music" is. The answer to this may be found if one were to pause and think of the checkered history of Bharatanatyam dance. As long as the dances of the temples of the Tamizh land were in receipt of royal patronage and were performed by the maidens from the hereditary families, the dance "scene" was nothing like what we now know it to be. The art flourished in a holistic and wholesome place; where the entire ChinnaMelam set, viz: the dancer(s), her Guru and accompanying musicians, all lived in the same ecosystem. They typically had both familial as well as artistic ties. All dancers were necessarily trained in music and the Natyacharyas were able tutors of dance.

In the post-independence era, when Bharatanatyam ceased to be the profession of a particular community, but instead started to be the hobby of choice for the new middle and upper middle classes, the status of its music also underwent a sea change. The number of fulltime dance practitioners started to dwindle and there emerged a large pool of dancers who learnt dance in their younger days; a few of whom chose to become teachers of dance in their later years. With the entry of this group of individuals, the nature of the orchestral set also was beginning to get transformed. Whereas in the olden days, the Natyacharya was the nattuvanar and typically the lead vocalist of the Sadir concert, the new age dance teacher, was not always equipped to lead the performance with nattuvangam AND vocal renditions. Hence, the services of a "dance singer" became almost mandatory.

A similar situation arose vis a vis the role of the mrdangist. In the old order, the mrdangam player was usually a "stock" artist; ie one who almost always accompanied the troupe that he was attached to. In fact, this combination of the Nattuvanar and the Mrdangam player was known as the "nattu-muttu" duo. They worked in close association with each other and thus played a critical role in elevating the entire concert. When the dancer and her musicians lived, worked and performed in such a close knit and cohesive atmosphere, it hardly mattered what name you called their music by. Whether one chose to call it "dance music" or anything else, all that mattered was that this tightly bound group of dedicated artists created some extraordinary artistic flashes of brilliance. As Shakespeare said famously: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet".

In the past decades, with the further division of the once comprehensive art form into more specialized streams, the world of Bharatanatyam has seen the

birth and growth of many new roles; and thus, many new professionals fulfilling these roles. For instance, we see choreographers, music composers, composers of rhythm score, resource persons, costume designers, makeup artists etc.; all roles that in the past, would have been played either by the Nattuvanar or by the dancer herself. With the changing times, just like all aspects of Bharatanatyam, its music has also changed considerably, thus warranting this study of: "Dance music"- then and now.

In the present work, the "then and now" of Bharatanatyam dance music shall be studied under the following heads:

1. Repertoire
2. Artists & Instruments
3. Handling of Sancharis
4. Length of items & Duration of concerts
5. From Maargam to dance dramas and ensemble work
6. Shollukattus & Jatis
7. Eduppus
8. Kaala Pramanam
9. Acoustics/Technology/Recording

Repertoire

The traditional repertoire of Bharatanatyam is in many ways a bequest of the Tanjore court and the quartet that it patronized. Though the Nayak era saw scores of dasiattam performances, one can say that the Tanjore quartet contributed a huge corpus of items, even as they streamlined the format of the concert and put in place some mores that are followed to this day. The repertoire practiced then included items such as: Alarippu (formerly known as alaru), Jatiswaram, Shabdam, Pada Varnam etc. Depending on the venue and occasion, suitable padams and Javalis were performed. The tillana (believed to be a creation of Melattur Veerabhadrayya) also made its way into the maargam. Barring a few variations, such as the ugaabhogas that were performed in the Mysore court or the ashtapadis performed by a few court dancers, the maargam repertoire remained reasonably unchanged. Though the number of options within a

said musical form was staggering, the format itself remained fairly consistent. For instance, one saw alarippus in various talas, jatiswarams in different ragas and talas, shabdams in myriad ragas, talas and themes, so on and so forth, but the structure of the alarippu remained consistent and the presence of the alarippu was a given.

With the passage of time and the gradual exit of Bharatanatyam from the royal courts and temples, the repertoire of the dance grew exponentially. Ironically enough, though the repertoire seemed to be expanding and growing on the one hand; in reality it has shrunk in many ways. One example that stands out in this regard, is the diminished role of the padams and javalis. Many families that belonged to the hereditary community of dancers and singers were repositories of hundreds of padams and javalis. The family of Veena Dhanam, for instance passed on to their descendants hundreds of these compositions in their most pristine form. Today one cannot see ALL these padams and javalis being performed commonly. Though not obsolete or extinct, they certainly are not seen as often as they ought to be.

Ritualistic dances

Over the past decades many items that were hitherto associated with the ritualistic dances of the temples have made their way into the dance repertoire. One now regularly sees pieces such as Kautuvams, Mallaris, Melaprapti etc being performed on stage. While Melapraptis are performed more commonly by dancers belonging to the school of Tanjore, Kautuvams and Mallaris are performed by almost all baanis. The inclusion of Kautuvams into the Bharatanatyam repertoire is a fairly debated topic. Smt Meenakshi Chittaranjan, a forerunner of the Pandanallur Baani states that her Guru eschewed the inclusion of kautuvams, since he believed that these pieces belonged to the realm of temple dances and ought to remain there transporting them to the proscenium was both inappropriate and unnecessary.

Similarly, the mallari was a piece that was part of the PeriyaMela repertoire that was played by the nagaswaram and Taval artists. Different types of

mallaris such as taligai Mallari (that was played when whenprasadam was offered), Teyrmallari (played during the procession of the chariot) etc. formed part of the periyamelam's performances. The "tattakaarams" of the Mallaris are nowadays vocally rendered and the Mallari itself is presented as one of the invocatory pieces. The opportunity to present the Mallari in Tishram and Triklam make it a rhythmic delight and thus the mallari has consolidated its position in the Bharatanatyam repertoire.

Krtis and Keertanams & other compositions

The post Varnam segment of a contemporary Bharatanatyam recital features as many possibilities as one can imagine. Krtis and Keertanams, compositions of the trinity, the Tamil trinity, Dasara Padagallu, Devarnamas, Bhajans, Abhangs, Bhakti poetry, verses of the Azhwars and Nayanmars, compositions of Annamacharya and Bhadrachala Ramadas... the list is never ending. The floodgates that opened about seven decades ago and remain open. The repertoire of Bharatanatyam is constantly being expanded. The decision pertaining to what is "suitable" for Bharatanatyam and what is not, has become extremely subjective and these decisions are made based, not on what one has been told or taught, but on what one feels and wants.

This ever-expanding repertoire has now come to include dance dramas and ensemble work too. While dance dramas usually tell a story, ensemble work may or may not tell one. They usually center around a theme: sometimes sacred, sometimes secular and sometime esoteric. While dance dramas came into vogue many decades ago, ensemble works are a more recent addition. Many ensemble productions have multi lingual lyrics, while some use foreign languages, while yet other go lyric-free.

Artists & Instruments

A brief study of the artists that provide(d) musical accompaniment for Bharatanatyam is likely to offer a few pointers toward the evolution of dance music over time. As mentioned earlier, the members of the musical troupe in a sadir concert were often related to the dancer. They belonged to one community and

worked as a team and shared the same artistic values. The group was led by the nattuvanar who was usually the Natyacharya of the dancer. He was held in great regard and not just wielded the cymbals but also sang (often assisted by a supporting vocalist). Though he was known simply as the nattuvanar, he was also usually the choreographer, composer of the jatis, teacher and over all mentor to the dancer. As the leader of the orchestral ensemble, he gave all the requisite cues and decided the kaalapramaanam; all without much ado.

The instruments used in the ensemble were usually the mrdangam, sometimes the fiddle and the clarinet too. The ensemble of T Balasaraswati invariably had her brother T Viswanathan on the flute. With the passage of time and the virtual breakdown of the old order, the role of the nattuvanar has considerably changed. If the nattuvanar happens to be the guru of the dancer, he/she plays a reasonably key part in the orchestra. If (as is very often the case), the nattuvanar is a "freelancer" then he/she is on par with any other member of the ensemble. In this case, the nattuvanar is no longer the leader of the group, but is instead led by the dancer. He/she takes instructions from the dancer and renders jatis, wields the cymbals and keeps timing according to the advice of the dancer.

While some instruments that were hitherto seen on the Bharatanatyam stage, have become very rare (the clarinet, for example is seen very rarely) some others have made their entry into the dance orchestra. One sees, in many Bharatanatyam recitals, Tabla, keyboard, drums of various kinds etc. While the suitability of the instruments in the context of Bharatanatyam remains a matter of debate, one can safely say that the aptness of these instruments depends on the bill of fare for the recital. The items being presented, the audience before whom they are being presented, the aptitude and preferences of the dancer are a few factors that ought to influence the decision pertaining to the inclusion of these instruments.

One significant change that has been observed in the postmodern period is the use of the keyboard or

synthesizer. While some of the electronic sounds used in the past decades sounded harsh and were thus not ideally suited to the music of south India, the samplers of today can be put to excellent use, if used wisely. If the right amplitude, volume, tone, sustain, velocity and dynamics are used, these sample tones are quite the blessing. Live sound from acoustic instruments can be captured and then tuned and trimmed based on the exact requirement of the particular piece of music. Many productions today have perfectly tuned conches, bells etc. and these are all a legacy of the ubiquitous but all so useful samplers.

Mrdangists as Nattuvanars

Yet another major change that one observes in the recent times is the trend of mrdangists donning role of the nattuvanar. This, again is not a trend that is universally accepted or endorsed. Some dancers opine that mrdangists make excellent nattuvanars, given their extensive knowledge and training in “laya”. Yet others are of the opinion, that a mrdangist can never do justice to the nattuvangam, since his would be the approach of a mrdangam player and not that of a dancer or a natyacharya. One also sees that the manner in which a mrdangist handles the nattuvangam talam is very different from the way a dancer/teacher of dance would. The same applies to the recitation of jatis. There are however some very fine dancers who have undergone training in mrdangam. When such artists don the role of the nattuvanar, the effect is usually very pleasing.

Sancharis

It is widely known that sancharis are an integral and critical part of the abhinaya of Bharatanatyam. The sanchari expositions offer an insight to the dancer’s understanding of the sahitya, grasp over its various layers, knowledge of mythology, history, sthalapuram etc. Sancharis have always been either of the Lokadharmi mode or the Natyadharman mode. In a 2019 interview, Dr. Narthaki Nataraj stated that her guru, Shri Kittappa Pillai insisted on including only Natyadharmanisancharis. She also clarified that the stories chosen for sanchari elaboration would have to necessarily be closely related to the sahitya of the song. Randomly imagined stories were firmly avoided.

She also revealed that her guru insisted that the hasta prayogas in the sanchari (as with that in the entire song) would have to be closely matched to the theme and subject of the song. For instance, if a song was about a particular form of Lord Krishna, the hastas used in the song would closely mirror the attributes of that particular manifestation only.

The music of the sanchari was usually either a repeated rendition of the line or neraval singing. Over time some dancers and natyacharyas have modified this to include either instrumental passages, tanam singing, Kalpana swaram or other phrases that suit the theme and mood of the sanchari being enacted. Some commonly used techniques involve the inclusion of shlokas into the sanchari, mantra chanting etc. Another aspect that is gaining popularity is the use of jatis to enact sancharis. When composed in a suitable manner, the syllables of a jati or korvai can be constructed and manipulated in a manner that allows the dancer to enact a sanchari to it.

However, extreme caution has to be exercised to ensure that the syllables sound like they were made for the ideas that are key to the sanchari and that they do not appear contrived. In a talk titled “The dance of music” that was aired on various social media platforms in 2020, eminent soundscape designer Shri Sai Shravanam recalled an instance where senior music composer Shri Rajkumar Bharathi used a jati to portray the activities of a thief, as he tries go about his business of burglary!

Length of items/Duration of Concerts

Over the past decades, the duration of both dance recitals, as well as that of musical concerts have reduced. For that matter, the duration of many performative arts has reduced considerably. Even the films one sees these days are often shorter than their older counterparts. With the shrinking duration of dance concerts, the music that one hears on the dance stage has also transformed. While a few categories of items have been placed on the back burner, a few others have received a fresh lease of life. For instance, Jatiswarams, which were at one point all popular are nowadays seldom seen, unless the performance in question is an Arangetram performance. The same can

be said of the Shabdham too. The alarippu has in some ways managed to evade eviction, though it has lent itself to considerable reinvention; what with the creation of "novel" alarippus such as Mayura Alarippu, Chakra Alarippu, Shatkala Alarippu, Panchakaala Alarippu, vahana Alarippu, Hasta Alarippu, Garuda Alarippu, so on and so forth.

With the reduced length of dance concerts, the length of each item has also correspondingly diminished. Consequently, the leisurely pace of singing/ playing and the opportunity of exploring sangathi after sangathi in every subsequent repetition is sometimes not available to the musicians. That said, in the new and current scheme of things an intelligent and capable artist can explore and improvise all he/ she likes, as long as he/ she makes clever choices and implements them in an adroit fashion.

Examples of items that remain in the Bharatanatyam repertoire, but in a considerably abridged version are: the jatiswaram and the Tillana, to name a few. In both these pieces, where we once saw around three to five Korvais, we now hardly see a couple. Thus, the number of times the Pallavi is repeated is also considerably lesser. Though many dance musicians see this as a welcome change, some senior dancers see it as a reduced opportunity to present various combinations of adavus.

When music is prerecorded, there is no scope for the length of the piece to vary from performance to performance. Needless to mention, the kaalapramanam of the item, the number of times each line is repeated, the sancharis, the musical, lyrical and rhythmic embellishments in the sancharis; all are almost set-in stone. The scope for improvisation if any, is at the choreography and re – choreography stage. The dancer can change variations in the dancing; subject to what is already available in the music.

Maargam-Dance dramas-Ensemble Work

Though the well-established maargam format has been able to withstand the test of time, other formats such as dance dramas and ensemble works have been making speedy inroads into the world of Bharatanatyam. As the dance metamorphizes from

one thing to another, so has its music. While the music of maargam was all about "items", the music of ensemble works and dance dramas are conceived, composed and divided on the basis of the various scenes or acts and what they aim to convey.

As the themes become more and more varied, the music too keeps pace. The ragas used have also changed a great deal. While the old Kuravanji dance dramas still use what one may call "traditional" ragas, the same cannot be said of the new age ensemble productions. For instance, Kavi Kunjara Bharathi's Azhagar Kuravanji has ragas like Yadukulakmbhoji, Vakulabharanam, Todi, etc, but also uses Behag, Khamas and other such "lighter" ragas. Rukmini Devi's Kalakshetra dance dramas also made some innovations in the usage of ragas. For instance, Raga Chittabhamari was used to portray the confusion and anguish of Dasharatha who is being held to his word by a belligerent Kaikeyi. They also used Raga Gangalahari in the boat sequence, in an attempt to mirror the waves of the Ganges through the cadences of this novel raga.

In the current trend of ensemble work, the possibilities vis a vis music is forever expanding. Not only does one see eclectic and unusual raga choices, but also unique and complex rhythmic choices. Multiple vocalists are sometimes utilized (often both female and male). Many artists prefer to refer to the music itself as the "soundscape" as it involves not just music, but also sounds of different kind. This would bring one to the all-important question, i.e., how does one differentiate between music, sound and noise?

Simply put any sound that is consistent and well aligned with pitch and rhythm (sruthi and laya) is music and sounds that are divorced from sruthi and laya may be categorized as unmusical and as noise. That said, to a sensitive and trained ear, even silences come across as musical sounds and are molded in a way that enhance the aesthetic values of a musical phrase or passage. Silences between lines, between words, between notes, between syllables etc can all be exploited to the fullest extent possible to convey the aesthetic imagination of the artist.

An able composer of dance music works not just with notations, talamsavarthanams etc., but utilizes the entire realm of sound to create music that is not only melodious and pertinent but also helps in the creation of rasa. Music thus created helps the artist convey the end result that was envisaged by him/her. To this end, one must understand that sound is a medium that conveys or expresses music.

Chollukattus & Jatis

Chollukattus and jatis are an intrinsic part of the music of Bharatanatyam. Though chollukattus which are recited and not sung may not per se appear to be musical, there is a fund of musicality embedded into these chollukattus too. The vallinam- mellinam (modulation) techniques play a huge role in adding to the musical values of the jatis in particular and the music in toto. Vazhuvooraar, Shri Kitappa Pillai, Smt Indira Rajanand many such stalwarts have, in their time raised the bar for attuvangam execution, chollukattu rendition and using the chollukattus effectively.

Historically, the chollus used in dance are unique as in, they are not identical to the Mrdangam chollus nor are they very similar to those used in Tavalplaying. They however mirror the chollus of the Konnakol family and follow the same musical and numerical rules of south Indian percussion music. One may not for instance use a Dhikkuthakathadhikita or a "thakkitakitathaka" or a tha cha kitatha ka, but would instead use chollus such as "ki ta tha ka thariki ta" "tharitha dh ana tha dh ana – dhanatha ja nu thadhi mi ", so on and so

There has been a constant evolution and change in the choice of chollus and their usage. In a statement at the Natya Kala Conference, eminent dance mrdangist Dr Guru Bharadwaaj, stated that the ancestors of Kitappa Pillai had used some "typical" Mrdangam sollus like Tham Kita thakaThari Kita Thakaetc in their jatis. Tavalchollus like Ku Kuntha, dinga, Plaangu, dhaneyku, etc were also used. Tavalshollus were imported into dance more often than Mrdangam sollus. A few morsing chollus like janujanu

were also borrowed. In later days, KN Dandayudhpani Pillai used the sollu "deenku" very often. This may be a combination of the Mrdangam sollus "dheem" and "thalaanku".

Without delving much into the source of each chollu and the rationale behind assimilating the said sollus into the dance vocabulary, one can conclude that the vocabulary of chollus and chollukattus is a constantly developing and expanding one. Chollus mostly mirror the sounds produced by the instruments on which they must have once been played. To this end, one may be able to conclude that the chollus of the Kanjira and other such ancient instruments might be the oldest and most natural sounding ones.

One must remember to try and follow the rules of taaladashaprana; ie Kaalam, maargam, Kriya, angam, Jaati, graham, kalai, Laya, Yati and prasthaara before playing around with the chollus to create the desired effect. Chollus can be used in an even more interesting and musical manner when using the idea of "Mashrta Nrta", when nrta becomes a parallel language to Sahityam.

The use, construction and presentation of jatis has also undergone some major modifications. Where we once had shorter jatis (4 to 8 avartanams in length), replete with sarvalaghu phrases, the jatis of today are longer, more mathematical in construction and filled with some mind boggling yatis. Few dancers, nattuvanars, mrdangists / jati composers who are of an adventurous sort have even tried using other mathematical concepts such as the Fibonacci sequence in the composition of jatis.

Today, Jatis are often used in sancharis or to tell a story. The voice modulation, intonation, articulation, kaarvai structure etc of these jatis are planned and executed based on the story being narrated or the sanchari being performed. One also sees numerous jatis in which words / phrases which have nothing to do with chollus, but are connected to the sahitya or theme of the piece are used. Some examples are jatis which have words like "Ram", "Shree Ram", "Jai Shree Ram" etc. interspersed into them.

Poruttam in Shollus

With the recent trend of mrdangam artists helming the laya aspects of a Bharatanatyam recital, the usage of chollus is taking even more interesting turns. The idea of matching the chollus to the sahityam or lyrics has gained momentum.

1.U, Tha , Ki, Ta,

U, tha, Ki, Ta Ki, na, thom, Ka

U, thaki ta kin a thom, ga da kutham, thom, ka...

Tha, ki, ta, - dhimginathom -tham,

1. (U, tha, ki, ta, - dhimginathom) x 2 tham,

(U, tha, tha, ki, ta – dhim, ginathom) x 3 – UDYAT

BHAASKARA SANNIBHAM (Line from Sri Dhvani PradambaPancharatnaStotram)

2. Dhanadhana

Ghu ma Ghu ma – CHAMA DHAMA MAANITA MOWNI HRDAALAYA (line from SubrahmanyaStotram)

3. Jhem, dhanatham,

Nam, jhem, dhanatham,

Ram, nam, jhem, dhanatham,

Thom, ram, nam, jhem, dhanatham,

Dhi, thom, ram, nam, jhem, dhanatham,

Tha, dhi, thom, ram, nam, jhem, -PHANA SHRNGA SAHASRA (Line from Narayana Bhattadri's Kalinga NartanaDashakam)

The above example is constructed as a SrotovahYati

The above example is constructed as a SrotovahYati

Eduppus

The eduppu phrase or the cue phrase leading up to the start of the Jati or Korvai is also something that has changed a great deal. Typically, the eduppuhas always been the standard "thalaangutha ka dhikutha ka thadhiginathom" Sri B Herambanathan states that the eduppu should be the "Tamilian" sounding Thalaangutha ka dhikutha ka thadhiginathom and not the more Sanskritizedversion, ieDha Lan, kuthakadhikutha ka thadhiginathom. In the last couple of decades, the varieties in eduppusare simply staggering. We see eduppus of all sizes and hues.

While some eduppus are designed to suit the talam, some mirror the starting words of the jati or teermnaanam. Some are as long as a whole aavartanam, while yet others are short and succinct, but full of fireworks. A few short, but attractive eduppus in aaditaalam leading up to a jati that begins on samam) are listed below:

i)Starts on Dhrtasamam:

| Tha , di, tha ka ja nu- thakumthariki ta tha ka –

Tha ka dhi, tha ka ja nu- thakumthariki ta tha ka-

Dhalan, kuthom- tha, thom, -

Dhalan, kuthom- tha,thom, -

ii)Starts on 7th kriya:

Dhalan, kutha ka dhiku

Gi nathom- dhingi a thom -thadhim gin a thom ||

(Note that the above eduppu contains a small SrotovahaYati in it)

iii)Starts on the 7th Kriya:

Dhalan, kutha ka dhiku

Tha ka dhi mi, - tha ka ja nu, - tha ka dhi mi

(note that the above eduppu has a small samayati in it)

iv)Starts on the 7th Kriya

Dhalan, kutha ka dhiku

Tham; that ha ri- dheem; thathari(this part alone rendered in Tisram)

v) Starts on the 7th kriya

Dha, lan, ku,

Thathari; -tha dh na; - tha ja nu; - thadhi mi;

vi) Starts on 7thKriya:

Dhal an, kutha ka dhiku

Dhalan, kutha ka dhikuthaki ta thadhiginathom

One may notice that all the above eduppus retain the traditional beginning, ie: "dhalan, ku". Since the opening phrase of the eduppus unchanged, it sounds familiar, with a minor, but thrilling variation. In recent times, there has also been a view that the eduppu can be altogether dispensed with. When dropped altogether, the dancer will have to start the jati or teermanam as soon as the mrdangam arudhi ends. While this may not be difficult for an experienced artist,

a novice or someone who does not possess a very sharp sense of laya may find this difficult to navigate. Hence the eduppus have been retained in some form or the other.

Kaala Pramaanam

Though the term kaalapramanam is commonly and rather loosely translated as “tempo”, the English word tempo, does not really do full justice to the depth of this term. As the term denotes, Kaala pramanam indicates not just the speed in which the number is rendered but is reflective of a certain fidelity to Laya and kaala; rhythm and time. It is a serious solemn and consistent rhythmical commitment that one has to deliver for the entire duration of the passage, if not the whole song/ piece.

Over the past decades, one notices that the kaalapramaanam of many numbers in the Bharatanatyam repertoire is shifting. In a 2020 online talk which appeared on various social media platforms, senior dancer and Guru Ms Leela Samson mentions how all dance items seem to have fallen into a standard kala pramaanam. Whereas in the past, the Varnam was in a relaxed chowka kalam, which allowed the speed and briskness of the tillana to shine forth, she states that in the current times, almost all the pieces of the Bharatanatyam concert seem to be in the Madhyama (keertana style) Kaala pramaanam. The reasons behind this are numerous.

One also notices a general escalation of the kaalapramaanam of the entire maargam. Prima facie, while this might be a trend adopted to keep up with the ostensibly changing attention span of the audiences and their clearly changing tastes, this does, in some way rob the artist of the opportunity to explore relaxed and unhurried expositions. The new and revised speedy kaala pramaana has also naturally altered the way adavus are imagined, used and executed.

Role of Acoustics/ Recorded music & Modern Technology

No discussion pertaining to the music of Bharatanatyam is complete without the all-important aspect of recording, technology and other allied aspects. Whether prerecorded music for Bharatanatyam dance is a boon or a bane is a hotly disputed subject. Yet, it has in many ways become the reality of today's Bharatanatyam world and thus, is the proverbial elephant in the room. Without going into the virtues and vices of prerecorded music, an attempt shall be made to study the workings of recorded music, the processes that happen prior to, during and post recording, the consequences thereof etc., with special reference to prerecorded music for ensemble productions, that do not fall within the ambit of the “maargam”

The role of the music composer/ director vis a vis prerecorded music

Once the composer is familiar with the vision of the dancer, he/she plunges into the “production” by familiarizing himself/herself with every word of the lyrics (if it is a presentation with lyrics). The next step would be the choosing of ragas and matching them to the lyrics. At this stage, there is a kind of a connect between the music composer and the lyrics; almost as though the lyrics speak to the composer or hit him / her in some way and he/ she responds not with words in return but with ragas. One can never delve into the mind of the composer and say for sure what exactly happens in his/ her mind and how he/ she chooses the ragas, the prayogas, the sancharas and the tunes.

The creative process: Raga- Swaras- Jatis & more
In more ways than one, the creative process emanates from almost a place of nothingness. It is near impossible to create a flowchart as to how the creative process unfolds. While some dancers imagine and execute their music in perfect sequence (in the order of ideation-creation and implementation) a, few others imagine it in terms of light, sound or other elements like scene design, aesthetics, visual appeal etc. An ideal dancer and composer work in perfect sync; i.e., imagining choreographic situations, musical patterns,

scene evolution etc.; not necessarily in any particular order, but in an effective pattern of osmosis, where one element of the work enhances all other and does not become a hindrance to the flow of creative juices.

Musical choices typically spring forth from the recesses of the composer's mind: either from memory or from a combination of one or more experiences. In the postmodern period of today, pieces of dance music sometimes cannot be divided and structured in the typical pattern of "Krti", "Keertana" etc. It may not even be possible to divide them in an "Avartana" based division. The music is one composite mix of a plethora of elements. One can hardly ever say where the lyrical parts end and where the instrumental passages begin. Nor can one say where chittaswarams feature or where jatis are used. Dialogues, free style alapana, swara Kalpana passages, tanam, shlokas, konnakol style recitation: all are freely and copiously used. In breaking away from the maargam, dance music might have gained a large level of hitherto unavailable freedom. The choices are plenty and must be exercised intelligently, tastefully and judiciously.

Many a time, transitions, interludes, sanchaaris etc are added on the fly; as the composition takes form- quite often in the recording studio. The success of this part of the creative process is greatly dependent on the understanding between the composer and the dancer. If the composer has an intuitive grasp of the what the dancer is trying to render, the motivation behind the dancer's movements and the dancer's vision as a whole, this spontaneous give and take can be a very fulfilling phenomenon. If this synergy between the two professionals is not in ample measure, this part of the compositional journey may be dedicated to "working out" the number of repetitions, the patterns or the mathematical structures in the BGMs (Background Music etc).

Choice of ragas

As with the dance itself, the music and its ragas have changed over time. While the choices of the Tanjore Quartet were reflective of the times that they

lived and composed in, the ragas used today are a combination of tradition and change. The pada varnams of the modern period were typically in weighty ragas like Bhairavi, Todi, etc. The quartet did, however compose in Khamas, kapi etc too. Considering the fact that pada varnams usually had multiple sancharis, ragas with ample scope for neraval or variation in sangathi delivery were chosen. Rakti ragas were given priority to. For example, the Sapta raga tala malikakeertanam of the Tanjore Quartet, is a grand composition with ample depth and variety. It allows a choreographer to fully explore the grandeur of ghana ragas. It uses ragas such as Todi, Poorvi Kalyani, Bhairavi, Kalyani, Mukhari and Varali. When designed in conjunction with appropriate accompanying jatis, a piece such as this is a viewer's delight as mood and metaphor come together to create a visual extravaganza.

Today, we see many composers who are attempting to shed stereotypes in Bharatanatyam dance music. For instance, common notions such as usage of ragas like Shubhapantuvarali or Sivaranjani for sadness, tishranadai for folk sequences, Khanda Nadai for war sequences etc are common stereotypes that are often challenged. This is not to say that this is only a contemporary phenomenon. From the days of yore, many great vaggeyakaras have made brave and unusual musical choices without much ado.

The creative process: Live Vs Recording

In a live concert, there is always a visual interaction between the dancer and the musicians and also between the musicians themselves. This interaction provides not only visual cues to all the artists, but also gives a great deal of inspiration to everyone on stage. The audience too makes a sub conscious visual interpretation from seeing the artists.

Visual interactions go a great distance in helping the artists render spirited and inspired performances in the proscenium. Very often, artists gain energy from the performance of their co artists. This sense of intuitive and sub conscious give and take is missing

within the confines of the studio; thus, making performing in a studio a completely different ballgame altogether. In terms of south Indian classical "dance music", many concert artists opine that performing in a studio is a far from comfortable experience. Performing in a closed space with virtually no audience, with almost all control vested in the professional who is at the console, with the dynamics that happen in an auditorium almost completely missing, the limitation of performing to the "click" etc. all seem like a set of very limiting circumstances to some artists.

During a live performance, the professional controlling the production of sound through the console can also respond to the changing dynamics on stage. There are extreme surges and dips in energy being created on the stage; none of which can actually be recreated in the static world of recorded music. Thus, the responsibility of the entire team that is working on the creation of the sound track is immense. The artists and technicians ought to individually and jointly imagine and understand the needs of the dancer, and execute them musically and aesthetically in a manner in which the content thus produced is not just technically sound but also artistically pleasing and sounds spontaneous and fresh each time it is played / heard on stage.

Nature of the prerecorded sound on the performing stage

When a dancer listens to pre-recorded music on stage, it is very important that the music motivates him/ her. It must and should create some kind of inspiration in the mind of the dancer and enable him/ her to give the best in terms of performance. It is well known that the rasa theory and the dhvani theory are closely intertwined. Though the dhvani theory is commonly considered one of semantics, it plays a vital role in raso-patti and the creation of rasa.

To this end, one of the common techniques used to ensure constant and effective audio cues for the dancer is the maintenance of a slightly exaggerated level of the percussion track. More often than not, the

percussion used in a Bharatanatyam concert would be the Mrdangam. When dance music is prerecorded, the mrdangam level is usually maintained significantly higher than what would be fixed for a live concert. It is not sufficient to merely augment the volume levels of the mrdangam in the sound track. It is imperative to extract a spirited and inspired performance in the studio, during the recording process itself. This, in turn is possible when both the artist and his instrument are in perfect form. Thus, the responsibility on the shoulders of the entire team, viz: the artists, the music composer (if there is one), the designer of soundscape / the sound engineer etc. is enormous.

In a live performance, the artistic choices are extremely spontaneous. The accompanying artists see and hear the main artist (in this case the dancer) and respond to what she / he is performing. The immediacy of stimuli is real and unbidden. When dance music is being recorded, the artist has to imagine almost every move that a dancer may make on stage and play/ perform accordingly. Even if the dancer, is present in the studio at the time of recording, all she/ he can offer is a rough idea of what the eventual performance would be like. The cues provided at the studio by the dancer can never fully do justice to the onstage performance(s) for which the recordings will be used. Another aspect that ought to be factored in is that the dancer can hardly ever perform the exact same way each and every time. Thus, the content created in the studio has to be at once accurate, yet flexible enough to accommodate any spontaneous or planned future (minor or major) improvisations that the dancer may choose to make.

The artistic freedom that an artist enjoys on stage, is mostly absent in a recording setup. Listening to one's own performance, real-time and through the medium of a headphone, with no "reflections" per se is something that needs an altogether different set of skills. Thus, not all dance concert artists make good recording artists and vice versa. This is because performing a live concert needs a lot of spontaneous

reactions to the happenings on stage; and the ability to instantaneously translate these inputs into suitable music. However, in the recording studio, the artist is not exactly reacting to the stimulus around him/ her, but is instead acting upon the brief given to him/her.

Conclusion

The music of Bharatanatyam is an ever evolving and a constantly changing subject. It is extraordinarily dynamic one and no one study can do full justice to it. As with any other performing art, Bharatanatyam is a

reflection of and a product of the society in which it operates and grows and thus, changes and modifications are not only inevitable, but also necessary for the healthy growth of the art form. As an art form that has relied heavily on the wisdom of oral traditions and has been passed on from generation to generation based on the pedagogy practiced by great Gurus, the art is also influenced by the prominent gurus of the times, their artistic views and choices.

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Telangana Sangeeta Nataka Akademi

Department of Language and Culture

2nd Floor, Kalabhavan, Ravindra Bharathi, Saifabad, Hyderabad - 500004

**National Seminar on
Music / Dance / Theatre Arts – Ancient, Modern & Post Modern**

Certificate

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కళాక్షేత్ర రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణ నృత్య రూపకం - పరిశీలన

- స్మితామాధవ్

పరిశోధక విద్యార్థి

హైదరాబాద్ కేంద్రీయ విశ్వవిద్యాలయం

రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం కళాక్షేత్రాలో రూపు దిద్దుకున్నటు వంటి ఎన్నో నృత్యనాటకాలలో ఒక అమూల్యమైన నృత్యనాటకం. ముఖ్యంగా తెలుగులో రూపొందించినటువంటి రూపకాల్లో రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం ఆణిముత్యం లాంటిది. 1950 దశకంలో శ్రీమతి రుక్మిణీదేవి అరుండేల్ భాగవత మేళ పద్ధతిపై మక్కువ కలిగింది. ఆ ఇచ్చతోనే రూపుదిద్దుకున్నవే రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణము, రుక్మాంగదచరిత్రము, ఉషాపరిణయం మొదలైనవి. మొట్టమొదట 1904లో రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణమును తొలిసారిగా ప్రదర్శించారు. ఇప్పటి వరకు కూడా ప్రసిద్ధి గాంచిన నృత్యనాటకాలలో రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం ప్రఖ్యాతిగాంచినది. ఇది స్వచ్ఛమైన తెలుగు, శాస్త్రీయ మరియు స్వల్పంగా జానపద సంగీతాల కలయికతో రూపుదిద్దుకొని ప్రదర్శించ బడతూ ఇప్పటికీ మన్ననలు పొందుతూ ఉంది. ఈ నృత్యనాటకంలో అతిముఖ్యంగా శ్రీ కృష్ణుడు మరియు రుక్మిణీ దేవిల పరిణయగాధను వివరించడమే ముఖ్యంశం.

శ్రీమతి రుక్మిణీదేవిగారు స్థాపించినటువంటి కళాక్షేత్రలో ఆమె రూపొందించిన నృత్యనాటకాలు చాలా ఉన్నాయి. దశాబ్దాల క్రితం రూపొందించి, నృత్యనాటకంగా ప్రదర్శించినప్పటికీ అవి నేటికీ కూడా కళాకారులు ప్రదర్శించినప్పుడల్లా వీక్షకులను ఆకర్షిస్తున్నాయి. అందువల్లనే వారి ప్రదర్శనలో అసాధారణమైన నాణ్యత, సంగీత, సాహిత్య నృత్యపరంగా కూడా అధిక విలువలకు ప్రాధాన్యత ఏర్పడి నిదర్శనంగా నిలుస్తున్నాయి వారి నృత్యనాటకాలు. కళాక్షేత్ర నృత్యనాటకాలు సంస్కృతం, తమిళం, తెలుగు వంటి బహుళభాషల్లో రూపొందించబడ్డాయి. కళాక్షేత్ర తెలుగు నృత్యనాటకాల్లో ఉషాపరిణయం, రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం, అతి ముఖ్యమైనవి. ప్రస్తుత వ్యాసంలో రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం, నృత్యనాటకాన్ని మాత్రమే అధ్యయనం చేస్తూ సంగీతం అంశాలపై ప్రత్యేక దృష్టిని సారించడం జరిగింది.

కళాక్షేత్ర - నృత్యనాటకం

ఒక వైపు కళాక్షేత్ర పసిద్ధ కళాకారులను, నాట్యరంగంలోని దిగ్గజాలను పోషించి, విద్య నేర్పించే కళాశాలగా గొప్పపేరు ఉన్నప్పటికీ కూడా మరోవైపు నృత్య నాటకాలు రూపొందించడంలో కళాక్షేత్ర పుట్టినిల్లు వంటిది. 1945వ సం॥లో శ్రీమతి రుక్మిణీదేవి అరుండేళ్ తొలిసారిగా నృత్యనాటకాన్ని రూపొందించి కళాక్షేత్ర శైలిలో ప్రదర్శింపజేశారు. అటుపిమ్మట ప్రదర్శించిన ఎన్నో నృత్యనాటకాలలో పాత్రానుసరణగా వస్త్రధారణ, ఇటు శాస్త్రీయ సంగీతం, అటు జానపద సంగీతంకు సరిసమానంగా ప్రాముఖ్యత ఇస్తూ ప్రతి సన్నివేశాన్ని అందంగా ప్రదర్శిస్తూ రావడం వల్లనే ఆమె నృత్యనాటకాలన్నీ ప్రఖ్యాతి చెందాయి. దాదాపు అవసరమైన చోట నృత్యనాటకాలలో కేరళ ప్రాంత నృత్యకళలైనటువంటి కథాకళి, ప్రాచీన యుద్ధకళ అయినటువంటి కళరీపయట్టులను అప్పుడప్పుడూ వినియోగిస్తూ నృత్యనాటకాలను రూపొందించడం వల్ల గొప్ప ప్రాముఖ్యతను సంతరించుకున్నవి.

శ్రీమతి రుక్మిణీ దేవి నృత్యనాటకాలు ప్రదర్శించాలి అన్న నిర్ణయం తీసుకోవడం చాలా అత్యుత్తమ నిర్ణయంగా నిలిచింది. ఆ కాలంలో అప్పటివరకు భరతనాట్యాన్ని స్త్రీలు ఒక్కరిగా ప్రదర్శించుట మాత్రమే జరిగేది. ఈ నృత్యనాటకాల వల్ల ఒకే సన్నివేశంలో నలుగురికి పైనే కళాకారుల ప్రదర్శించుటకు అవకాశం కలిగింది. మునుపటి కాలంలో సదిర్కచేరి అనేపేర ఒక స్త్రీ నృత్యప్రదర్శన మాత్రమే ఉండేది. ఆ నృత్యకళాకారిణితో పాటు సంగీత వాద్యబృందం మాత్రమే ఉండేది. తరచుగా కాకపోయినా అక్కడక్కడా కురవంజి నాట్య నాటకాన్ని ప్రత్యేక దేవాలయాలలో వారి ఆచారాల ప్రకారం విశేష సందర్భాలలో మాత్రమే ప్రదర్శించబడేవి. ఇవేకాక కచేరి విధానంలో తంజావూరు సహోదరులు కృతి చేసిన

కృతులు, ఇంకా నృత్యనాటకాలు పెరిగింది.

నృత్య నాటకం

అవకాశం కలిగి వేళాకోరీ కుటుంబం

నట్టువనారులుగా

నిర్వాహకులుగా

వాగ్గేయకారులుగా

పురుషులు నృత్య

ఎప్పుడయితే వే

నృత్యమును నేర్చు

ఇప్పటికీ నృత్య

దిగ్గజాలుగా ని

నృత్య నాటకం

చక్కగా విక్షింబ

ఉదాహరణకు

వాల్మీకి రా

అదేరీతిలో

దృశ్యకావ్యం

కుమారసంభ

సాధారణరీతి

ఉండకపోయే

నిధిని అంద

కళాక్షేత్ర

బృందానికి, న

సంగీత దిగ్గ

వంటి వారు

సిద్ధ పడ్డారు.

బృందానికి

రుక్మిణీ

ఉన్నటువంటి

- స్మృతామాధవ్
పరిశోధక విద్యార్థి
విశ్వవిద్యాలయం

, నాట్యరంగంలోని
కాలగా గొప్పపేరు
త్య నాటకాలు
నంది. 1945వ
కీ తొలిసారిగా
క్షేత్ర శైలిలో
ర్పించిన ఎన్నో
ణ, ఇటు శాస్త్రీయ
సరిసమానంగా
దంగా ప్రదర్శిస్తూ
ఖ్యాతి చెందాయి.
లో కేరళ ప్రాంత
చీన యుద్ధకళ
అప్పుడప్పుడూ
చదం వల్ల గొప్ప
ప్రదర్శించాలి అన్న
యంగా నిలిచింది.
స్త్రీలు ఒక్కరిగా
త్యనాటకాల వల్ల
ప్రదర్శించుటకు
లో సదిర్శకచేరి
మే ఉండేది. ఆ
బృందం మాత్రమే
కురవంజి నాట్య
చారాల ప్రకారం
బడేవి. ఇవేకాక
లు కృతి చేసిన

కృతులు, ఇంకా కొన్ని అంశాలు ప్రదర్శించబడేవి.
నృత్యనాటకాలు రావడంతో భరతనాట్యంకు మంచి ఆదరణ
పెరిగింది.

నృత్య నాటకాల వలన పురుషులకు నృత్య ప్రదర్శనలలో
అవకాశం కలిపించబడింది. అంతకు ముందువరకు ఇశై
వేశాళర్ కుటుంబాలకు చెందిన పురుషులు నాట్యచారులుగా,
నట్టువనారులుగా, సంగీత కళాకారులుగా లేదా సంగీతబృంద
నిర్వాహకులుగా, గురువులుగా, మార్గదర్శకులుగా,
వాగ్గేయకారులుగా వుండే వారు కానీ, ప్రదర్శనలరీత్యా
పురుషులు నృత్య ప్రదర్శనకు వచ్చేవారు కాదు. నృత్యనాటకాలు
ఎప్పుడయితే మొదలయ్యాయో పురుషులు స్వల్ప వ్యవధిలోనే
నృత్యమును నేర్చుకున్నారు. అప్పుడు మొదలైన నూతన ధోరణి
ఇప్పటికీ నృత్య రంగంలో ఎంతో మంది పురుషులను
దిగ్గజాలుగా నిలిపింది.

నృత్య నాటకాల వలన భారతదేశంలోని సాహిత్య నిధిని
చక్కగా విక్షింప చేయుటకు మంచి అవకాశం లభించింది.
ఉదాహరణకు కళాక్షేత్రంలో రామాయణ ప్రదర్శన కొరకు
వాల్మీకి రామాయణం నుండి శ్లోకాలను తీసుకున్నారు.
అదేరీతిలో కాళిదాసు రచించిన కుమార సంభవంను
దృశ్యకావ్యంలా ప్రదర్శించారు. దీనికై కాళిదాసు రచించిన
కుమారసంభవం తొలి ప్రతుల నుండే శ్లోకాలను తీసుకున్నారు.
సాధారణరీతిలో నృత్యప్రదర్శనకు వీటితో అవకాశం
ఉండకపోయేదేమో ? నృత్య నాటకాల ద్వారా దేశ సాహిత్య
నిధిని అందరికీ అందింప చేసేలా అవకాశం లభించింది.

కళాక్షేత్రలో నృత్య నాటకాల ద్వారా సంగీత కచేరి
బృందానికి, నాట్యబృందం వారికి మధ్యవున్న దూరం తగ్గింది.
సంగీత దిగ్గజాలయిన టైగర్ వరదాచారి, పాపనాశం శివన్
వంటి వారు నృత్య నాటకాలకు సంగీతంను సమకూర్చుటకు
సిద్ధ పడ్డారు. అందువల్ల సంగీత కచేరి విద్యాంసులకు, నృత్య
బృందానికి ఒక మంచి పంథాలో మైత్రికుదిరింది.

రుక్మిణీదేవి గారికి భాగవతమేళా సాంప్రదాయాతో
ఉన్నటువంటి అనుబంధం

రుక్మిణీ దేవికి ప్రాచీనమైన అంశాలు, సాంప్రదాయాలు
అంటే అమితమైన ప్రేమ. దీనివల్ల భాగవత మేళపై ఇష్టం
ఏర్పడి భక్తి కలిగింది. 1945వ సం॥లో తన మొట్టమొదటి
నృత్య నాటకం చేసిన తర్వాత, రుక్మిణీ దేవి ఎప్పటికప్పుడు
కొత్త పంథాలో నృత్య నాటకాలు చెయ్యాలి అనుకుంటున్న
సమయంలో మేళటూరు భాగవత మేళా వైపు ఆమె దృష్టి
మరలింది. మేళటూరు భాగవతమేళ వారు చౌళరాజుల కాలం
నుండి నల్లారు, మేళటూర్ అనే రెండు గ్రామాల
దేవాలయాలలో భాగవత మేళా తరచుగా చేస్తూ ఉండేవారు.
ఆ సాంప్రదాయ పద్ధతిపై రుక్మిణీ దేవి గారికి దృష్టి మరలి
ఆ పద్ధతిని నృత్య నాటకంలో తీసుకు రావటానికి
ప్రయత్నించారు. మేళటూర్ భాగవత మేళాలో కాశీనాథయ్య,
గోపాలక్రిష్ణ శాస్త్రి, వెంకటరామ శాస్త్రి, వీరభద్రయ్య అనే
వారు నృత్య రూపకాలు నృత్యనాటకాలకు సంబంధించిన పద
సంపుటిని కూర్చి పెట్టేవారు. ఆ సమయంలో ఈ కృష్ణ అయ్యర్
సలహా మేరకు శ్రీబాలు భాగవతర్ గారిని కళాక్షేత్రకు
ఆహ్వానించి, వారి సహాయంతో భాగవతమేళాలో వున్న
నాటకాలకు సంబంధించిన విషయాలను సంగ్రహించి
భరతనాట్యానికి తగ్గట్టు మలచుకొని పదర్పింప చేశారు.

మేళటూర్ భాగవతమేళా సాంప్రదాయంలో చక్కటి
సాహిత్యం వుంది కానీ, నృత్యంకు సంబంధించిన
హస్తాభినయం, హావభావాలకు సంబంధించి, పాద వినియోగ
విషయాలకు సంబంధించి విడిగా ఒక సాంప్రదాయం
లేకపోవడం రుక్మిణీ దేవి గారికి ఒక మంచి అవకాశంగా
పరిణమించింది. ఆమె ఆ నాటకాలను తీసుకొని భరత
నాట్యానికి అనువుగా మార్చుకొని అత్యుద్భుతమైన నృత్య
నాటకాలుగా రూపొందించటానికి వీలుపడింది.

మేళటూర్ భాగవత మేళా సాంప్రదాయం గురించి
రుక్మిణీ దేవి గారికి తెలిసిన సమయంలో భాగవత మేళా
పెద్దలు వారికి సాంప్రదాయంలో అతి ముఖ్యమైన
నాటకమయిన ప్రహ్లాద చరిత్రంను మేళటూర్ దేవాలయం
వెలుపల ప్రదర్శించుటకు వీలులేదు, ఆ పద్ధతి సాంప్రదాయ
విరుద్ధం అవుతుందని వారు వివరించారు. కాబట్టి ఆ

నృత్యనాటకాన్ని తప్ప రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం, ఉషాపరిణయం వంటి రూపకాలను తీసుకొని రుక్మిణీదేవి అరుండేల్ కళాక్షేత్రలో ప్రదర్శింప చేయటానికి నిర్ణయించారు. ఆ సాంప్రదదాయంను పూర్తి వివరణతో తర్ఫీదు ఇచ్చుటకు శ్రీబాలుభాగవతర్, వారి సహోదరి అయినటువంటి కళ్యాణి అమ్మల్ కళాక్షేత్రకు విచ్చేసి అక్కడ ఇదివరకే ఉన్నటువంటి సంగీతజ్ఞులయిన యస్. శారద, వెంకటాచలశాస్త్రి, తురయూర్ రాజగోపాల శర్మ, భాగవతుల సీతారామ్ శర్మ మొదలగు బృందంను కలిసి వారికి ఎన్నో మాసాలు తర్ఫీదు ఇచ్చారు. నృత్య నాటకాలను వారు చాలా అరళింపు చేసుకొనేలా చేశారు. ఆ నృత్య నాటకాలలో రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం అనేది ఒక మచ్చుతునక వంటిది రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణంలో ఇమిడివున్న సంగీత అంశములు భాగవత మేళలో ఉన్న అంశాలను అదే విధంగా వినియోగించారు. మేళట్టూర్ భాగవత మేళా వారు భగవంతుని కోసమే ఎక్కువ సమయం వెచ్చించి ప్రదర్శిస్తారు. కళాక్షేత్ర వారు ఈ తరం వీక్షకుల అభిరుచి, ప్రదర్శనాస్థల పరిస్థితులను బట్టి భాగవత మేళా నాటకాలను అందరికీ అర్థమయేలా కాలానుగుణంగా వుండేలా రూపొందించి ప్రదర్శింపచేశారు. ఇప్పటికీ కాలానుగుణంగా చక్కగా చిన్న చిన్న మార్పులతో ప్రదర్శనలు ఇస్తున్నారు.

ఎప్పటిలాగే రుక్మిణీదేవి అరుండేల్ రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం నృత్య నిర్మాణం కోసం ఖచ్చితమైన పరిశోధనలు చేసి, ప్రాధాన్యతతోకూడిన సంగీతం, కథ, ఒక్కొక్క పాత్రకు సంబంధించిన కథా వివరణ, లయ విన్యాసాలు, పద ఉచ్చారణ విధానం, సంభాషణ విధానం, ఆహార్యంకు సంబంధించి వస్త్రధారణను రూపొందించి రామాయణం, కురవంజి నృత్యనాటకాలు చేశారు. వాటిలో కొదిగా కథాకళి వినియోగించినా భాగవత మేళకు సంబంధించినది కాబట్టి కథాకళి అంతగా కనబడదు.

రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం - కథాంశం

ఈ నృత్యనాటకంలోని కథాంశం ప్రకారం చిన్న బాలిక అయిన రుక్మిణీదేవికి, తన సహోదరుడు అయిన రుక్మి తన బాల్య మిత్రుడయిన శిశుపాలునితో వివాహం నిశ్చయించగా,

ఆ వివాహం ఇష్టంలేని రుక్మిణీ ఒక విప్రోత్తమునితో ద్వారకా ధీశుడయిన శ్రీకృష్ణుడికి లేఖ రాసి పంపింది. సమయం చూసి శ్రీకృష్ణుడు రుక్మిణీ దేవిని అపహరించి తన ద్వారకకు తీసుకు వచ్చి వివాహం చేసుకుంటాడు. శ్రీమద్భాగవతంలో రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం అనేది శరణాగతి యొక్క సారాంశంగా తెలుపుతారు. రుక్మిణీ సందేశంను 7 శ్లోకాలలో పరిపరి విధాల అర్థపరమార్థాలను వివరంగా తెలియచేయడానికి పెద్దపెద్ద వ్యాఖ్యాతలు లోతుగా ఆలోచిస్తున్నా ఎప్పటికప్పుడు వివరణకు అర్థంపరమార్థం కనబడుతూ ఉంటుంది. అంతటి మహోత్తరమైన అర్థం కలిగిన శ్లోకాలు అవి.

వినసాంపైన రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం

కళాక్షేత్ర రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం నృత్యనాటకంలో మొట్ట మొదటగా గణేశ ప్రార్థన శుక్లాంబరధరంతో మొదలు పెట్టి, నాట రాగంలో కొన్ని శ్లోకాలతో ప్రారంభించి, వెను వెంటనే రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం నృత్యనాటకానికి నాంది చెప్తారు. కానీ, మేళటూర్ భాగవత మేళాలో మాత్రం పూర్వరంగం పూజా విధానంతో మొదలిడి దేవుడికోసం దేవాలయ విధానంలో రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం మొదలు పెడతారు. కానీ కళాక్షేత్రలో సభా విధానం కోసం తొలిగా కృష్ణశబ్దం రాగతాళమాలికలో మొదలుపెట్టి శ్రీకృష్ణ పరమాత్మ బాల్య లీలలు, యువ పర్వంలో చేసిన లీలలు ప్రదర్శిస్తారు. శబ్దం ప్రదర్శించేప్పుడు కళాకారులు సొల్లుకట్టు ప్రకారం, తాళం ప్రకారం, పదప్రక్రియ ప్రకారం, ర్ఘంతర్ఘం తారితరీఘం ర్ఘణుత అను పద సంపుటని ఒక రీతిలో తాళం వేస్తున్న విధానం ప్రకారం అడుగులు వేస్తూ చేస్తున్నప్పుడు, తరువాత ప్రదర్శన ఎంత అందంగా గంభీరంగా ఉంటుంది అని ఆసక్తిగా ప్రేక్షకుల వీక్షిస్తారు. ఈ కృష్ణశబ్దం కొరకు వినియోగిస్తున్న రాగాలు గంభీర నాట, భౌళి, ఘంట, ముఖారి, వసంత రాగాలు మరియు మిశ్రచాపు, ఆదితాళం, ఖండ చాపు, రూపక తాళం మొదలగు తాళాలు వినియోగిస్తుంటారు. ఇందు అతి శుభప్రదమైన “వాసుదేవ దయానిధే బాలక్రిష్ణ నమోస్తుతే” అను పదజాలంను మిశ్రచాపు తాళంలో, చిట్టస్వరం తత్తోడకతాం అను క్లిష్టమయినతో సొల్లుకట్టు వాడుతారు.

త్తమునితో ద్వారకా
ని. సమయం చూసి
ద్వారకకు తీసుకు
గవతంలో రుక్మిణీ
కంగా తెలుపుతారు.
పరిపరి విధాల
మడానికి పెద్దపెద్ద
కప్పుడు వివరణకు
ంతటి మహత్తరమైన
నాటకంలో మొట్ట
తో మొదలు పెట్టి,
ంచి, వెను వెంటనే
ది చెప్తారు. కానీ,
ర్వరంగం పూజా
లయ విధానంలో
కళాక్షేత్రలో సభా
గతాశమాలికలో
యవ పర్వంలో
ప్పుడు కళాకారులు
ప్రక్రియ ప్రకారం,
ద సంపుటని ఒక
అడుగులు వేస్తూ
దంగా గంభీరంగా
రు. ఈ కృష్ణశబ్దం
ట, భౌతి, ఘంట,
దాపు, ఆదితాళం,
లగు తాళాలు
వమైన “వాసుదేవ
లంను మిశ్రచాపు
క్షిప్తమయినతో

తదుపరి సన్నివేశాలలో దేవగాంధారి, బేగడ, బిళహరి,
పత్తవరాళి, మణిరంగుతోడి, కానడ, రీతిగౌళ,
శుద్ధసావేరి, అరాణా, చక్రవాకం, నీలాంబరి, పూర్వకళ్యాణి,
ఖరహరప్రియ, సెంజురుట్టి, సౌరాష్ట్రం మొదలగు రాగాలు
ప్రాచీన పద్ధతి ప్రకారం శ్రుతియున్న పురాతన రాగాలు
వినియోగిస్తారు. మెలటూర్ సాంప్రదాయానుసారం చాలా
వరకు స్త్రీ పాత్రకు సంబంధించిన రాగాలు మకాదు, అరాణా
రాగంలోనే వుంటాయి. మేళట్టూరు విధానాన్ని కళాక్షేత్రంలో
కూడా అవలంబిస్తున్నారు. ప్రత్యేకంగా ఉత్తమ నాయిక
అయినటువంటి రుక్మిణీదేవి పాత్ర ప్రవేశంకు సంబంధించి
“కదిలి వచ్చిన రుక్మిణీ” అను పదజాల వినియోగంతో
మిశ్రచాపు తాళంలో శాస్త్రీయత వుట్టిపడే విధంగా సాంప్రదాయ
మేళవేంపుతో రుక్మిణీదేవి పాత్ర ప్రవేశం జరుగుతుంది. అదే
విధంగా శ్రీరాజగోపాల శ్రితజన పరిపాల అను కృతి సావేరి
రాగంలో సాగుతూ చూపరులకు చాలా ఆనందమైన
అనుభూతిని కలిగిస్తుంది. ఇచ్చట ప్రత్యేకంగా “కలగంటినమ్మ”
అను మొహనరాగంలో చిన్న పాటను వినియోగించడం
గమనార్హం. కళాక్షేత్రంలోని పెద్దల మాటప్రకారం
ఉషాపరిణయం అను నృత్య నాటకంలో కూడ అదే రాగం,
అదే పాటను వినియోగిస్తారు. ఈ నృత్యనాటకంలో ముఖ్యంగా
ఘనపంచరాగ మాలికగా రాగాలు నాట, గౌళ, ఆరభి,
వరాళి, శ్రీరాగాలు వినియోగిస్తారు. భాగవత మెళా
సాంప్రదాయం, కళాక్షేత్ర సాంప్రదాయం వారు శాస్త్రీయ
సంగీతంపై వున్న మక్కువతో జానపద పాత్రలకు కూడా ప్రాచీన
రాగాలైన సౌరాష్ట్రం, సెంజుపట్టి వంటి రాగాలు వాడారు.
ఈ నృత్యనాటకంలో బుడబుక్కల పాత్రకు “ కంచి కామక్షీ
పలుకు, మధురమీనాక్షీ పలుకు” అను విచిత్రమైన సంభాషణ
శైలి తారసపడుతుంది బుడబుక్కల పాత్ర వేషధారణకు
తగ్గట్టుగా ఉండే విధంగా రూపకల్పన చేశారు. శ్రీకృష్ణుని
గూర్చి అతడు రుక్మిణీదేవికి వివరించు సందర్భములో
“నీలమేఘము వలె” అను ఒక పాట అతని నోట వింటుంటే
హృదయానందం కలుగుతుంది.

సొల్లుకట్టు మరియు జతులు

ఈ నృత్యనాటకంలో మేలట్టూర్ భాగవత మేళాలో
ఏ విధంగా అయితే సొల్లుకట్టు, స్వరములను వినియోగిస్తారో
వాటినే కళాక్షేత్రలో వినియోగిస్తూ వాటికి కొద్ది స్వరాలు
మాత్రమే తురయూర్ రాజాగోపాల శర్మ చేర్చారు. తీర్మానాలు
అన్నీ ఈ నృత్యనాటకం కోసం కూర్చినవే. తీర్మానములు
హెచ్చుగా మధ్యమ లేక దురితకాలంలో ఉంటాయి.

రుక్మిణీ సందేశం

ఇందులో చెప్పుకోవల్సిన ముఖ్యాంశం రుక్మిణీ
సందేశం. ఈ సన్నివేశ ఘట్టం భావోద్వేగంతో కూడిన
రాగమాలిక ద్వారా ప్రేక్షకులకి చేరేలా ప్రదర్శింప చేశారు.
శ్రీమతి రుక్మిణీ దేవి, శ్రీ బాలు భాగవతార్ ఇరువురూ కూడా
శాస్త్రీయత, సాంప్రదాయం, పాత పద్ధతులకు ఎటువంటి మార్పు
లేకుండా చూసేవారు. అయినా కూడా నిజమైన ప్రతుల
లిపికి రుక్మిణీ సందేశం ఘట్టంకోసం మాత్రం ఒక చిన్న శ్లోకంను

“శృత్యాగుణాన్ భువనసుందర శృతి శృణ్వతాంతే
నిర్వప్యకుర్ణ వివర్తైర్ధరతోంగ తాపం రూపం

దృషాం దృషిమతాం అఖిలార్థలాభంత్యై

అచ్యుతా విషతే చిత్తమప్రతపంమే”

శ్రీ మద్భాగవతం నుండి తీసుకుని చేర్చారు. రుక్మిణీ
సందేశం ఇందులో చెప్పుకోవల్సిన ముఖ్యాంశం.

ఈ శ్లోకం ద్వారా విదర్భ రాజపుత్రిక ముగ్ధనాయిక,
ఉత్తమనాయిక అయిన రుక్మిణీ దేవి చాలా గౌరవప్రదంగా
తాను శ్రీ కృష్ణునికి తెలియ చేయవలసిన విషయాన్ని కన్య
అయినప్పటికీ పద్ధతిగా ,స్పష్టంగా , సున్నితమైన శైలిలో,
సామాన్యంగా స్త్రీలకు ఉండే బిడియాన్ని వదలి తన ప్రేమను
తెలియచేస్తుంది, శ్రీమతి రుక్మిణీ దేవి అరుండేల్ నృత్యనాటకంలో
కూడా ఆ గుణాలను తన రూపకల్పన ద్వారా చూపించారు.
వ్యాఖ్యాతలు ముఖ్యంగా చేప్పే విషయమేమిటంటే రుక్మిణీ పలికే
వాక్యార్థం, శృత్యాగుణ్ అనే పద వరుసకు తను ప్రేమించిన
శ్రీ కృష్ణుని గుణాలను దానికితోడు సకలగుణాలను అనగా

శ్రీ కృష్ణుని చిన్ననాటి చిలిపి అల్లరి చేష్టలను కూడా ఒకే విధంగా ప్రేమించింది అందుకే శృత్వాగ్నేపదచెధనలో శృత్వాఅగుణాన్ కూడా కనిపిస్తుంది. ఈశ్లోకం శంకరాభరణం రాగంలో ఉండటం వలన తరువాత రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం సన్నివేశాలకు చాలాశుభప్రదం సూచించే అనుభూతినిస్తుంది. ఇందు “అంగ తాపం” అను పద సంపుటికి తగట్టుగా శ్రీమతి రుక్మిణీ దేవి అరుండేల్ నృత్యరూపకంతో సన్నితంగా ఎంతో సృజనాత్మకతతో రూపకల్పన చేశారు. అంటే సాక్షాత్తు శ్రీమహాలక్ష్మీ దేవి, సాక్షాత్తు శ్రీ మహావిష్ణువుకు లేఖ రాసి ఒక విప్రోత్తమునితో పంపుతుంది అనే సన్నివేశాన్ని ఇద్దరు పురుషులు అనగా ఒక బ్రహ్మణోత్ర శ్రీకృష్ణుడికి లేఖ చూపించడం అను సన్నివేశాన్ని ఆమె చాలా ప్రజ్ఞతో రూపకల్పన చేసి ప్రదర్శించడం జరిగింది.

ఈ శ్లోకంను చేర్చడం ద్వారా తెలుగు నృత్యనాటకంలా అనుభూతిని ఇస్తున్న ఈ నృత్యనాటకం మణిప్రవాళం శైలిలా మారింది. వైష్ణవ సాంప్రదాయంలో రుక్మిణీ సందేశం అను ప్రతిలో రుక్మిణీదేవి, శ్రీకృష్ణుడికి రాసిన లేఖలో ఏడు శ్లోకాలు మిక్కిలి విలువ కలిగియున్నవి, ఇందు నాయిక తన నాయకుడిపై కలిగియున్న ప్రగఢ ప్రేమను స్పష్టంగా తెలియ చేస్తూ ఉంటుంది. శరణాగతి యొక్క తత్వాన్ని ప్రత్యేకంగా తెలుపుతూ శ్రీకృష్ణ పరమాత్మ సకల గుణాలు, రూపలావణ్యం, ఐశ్వర్యం, శక్తి, బలం మొదలగు సకల గుణాలు ఈశ్లోకాలలో మంచి సంస్కృతంలో నిక్కుముగా కనిపిస్తుడటంతో ఈ శ్లోకం యొక్క వినియోగం ఒక మంచి ఎన్నిక అని చెప్పవచ్చు. ఈ శ్లోకం ద్వారా జీవుడు పరమాత్మతో అనుసంధానం కావాలి అనే మధురభక్తిని నాయిక నాయక భావన కూడా తెలియచేస్తుంది.

ఇందు శ్రీకృష్ణ పరమాత్మ యొక్క ఇతర నాయికలు మీరా ఆండాల్ వంటి వారు తమ ప్రేమను సూటిగా ధైర్యంగా వ్యక్తపరచిన శైలి వారిది. కాని చిన్న బాలిక అనగా కన్య అతఃపురంలో సున్నితంగాఉంటూ స్త్రీల మధ్యనే పెరిగిన

రాకుమార్తె అయిన రుక్మిణీదేవి తను ఉపయోగించిన పదక్రమశైలి మిక్కిలి గౌరవ ప్రదంగా స్వాభావికంగా ఉంటూ సున్నిత మనస్సువలన రుక్మిణీదేవి శ్రీకృష్ణుని వివాహం చేసుకోవాలి అను తన సంకల్పాన్ని లేఖ ద్వారా తెలియజేస్తుంది. తరువాత ఈ సందర్భానికి తగట్టుగా రాగమాలికలో కూర్చబడిన సారంగ, ధన్యాసి, నాయకి, వసంత, వరాళి రాగాలను వినియోగించారు. ఈ రాగాలు అన్నీ కూడా రుక్మిణీ దేవి తాపత్రయాన్ని స్పష్టంగా తెలిపే శైలిలో ఉంటాయి. మరియొక ఘట్టంలో ముఖ్యంగా చెప్పుకోవలసినది ఏమిటంటే భాగవతంలోని రుక్మిణీ సందేశంలో 4వ శ్లోకంలో ఒక పద క్రమార్థం “ఆరాధితో యది గదాగ్రజ” రుక్మిణీ దేవి శ్రీకృష్ణ పరమాత్మతో చేస్తుంది. మీరు మీ అనుజుడికి ఒక మాట తెలిపి ఇచటికి విచ్చేసి నన్ను తీసుకు వెళ్ళిపోండి కృష్ణా అని. మన శాస్త్ర ప్రకారం చూస్తే కళ్యాణానికి పురుషుడి పెద్దవారి అనుమతి కోరవలసివస్తుంది, పిన్నవారిని కాదు అడగవలసింది. అయినా దీనికి వ్యాఖ్యాతలు చేప్పే వ్యాఖ్యానం ఏమిటంటే రుక్మిణీదేవి సమయస్ఫూర్తితో మీ అనుజుడికి తెలిపి వచ్చి నన్ను కళ్యాణం చేసుకో కృష్ణా అనుటకు కారణం జ్యేష్ఠుడికి వివాహం జరిగితే మేలు అనుకునేది అనుజుడే కాబట్టి. ఎవరితో తెలిపితే కార్యం ఖచ్చితంగా జరుగుతుందో ఆయోచనతో తన విన్నపం తెలుపుతుంది అనేది ఈశ్లోకం తెలియజేస్తోంది.

“ఆరాధితో యదిగదాగ్రజ” అను పదక్రమం రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం నృత్య నాటకంలో ఉపయోగించలేదు. అయినా కూడా ఆమె రుక్మిణీ యొక్క మనస్సు, తాను తెలుపవలసిన విషయార్థమేమిటో రుక్మిణీదేవి అరుండేల్ చాలా బాగా అర్థంచేసుకున్నారు. ఆ ఏడు శ్లోకాల్లో రుక్మిణీదేవి మనస్తత్వాన్ని రుక్మిణీ దేవి అరుండేల్ స్పష్టంగా తన మనసులో స్థిర పరచి నృత్యంను రూపొందించారు. అంటే మూలకావ్యం అయిన భాగవతంలోని అణువణువు రుక్మిణీదేవి అరుండేల్ బాగా అర్థం చేసుకుని రూపకల్పన చేశారు. అనుటకు రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణంలో ప్రతి సన్నివేశం కూడా నిదర్శనంగా నిస్తుంది.

సంభాషణలు
మెళకటూ
సంభాషణలు
నాటకం చేసిన
కేవలం రెండు
మొదటిది మొదటి
మరియు శుభ
తెలిపినప్పుడు,
ద్వారకకు పోవు
తలపడినప్పుడు,
కొంత సంభాష
రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం
భాగవత
నృత్యనాటకాల
సంగీత విధానా
జరిగింది. కానీ
సంగీతాన్ని కూ
అటు కృతిఅని,
సంప్రదాయంలో
కాకపోతే రాగతా
అవుతుంది. భజ
నిలయ అను ఒక
సాగుతున్న ఈ
అందంగా సాగు
నాదనామక్రియ
“భజగోవిందం
వినియోగించారు
అను ఘనమయిన
మధ్య మధ్యలో వా
అర్థమవుతూ జన
గౌరీ పూజ ఘట్టం

ఉపయోగించిన
స్వాభావికంగా
కృష్ణుని వివాహం
తెలియజేస్తుంది.
అతల్ కూర్చబడిన
రాళి రాగాలను
వా రుక్మిణీ దేవి
యి. మరియొక
ది ఏమిటంటే
కంలో ఒక పద
క్మిణీ దేవి శ్రీకృష్ణ
ఒక మాట తెలిపి
కృష్ణ అని. మన
ద్దవారి అనుమతి
సింది. అయినా
ంటే రుక్మిణీదేవి
నన్ను కళ్యాణం
వాహం జరిగితే
తెలిపితే కార్యం
తన విన్నపం
ంది.
క్రమం రుక్మిణీ
అయినా కూడా
తెలుపవలసిన
చాలా బాగా
వి మనస్తత్వాన్ని
మలో స్థిర పరచి
కావ్యం అయిన
రుండేల్ బాగా
మటకు రుక్మిణీ
ంగా నిస్తుంది.

సంభాషణలు

మెళటూర్ భాగవత మేళా రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణంలో చాలా సంభాషణలు ఉన్నాయి. అదే కళాక్షేత్రం వారు రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం నాటకం చేసినప్పుడు సంభాషణలు తక్కువ చేశారు. ఇందు కేవలం రెండు ఘట్టాలలోనే సంభాషణలు తారసపడతాయి. మొదటిది బుడబుక్కలవాడు, రుక్మిణీ దేవికి తన కళ్యాణ ఘడియ మరియు శుభసూచక విషయం తెలిపి ధైర్య వచనాలు తెలిపినప్పుడు, రెండవది రుక్మిణీ, శ్రీకృష్ణుడు విదర్భ నుండి ద్వారకకు పోవుదారిలో రుక్మి వారిని అడ్డగించి శ్రీ కృష్ణుడితో తలపడినప్పుడు, శ్రీకృష్ణుడు రుక్మిని శిక్షించడం లాంటి సన్నివేశాల్లో కొంత సంభాషణ ఉంటుంది.

రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణంలోని సంగీత రూపాలు

భాగవత మేళంలోను, కళాక్షేత్ర చేసిన వలు నృత్యనాటకాలలోను దరువు థిల్లన వంటి వివిధ రకాల సంగీత విధానాలను నృత్యరూపకాలలో వినియోగించడం జరిగింది. కానీ, రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణంలో ఎప్పటిలా కీర్తన శైలి సంగీతాన్ని కూర్చారు. అయినా కొన్నిచోట్ల వాడిన కృతులు అటు కృతిఅని, ఇటు కీర్తన అని చెప్పలేము. భాగవతమేళా సంప్రదాయంలో వాడిన సొల్లకట్టులను ఇందులో వాడారు. కాకపోతే రాగతాళమాలికలో కృష్ణశబ్దం తొలిగా ప్రారంభం అవుతుంది. భజన సంప్రదాయంలో ఆభేరి రాగంలో గోకుల నిలయ అను ఒక పాటను మేళవించడం వలన గాంభీర్యంగా సాగుతున్న ఈ నృత్య నాటకం చాలా సరళంగా ఇంకా అందంగా సాగుతుంది. ఇంకా అందరికీ తెలిసిన రాగం నాదనామక్రియ రాగంలో నామ సంకీర్తనం తీరులో “భజగోవిందం భజగోవిందం” అను సంకీర్తన కూడా వినియోగించారు. ఈ నృత్యనాటకంలో నాయకి, మణిరంగు అను ఘనముయిన రాగాలను, భజన సంకీర్తనలను, అక్కడక్కడ మధ్య మధ్యలో వాడుతూ ఉండడం వలన అందరికీ సరళంగా అర్థమవుతూ జనరంజకంగా ఉంటుంది. అటు తరువాత గౌరీ పూజ ఘట్టంలో ఘంటా రాగంను “గౌరికి శైల కుమారికి”

అన్న పాటలో వాడటం వలన ఈ పాట వింటేనే దైవానుభూతి కలుగుతుంది. ఈ పాట ఘంటా రాగంలో ఉన్నా పున్నాగవరాళి రాగం వింటున్న అనుభూతి కలుగుతుంది. ఈ పాటకు కుమ్మి రీతిలో రుక్మిణీ దేవి సఖులు గౌరీదేవిని స్తుతిస్తూ విగ్రహం చుట్టూ తిరుగుతూ పాడుతూ నృత్యంచేసేలా రూపకల్పన చేశారు.

రుక్మిణీకళ్యాణం నృత్య నాటకంలో వివాహ ముహూర్త మునకు సంబంధించిన సన్నివేశాలలో ఉత్సవ సాంప్రదాయ కీర్తనలు, లాలి పాటలు అనగా వివాహ సమయంలో నూతన వధూవరులను ఉయాలలాడించడం వంటి కళ్యాణ పరంపరలలో సాగుతున్న సన్నివేశాలలో వినియోగించారు. నృత్యనాటకంలో అప్పటివరకు గాంభీర్యంగా సాగిన సన్నివేశాల తరువాత నవరోజురాగంలో దేవకి సుకుమార అనుపాటను ఉపయోగించడం వలన ప్రేక్షకులందరికీ హాయి, సౌమ్యత్వాన్ని కలుగుతుంది. చివరిగా జనరంజకమైన, మధ్యమావతి రాగంలో “శ్రీరాజగోపాల” అనుమంగళంను కళాకారులు ప్రదర్శిస్తున్నప్పుడు, ప్రేక్షకులందరికీ ఆ కళ్యాణంలో మనం కూడా భాగం అన్న అనుభూతి, మధురాను భూతి కలుగుతుంది. సాధారణంగా మంగళంను లఘువుగా ముగిస్తారు కానీ, ఇచ్చట ఒక చిన్న చిట్టస్వరాన్ని వినియోగించారు.

ముగింపు

రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం అనేది సీతా కళ్యాణం వలె వధూవరుల ఇరు వర్గాల తల్లిదండ్రులు, బంధువర్గాలు కలిసి నిర్ణయించిన వివాహం కాక, రాక్షస వివాహం అని పూర్వశృతి. శ్రీ కృష్ణునికి రుక్మిణీ దేవి లేఖను పంపి తనను రాక్షస వివాహం చేసుకో క్రిష్ణ! అని మొరపెట్టుకుంటుంది. కాబట్టి రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణంను రాక్షస వివాహంగా పరిగణిస్తారు. అయినా ప్రేక్షకులు మధురానుభూతి పొందుట కొరకు ఒక సదుద్దేశంతో ఈ రాక్షస వివాహంలోని అంశాలలా కాక, దైవతస్వానుభూతి వుండేలాగా, దైవ కళ్యాణంలా శ్రీమతి రుక్మిణీదేవి అరుండేల్

ఈ నృత్య నాటకాన్ని రూపొందించడం జరిగింది. ఈ నృత్యనాటకం ఇంత జనాదరణ పొంది 50 సం॥లు గడిచినా ఇప్పటికీ అంతే జనరంజకంగా సాగతూ వుంది అంటే శ్రీమతి రుక్మిణీదేవి మనోసంకల్పం, రూప కల్పన విధానంలో, అవిడ పాటించే సాంప్రదాయ, శాస్త్రీయ విధానాలు చాలా పత్యేకతను సంతరించుకొని నిలబడ్డాయి అని చెప్పవచ్చు. ఇందుకు శ్రీమతి రుక్మిణీ దేవికి నృత్య నాటకం రూపకల్పన చేస్తున్నపుడు మేళటూరు భాగవత మేళా వారు ప్రత్యేకంగా నేర్పిన విధానం, వారి ఘనత, వారి నైపుణ్యత, వారి సాంప్రదాయానుసారం తర్ఫీదు ఇచ్చిన తీరు, అందుకు

అనుగుణంగా కళాకారులు ప్రదర్శించిన తీరు వలన మనం అందరం ద్వాపరయుగంలో నిక్కముగానే రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం వీక్షిస్తున్నామేమో అన్న మధురాను భూతి కలుగుతుంది.

కాలానుగుణంగా భౌగోళిక అంశాలరీత్యా యోచించిన, రుక్మిణీదేవి విదర్భ రాజ్య రాకుమార్తె, మరొకవైపు శ్రీ కృష్ణుడు ద్వారక నగర పాలకుడు. రుక్మిణీ కళ్యాణం నృత్యనాటకంలోని సంగీతం వింటుంటే మనకు తెలియకనే మనం కూడా రుక్మిణీదేవితోపాటు సంగీత పరంగా విదరభ రాజభవన అంతఃపురం నుండి ద్వారకకు భౌగోళికంగా పయనించినట్లు అనుభూతి కలుగుతుంది.

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చిత్తురు వద్ద
వర్ధిల్లిన వాగ్గేయక
తెలుగు ద్విభాషాకో
బాగా నేర్చిన విద్య
అడి పాడి ప్రేక్షకు
ఇతడు 400
నేడు కేవలం 200
దొరుకుతున్నాయి
పామరులను తన ప
శృంగార పదములు
కీర్తనలు రాశాడు.
భక్తిలో అన్నమయ్య
రాశాడు సారంగపా
పదాలను వేణుగోపా
“సారంగము”
నెమలి అని అర్ధము
చేత ధరించిన వా
కుంభకోణంలో, శ
శ్రీమహావిష్ణువు అర్చన
పేరు పెట్టుకున్నారు ఆ
ఆరావముదన్, ఉత్త
ప్రకాశించిన ధృవతా
ఇంటి పేరేమిటో, బంధ
లేదు. భార్య పేరు కూ
జీవిత విశేషాలు
కార్యేటి నగర న
వాగ్గేయకారుడయ్యాడు
సన్మానాలకు పాత్రుడ
గడించాడు. ఆరంభదశ



Telangana Sangeeta Nataka Akademi

Department of Language and Culture

2nd Floor, Kalabhavan, Ravindra Bharathi, Saifabad, Hyderabad - 500004

**National Seminar on
Music / Dance / Theatre Arts – Ancient, Modern & Post Modern**

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INNOVATIONS IN LAYA IN THE FIELD OF BHARATANATYAM IN THE POSTMODERN ERA

SMITHA MADHAV & PROF. DR. MS SIVA RAJU,

Research scholar,
SarojiniNaidu School of Dance and Communication,
University of Hyderabad.

Introduction

In keeping with the saying "SrutiMaata- Laya Pita", Bharatanatyam dance balances out perfectly its adherence to both melodic and rhythmic aspects of music. The very famous definition: GeetamVaad yamThathaNrityam - trayamsangeetamuchyathe", though not given for Bharatanatyam in particular, does in many ways describe the true nature of Bharatanatyam. Whether in the royal courts or in the modern proscenium stage, Bharatanatyam dance is a delicate blend of all these elements and much more, thus making it a fine but robust art form which is a fit feast for the senses of us mortals, even as it takes us closer to the immortal. In this study, an attempt shall be made to study the innovations that one sees in the Laya aspects of Bharatanatyam. In the interest of brevity, the changes that shall be studied will be limited to those of the past two decades.

The study shall be carried out under the following heads:

1. Alarippus
2. Mei Adavus
3. Korvais of jatiswarams and Tillanas
4. Sorkattus, jatis&Eduppus
5. Tattimettu
6. Attami
7. Poruttam
8. Laya aspects in recorded music
9. Weilding of the nattuvangam Talam
10. Use of percussion instruments

Alarippus: It is widely known that Alarippus are the favoured opening piece of Bharatanatyam Maargam. Prior to the codification

made by the Tanjore Quartet, the Alarippu was known as "Alaru". To this day, many artists prefer to begin their recitals with the Alarippu. Though other items such as the Pushpanjali, Melaprapti or a krti on Ganesha is sometimes presented, the alarippu still enjoys a pride of place in the bill of fare in a Bharatanatyam concert. Smt Meenakshi Chittaranjan states that her Gurus Shri PandanallurChockalingam Pillai and Shri PandanallurSubbaraya Pillai (like many other seniors of theirtime) always preferred to open the concert with the alarippu and believed that no other item was as suitable as the alarippu to present at the opening of the concert.

Typically performed in three speeds viz: vilamba, madhyama and duritha, the alarippu is performed with a standard set of adavus. Most of the alarippu has the arms held in natyarambham. The Thol thalli movement is prominent. The tail end of the Alarippu has a few teermanamadavus; which mark the close of the piece. The alarippus are usually presented in various nadais, such as tishra, chaturashra, Mishra, khanda etc. The sankeerna nadai alarippu is not as common as those in other nadais.

Noteworthy innovations in Alarippus include:

- * Alarippus in complex taalās
- * Alarippus on specific themes
- * Alarippus in speeds higher than trikalam
- * Teermanams in alarippus
- * Variations in movements in alarippus

Today, we commonly see alarippus in hitherto unused talas such as: Khanda jaati eka taala, Mishra Jaati Eka Talam, TishrajaatiTriputataalam, so on and so forth. Basically, any tala in the 35 taalās may be chosen. Needless to mention, alarippus in shorter talas such as Khanda jaati eka talam would be less challenging to execute for the dancer, while those in longer ones would be a test of the mettle of the dancer as well as the nattuvanar. The prolonged use of the natyarambham makes alarippus of longer talas extra challenging for the dancer. A sample of an alarippu in Mishra Jaati eka taalam is annotated below:

KORVAI:

|| Thad dhi; - tha ka thariki ta tha ka
 DhiDhi; - tha ka thariki ta tha ka
 Thom Dhi; - tha ka thariki ta tha ka
 Nam dhi; tha ka thariki ta tha ka
 Tha; Ka; Dhi; Ku: (tha ka thadhiki ta Thom) x 3 ||

MUGAPPU:

|| Thathai; Thai yum, thatham; dhitham, ki ta ki ta thatha ka ||

TRIKALAM:

|| Tham; dhitham; - Thai; dhithai; ki ta ki ta thatha ka ||

TEERMANAM:

|| Tha, hatha jam thari
 Jam, thari JA gathari
 (Ki ta tha ka tharikita) x 3 ||

|| Tha; ; ; ||
 || Thiriku du tha ka – thiriku du thaka;
 Thiriku du tha ka – thiriku du tha ka; -
 Thiriku du tha ka – thiriku du tha ka ||

|| Dhalan, ku – dhalan, ku – tha ka dhiku – tha ka dhiku- tha
 ;dhi; gi ; na , thom||

(|| Dheem, dheem , dheem,
 Tha - Dheem, dheem, dheem,
 Tha; - Dheem, dheem, dheem,

Tha, dhi, ki ta tha ka thariki ta thom ||) x 3 Tha

Alarippus in specific themes: One very popular innovation in the realm of alarippus is the introduction of “thematic” alarippus. One often sees mayooraalarippu (where the adavus of the alarippu mimic the movements of a peacock) hasta alarippu, where the pataka hasta which is held in natyarambham is replaced by various samyutha and

asamyuthahastas. Another interesting but not yet very popular variation is the “Garuda Alarippu” where the movements of the eagle are incorporated into the sequence of the alarippu. In the garudaalarippu, one sees the incorporation of the words “VinaaVenkatesham Na Naatho Na Naathasadaa Venkatesham Smaraamismaraami- Hare Venkatesha Praseedha Praseedha PriyamVenkatesha Prayaccha Prayaccha”. In order to accommodate these words in taalam, an appropriate taalam, i.e., Khanda Jaati Eka Taalam is chosen. An excerpt from this alarippu is seen below:

	Vi naVenkatesham Nanaathonanaathah	
	SadaaVenkateshamSmaraamiSmaraami	
	HareVenkateshahPraseedaPraseeda	
	PriyamVenkateshaPrayacchaPrayaccha	

Traditionally, the alarippu is usually performed in Trikaalam. Over the past few years, we notice few dancers and nattuvanars who are of the more adventurous sort and are presenting alarippus in five or sometimes even six speeds. With the trend of mrdangists playing more and more pivotal roles in the shaping of the laya aspects of the concerts, such innovations are becoming more commonplace. Thus, one commonly sees alarippus such as panchakalaalarippu, shatkalaalarippu etc. In the event of the music being prerecorded, the temptation to attempt alarippus in panchakaala or shat kaala mode is even more. The click of the tempo given by the metronome during recordings makes it possible, for a capable nattuvanar to recite all speeds with accuracy and perfection. Nowadays, we sometimes find small korvais or teermanams at the end of the alarippu. This gives an emphatic finish to the piece. It also makes the end more electrifying. An example of such a teermanam is seen in the earlier example (Mishra Jaati Eka Taalam)

With all the above-mentioned changes in the content, construction, execution, and articulation of the alarippu, it is needless to mention that the movements of the item are also changing. For example, where we once saw only the attami (technically known as the sundaribheda amongst the greevabheda or neck movements) we now see the use of other greevabhedas; such as Tiraschina, prakampita

etc. However, it is desirable to modify the adavaus and choreography of the alarippu in a way that the basic structure of the piece is not tampered with. If this is not ensured, then the alarippu would cease to look like one and would instead look like any other korvi or teermanam. This view has endorsed by Shri Kuttalam Selvam avargal in a 2019 interview.

Mei Adavus: From the times of sadirKutcheris, meiadavus have formed an integral part of the Pallavi portions, especially in tillanas. Some experts call this meiadavu as “ezhiladavu” also. As the name indicates, the Mei or ezhiladavu is conceived as a graceful set of movements that are more lasya oriented, than laya oriented. The movements are of the whole body and the torso is twisted and turned generously. The footwork is not usually very mathematical.

In the past couple of decades, we see a lot of variety and grandeur added to the ubiquitous meiadavu. One notice that the meiadavus have also started to become a bit more mathematical. As a natural continuation of this, the trikalam delineation of the meiadavu has also changed form. When the laya layer of the meiadavu was more sarvalaghu oriented, it was possible to have the same adavu pattern for all three speeds. However, with the inclusion of mathematically complex laya patterns into the meiadavu, it is not always possible to have the same adavus in all three speeds. Hence, one often notices that the adavus used in the first and second (vilamba and madhyama) speeds are of one kind, and those of the third (duritha) speed are of another.

With many performances being staged as group recitals, rather than as solo numbers, the choreography of the meiadavu is often visualized in a manner that reflect the pindi bandhas mentioned in the Natyasastra. This, also leads to a further change in the movements, since the need for the dancers to converge and split, to move back and forth, in all directions arises. Some industrious and innovative choreographers, natyacharyas and dancers have also tried to include the idea of Mashmanrtta (also described in the Natyasastra) in the meiadavus of tillana. Since the meiadavu is usually the most “uncomplicated” (from a laya standpoint) part of the tillana, it is a

good place for the inclusion of mashmaNrta. Here, nrta hastas are used to convey some broad ideas connected to mood and metaphor, story and character etc; thus, creating a parallel language of communication. The ideas contained in the MashmaNrta of the meiadavu is usually connected to the theme around with the sahityam of the charanam is built. Doing these stitches together the opening parts of the tillana to the closing parts, thus making the tillana a more cohesive, compact and tightly knit unit. Some examples of this include the usage of the MayuraAdavu for a tillana with sahityam in praise of Lord Murugan (the peacock is the mount of Lord Muruga) and the Chin Mudra for one in praise of Sri Kanchiparamacharya. This heightens mood and the increases the scope of the tillana multifold in a way that the tillana ceases to be a fully nrta piece with a couple of sahityam lines at the end.

Korvais of Jatiswarams and Tillanas: As with the above-mentioned changes in meiadavus, the construction and execution of korvais in Tillanas and Jatiswarams is also constantly changing. Until about four decades ago, one saw as many as five korvais in both tillanas as well as In Jatiswarams. These korvais were mostly in the madhyama kalam and seldom had complicated teermanams towards the end of each of them. Since the korvais are presented along with the vocal rendition and not in isolation, it was deemed mandatory to ensure that the korvais were mostly in the sarvalaghu mode. This would ensure that there was harmony between the footwork the nattuvangam, the mrdangam and the vocal. One must also remember that in the days of yore, the nattuvanar was typically the lead vocalist as well. He was also the choreographer of the dance, the teacher of the dancer and the conductor of the audience. Thus, he naturally planned the rhythm score of the piece in a way that ensured that the vocal and the nattuvangam ran on parallel lines with comfort and ease.

With the entry of freelance vocalists into the dance orchestra, the role played by the nattuvanar has changed considerably. Now, the vocalist sings and the nattuvanar renders the jatis and wields the cymbals. Hence the nattuvanar has gone from a dual role to a single one. The oneness of song and rhythm has also undergone a subtle but clear division. Hence, we now have several moments on the dance

stage where the nattu- muttu combine (The duo comprising of the mrdangists and the nattuvanar) are doing their own thing, i.e., the vocalist is singing the song, avarthanam to avarthanam while the nattuvanar, the dancer and the mrdangists are rendering laya patterns in a mathematical fashion. While this sometimes results in some exciting, intricate, complicated and nail-biting moments, it does, on occasion result in some less than harmonious cacophony. Whether it is melodious and mellifluous or harsh and terse depends on the tastes of the dancer / choreographer. The choices before them are plenty but need to be used in moderation. Today, the korvais are fewer in number, but more mathematical in nature. Some ideas of poruttam are also introduced into the korvais. For example, in the SumanesaRanjaniTillana of Sri Madurai T Srinivasan, the Pallavi has an “atheetham” eduppu; that is, it begins three maatrais before the samam:

Thatha, || Dheem; ,thadheem; , thana, dhi ra, | na

For a tillana such as this, instead of composing the korvai from samam to samam, it may be composed from samam to idam (of the eduppu). This makes the tillana more challenging, but exciting. Similarly, in the Maandtillana of Shri Lalgudi G Jayaraman, the tillana starts 6 maatrais after the samam:

||; , - thanadheem, thadheem, thadhi ra na |

In this case, a korvai which starts on samam and ends 6 maatrais after the samam will be very suitable.

Sorkattus, Jatis&Eduppus:

Sorkattus and jatis are an intrinsic part of the music of Bharatanatyam. The vallinam- mellinam (modulation) techniques play a huge role in adding to the musical values of the jatis in particular and the music in toto. Vazhuvooraar, Shri Kitappa Pillai, Smt Indira Rajanand many such stalwarts have, in their time raised the bar for nattuvangam execution, sorkattu rendition and using the sorkattus effectively.

Historically, the sollus used in dance are unique as in, they are not identical to the Mrdangam sollus nor are they very similar to those used in Taval playing. They however mirror the sollus of the Konakkol family and follow the same musical and numerical rules of south Indian percussion music. One may not for instance use a Dhikkuthakathadhikita or a “thakkitakitathaka” or a tha cha kitatha ka, but would instead use sollus such as “ki ta tha ka thariki ta “tharitha dh ana tha dh ana – dhanatha ja nu thadhi mi”, so on and so forth.

There has been a constant evolution and change in the choice of sollus and their usage. In a statement at the Natya Kala Conference, eminent dance mrdangist Dr Guru Bharadwaaj stated that the ancestors of Kitappa Pillai had used some “typical” Mrdangam sollus like Tham Kita thakaThari Kita Thakaetc in their jatis. Tavilsollus like Ku Kuntha, dinga, Plaangu, dhaneyku, etc were also used. Tavilsollus were imported into dance more often than Mrdangam sollus. A few morsing sollus like janujanu were also borrowed. In later days, KN Dandayudhpani Pillai used the sollu “deenku” very often. This may be a combination of the Mrdangam sollus “dheem” and “thalaanku”.

Without delving much into the source of each sollu and the rationale behind assimilating the said sollus into the dance vocabulary, one can conclude that the vocabulary of sollus and sorkattus is a constantly developing and expanding one. Sollus mostly mirror the sounds produced by the instruments on which they must have once been played. To this end, one may be able to conclude that the Sollus of the Kanjira and other such ancient instruments might be the oldest and most natural sounding ones.

The use, construction and presentation of jatis have also undergone some major modifications. Where we once had shorter jatis (4 to 8 avartanams in length), replete with sarvalaghu phrases, the jatis of today are longer, more mathematical in construction and filled with some mind boggling yatis. Few dancers, nattuvanars, mrdangists / jati composers who are of an adventurous sort have even tried using other mathematical concepts such as the Fibonacci sequence in the composition of jatis.

Today, Jatis are often used in sancharis or to tell a story. The voice modulation, intonation, articulation, kaarvai structure etc of these jatis are planned and executed based on the story being narrated or the sanchari being performed. One also sees numerous jatis in which words / phrases which have nothing to do with chollus, but are connected to the sahitya or theme of the piece are used. Some examples are jatis which have words like "Ram", "Shree Ram", "Jai Shree Ram" etc. interspersed into them.

Eduppus: The eduppu phrase or the cue phrase leading up to the start of the Jati or Korvai is also something that has changed a great deal. Typically, the eduppuhas always been the standard "thalaangutha ka dhikutha ka thadhiginathom" Sri B Herambanathan states that the eduppu should be the "Tamilian" sounding Thalaangutha ka dhikutha ka thadhiginathom and not the more Sanskritizedversion, ieDha Lan, kuthakadhikutha ka thadhiginathom. In the last couple of decades, the varieties in eduppusare simply staggering. We see eduppus of all sizes and hues. While some eduppus are designed to suit the talam, some mirror the starting words of the jati or teermnaanam. Some are as long as a whole aavartanam, while yet others are short and succinct, but full of fireworks. A few short, but attractive eduppus in aaditaalam (leading up to a jati that begins on samam) are listed below:

i) Starts on Dhrtasamam:

| Tha , di, tha ka ja nu- thakumthariki ta tha ka -
Tha ka dhi, tha ka ja nu- thakumthariki ta tha ka-
Dhalan, kuthom- tha, thom, -
Dhalan, kuthom- tha, thom, -
Dhalan, kuthom - tha ||

ii) Starts on 7th kriya:

Dhalan, kutha ka dhiku
 Gi nathom- dhingi a thom -thadhim gin a thom ||
 (Note that the above eduppu contains a small SrotovahaYati in it)

iii) Starts on the 7th Kriya:

Dhalan, kutha ka dhiku

Tha ka dhi mi, - tha ka ja nu, - tha ka dhi mi

(note that the above eduppu has a small samayati in it)

iv) Starts on the 7th Kriya

Dhalan, kutha ka dhiku

Tham; that ha ri- dheem; thathari(this part alone rendered in Tisram)

v) Starts on the 7th kriya

Dha, lan, ku,

Thathari; -tha dh na; - tha ja nu; - thadhi mi;

vi) Starts on 7thKriya:

Dhalan, kutha ka dhiku

Dhalan, kutha ka dhikuthaki ta thadhiginathom

One may notice that all the above eduppus retain the traditional beginning, ie: "dhalan, ku". Since the opening phrase of the eduppus unchanged, it sounds familiar, with a minor, but thrilling variation. In recent times, there has also been a view that the eduppu can be altogether dispensed with. When dropped altogether, the dancer will have to start the jati or teermanam as soon as the mrdangam arudhi ends. While this may not be difficult for an experienced artist, a novice or someone who does not possess a very sharp sense of laya may find this difficult to navigate. Hence the eduppus have been retained in some form or the other.

Kaala Pramaanam: Though the term kaalapramanam is commonly and rather loosely translated as "tempo", the English word tempo, does not really do full justice to the depth of this term. As the term denotes, Kaala pramanam indicates not just the speed in which the number is rendered but is reflective of a certain fidelity to Laya and kaala; rhythm and time. It is a serious solemn and consistent rhythmical commitment that one has to deliver for the entire duration of the passage, if not the whole song/ piece.

Over the past decades, one notices that the kaalapraamaanam of many numbers in the Bharatanatyam repertoire is shifting. In a 2020 online talk which appeared on various social media platforms, senior dancer and Guru Ms Leela Samson mentions how all dance items seem to have fallen into a standard kala pramaanam. Whereas in the past, the Varnam was in a relaxed chowka kalam, which allowed the speed and briskness of the tillana to shine forth, she states that in the current times, almost all the pieces of the Bharatanatyam concert seem to be in the Madhyama (keertana style) Kaala pramaanam. The reasons behind this are numerous.

One also notices a general escalation of the kaalapraamaanam of the entire maargam. Prima facie, while this might be a trend adopted to keep up with the ostensibly changing attention span of the audiences and their clearly changing tastes, this does, in some way rob the artist of the opportunity to explore relaxed and unhurried expositions. The new and revised speedy kaalapraamaanam has also naturally altered the way adavus are imagined, used and executed.

5. Tattimettu: It is well known that the tattimettu is used as a finishing for a passage or sequence; ie for say a Pallavi or anupallavi. The tattimettu usually comprises of two types of foot movements, ie: striking of the foot (tattu) and lifting the heel up and resting the foot on the toes (mettu), thus earning this sequence its name. Traditionally, the tattimettu comprises of sarvalaghu sequences only. For example, a tattimettu in aditalam (chaturashranadai) would follow a sequence of tha ka dhi mi- tha ka ja nu and a tattimettu for a song in either rupaka tala or aditalam (tishranadai) would follow a sequence of thaki ta – dhiki ta. A song in Mishra chaapu would have its tattimettu in thaki ta tha ka dhi mi format, while one in Khanda Chaapu would be structured as that ka thaki ta. The last segment of the tattimettu would have a teermanamadavu ending (either thaidthidhithai, thaithaidhidhithai, thaithaithaidhidhithai, so on and so forth) that would signal the end of the tattimettu. In the postmodern period, we have seen many changes brought upon the once inconspicuous tattimettu. We see some mathematically intricate tattimettus in vogue. For example:

Aadi Talam:

||tha ka, - thaki ta, - tha ka dhi mi, - Tha ka thaki ta, -
thadheem, gin a thom, - tha, dhim, ginathom ||

In other words, the sequence mentioned above is arranged as: 2 , 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 . There is a gap or kaarvai one akshara or beat between each of these numbers

Another example:

RupakaTalam (8 avarthanams):

|| (Tha ka dhi mi) x 4
(Thakita) x 4
(Tha ka) x 4

Thai dhidhithai – Thai thaidthidhithai- thaithaithaidhidhithai ||

The main factor that needs to be factored into while constructing a tattimettu is that the execution of the tattimettu should not disturb the flow of the song in any manner. When a tattimettu is performed the audience must feel like they are listening to a piece of melody, which has some nrta incidentally woven into it. It must not feel like a nrta sequence with lyrics struggling to find their way into it. Also, the hand gestures should be split and used based on the sahitya and not based on the laya breakup. Thirdly and lastly, there must be more of tattimettu style adavus and fewer of teermanamadavus in a tattimettu. If a dancer/ choreographer can create a tattimettu bearing in mind all the above factors, it may be a pleasant innovation.

Attami: The state of the attami is very similar to that of the tattimettu. The changes brought about in the attami are also very similar to those that have come about in the tattimettu. With the changes of the laya patterns in the attami, the movements of the attami have also changed in a corresponding manner, where we once see only the attami (technically known as the sundaribheda amongst the grevabheda or neck movements) we now see the use of other grevabhedas; such as Tiraschina, prakampita etc. Sometimes the meyl kalam and keezh

kalam are used in an alternating manner, thus making the attami more exciting. All the precautions that ought to be taken with the construction of innovative tattimettus ought to be taken with the creation of novel attami sequences too. A few examples of innovative attami sequences:

1. Aadi taalam:

|| Tha ka dhimi -tha ka ja nu,- tha ka thaki ta- tha ka thaki ta, -
thadheem, gin a thom- thadheem, ginathom ||

2. RupakaTalam:

(Thaki ta – tha ka dhimi) x 2

(Thadheem, ginathom) x 2

(Tha ka thaki ta) x 2

Poruttam: Poruttam, as we all know means quite literally matching or something apt and suitable. The concept of poruttam, in dance can be both laya oriented or matched to the sahityam. With the recent trend of mrdangam artists helming the laya aspects of a Bharatanatyam recital, the usage of sollus in a poruttam manner is taking even more interesting turns. For example:

1. Adi taalam:

U, Tha , Ki, Ta,

U, tha, Ki, Ta Ki, na, thom, Ka

U, thaki ta kin a thom, ga da kutham, thom, ka...

Tha, ki, ta, - dhimginathom -tham,

(U, tha, ki, ta, - dhimginathom) x 2 tham,

(U, tha ,tha, ki, ta – dhim, ginathom) x 3 – UDYAT BHAASKARA

SANNIBHAM (Line from Sri DhvaniPradambaPancharatnaStotram)

2. Adi Taalam

Tha ; , Dhi; ,

Thari, thari,

Dhana, dhana,

Tharithari

Dhanadhana

Ghu ma Ghu ma – CHAMA DHAMA MAANITA MOWNI
HRDAALAYA (line from SubrahmanyaStotram)

3. Adi Taalam

Jhem, dhanatham,

Nam, jhem, dhanatham,

Ram, nam, jhem, dhanatham,

Thom, ram, nam, jhem, dhanatham,

Dhi, thom, ram, nam, jhem, dhanatham,

Tha, dhi, thom, ram, nam, jhem, -PHANA SHRNGA SAHASRA

(Line from Narayana Bhattadri's Kalinga NartanaDashakam)

The above example is constructed as a SrotovahaYati

In all the above examples, the sounds of the sorkattus are matched to the sounds of the sahityam. For example:

Ghumaghuma – Chama Dhama

Dhanatham, - Phanashrnga

U, tha, ki, ta – UdyatBhaaskara

In the next example, one sees how poruttam can be made keeping in mind the numerical valuation of the sahityam as well as the syllables used in the sahityam that follows the jati or sorkattu. This idea can be illustrated thus:

**Inna men manam (Pada Varnam) - ragam Charukesi- Taalam
Adi**

Teermanam portion of Trikala jati :

|| Tha ka thaki ta – Thangu

(Thaki ta tha ka dhimi) x 2 - Thangu

(Tha ka dhimi tha ka thaki ta) x 3 – NAM;

Tha ka thaki ta – Thangu

(Thaki ta tha ka dhimi) x 2- Thangu

(Tha ka dhimi tha ka thaki ta) x 3 – NAM;NAM;

Tha ka thaki ta – Thangu

(Thaki ta tha ka dhimi) x 2 - Thangu

(Tha ka dhimi tha ka thaki ta) x 3 – NAM;NAM;NAM;|| (Inn; nam; enmanam)

In this Varnam, the valuation of the words in and nam are three aksharas each. Thus, the kaarvai phrases are constructed also as three aksharas each. This occurs once in the first instance, twice in the penultimate round and thrice in the final one. The sollu chosen are also in tandem with the lyrics of the saahitya. Thus, while the jati ends with the sollu, the ensuing Varnam Pallavi commences with Innam, thus making it very suitable.

Laya aspects of recorded music: When a dancer listens to pre-recorded music on stage, it is very important that the music motivates him/ her. It must and should create some kind of inspiration in the mind of the dancer and enable to give the best in terms of performance. It is well known that the rasa theory and the dhvani theory and closely intertwined. Though the dhvani theory is commonly considered one of semantics, it plays a vital role in rasotpatti and the creation of rasa.

To this end, one of the common techniques used to ensure constant and effective audio cues for the dancer is the maintenance of a slightly exaggerated level of the percussion track. More often than not, the percussion used in a Bharatanatyam concert would be the Mrdangam. The levels of the Mrdangam would be about 20% more than what would be maintained in a live performance. This ensures that the dancer is able to get constant reaffirmation regarding the tempo during the performance. Since the dancer can get no visual cues from her/ his musicians, it is important to provide these highlighted or exaggerated audio cues.

When, for instance the Mrdangam is set at 20% higher than the “live” performance, it is not sufficient to merely augment the volume levels in the sound track. It is imperative to extract a spirited and inspired performance IN the studio, during the recording process itself. This, in turn is possible when both the artist and his instrument

are in perfect form. Thus, the responsibility on the shoulders of the entire team, viz: the artists, the music composer (if there is one), the designer of soundscape / the sound engineer etc is enormous.

In a live performance, the artistic choices are extremely spontaneous. The accompanying artists see and hear the main artist (in this case the dancer) and respond to what she / he is performing. The immediacy of stimuli is real and unbidden. When dance music is being recorded, the artist has to imagine almost every move that a dancer may make on stage and play/perform accordingly. Even if the dancer, is present in the studio at the time of recording, all she/ he can offer is a rough idea of what the eventual performance would be like. The leads provided at the studio by the dancer can never fully do justice to the onstage performance(s) for which the recordings will be used. Another aspect that ought to be factored in is that the dancer can hardly ever perform the exact same way each and every time. Thus, the content created in the studio has to be at once accurate, yet flexible enough to accommodate any spontaneous or planned future (minor or major) improvisations that the dancer may choose to make.

In the world of pre recorded music, there are many advantages and disadvantages from a laya perspective. Today, most recordings are made with the “click” tempo of the metronome. While this ensures accuracy, it also takes away the ability to change the tempo at will. In a live concert, the kala pramaanam inevitably changes a bit from passage to passage; sometimes even from aavartanam to aavartanam or word to word also. With the usage of the click this dynamic flexibility is lost. One may argue that this ensures perfect fidelity to laya and increased accuracy.

Wielding and usage of the nattuvangataalam: It is well known that the nattuvangam taalam wielded by the nattuvanar is a symbol of great pride, dignity and respect for him/ her. To this day, the dancer shows great respect towards the nattuvangam taalam and seeks its grace before the commencement of the performance. The method of holding the taalam has changed over the past decades. In a 2019 interview, Dr NarthakiNataraj stated that her Guru Shri Kitappa Pillai wielded the cymbals in a very unobtrusive manner and also struck them without

much ado. She also reminisced about the use of the open stroke and the closed one (potthithattardhu) and how he used the former much more than the latter. The sound of the nattuvangataalam was not very “busy” either. That is to say that if an aavarthanam had 64 mastras, the taalam would not be struck 64 or even 32 times. It was struck in a judicious manner, highlighting only those strokes that required highlighting.

Today, one notices that the nattuvangam is used more liberally and in a busier fashion. The strokes are many and the turn of the cymbals is also very frequent. One notices ample use of both the open stroke as well as the closed one. Mrdangists who become nattuvangars have the added advantage of possessing strong and nimble wrists and fingers and use this to full effect. Whether this change is one for the better is open to debate.

Use of percussion instruments: In the past few decades, there has been an opening in the floodgate of choices vis a vis the use of instruments. This applies to both percussion as well as melody instruments. Today, one often sees the tabla or Dholak being used in the dance orchestra. The tabla was traditionally used with Hindustani music, Kathak dance etc but not seen in the ChinnaMelam set. Today it is no longer alien to south Indian dance and music and often makes an appearance. One also sees the need-based use of other instruments such as Chenda, Maddalam (imported from the world of SopaanaSangeetam). A host of other folk instruments such as “deppu” Dukkitharangetc are also often used based on the requirement of the piece. If the music is prerecorded, it is possible to use multiple instruments without making the music sound cacophonous. Specific instruments can be used in designated areas thus coming together to create a soundscape that is colourful and not monotonous.

Conclusion: As with all aspects of Bharatanatyam, its laya elements are also constantly changing and evolving. Today, we stand at a rather critical juncture. The choices in front of us are myriad and must be utilized and exercised with taste, intelligent and judiciousness. Self-restraint must be maintained at all times and one must not go overboard with any one laya element or with the entire laya segment

of the dance as a whole. One must remember that Bharatanatyam is indeed a fine blend of Bhava Raga and Tala and must remain so.

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10. The dance of Music- Zoom talk by Aalaap.Speakers: Ms. Leela Samson, Smt Sudha Raghuraman, Shri Sheejith Krishna, Shri Rajkumar Bharathi & Shri Sai Shravanam.

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