

# Dances of India



Vivekananda Kendra Patrika



## DANCES OF INDIA

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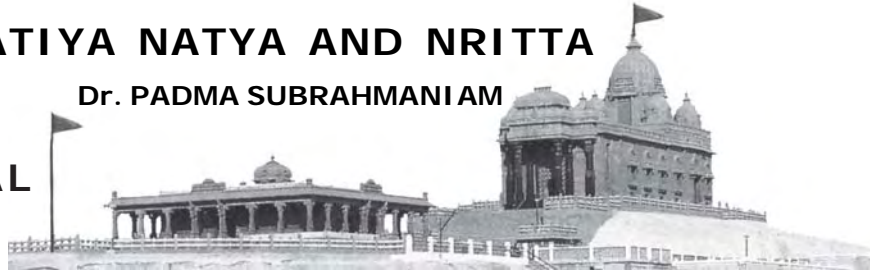
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## BHARATIYA NATYA AND NRITTA

Dr. PADMA SUBRAHMANIAM

### EDITORIAL



The earliest extant literature on the subject of Indian Dance is Bharata's *Natyasastra*. There seems to have been some *Nata Sutras* even before this *Sastra* was penned. But they have either been lost or got dissolved into the present *Natyasastra*. The term *Natya* encompasses in itself all the artistic elements of the Theatre Art. Dance was only a part of drama in ancient India. But drama itself was mostly danced. There was hardly any bifurcation between these arts in the true Hindu theatre. Like the Hindu religion, which is itself a fusion of the Aryans' *Vedic yagna* and the non-Aryans' *Agamic puja*, the Hindu theatre also took the form of a homogeneous presentation of dance and drama. Dance seems to have been a favourite sport of the non-Aryans, while drama, with its literary beauty was the Aryan's love. The art of dance developed as drama through its getting mingled with the Aryan culture. *Natya* was the term which indicated this composite whole. The term *Sangita* was always referred to in its triple aspects viz., *Gita* (song), *Vadya* (instrumental music) and *Nritta* (dance). All the earlier works on *Sangita* had chapters on everyone of these elements. *Natya* included these three plus drama too. The *Natya sastra* is an unsurpassed

compendious work dealing with all these elements in totality and running to thirty-six chapters. It is highly probable that this composite work was written during the course of a few centuries, by authors of the same pen-name. Hence this work may be considered as an extraordinary compilation of a series of supplemental treatises on the subject. This clearly proves the exclusive importance that the nucleus of the original treatise on *Natya* and its author Bharata enjoyed in the ancient Hindu society.

*Natya*, in its complete form consists of music, dance and communication through expression. Of these, the second and third elements are known as *Nritta* and *Abhinaya*, respectively. The *Natya-sastra* describes all these elements in great detail. Later, authorities like *Saarangadeva* (12th century A.D.) recognised another form called *Nritya* and defined it as a representational kind of *Nritta*. But Bharata's period had the arts of only *Nritta* and *Abhinaya* as parts of *Natya*. *Nritta* could be handled in two ways, viz., *Uddhata* (gracefully forceful) and *Sukumara* (gracefully soft). These obtained the names of *Tandava* and *Lasya* perhaps only after Kalidasa's time. During Bharata's

period, the term *Tandava* seems to have been a synonym of *Nritta*. The Aryans seem to have freely incorporated the art of *Nritta* into their *Natya*. Ever since then, *Natya* was almost suffused with *Nritta*. Its actual place in it is revealed through the study of the nature of *Natya*.

The goal of any *Natya* is only to create *Rasa*. *Rasa* is the enjoyment of an aesthetic bliss' derived through witnessing or reading a production. The process through which this is achieved is the sub-structure of the varied rules analytically laid down in the *Natyasastra*. The *Bhava*, i.e. feeling, contained in a situation and the character involved has to be expressed by the actor or the writer, as the case may be, in such a way that it can be understood by the onlooker or reader. Unless the feelings and ideas are communicated, the audience cannot share those feelings, which ultimately is responsible for evoking *Rasa*. The art of communication is called *Abhinaya*. There are four mediums of expression available for the artists. This analysis, given in the *Natyasastra*, is so accurate and universal that it is valid even today, for any production in any part of the world. The four *Abhinayas* are: *Angika* (physical), *Vachika* (verbal), *Aharya* (external) and *Satvika*. (internal)

*Angikabhinaya* is the art of physical expression. The entire human body has been analysed in the *Natyasastra* as *Angas* (major limbs) and *Pratyangas* (minor limbs). Later, authorities added to this classification the *Upangas* (subsidiary limbs) which in turn, were divided as those belonging exclusively to the face and those of the other limbs of the body. Exercises from head

to foot are prescribed for each limb, based highly on kinetic principles. The student was expected to master these individual exercises and proceed to practising combinations of movements of various limbs.

These exercises are to be meaningfully utilised to convey ideas and more important than that, feelings. This is the essence of *Angika Abhinaya*. Physical expression is a part of human nature. The connection between the psyche and the physic is so intrinsic, that even the minutest vibration of the mind gets easily reflected through the body in daily life itself. For instance, nodding the head is part of human behaviour while reacting. The force, speed and space of our pacing also reflect the inner composure and conflicts. The art of physical expression is hence beautifully conceived, classified and codified by Bharata, to artistically suit a dramatic representation.

*Angikabhinaya* is of two categories. One is the *Padarthabhinaya* while the other is *Vakyarthabhinaya*. The former means the expression of word to word meaning, while the latter is a communication of the general idea of a sentence or even the mood. For the actual execution of these, three mediums are given, viz., *Sakha*, *Ankura* and *Nritta*. *Sakha* literally means branch; *Ankura* is sprout while *Nritta* is dance. *Sakha* indicates the availability of an entire system of gesticulation through the hands. A complete language of gestures has been handed down by generations of artistes. These hand gestures are of two kinds. One is a group of *Abhinaya Hastas* and the other is a set of *Nritta Hastas*. The former is

sub-divided as *Asamyuta* (single hand) and *Samyuta* (combined hand) gestures. These *Abhinaya Hastas* are used to bring out the *Padarthabhinaya*. The practical application of the given set of *Abhinaya Hastas* is called *Ankura*. The second group of gestures called the *Nritta Hastas* are to be used in *Nritta-Dance*. These may be used in the art of *Vakyarthabhinaya*. The most obvious requirement for the actors was the mastery over *Angikabhinaya* for, this medium of expression was used in full measure in ancient *Natya*. This is nothing short of demanding dancing talent in actors. The scenes like Sakuntala watering the plants or the bee harassing her, or even Dushyanta riding the chariot, were all enacted with suitable gestures and movements. The *Caris* and *Gatis* involving the legs were to be used to represent the various characters and situations. Their combinations called the *Mandalas* were to be used to enact fighting sequences. The *Angaharas* which involve the *Karanas* were primarily meant for invoking the blessings of the gods and manes in the preliminary of the play. They were also to be used wherever the emotion of love dominated. These *Angaharas* involve hand gestures.



But the *Mandalas* are groups of dance movements to be used along with holding weapons like the bow and arrow. The *Nyayas* or rules for such a handling are also laid down. The actors were actually dancers. All these prove that *Natya* was enacted as *Nritta* in all the practical sense. Abhinavagupta is of the opinion that *Natya* and *Nritta* are not different from each other from the view of actual practice. Of course, unless one is able to comprehend the nature of the *Natya* of those by-gone days, it will not be possible to digest the idea of the arts of drama and dance not being different. The *Natya* of ancient India was a wholesome combination of the present day play, opera and ballet. The exacting nature of the talent of the artistes was in the form of their being expected to speak, sing and dance.

Bharata has mentioned only *Natya* and *Nritta*, while the classification and rigid crystallisation of the term *Nritya*, as understood today is not found in his work. But *Nritta* itself can be presented as representational or non-representational. It can be a part of the



actual body of the play, or adorn the preliminary of the same. In any case, *Nritta* was considered as a limb of *Natya*. In other words, it is enlisted under *Angikabhinaya* by Abhinavagupta, the commentator. *Sakha*, *Ankura* and *Nritta* are the three elements of physical expression. This means that *Nritta* is the expression of ideas through the movements of the entire 'body'. This aspect of *Angikabhinaya* has gone into oblivion in the course of the past four or five centuries. *Angikabhinaya* has come to mean the mere art of hand gestures based on the *Abhinaya Hastas* delineated in a more recent work, viz., Nandikeswara's *Abhinaya Darpanam*. The art of using the entire body to convey ideas is *Nritta* according to the Bharata tradition. Later, authorities classified *Nritya* as representational and *Nritta* as non-representational arts. But, Bharata's *Nritta* was both re-presentational and non-representational. It was an art to be mastered by the actors and dancers. Every major and minor limb was to undergo exercises which were to be practised, independent of each other as well as being woven into one fabric. These *Vyayamas* formed the foundation of *Nritta*. The limbs of the body are classified as *Angas*-major limbs which include the hand, chest, sides, waist, hands and feet. *Upangas* are the minor limbs such as the neck, elbows, shoulders, belly, thighs, shanks, knees and heels; the *Upangas* of the face are eyes, eye-brows, nose, lower lip and chin. Later, authorities like Sarangadeva classified the limbs into three groups as *Angas* (major limbs), *Pratyangas* (subsidiary limbs) and *Upangas* (minor limbs). Exercises for each of the *Angas* and *Upangas* are named and described in the *Natyasastra*. These are

so analytical that they almost exhaust the possibilities of human ability. They create an unlimited scope for the artistic use of the body. The pedagogy of the technique has been unfortunately lost along with the technique itself. Bharata's *Nritta* is no easy path. It cannot lend itself for celebrating *Arangetrams* in six months! It does not allow us to get satisfied with the mere footwork technique of the *Adavu* system of *Sadir* or any other isolated dance style of today. The feet are only one of the *Angas* and hence the steps are not the end of this demanding style. Every limb has to be under the control of the dancers in the Bharata *Nritta*. In the process of this achievement, the first stage is the learning of the *Vyayarnas* which are exercises of the *Angas* and *Upangas*. Three basic elements mark the second stage of learning the *Nritta*. These are the *Sthanas* (postures of the body), *Nritta Hastas* (course of movements of the arms and hands) and *Caris* (the specific way of moving the leg). Then comes the particularisation of the combinations of the three elements of *Nritta Hasta*, *Sthana* and *Cari*. Any such single combination is given the name *Karana*. The *Natyasastra* has enlisted and enumerated 108 such combinations under the name of *Karanas*. The *Karanas* should be understood as a unit of *Nritta*. The foundation as well as the pinnacle of Bharata's *Nritta* is the *Karana*.

Before going into the details of the *Karanas*, it is essential to grasp the concept of its elements. *Sthana* denotes the *Sthithi* or the static aspect. It is the definite posture of the body which decides the

physical lines and the space the body occupies. These *Sthanas* depend on the varied positions of the feet. *Sthanas* are based on the *Padabhedas* such as *Sarna*, *Parswa*, *Tryasra*, *Ancita*, *Agratalasanchara*, *Suci* and *Kuncita*. The *Sthanas* involve the positions of the entire legs unlike the *Padabhedas* which involve only the feet. The knees play a prominent role in this formation. Bharata has mentioned six *Sthanas* for men in Chapter and three for women in Chapter XIII.

This does not mean that they cannot or should not be used by the contrary sex. In addition to these standing postures, he has given nine sitting postures (*Asanas*) and six reclining postures in Chapter XIII.

Sarangadeva has given a list of fifty *Sthanas* including *Desi* (Folk, Novel and Exotic) postures. The *Sthanas* of Bharata and Sarangadeva do not involve the hands. But later works like the *Naiya sastra Sangraha* prescribe the hand gestures for the *Sthanas*. *Sthanas* or

*Sthanakas*, as they are variedly referred to, are in short definite positions of the body in which the legs and hands are to be moved in a *Karana*.

The second element of major importance in a *Karana* is the *Nritta Hasta*. *Hastas* are the hand gestures which can be broadly classified as those of communicative significance and others of mere aesthetic

value. The former is called *Abhinaya Hasta* and the latter type connected with *Nritta* is called *Nritta Hasta*. The *Abhinaya Hastas* are also of two kinds, viz., *Asamyuta*-single hand gestures and *Samyuta*—combined hand gestures. Bharata has given a list of 24 *Asamyuta*, 13 *Samyuta* and 30 *Nritta Hastas*. The main difference between the *Abhinaya Hasta* and *Nritta Rasta* is in their static and dynamic qualities. The original form of the *Abhinaya Hasta* is static and

involves just the fingers.

This static form of *Abhinaya Hasta* is motivated in several ways to bring out several ideas. For example, the first *Abhinaya Hasta*, *Pataka* literally meaning flag, can be moved in various ways to depict ideas such as you, me, sky, floor, clouds, opening or closing doors, welcoming or driving out and many other such contrary ideas. But each *Nritta Hasta* has a definite course of action involving the entire arms and not just the palms; thirty such actions are described. These actions

depend on the four *Hasta Karanas* (four ways of whirling the wrists). The thirty *Nritta Hastas* are based on such rolling actions of the hands and arms. The *Nritta Hastas* of Bharata's period are now obsolete; only a few are seen scattered in the various dance styles.

The third element that constitutes the *Karana* is the *Cari*. It has its roots in *Car*



which means to move one's self, go, walk or roam about, get diffused and to continue performing. The term *Cari* indicates all the meaning given for its root. Bharata defines it as the simultaneous movements of the thigh, shank and feet. Hence, the *Cari* is a movement which causes the action of the entire leg. Thirty-two such *Caris* are described under the classification of *Bhu Cari* and *Akasa Cari*. The sixteen *Bhu Caris* are the movements of the feet close to the ground while the sixteen *Akasa Caris* are movements, involving leaps, jumps and extensions of the leg off the ground. These *Akasa Caris* remind us of some of the Plies of the Western Classical Ballet. Hence, it is erroneous on the part of some scholars to assume that Indian Dance has no movements involving actions on the air or having the extension of the thighs. This wrong impression is caused by the fact that these *Akasa Caris* have become obsolete in the presently known traditions.

The *Karana*, being a combination of *Sthana*, *Nritta Hasta* and *Cari*, is certainly a movement and not a mere pose as normally being misunderstood. *Karana* has its root in *Krn* meaning doer, causer, doing, making, producing, helping the act of doing and on the whole, any action. The word *Karana* also suggests the idea of being an instrument, an element and an *Anga* or part of something, and in dance, it is a unit of action. We have words like *Antahkarana*, meaning an inner part, i.e., the conscience. We also have the popular usage like '*Manasa Vaca Karmanaha tridha Karanani*' meaning by the three means of thought, word and deed. Hence, *Karana* is a means to some end. *Karanas* are woven to form an

*Angahara* (a chain of dance movements).

The major difference between the technique of Bharata's *Nritta* and that of our contemporary *Nritta* is in the use of the legs, space and patterns. The extension of the legs caused by the *Akasa Caris* have been practically lost. All the present styles depend on the foot-work technique only. The use of the legs from the root of the thighs down to the toes has been out of vogue for nearly five centuries. The various aspects of Bharata *Nritta* are seen scattered in the so-called regional styles and very often seen in the neighbouring cultures of Ceylon, Burma and Indonesia. The distinctions of the regional dance styles of India are because each of them has just either retained or concentrated on the isolated aspects of *Nritta*. The Kathak has the *Sarna Sthana* as its main stay, while the *Sadir* and its sister styles have the *Mandala Sthana*.

The *Vaisakha* and *Vaishnava* are seen more in the Kathakali. The *Hasta Karanas* and some *Nritta Hastas* are retained in Manipuri while the South has managed to preserve all the *Abhinaya Hastas*. In the eyes of those who have studied the practical aspects of the *Naiya sastra*, almost any dance style of our country reveals a basic unity in the apparent diversity. Almost every dance movement can be explained against the backdrop of the *Natyasastra*. The unlimited scope offered in this text, when used in practice, gives room for unending variety.

The new term *Bharata Natyam* for the older term *Sadir* has created a fair amount of confusion in regard to its antiquity. This

style is just one kind of *Bharata Natyam*, if we take the term *Bharata Natyam* to mean that *Natya* which follows Bharata's work. It is partiality to associate the name of this great sage with just one of the styles that still retains the traces of his *Natyasastra*. In fact, the present *Bharata Natyam* is more of *Nritta* and *Nritya* in its nature than *Natya* in its true sense. Every style of dance has in it some aspect of the *Natyasastra* still lingering. Hence, the various styles may be referred to as, *Bharata Natyam* in Manipuri style, *Bharatanatyam* in Sadir style, *Bharatanatyam* in Kathakali style and so on. In the eyes of one who has studied the *Natyasastra* all the so-called major dance styles of India appear like the different shades of the same colour. Are we not used to recognising all the sub-styles such as those of Thanjavur, Vazhuvur, etc., as *Bharatanatyam* and the *Gharanas* of Lucknow, Jaipur and others as *Kathak*? It is only an extension of the same. The evolution of the *Karanas* can be seen in all these styles. Some examples are the changed forms of *Mattalli Karana* in Kuchipudi, *Paraswajanu Udvrittam* and *Mandalaswastikam* in *Sadir*, many of the *Karanas* involving *Tribhang* in Odissi, *Atikranta* and *Parswakranta* in Kathakali, *Vartitam* in Mohini Attam, *Adhyardhika Cari* in Manipuri, *Karanas* involving *Bhramaris* in Kathak and *Vivrttam* in Yakshagana. The use of the entire legs and arms in the *Caris* and *Nritta Hastas* give the *Karanas* definite character. These do differ from the established and well-remembered classical traditions. It is natural that the performances of these *Karanas* disturb those who are soaked in any one of the

most angular sub-styles of the *Sadir*. The fact is that Bharata's *Nritta* is all embracing. A resurrection of the lost technique has proved that Bharatanatyam in its true sense is *Bharatiya Natya*.

Another interesting factor of Bharata's *Nritta* is that it is suitable for both the sexes. The same set of 108 *Karanas* are meant for both the male and the female dancers. There are no separate movements for *Lasya* and *Tandava*. In fact, the term *Tandava* is used only as a synonym of *Nritta* in the *Natyasastra*. This *Tandava* is common for both the sexes. The chapter dealing with the *Karanas* is called *Tandava Lakshanam*. The *Katanas* are called *Nritta Katanas*. Though their origin is attributed to Lord Siva, it is handled by Parvati Devi and the apsara women too. Hence, we must realise a basic fact, that though the format of the action are the same, due to the inherent differences in nature of the male and female, the ultimate effect is different when they are performed. The forceful style of presentation is given the name *Uddhata* and the soft execution of the same is called *Sukumara*. Hence, according to *Natya-sastra*, *Nritta* or *Tandava* may be performed as per the *Uddhata* or *Sukumara* usage. It should also be kept in mind that the *Uddhata* and *Sukumara* usages are not to be compartmentalised for the male and the female dancers. As and when necessity arises, these can be interchanged in consonance with the character and the situation.

Dance, Gymnastics and Acrobatics have all often got mixed up in the course of their development. This is true of the dance of every part of the world. In fact, some



of the more acrobatic *Karanas* must be viewed from the point of view of exercise and in the case of *Natya*, their proper use in the relevant sequences. For example, the somersault was meant for fighting sequences and certainly not for being included in the *Angaharas* to represent love. The movements which are more of acrobatic nature were actually termed as *Adhama-inferior* in a later work called *Mahabharata Chudamani*. The ideal *Nritta* is that which emanates beauty and joy at the various levels of human understanding and perceptions such as physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual.

The level of *Nritta* is directly proportional to the level of the dancer's realisation of her own inner personality; this is quite apart from her physical beauty or even skill.

*Nritta* is a spiritual experience for the ideal dancer and the ideal audience. It is a means through which the dancer achieves a shedding of her body consciousness. As in Yoga, in dance too, the body is trained only to be forgotten about. The dancer's self, integrated with the universal dance of all the constant Cosmic Activity, liberates her from all the shackles of this earth. The dancer herself becomes a microcosmic being, experiencing within herself unlimited freedom and bliss. The result of such a *Nritta* is the same as that of Yoga and Yagna.

Apart from the art of *Angikabhinaya* in which *Nritta* also is included, Indian theatre has long recognised the use of *Vachikabhinaya*-verbal expression, *Aharyabhinaya*-expression through external elements like costumes, make-up and scenery and last

but not the least *Satvikabhinaya*-an outcome of the psychological states of mind. *Vachikabhinaya* includes the dialogues and songs. It may be prose or poetry. Voice modulation and its control, play a major role in this form of communication. The *Natyasastra* gives even the rules of prosody. The language employed is also expected to suit the various characters. All the plays of our contemporary theatre seem to utilise only *Vachikabhinaya* and that too devoid of songs. The *Aharyabhinaya* included the specific facial make-up, colours, crowns, jewelry and costumes for each character.

*Satvikabhinaya* is perhaps the most important, yet the most difficult mode of expression. It cannot be gained through mere learning or practice. It needs an innate sense to feel the various situations. It depends on the mental involvement of the performer backed by a clear intellectual grasp of the characterisation to be portrayed. *Sat* literally means 'mind'. Even in actual life, it is most natural that the inner feelings get reflected in the face. Apart from the facial expressions, the eight *Satvika* conditions are said to be stupor, perspiration, horripilation, change of voice, trembling, change of colour, tears and fainting. The four-fold art of *Abhinaya* can further be classified as *Natya-dharmi* (stylistic) and *Lokadharmi* (realistic). The *Natya* was the combination of both these modes of expression. *Natyadharmi* pertains to the conventions of the stage. For example, walking around the stage may denote a change of place. The use of dance in drama is itself *Natya-dharmi*. The convention in a play, according to

which persons are supposed not to hear words uttered in proximity, or to hear what has not been uttered at all, are all part of *Natyadharmi*. In this conventional stylistic mode, the actor may dance instead of walking. In short, anything which is beyond the purview of realism, but presented in an artistically appealing manner is *Natyadharmi*. If, on the other hand, the play depends on natural behaviour, presented as simple acting with no flourishes of even physical expression, it is called *Lokadharmi*.

A deeper insight into the *Natyadharmi* and *Lokadharmi* modes reveal that the former is formal and perhaps easier to be handled whereas the latter is informal, but requires a consummate skill, understanding, mental involvement, imagination and sobriety. The former can be taught, but the latter has to be felt and hence it requires an artiste of greater experience in communication. It is also true that *Lokadharmi*, when treated well, is more easily understood even by an uninitiated audience. But the *Natyadharmi* reaches only those who are at least fairly well versed with the conventions of the stage. The use of hand gestures is directly proportional to the degree of *Natyadharmi*. It is interesting to note that Bharata has stated that in superior persons, hand gestures should have scanty movements, in mediocre ones, there should be medium movements, while in the acting of ordinary persons, there should be profuse movements of hand gestures. But when different occasions or time 'present themselves, wise people should make varied use of the hand gestures. Bharata has also mentioned that the hand gestures are to

be totally discarded when he has to enact situations such as fainting, dreaming or being terrified, disgusted or overcome by sorrow and so on. Such scenes need to be enacted through *Satvikabhinaya*.

This expression of inner feelings without the use of gestures is closer to the concept of *Lokadharmi* or realism. Hence the situations and characters fully charged with emotion are expected to depend only upon *Satvikabhinaya* in the *Lokadharmi* style. Bharata's *Natya* was a combination of both the stylistic and the realistic modes of expression, thus adding to its unending variety.

Apart from the differences in the modes of communication, *Natya* on the whole, is to be constructed in one or a mixture of the four styles called *Vrittis*. They are *Bharati*, *Arabhati*, *Satvati* and *Kaisiki*. Here they are interpreted from a practical point of view.

*Bharati* is the verbal style, depending mainly on the beauties of *Vachikabhinaya*. Use of flowery language as well as the slang suitable for the specific characters are the main features of this *Vritti*. The mere reading of the play itself must be satiating in the *Bharati Vritti*. Language and diction with proper voice modulation mark the strength of this style. *Arabhati Vritti* is the forceful style characterised by a predominance of combats, arousing the psychological states of fury, hatred and wonder. The combats are to be performed through the use of *Mandalas*. Hence it involves a fair amount of *Natyadharmi* with *Angik-abhinaya* of the *Uddhata* or forceful nature. It also needs pageantry and glamour through elaborate scene settings,

costumes and make-up. Hence *Aharyabhinaya* plays a major role in the *Arabhati Vritti*. *Satvati Vritti* depends mainly on the strength of the emotional content. The main feature are the moulding of the characters, and story with enough scope for *Satvikabhinaya*. This naturally amounts to a greater use of *Lokadharmi* with only a little use of gestures. *Satvati* has been translated as the 'Grand Style'. Perhaps this description suits the glamour of the *Arabhati* style. *Sat* denotes psyche and hence *Satvati Vritti* may be understood as the emotional style, wherein *Satvikabhinaya* dominates. *Satvika* also denotes the *Satvaguna*-the superior qualities of human thought and its consequential behaviour, the other qualities of a relatively lower gradation being *Rajoguna* and *Tamoguna*. The play in *Satvati Vritti* is expected to portray characters of higher qualities. Even if there are sequences of fights and personal combats, they must be based on the *Nyayas* (strict adherence to the proper rules). Of course, the essence of all Indian plays is the victory of the good over the evil. The *Satvati Vritti* needs to suppress even sorrow. This style, on the whole should be taken to require subdued acting (without being demonstrative) with a realistic expression of feelings and concepts of a superior nature.

The *Kaisiki Vritti* is different from the *Satvati Vritti* in its *Natya-dharmi* character. *Kaisiki* needs delicate emotions like, love, portrayed through *Angikabhinaya*. It needs the support of glittering costumes, lilting music and cultivated dance, all melting together to make an amalgam of

pleasantness. It needs beautiful women, like the heavenly damsels, the *Apsaras*. They are said to have been created by Lord *Brahma* to fulfil the requirement of this *Vritti*. It is likely that it is the concept of *Apsaras* that gave to the Indian stage the *Kaisiki Vritti* itself. This idea of feminine grace-*Lasya*-which has come down to this day is certainly a product of the influence of these imaginative dancing demi-goddesses. The *Kaisiki Vritti* is still seen having its sway in the Indian movies wherein the heroine is unhesitatingly portrayed as singing and almost dancing the pathetic songs, even when portraying the contemporary society. The stylism in the Indian movie is the result of its inheritance from the traditional Indian theatre. The older Tamil dramas of this century were, and are still marked by a profuse use of music. Such musical dramas of Tamilnadu have their own parallels in other parts of our country.

The most amazing fact is the permanent value of Bharata's analysis and classifications of the art of dramatic presentation. The ideas of the four modes of communication, realism, stylism and the four basic styles of the theatre art hold good, for any part of the world and at any point of time. Almost any production can be analysed against this basic backdrop of the *Natyasastra*.

The *Natyasastra* does not stop with the mere analysis of the *Vrittis*. It has also given advice to artistes regarding the choice of the specific styles, in a pure or mixed fashion to suit the taste of the audience of the various regions. These are broadly classified under four *Pravrittis*,

taking geographic divisions into consideration. These are called *Dakshinatya*, *Avanti*, *Odramagadhi* and *Panchali*. The geographical names mentioned in the *Natyasastra* with regard to these *Pravrittis* are met with in the *Puranas*. The *Dakshinatya Pravritti* pertains to the land south of the Vindhya mountains and uses the *Kaisiki Vritti*. *Avanti* belongs to the western region and makes use of the *Kaisiki* and *Satvati Vrittis*. *Odramagadhi* is meant for the eastern region including Nepal and is expected to use the *Kaisiki* and *Bharati Vrittis*. *Panchali* is with regard to the northern region; For this the *Satvati* and *Arabhati Vrittis* are recommended.

Combinations in varying degrees of the different elements of *Naiya* like the four *Abhinayas*, the two *Dharmis* and the four *Vrittis* with all the aspects of *Sangita* viz., *Gita*, *Vadhya* and *Nritta* gave rise to a number of major and minor types of drama. These were the *Rupas* or *Rupakas*, and the *Uparupakas* respectively. Bharata mentions only the ten major *Rupas*. Later history shows that many minor plays called *Uparupakas* were developed as dance and music dramas. All the present operatic, dramatic and dance forms can be studied in relation to the older *Rupakas* and *Uparupakas*.

In this context, the dance known as *Bharatanatyam* today, is neither *Naiya* in its true sense nor does it faithfully follow Bharata. It has the aspects of *Nritta* and *Padarthabhinaya* performed mostly as solo dance. In fact, it is closer to the concept of *Lasya* as found in the *Naiya-sastra*. *Lasya*, according to Bharata's work, includes a set of songs or verses to be

sung or recited by a solo female dancer. These are at least somewhat similar to the general format of the present *Bharatanatyam*. But this *Lasya* of Bharata's work is only one of the sparks from the great fire of *Natya* which was of a major composite structure. Except the *Abhinaya Hastas*, the present *Bharatanatyam* has not retained many of the intricacies of even Bharata's *Nritya* and *Abhinaya*.

There are other dramatic forms which are close to Bharata's *Natya* in their conception if not in their technique. The *Therukkoothu* and *Bhagavatamela* of Tamilnadu, *Koodiattam* and *Chakkiarkoothu* of Kerala, the *Bhagavata Atta* of Kuchipudi and of other similar villages of Andhra, and the *Yakshagana* of Karnataka, are some of the theatrical forms which show an underlying unity in their format in spite of their linguistic diversity. All these forms are descendants of Bharata's *Natya* and hence all the four *Abhinayas* play an equal role in them. The artistes are expected to speak sing and dance. Mime plays a major role in them. The songs are in the local languages. But the general character of these plays is highly unified. There is a striking similarity even in their *Aharya*. The large crowns the jewels, their shoulder pieces and the make-up have a striking similarity. The characters are represented with their suitable *Gatis* (gaits) along with the songs called *Darus*. The origin of the *Daru* can be traced in the *Druva*, a musical form mentioned in the *Natyasastra*. The types of *Darus* are common to all these. Only their names and metres change. The *Sutradhara* (the director of the play) introduces the play in the prologue. He is called the *Kattiyakkaran*



in Tamil. The *Tiraisilai* (the hand-held curtain) is used in all these forms to introduce major characters. Except the *Koodiattam*, all these other theatre forms are enacted only by male artistes.

Bharata's *Natya* is so comprehensive that its elements are invariably met with in a scattered manner, even in the remotest corners of our country. Its compendious nature is a testimony to the unparalleled artistic and intellectual synthesis of ancient Indian theatre. With the help of this *Sastra*, we are able to analyse and appreciate any theatrical form of the world. It is amazing how this art had been fully developed in all the possible aspects, even at a period when some parts of the world were still sleeping in the cradle of civilisation. The unlimited scope it offers for creativity, in spite of recording even the minutest detail of the art of action and acting, speaks for the unending variety of interpretation, that generations of artistes have been able to conceive for the same rules.

The general impression of some scholars that Indian theatre offers no scope for creativity and imagination is actually baseless. The *Natya-sastra* and other texts are like grammar and the artistes who handle them are like poets. The freedom which poets have within the frame-work of the rules of grammar and prosody, is certainly enjoyed by the actors and dancers. The terms *Margi* and *Desi* in both music and dance signified the older and newer forms. As centuries passed, the spontaneous creativity of the artistes of various regions were also codified under the name of '*Desi*'; '*Margi*' signified

Bharata's tradition. Hence, like a living language, the performing arts of India have also been undergoing changes constantly. This does not mean that they ever lost their roots at any point of time.

The Indian artiste finds audience of the level of appreciation which is equal to her own mental calibre. After all, *Natya* is said to yield all the fruits of *life-Dharma, Artha, Kama* and *Moksha*. Hence the artistes have been and are still serving as poets, using the rules laid down in the *Sastras* to create their own worlds of art.

Bharata's *Natya* has its deep roots in every part of our country. It has also spread its principles at all the levels of appreciation. *Natya* is an imitation of the three worlds and hence all types of characters are included in it. It has always had the responsibility and capacity to satisfy people of various tastes. In spite of laying the qualities of even an ideal spectator, Bharata says that the inferior and common persons in an assembly which consists of the superior, the middling and the inferior members, cannot be expected to appreciate the performance of the superior ones. And hence an individual to whom a particular dress, profession, speech and an act belong as his own, should be considered fit for appreciating the same. That is why we need *Sahrdaya* (audience of equal mental calibre) to make the performance of *Natya* a real success. As water finds its own level, *Natya* too finds its own audience at various planes of human perception.

## The Dance Of Shiva

ANANDA K. COOMARASWAMY

**T**he Lord of Tillai's Court a mystic dance performs; What's that, my dear?"

- Tiruvachagam, XII.14

Amongst the greatest of the names of Shiva is Nataraja, Lord of Dancers, or King of Actors. The Cosmos is His theatre. There are many different steps in His repertory. He Himself is actor and audience-

*When the Actor beats the drum,  
Everybody comes to see the show;  
When the Actor Collects the stage  
properties  
He abides alone in His happiness.*

How many various dances of Shiva are known to His worshippers I cannot say. No doubt the root idea behind all these dances is more or less one and the same, the manifestation of primal rhythmic energy. Shiva is the *Eros Protogonos* of Lucian, when he wrote:

"It would seem that dancing came into being at the beginning of all things, and was brought to light together with Eros, that ancient one, for we see this primeval dancing clearly set forth in the choral dance of the constellations, and in the planets and fixed stars, their inter-weaving and interchange and orderly harmony".

I do not mean to say that the most profound interpretation of Shiva's dance was present in the minds of those who first danced in frantic, and perhaps

intoxicated energy, in honour of the pre-Aryan hill-god, afterwards merged in Shiva. A great motif in religion or art, any great symbol, becomes all things to all men; age after age it yields to men such treasures as they find in their own hearts. Whatever be the origin of Shiva's dance, it became in time the clearest image of the activity of god which any art of religion can boast of. Of the various dances of Shiva, I shall only speak of three, one of them alone forming the main subject of interpretation.

The first is an evening dance in the Himalayas, with a divine chorus described as follows in the *Shiva Pradosha Stotra*:

"Placing the Mother of the Three Worlds upon a golden throne, studded with precious gems, Shulapani dances on the heights of Kailasa, and all the gods gather round Him:

"Saraswati plays on the *Vina*, Indira on the flute, Brahma holds the time-marking cymbals, Lakshmi begins a song, Vishnu plays on a drum, and all the gods stand round about:

"Gandharvas, Yakshas, Patagas, Uragas, Suddhas, Sadhyas, Vidyadharas, Amaras, Apsarasas, and all the beings dwelling in the three worlds assemble there to witness the celestial dance and hear the music of the divine choir at the hour of twilight". This evening dance is also referred to in the invocation preceding the *Katha Sarit Sagara*.

In the pictures of this dance, Shiva is two-handed, and the co-operation of the gods is clearly indicated in their position of chorus. There is no prostrate Asura trampled under Shiva's feet. So far as I know, no special interpretations of this dance occur in Shaiva literature.

The second well-known dance of Shiva is called *Tandava* and belongs to His *tamasic* aspect as Bhairava or Virabhadra. It is performed in cemeteries and burning grounds, where Shiva, usually ten-armed form, dances wildly with Devi, accompanied by troupes of capering imps. Representations of this dance are common amongst ancient sculptures, as at Ellora, Elephanta, and also Bhuvaneshvara. The *Tandava* dance is in origin that of a pre-Aryan divinity, half-god, half-demon, who holds his midnight revels in the burning ground. In later times, this dance in the cremation ground, sometimes of Shiva, sometimes of Devi, is interpreted in Shaiva and Shakta literature in a most touching and profound sense.

Thirdly, we have the *Nadanta* dance of Nataraja before the assembly (*sabha*) in the golden hall of Chidambaram or Tillai, the Centre of the Universe, first revealed to gods and rishis after the submission of the latter in the forest of Taragam, as related to the *Koyil Puranam*. The legend, which has after all, no very close connection with the real meaning of the dance, may be summarised as follows:

In the forest of Taragam dwelt multitudes of heretical rishis, following of the Mimamsa. Thither proceeded Shiva to confute them accompanied by Vishnu disguised as a

beautiful woman, and Adi-Shesha. The rishis were at first led to a violent dispute amongst themselves, but their anger was soon directed against Shiva, and they endeavoured to destroy Him by means of incantations. A fierce tiger was created in sacrificial fires, and rushed upon Him; but smiling gently, He seized it, and, with the nail of His little finger, stripped off its skin, and wrapped it about Himself like a silken cloth. Undiscouraged by failure, the sages renewed their offerings, and produced a monstrous serpent, which, however, Shiva seized and wreathed about His neck like a garland. Then He began to dance; but there rushed upon Him a last monster in the shape of a malignant dwarf, Muyalaka. Upon Him the god pressed the tip of His foot, and broke the creature's back, so that it writhed upon the ground; and so, His last foe prostrate, Shiva resumed the dance witnessed by gods and rishis.

Then Adi-Shesha worshipped Shiva, and prayed above all things for the boon, once more to behold this mystic dance; Shiva promised that he should behold the dance again insacred Tillai, the centre of the Universe.

This dance of Shiva in Chidambaram or Tillai forms the motif of the South Indian copper images of Shri Nataraja, the Lord of the Dance. These images vary amongst themselves in minor details, but all express one fundamental conception. Before proceeding to enquire what these may be, it will be necessary to describe the image of Shri Nataraja as typically represented. The images, then, represent Shiva dancing, having four hands, with braided and jewelled hair of which the lower locks are whirling

in the dance. In His hair may be seen a wreathing cobra, a skull, and the mermaid figure of Ganga ; upon it rests the crescent moon and it is crowned with a wreath of Cassia leaves. In his right ear, He wears a man's ear-ring, a woman's in the left; He is adorned with necklaces and armlets, a jewelled belt, anklets, bracelets, finger and toe rings . The chief part of His dress consists of tightly fitting breeches, and He wears also a fluttering scarf and a sacred thread. One right hand holds a drum, the other is up- lifted in the sign of do not fear: one left hand holds fire, the other point'; down upon the demon



Mryalaka, a dwarf holding cobra ; the left foot is raised, There is a lotus pedestal, from which springs an encircling glory (*tiruvasi*), fringed with flame, and touched within by the hands holding drum and fire. The images are of all sizes, rarely if ever exceeding four feet in total height.

Even without reliance upon literary reference, the interpretation of this dance would not be difficult. Fortunately, however, we have the assistance of a

copious contemporary literature, which enables us to fully explain not only the general significance of the dance, but equally, the details of its concrete

symbolism. Some of the peculiarities of the Nataraja images, of course, belong to the conception of Shiva generally, and not to the dance in particular. What is the meaning of Shiva's *Nadanta* dance, as understood by Shaivas? Its essential significance is given in texts such as the following:

"Our Lord is the Dancer, who, like the heat latent in firewood, diffuses His power in mind and matter, and makes them dance in their turn." [Kadavul M a m u n i v a r ' s

*Tiruvatavurar Puranam*, Puttaraivatil, Venracarukkam, stanza 75, translated by Nallaswami Pillai, *Shivajnanabodham*, p. 74.]

The dance, infact, represents His five activities (*Panchakritya*), viz: *Srishti* (overlooking, creation, evolution), *Sthiti* (preservation, support), *Samhara* (destruction, evolution), *Tiro-bhava* (veiling, embodiment, illusion and also giving rest), *Anugraha* (release, salvation, grace). These, separately considered, are the activities of the deities Brahma, Vishnu,



Rudra, Maheshwara and Sadashiva.

The cosmic activity is the central motif of the dance. Further quotations will illustrate and explain the more detailed symbolisms. *Unmai Vilakkam*, verse 36, tells us:



“Creation arises from the drum: protection proceeds from the hand of hope: from fire proceeds destruction: the foot held aloft gives release”. It will be observed that the fourth hand points to this lifted foot, the refuge of the soul.

Shiva is a destroyer and loves the burning ground. But what does He destroy? Not merely the heavens and earth at the close of a world-cycle, but the fetters that bind each separate soul. Where and what is the burning ground? It is not the place where our earthly bodies are cremated, but the hearts of His lovers, laid waste and

desolate. The place where the ego is destroyed signifies the state where illusion and deeds are burnt away: that is the crematorium, the burning ground where Shri Nataraja dances, and whence He is named Sudalaiyadi, Dancer of the burning-ground. In this simile, we recognise the historical connection between Shiva’s gracious dance as Nataraja, and His wild dance as the demon of the cemetery.

This conception of the dance is current also amongst Shaktas, especially in Bengal, where the Mother rather than the Father-aspect of Shiva is adored. Kali is here the dancer, for whose entrance the heart must be purified by fire, made empty by renunciation.

We find in Tamil texts, the purpose of Shiva’s dance explained. In *Shivajnana Siddhar*, Supaksha, Sutra, V, 5, we find:

“For the purpose of securing both kinds of fruit to the countless soul, our Lord, with actions, five, dances His dance”. Both kinds of fruit, that is *Iham*, reward in this world, and *Param*, bliss in Mukti.

The conception of the world process as the Lord’s pastime or amusement (*lila*) is also prominent in the Shaiva scriptures. Thus Tirumular writes, “The perpetual dance is His play”. This spontaneity of Shiva’s dance is so clearly expressed in Skryabin’s *Poem of Ecstasy*.

This aspect of Shiva’s immanence appears to have given rise to the objection that he dances as do those who seek to please the eyes of mortals; but it is answered that in fact He dances to maintain the life of the cosmos and to give release to those

who seek Him. More over, if we understand even the dances of human dancers rightly, we shall see that they too lead to freedom. But it is nearer the truth to answer that the reason for His dance lies in His own nature, all His gestures are own-nature born (*svabhavajah*), spontaneous and purpose less for His being is beyond the realm of purposes.

In a much more arbitrary way, the dance of Shiva is identified with the *Panchakshara*, or five syllables of the prayer Shi-va-ya-na-ma 'Hail to Shiva'. In *Unmai Vilakkam* we are told: "If this beautiful Five-Letters be meditated upon, the soul will reach the land where there is neither light nor darkness, and there Shakti will make it One with Shivam" [*Nandikeshvara, The Mirror of Gesture*, translated by Coomaraswamy and Dug- girala, p .11.]

The *Tiru-Arul-Payan* however (Ch. IX. 3) explains the *tiruvasi* more naturally as representing the dance of Nature contrasted with Shiva's dance of wisdom.

"The dance of nature proceeds on one side: the dance of enlightenment on the other. Fix your mind in the centre of the latter".

Now to summarize the whole interpretation we find that the essential significance of Shiva's dance is three-fold: First, it is the image of his rhythmic play as the source of all movement within the Cosmos, which is represented by the Arch: Secondly, the purpose of His dance is to release the countless souls of men from the snare of

Illusion: Thirdly, the place of the dance, Chidambaram, the Centre of the Universe, within the Heart. So far I have refrained from all aesthetic *criticism* and have endeavoured only to translate the central thought of the conception of Shiva's dance from plastic to verbal expression, without reference to the beauty or imperfection of individual works. But it may not be out of place to call attention to the grandeur of this conception itself as a synthesis of science, religion and art. How amazing the range of thought and sympathy of those rishi-artists who first conceived such a type as this, affording an image of reality, a key to the complex tissue of life, a theory of nature, not merely satisfactory to a single clique or race, nor acceptable to the thinkers of one century only, but universal in its appeal to the philosopher, the lover, and the artist of all ages and all countries. How supremely great in power and grace *this* dancing image must appear to all those who have striven in plastic forms to give expression to their intuition of Life !

It is not strange that the figure of Nataraja has commanded the adoration of so many generations past; familiar with all scepticisms, expert in tracing all beliefs to primitive superstitions, explorers of the infinitely great and infinitely small, we are worshippers of Nataraja still.

*Source: «The Dance of Shiva», Page 66-79 Published by Sagar Publications, 72. Janpath, Ved Mansion, New Delhi - 1.*

## The Gift Of Tradition

K. S. RAMASWAMI SASTRI

All over the world we have crude folk dances as well as classical dance. We find the figures of dancing women in the ruins of Harappa and Mohanjo Daro. In the *Rigveda*, Goddess Ushas (Dawn) is described as clad in gay garments, like a dancer. God Siva as Nataraja and Goddess Uma are said to have taught respectively Tandava (the vigorous masculine type of dance) to the sage Tandu and through him to Bharata and others, and Lasya (the graceful feminine type of dance) to Bharata and others. In the *Abhinaya Darpana* of Nandikeswara, we find the famous verse:

*Angikam Bhuvanam Tasya  
Vaachikam Sarvaangmayah /  
Ahaaryam Chandrataaraadi  
Tam nu tvah saatvikam Shivam / /*

(The world is the movement of His limbs; all speech is His Voice; the moon and the stars are His decorative ornaments. Let us pray to the good God Siva). The cosmic dance (*tandava*) of God Siva is of seven kinds and symbolises the *Anavarata* or eternal dance and the dances of creation and preservation and destruction and obscuration and grace (*Panchakritya* or five divine acts) and the dance of bliss (Ananda Tandava). There is also another classification as Ananda Tandava, Uma Tandava, Sivagauri Tandava, Kalika Tandava, Tripura Tandava and Samhara Tandava. In the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, we find the dances of the celestial apsaras, maidens in the

sage Bharadwaja's *ashrama* (hermitage). Valmiki describes Swayamprabha's friend Hema as *Nritta Gita Visarada* (Expert in dance and music). In Ravana's harem there were similar experts as *Nritta Vaditra Kusalah* (*Sundara kanda*, X 32). In the *Mahabharata* we are told that Arjuna learnt dance from the celestial maiden Uma and taught it to princess Uttara Panini (500 B.C.) refers to *Natasutras*. Queen Mira Bai's devotional dances are well-known. Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* was interpreted by the dances of his wife Padmavati. Dance went into the hands of courtesans for centuries but now it has been taken up enthusiastically by family women and is universally popular.





### Literature Galore

Bharata's *Natya Sastra* is the Bible of Indian aestheticians. It says that the Creator (Brahma) created it to give joy in life to the gods who found their cosmic functions to be heavy and dreary. *Bharatarmada* and *Abinaya Darpana* are other important classical works on the Indian art of dance. Kalidasa's drama *Malavikagnimitra* throws much light on the art and show show princess Malavika was an expert in it. *Vishnu Dharmothara* and *Agni Purana* throw much light on the art. Other important Sanskrit works are Dhananjaya's *Dasa Roopaka*, Sargadava's *Sangita Ratnakara*, Thulajaji's *Sangita Saramitra*, Bala Ramavarma's *Bala Bharata*, Haripala Deva's *Sangita Sudhakara*, Veda Suri's *Sangita Makaranda*, *Rasamanjari* etc.

Tamil literature is described as consisting of *Iyal* (poetry) and *Isai* (music) and *Natakam* or *Koothu* (Dance). Of the many ancient Tamil works on dance only *Bharata Senapatheeyam* is extant. *Bharata Siddhanta*, *Bharata Sangraha* and *Mahabharata Choodamani* are recent

works. In the famous Tamil epic *Silappadikaram* we have many great ideas relating to the art. There is a reference to eleven varieties of dance (*alliyam, Kudai, Kudam* etc). It refers to 24 kinds of *abhinayam*, *Kamba Ramayana* refers to a dance hall called *Adumantapa Balakanda, Nagarapadalam* stanza 62). 108 Kanasor dance

poses are beautifully sculptured in the gopuram at Chidambaram. There is a dance platform in front of the great temple at Tanjore. There are innumerable Tamil and Telugu and Canarese amorous and devotional songs (*padams*) composed for interpretation by dances.

The Tamil word *Nattuvangam* means the art of teaching dance, and *Nattuvanar* means dance-teacher.

Two beautiful verses in *Abhinaya Darpana* give us the very quintessence of the teaching as well as the learning of the Indian art of Dance.

*Kanthenaambayedgetam*  
*Hastenaartham Pradarshayet /*  
*Chakshubhyaam darsayedbhauam*  
*Paadaabhyaam taalamaacharet //*

(Sing with the mouth and show the meaning by the gesture of the hand and reveal the emotion (*bhava*) by the eyes and gently beat time with the feet).



*Tato hastastato drishtir-  
Yato drishtistato manah /  
Yato manastato Vaachah  
Tato Vaachastato Rasah //*

(The eyes follow the hand, the mind follows the eyes, the *bhava* follows the mind, and the *rasa* follows the *bhava*).

*Gitaavaadyatalaanuvartini /*

(The dance must accompany the vocal song and the instruments). It is thus clear that the speechless eloquence of the eyes intensifies the beauty of the gestures and rouses the inner feeling (*bhava*) to the blossomed state of aesthetic emotional bliss (*rasa*).

It is often said that Bharata Natyam is meant to be performed only by women. In recent times, Uday Shankar and Ramgopal and others have learnt and exhibited it. But *Lasya* or the graceful form of dance is more appropriate for women than for men. There is a view that it is suited to women and not to girls because *Sringara bhava* (the emotion of love) cannot be understood by girls. But the essence of the dance being devotion or divine love expressed in terms of human love, the charm of the dance depends on naturalness and sincerity which are clouded in adolescent and adult human beings by egoism and egotism and a desire to excel and shine.

### Variations in Gesture

In classical aesthetic terminology, *Nritta* means pure dance *without* reference to any theme or emotion. *Nritya* is dance which expounds emotion by gestures. *Natya* adds a story element to it. *Abhinaya* is the interpretation of emotion by gestures



(*angika*), by voice (*vacheka*), by dress and decoration (*tapery*) and by physical manifestations (*sattvika*). *Anyadbhavasrayam nrittam nrityam talarasasrayam*. Gestures can be by the limbs (*anga, pratyanga, and upanga*). They can be shown by a single hand (*asamyuta*) or by both hands (*samyuta*). Tamilnadu is rich in the variety of folk dances as well as in the classical art of dance. The descriptions *Marga* and *Desi* refers to classical dances and regional folk dances respectively. The *Kummi* and *Kolattam* and *Pinnal Kolattam* dances by the girls of the Tamilnadu are danced in lovely rhythmic patterns in which songs beautify movements and movements beautify songs. They are not mere crude movements



of the limbs out of exuberance of animal spirits because in that case they would be dance but not art. Nor are they so elaborate and controlled by rules as Bharata Natya. The Bhajan dances of trained religious singers and dancers are midway between folk-music and folk-dance on the one hand and elaborate Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam on the other hand. On the other hand, *oyilattam*, *chakkaiattam*, *kauadi* dances, *karagam* dances, dummy horse (*poikal kuthirai*) dances, *theru koothu* (street drama) dances by hill tribes, gypsy dances etc. are folk arts pure and simple. But *Bommalattam* (puppet-shows) is an artistic achievement. The puppets are moved by strings tied to the limbs of the artist behind the curtain. The songs of the singers and the movements of the puppets synchronise superbly. When I was young I saw Harischandra's story in *Bommalattam*. It was attended by thousands night after night and it made a profound impression on my mind. The introductory dance by the *Kinchin bommai* (puppet) was as lovely as a Bharata Natyam dance. What is called *Pavaikoothu* (puppet-dance) in ancient Tamil literature shows the antiquity of the art. In Andhra we have the *Thol Bommalatta* (painted leather pieces operated with bamboo sticks and seen through a semi-transparent screen lighted from behind). In the Malabar, shadow play figures are shown by perforating holes on square pieces of flat leather.

### Folk-Dances

The Tamil literature--especially the great epic *Silappadtkaram*--refers to other dances such as *alliyam*, *kudam*, *kodukoti*, etc.

They are not now extant. It refers also to *Ayar koothu* (dances by shepherds), *Kuravai koothu* (dances by kuravans) etc. They are obsolete. But what is called *kuravanji* has been lifted to the highest level of art by the genius of poets. In it, a human heroine loves a king or a god and gypsy goes to her and foretells her good fortune. The *Kutrala Kuravanji Sarfoji Kurauanji*, *Viralimalai Kurauanji* and *Aehagar Kuravanji* are fine works of art and give room for fine ballet dances which are not mere folk-dances but are fine artistic performances. I must refer also to a new aesthetic creation viz. *Chchaya Natakas* (*Nizhal Attam* in Tamil) or shadow-plays by the great artistic geniuses Sri Uday Shankar and his wife Srimathi Amala Shankar. In them, the acting is by human beings but the public see only the shadows thrown on a gigantic screen from the other side of the screen. They have now presented the *Ramayana* and the *Buddha Charita*.

Thus we have in the above dances, both pure folk dances as well as artistic dance performances in which the art element blends with the folk element. The *Bhagawata Mela* of Melattur and Oothukad and Soolamangalam etc. in the Tanjore District is a high-class classical dance-drama, whereas Bharata Natyam is a solo-dance which is the *ne plus ultra* of the classical dance art of South India. *Bhagawata Mela* dances present various puranic themes through dances by many men who sing and dance where-as in Bharata Natya the artist does not sing while others sing. The songs in *Bhagawata Meta* are in Telugu as the Naik kings of

Tanjore had it as their court language. The themes are the stories of Prahlada, Harischandra, Dhruva, Markandeya, Usha, Rukmini, Sita and others. The dance-dramas combine fine poetry and elaborate Carnatic music and fine and elaborate dances. The founder of this classical dance-drama was Venkatarama Sastri of Melattoor who was a contemporary of the immortal musician Tyagaraja.

### Influence Abroad

Finally I wish to make a passing reference to the farflung influence of Indian Art in Ceylon and Burma and Indonesia and far East Asia including Thailand (Siam) and Cambodia and also in China and Japan. In Java, Bali, Cambodia, and in Eastern Asia generally, Indian art concepts and art-motifs have had a dominant influence. Dr. A. K. Coomaraswami says: "The leading motifs of Chinese and Japanese building art of the pagoda and torii are also of Indian origin". (*The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* page 117). Mr. Havell says, "Indian idealism during the greater part of this time was the dominant note in the art of Asia which was thus brought into Europe; and we find a perfectly oriental atmosphere and strange echoes of eastern symbolism in the medieval cathedrals of Europe and see their structural growth gradually blossoming with all the exuberance of Eastern imagery". We find the influence of Indian art, viz, Hindu

art and Buddhist art in the temples at Angkor Vat and Prambanan and Borobodur and also particularly in the music and dance and the general cultural atmosphere in the island of Bali. In Indonesia, Indian art and the colourful beauty and glory of nature and human life and dress and decoration were blended to perfection. In Bali, the *pendel*, the *jangar*, the *leyong* and the *kabzyar* dances interpret the heroic actions of Arjuna and other heroes of Indian mythology. The *pendel* is a classical dance connected *with* temple rituals. The other dances also interpret Puranic episodes. The *Ketjah* or monkey dance depicts the *Ramayana* story. There are also dances interpreting the Buddhist and *jataka* stories. There are also folk dances. The *gamelon* orchestra, aided sometimes by vocal music, adds to the fascination of the dances. The dance gestures are of Indian origin. The dress and the decoration of the Javanese and Balinese dancers are similar to those discernible in the Ajanta frescoes. Tagore says: "In India where exuberance of life seeks utterance, it sets them to dance. One who knows their peculiar dance- language can follow the story without the help of words".

It is thus clear that the art of Dance was born and grew up in India as a spiritual art and spread all over South -East Asia and flourishes even to-day as a supreme spiritual art in the house of its birth.



## The Spiritual Background of Indian Dance

RUKMINI DEVI

One of the greatest and most ancient arts of India is the dance and as far as I know India alone has given it so high a place in both national and spiritual life. No one was too low born for this sacred art, nor anyone too great or spiritual for it. From the Sublime Being comes the inspiration and example. Therefore, everyone who is but part of Him, every living creature, is animated by that spirit of creation which is the dance. It is because the whole conception of art is cosmic and all-embracing that in reality it is undying and eternal. Its expression is many, for it is like the light of the sun which sparkles on the ocean. From the oneness of that life comes the creative genius in man. Man intuits the spirit and absorbs his environment. From the harmony of the environment, the life, the thought, the philosophy and nature all around, with the creative spirit within, inspiration is born, and art is the expression.

Environment is of tremendous importance to the actual form of art. The environment is what we call national life. If in India, the dance, as any other art, is essentially spiritual and philosophical, it is merely

because the sages have given a spiritual meaning to it. It is also because the very same sages have, at the same time, helped to build the nation so that there is no fundamental difference between the spiritual and the physical, nor is there a difference between the manifest and the unmanifest. This has been the uniqueness in the civilization of India. If we understand the highest, we understand the least also— for both are one.

### Importance of Music



From this point of view comes the dance tradition of our country. The dance is not an art by itself. It is a unique expression, through the body, synthesising all arts. In reality, though it is the nature of the body to respond to

rhythm, yet it is *thamasic* in nature and its inertia expression, which we call dance. Therefore, the perfect harmony of the physical and emotional produces the dance. How is emotion stirred? It is flexible and quickly affected and that which stirs it most is sound. Sound as movement expresses itself in music. Music is the speech of the Highest. The first manifestation is in terms of sound, which is speech or music. All this is so

magnificently conceived and presented to humanity through the form of Nataraja, the great Yogis of Yogi. In Him is synthesised all planes of consciousness and all the arts.

We find that the instinct of dance is in the savage as in the cultured. When the dance becomes an art that transcends the physical, it becomes art, giving pleasure to all, to the devas as well as human beings. It is equally an art that pleases all tastes. In dance there is music for the musician, for dance is but the music of the body. It is said that when music, in terms of



poetry, song and rhythm, blends with the instruments, it becomes complete music. There is music in the dance as there is dance in music. **Without the spirit of music within, it is impossible to dance; for music is the expression of the highest emotion, through gesture, movement or mime.** When it is perfectly expressed through gesture of *hastabhinaya*, movement or *angika-abhinaya* and *satvika-abhinaya* or facial expression, the dancer becomes something beyond and unfolds another great art into herself—the art of *natya* or drama. Then she becomes the story-teller or the actress. To do perfect justice to the story telling or in delineating a particular character in drama, *aharya-abhinaya* (expression through costume) becomes part of the four-fold aspects of the dance.

In Bharata Natya as danced in solo

performances, the dancer is the story-teller and *aharya abhinaya* or the expression of a character through beautiful costumes and jewels is elaborate but simple in one sense. The dancer has merely to prepare

herself to be beautiful and pleasant and to create a personality that can make her story attractive. Her art is music in the form of dance and every emotion of every song and every character is in her. In the dance-drama where the dancer is a particular character, the art of costume is itself expressive of a *rasa* or an aspect of the fundamental state and no movement is expressive by itself. The truest expression is in the experience within, which is dependent on so many things—especially on the spiritual development and perception of the artist.

### Dance and Our Heritage

Thus dance becomes an art that unifies art. The painter sees beauty of line and colour, the sculptor sees the grace and the form, the actor sees the portrayal of life, and the musician and poet alike see

the very embodiment of poetry in motion. With all these blended in one who is dedicated body and soul, the dancer becomes the very expression of [ataraja Himself, of whom it is described that His *Angika* or the movement of His limbs is the world around, the *Vachika*, the poetry of His dance, is the language within all speech, the *Aharya*, His costume and jewelry, are the moon and the stars, while the *Satvika*, the true expression, is the essence of Being, Siva Himself. In Him is all united and in Him is all transcended by the divine spirit. This is the dance and this is our heritage.

In this spirit we can still see true dance in India. Bharata Natya is the root and origin of all dance in India. Essentially, all real Indian dancing is Bharata Natya, though now only one particular school of art is known by the name. The most ancient authority on dance is the *Natya Sastra* of Bharata. In the South, there is what is known as the Tanjore School of Bharata Natya, but Kancheepuram and other cities are equally famous for the practice of the art. In every temple and on all auspicious occasions, there were dance performances. The art very nearly died as it had become a means for remembering the body rather than of forgetting it. Yet, those whom the world denounced as having become corrupt, gave themselves up with devotion and sincerity to the art they loved. The art was their very life and they worked and sacrificed their bodies for perfecting the art.

### **Divinity in Indian Dance**

According to the Indian conception,

character and dance go together. In reality they are one and the same, for what is without is but what is within. Through the portrayal of Gods and Goddesses one becomes divine. Indian dance being spiritual, it is suited only for spiritual expression. Through *bhava* one portray, in story-form the lives of Gods and Goddesses. The Indian genius has shown that humanity is divine and divinity is human; hence the stories of Gods and Goddesses who live and speak like humans. This was so in every part of India. There were the dance-dramas of the *Bhagavatars* (men-dancers) in the Tanjore district, in Kuchipudi in the Telugu districts, and Chakiar Koothu in Malabar where it still survives. Through these and through the still-living dance drama of Kathakali in Malabar, religion lived, philosophy lived and art lived. As you travel all over India we find no part of the country where dance did not flourish, although, except in Assam, Orissa and one or two places in the later years, dance was considered as an art of the vulgar. Yet one hears of the great Kathak dancers of the United Provinces as flourishing under the patronage of rulers and noblemen. One never hears of Kathak being performed in temples but only in courts as temples had been destroyed, and the temple lost its place as a centre of art and culture. In Assam it is a respected art and it lives as a sacred expression enjoyed by all. Though the style is different from orthodox Bharata Natya, yet in essence it is the same, giving the same age-old atmosphere, and telling the stories of Krishna, Rama and the dance as an art-form lives everywhere, in the temples, in the courts, in the fields, among the peasants and even ordinary people all



over India.

Because we forgot our heritage, the art almost disappeared. Today there is a sudden awakening to the glory of the art, and people everywhere are thinking and speaking of the dance. Entertainments are given everywhere and new names of famous exemplars of the art are heard.

### Revival of the Art

But if the art is to live, we have first to remember that it is an essential part of our lives. **India's real achievement depends upon her understanding of the place of art in life.** To know this, one must understand India, the very heart of India herself. We cannot revive the art by forgetting India. Indians today are forgetting India. They try to express in dance, a spiritual medium, ideas totally foreign to our genius. People try to portray Rama but disbelieve in Rama! That is why in modern India, art fails for want of sincerity. We tried apparently to rescue the art from the corrupt, but because we lack devotion, dedication and sincerity, we are gradually corrupting art itself. There is a general lowering of standards and the decline has been so fast that one dreads what is in store for the future. Will the dance have to go through another death before it regains its own glory? As dance is part of life itself, the nation and its consciousness will have to go through a revolutionary change in character. Indian arts have been slowly deteriorating because crudities have crept in. The sense

of colour has almost vanished, equally the sense of form and line. The ordinary dramas portraying religious stories like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were crude and childish in presentation, though sincere in spirit. Today sophisticated vulgarity has taken the place of simple crudeness. Which is preferable, the crudeness of the ignorant or the vulgarity of the



sophisticated? The latter has no compensations and is subtle and dangerous while the former had at least its merits. Hard work was its feature, inspiration its source, and devotion its aim. Today, there

is dance without hard work. People want either diplomas or headlines. It is easy to have both because we do not have today, trained audiences, including art critics and the public will take one at one's own valuation. If that valuation is high as it is bound to be in the mind of the ignorant, the "fame" achieved is indeed great. It was said by Kathakali teachers of the old type that it took 12 years of hard training before a dancer could even take a minor part on the stage. In Bharata Natya it took no less than seven or eight years of hard work. Today, even twelve months is too long. Owing to the lack of devotion, there is lack of discipline and, as a consequence, there is a deficiency in technique. The result is that there is no inspiration. To make up for this, false stimulation from outside is resorted to, instead of true stimulation from within. This naturally kills the creative spirit and, therefore, there has to be copying from others, and perhaps also borrowing from foreign countries. True art never copies. It is like a well of deep cool waters from which flows fresh ideas and life. India understood the dance as joy which is why Nataraja's dance is called Ananda- Tandava. This joy is that of a Yogi. What sort of a Yogi? One who has forgotten his body. The forgetfulness is not due to negligence but due to control. After training the body, one forgets it. This is the technique of "art which conceals

art". This is why the dance is called a Yoga. People think that technique is the antithesis of creative expression. This is a wrong notion, since the creative spirit is but the achievement of a technique by which the technique itself vanishes, and uniqueness is the result. This final out- come is the supreme joy of creation. Even in folk art there is the expression of joy. Every part of India has its folk art, solo or group dramas, and dance-dramas. Each type expressed the uniqueness of the life and thought around, all different from each other like the Garba and the Rasa Lila of Gujarat, the Kaikottikali and Kolkali of Malabar, Kummi and Kolattam of the Tamil country, the village dances of Assam, Orissa and other places. For groups of every level of thought there is the dance from the lowest to the highest, from the child to the adult, filling the country *with* music and movement. When Indians realise what is Indian in essence, art will regain *its* original height and the dance will return to the people in all its pristine purity.

Dance is being revived but if this revival is to continue, we must know the spiritual message of art and make art a part of our lives. Then our very lives will become works of art and India will become a Land of Beauty; a fit vehicle for the message of the Sages and Saviour of humanity.



## The Renaissance of Indian Dance and its Consequences

MOHAN KHOKAR

**D**uring the last two centuries or so, the art of dance in India was not held in much respect, due to certain norms of prudery which were introduced into India by the alien rulers. For most people in India as well as outside, Indian dancing was associated exclusively with what was performed by the Devadasis and *Nautch*-girls, and as a result of the social stigma attached to these women, dancing in India came to be looked upon as a vain and vulgar pursuit. This state of affairs continued well into the first quarter of this century, till the setting in of the Renaissance of Indian dance, but after this the art of dance in India rapidly came into its own and since then it has not only retrieved much of its lost prestige and glory but also made marked progress. The revival of the dance in India began a little over three decades ago, and important pioneering work in this direction was done by Uday Shankar, Rukmini Devi Arundale, E. Krishna Iyer, Menaka, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahakavi Vallathol. However, it deserves to be noted that before the revival proper began in India certain dancers in the West became interested in Indian dance and they endeavoured to present, to whatever, extent it was possible for them, dances and ballets based on Indian themes. In fact it can be said that it is these early attempts to produce Indian dances and Indian ballets in the

West that paved the way for the revival of the dance in India.

### Western Interest in Indian Dance

**The first dancer in the West to perform Indian dance was the American ballerina Ruth St. Denis.** From her early years Ruth St. Denis was much interested in the Orient and this led her, in 1904, to compose and present her first Indian dance, which she called *Radha*. This proved a great success, which prompted Ruth St. Denis to take *Radha* to Europe where she toured for three years before returning to



America. Ruth St. Denis continued to take great interest in Indian dance and during the next ten years or so she composed and performed several Indian dances in America, such as *The Cobras*, *The Incense*, *The Nautcli* and *The Yogi*. In 1925 Ruth St. Denis and her husband, dancer Ted Shawn, visited India, and after their return

to America Ted Shawn presented *The Dance of Shioa*, a solo number which he performed, with great success, for several years. **It is to be noted that the dances presented by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn were not in any authentic Indian technique but in their own improvised Indian style. However, the importance of these dances lies in the fact that they were able to create interest for Indian dance in America and Europe, and this interest, in due course, led to the revival of the dance in India.**

After Ruth St. Denis, another Western dancer, the great Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova took an interest in composing and performing Indian dance. She undertook an extensive world tour which lasted several years, and she visited India in 1922 but was thoroughly disappointed as she could not find any trace of the great art of dance in India of which she had heard so much. However when she returned to Europe she carried impressions of India with her and in 1923 she composed and presented two short Indian ballets, *A Hindu Wedding* and *Krishna* and *Radha*. For composing these ballets she took the help of Uday Shankar, who was then a student of painting in London, and Shankar also partnered Pavlova in *Krishna* and *Radha*. In 1928 Pavlova visited India again, and on this occasion she performed her Indian ballets in parts of India. This proved to be very helpful in creating interest for dance in India, and the seeds of the Renaissance can be said to have been sown at this time. After this Shankar played a leading part in the revival of Indian dance, and he was soon followed by two others, Rukmini

Devi and Menaka who, too, were inspired and initiated into the dance by Pavlova and were destined to make positive contributions in the field. Apart from Ruth St. Denis and Anna Pavlova there are two other Western dancers who played an important part in the revival of Indian dance. They are La Meri and Ragini Devi, both Americans. Like Ruth St. Denis, La Meri was interested in the dances of the Orient from an early age, and this led her, in 1936, to visit India, to study Indian dance. She learnt Bharata Natya under Papanasam Vadivelu Pillai and Mylapore Gowri and Kathak from Ram Dutt Misra. And even as Pavlova discovered Uday Shankar and introduced the world of dance to him, to La Meri goes the credit of discovering Ram Gopal and introducing him to the world of dance. As for Ragini Devi, she was the first Western dancer to come to India to study Indian dance in a fairly serious manner and she was also the first to carry the Kathakali dance outside Kerala and to present it in other parts of India, which she did in 1932, with Gopinath as her partner.

Thus, it is evident that Western dancers like Ruth St. Denis, Anna Pavlova, La Meri and Ragini Devi became interested in Indian dance before Indians themselves did, and this in many ways paved the way for the revival proper of the dance in India. Uday Shankar left the Pavlova company, stayed in Europe a few more years dancing and gaining valuable experience, and then came to India to become the torch-bearer of the Revival movement. In 1930, Uday Shankar took a party of dancers and for eight years he toured Europe and America.

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This was the first time that Indian dance with authentic Indian music and costumes was carried outside India, and wherever he went Shankar won respect for himself as well as for Indian dance. In 1938, Shankar returned to India and soon afterwards he founded a school of Indian dance, known as *India Culture Centre*, at Almora. This Centre was established largely with financial help received from Shankar's admirers in Europe and America, and here, apart from providing training in Shankar's own style of 'Creative Dance', classical dances like Bharata Natya and Kathakali were also taught and for this there were great masters like Sankaran Nambudiri and Kandappa Pillai.

Having made a successful beginning, the Dance Renaissance in India soon spread to several parts of the country, with the result that the major forms of Indian classical dance began to get it rehabilitated. In the South, Mahakavi Vallathol founded the *Kerala Kala Mandalam* for teaching Kathakali and Mohini Attam, and it is no exaggeration to say that even today most of the Kathakali and Mohini Attam dancers who matter have sometime or other been associated with this institution. About the same time Rukmini Devi and E. Krishna Iyer rescued Bharata Natya from the depravity it had fallen into and, by themselves setting examples, gave the art a new respectable status. Rukmini Devi augmented her contribution by establishing Kalakshetra, a school for teaching Bharata Natya and Kathakali. In the North, Menaka gave a new life to Kathak by being the first woman of respect and learning to take this part from the *Nautch-girls* and to perform it

professionally. As early as 1936, Menaka even took a company of Kathak dancers to Europe and her performances at the International Dance Olympiad in Berlin won her three of the highest awards which, understandably, immediately raised the status of Indian dance in the West as well as in India. And, finally, Gurudev Tagore contributed his share to the Renaissance by introducing Manipuri dance as a subject of study in Santiniketan.

**Apart from bringing about a general rehabilitation of the major forms of classical dance in India, the Renaissance also helped the emergence of the art of ballet in India.**

Ballet, it must be pointed out, is an art which is new to India, for though dances and dance-dramas and operas of sorts have existed in India since long, there is no tradition of ballet, according to the Western concept, in India. **In ballet there is a story or theme, there is choreography, decor and music but the music is purely orchestral and no songs are allowed.**

#### Uday Shankar's Contribution

**Ballet was introduced into India by Uday Shankar, and he learnt the technique and the presentation methods of this art through his association with Anna Pavlova and his long stay in Europe.** Shankar's early ballets, such as **Tandava Nritya** and *Shiva-Parvati Nritya Dwandva*, were rather simple and were composed largely in Shankar's own style of dance. In this style, the bulk of the movements and steps were original, but Shankar also incorporated traces of certain classical and folk-dances



of India and of dance forms he saw in Europe. Later, when Shankar made an extended stay at Dartington Hall, England, he came under the influence of the German dancer Kurt Jooss, who is an upholder of the Free Expression Dance movement in the West, and this goaded Shankar to produce ballets like *Rhythm of Life, Labour and Machinery*. Many years afterwards Shankar took another step forward when he used the South-East Asian technique of shadow-plays and produced two ballets, *Ram Leela* and *Buddha*.

### Other Developments

Shankar's example was soon followed by several other dancers in India. One of the first to do so was Menaka, who broke ground by producing four Indian ballets, *Krishna Leela, Deva Vijaya, Malavikagnimitra* and *Menaka Lasyam*. It should be pointed out, however, that these ballets were not composed in the creative dance style of Shankar but in the Kathak technique. Later, a number of other dancers followed the lead given by Menaka and began to produce ballets using classical modes of Indian dance. The work of Rukmni Devi, Mrinalini Sarabhai and Gopinath is particularly important in this connection. They have produced a good number of ballets using Bharata Natya or Kathakali or, in some cases, both together.

The creative dance style evolved by Uday Shankar was further developed when he established the India Culture Centre, at Almora. This school produced a large number of talented dancers, many of whom later contributed a good deal to the development and spread of ballet in India.

Some of those, all of Shankar's school, whose contribution in this direction has been truly outstanding are Zohra Segal, Narendra Sharma, Devendra Shankar, Sachin Shankar and Shanti Bardhan. Bardhan, who is unfortunately no more, made a noteworthy contribution by producing a ballet *Ramayana* in which he used an original technique wherein the dancers move and act like wooden puppets. It should also be mentioned that the art of ballet in India received a tremendous fillip from the forties onwards when, as an outcome of the national upsurge, a number of important ballet and theatre organisations came into existence, such as the Indian People's Theatre Association, Indian National Theatre and India Renaissance Artists. Indeed, some of the early ballets produced by these organisations, such as *The Spirit of India, India Immortal, The Discovery of India* and *Rhythm of Culture*, are still regarded as classics in the field.

### The Role of Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore, for his part, did much to help the revival of dance and the spread of ballet in India. Using Manipuri as the basis he evolved an individual technique, which came to be known as the Santiniketan style of dance, and in this he composed and presented many dances and dance-dramas, the themes of all of which were taken from his own songs and plays. *With* these productions, Tagore toured several parts of India and these presentations no doubt added to the dignity of Indian dance and also helped draw students from all over India to Santiniketan who, later, were instrumental in carrying

the Santiniketan style to practically all parts of the country.

### Consequences of the Renaissance

The Renaissance of Indian dance began rather abruptly, but it has moved fast and has now achieved what by any standard are imposing dimensions. This has helped the resuscitation of the art of Indian dance as a whole, and all forms of Indian dance—classical, folk and tribal—have benefited. In fact, through the rendering of timely succour, many traditional dances and dance-dramas have been saved from completely sinking into oblivion. Such was the state of neglect in which they existed on the eve of the Renaissance. **Another major consequence of the revival has been that a number of traditional dances and dance-dramas have been carried from the temple to the stage, and this is something which would have seemed impossible even two decades ago. Such was the sanctity attached to these arts. For instance, one can see the Kuchipudi, Bhagavata Mela, Kuravanji and Krishnattam on the stage; yet only a few years ago, so orthodox were the regulations connected with the staging of these dance plays that performances were allowed only in certain temples and only at specified times in the year.** Folk-dances and tribal-dances, too, have earned a new lease of life and this has received its greatest fillip from Folk-Dance festivals which for some years have become an important feature of Republic Day celebrations at Delhi. In recent years similar

festivals have also been organised in several other regions of India, and these have helped not only to unearth hidden and dormant forms but also create wider interest in folk and tribal dances of all parts of India.

The cinema, which is a product of the modern age, has also been affected by the Renaissance of Indian dance, for the dance has come to be one of the most important ingredients to ensure the success of a film. In the early days of the film in India, dancing was occasionally included to provide diversion and the technique used was a version of the decadent *Nautch*, but in recent years classical dance-forms like Bharata Natya and Kathak have been successfully used in Indian films. On the whole, however, it can be said that it is rare that one sees pure and good dance in an Indian film, for what is generally presented is an adulteration or hybridisation of various Indian dance techniques, and more recently, there has also been a tendency to incorporate and ape dances and rhythms of the West in Indian films.

All in all, the three decades or so following the Renaissance have been very eventful in the history of Indian dance. And, though in the more recent years one has seen, to some extent, a lowering of standards brought about mainly by unscrupulous charlatans and dabblers in the art, one is at the same time happy to find the art of dance gain a new and more honoured place in popular esteem and also the emergence of Indian dance as an art with an international status.

## THE ART OF DANCE

DR. C. P. RAMASWAMI IYER

... Throughout the world's chronicles, the dance as embodying rhythmic movement, designed to express individual or group emotions, has been identified both with sacred and secular activities. It is another aspect of the practice of those *Aranar* and *Mudrar* with which the yogi seeks to conquer his physical as well as his psychic selves and make of them his servants, not his masters. As early as the *Vedas*, it was laid down, for instance, that in connection with the great Aswamedha and other sacrifices or Yajnas performed for the good of the country, there should be enacted some specified sacred dance. The *Yajurveda* and the *Brahmanas*, as a matter of fact, speak of the Maha- Vrata dance and a special and elaborate performance in connection with the Stotra after the Rajasuya and other Yajnas.

The art of dance amongst us has been largely synonymous with and has been the attendant of many religious and symbolic ceremonies. Which of us but has been thrilled by the sight of that memorable-embodiment of Nataraja, one of the greatest evocations of Indian genius? Inside yonder hall, you will find such an image of Nataraja, the Lord of the Cosmic Dance, whose performance is a symbol and a typification of that involution that takes place after each Pralaya is over, when order is to be restored after chaos. It is in that sense that the *Vedas*, the *Avesta* and the *Bible* alike speak of Logos, the word or

Nada, the sound, as the origin of the worlds. This sound is the sound of the drum that Nataraja holds aloft. In order that we may realise the full significance of that dance, not merely from the artistic point of view but from the cosmic, we should picture to ourselves the idea of motion, ceaseless and quick beyond seeming or imagination, motion akin to the speed of the stars, but nevertheless accompanied by the steadiness and poise of the manifested Divine, a dance to match the music of the spheres, a dance of the great-Energiser trampling on the forces of evil and calling on all created beings, by the sound of the drum, to burn their sins, and deficiencies in the fire that is held aloft, and to achieve the *summum bonum* of their existence. This is part of the spiritual and compelling significance of that dance. But rather than dilate any further on this topic in our poor language, may I be allowed to refer to what a great Tamil singer hymned many centuries ago, addressing the image of Sri Nataraja at Chidambaram?

Very loosely translated, the meaning of the passage is as follows;- "Oh, Lord of the eternal *cosmic dance*, what in relation to you does not *dance and throb* to the tune of the Infinite? Your matted and tawny locks are dancing in rhythm. Your features, like unto the mellow orb of night, dance. Your piercing and wide eyes dance. The rays of the moon streaming from thy locks vibrate in unison. The drum *that you hold* in your

hands calls to the Universe and accompanies the music of the spheres, the circumambient Nada. The skin of the tiger, slain as the spirit of evil, that you wear on your dancing frame, quivers, Your hand held in benediction moves and dances in harmony. One leg is lifted up, but it is in



static dance. One leg forces down steadily and implacably the forces of evil, but it moves even while at rest. Your consort by your side looks at you smiling and inwardly rejoices over her privilege to witness this great manifestation. Oh, Lord of the world, the object of all worship and praise, clad in the ether as thy vesture, Oh, Lord manifesting yourself at Chidambaram, Oh, embodiment of intellect and perception and bliss!"

I have referred this poem for the purpose of indicating what ideals underlay the dance and the symbolism of the dance in the olden days. Tamil is the language of Bhakti, as Sanskrit is the instrument for expressing lofty speculation, acute analysis and philosophy. The same idea is conveyed in a famous Sanskrit *sloka* which I thus translate;

*uddhrtyedam vimukter-ayanam itikarat  
darsayan pratyayartham  
bibhrad-vahnim sabhayam kalayati  
natanam yah sa payan-natesah.*

"Lord Natesa's uplifted hand points the way to salvation; He holds the fire which destroys the evils of the world; in the dance hall of the Infinite He performs the sacred and eternal dance. Let Him protect us."

Such is the beginning of the art. The religious dance was not peculiar to India. Egypt had it; Assyria had it; Palestine had it. The Old Testament speaks of flute and tabor and drum, and of the maidens dancing before Samuel and Saul. King Solomon has referred often times to the practice of this art. China and Japan have developed this art mainly on the secular side, with great minuteness and artistic skill, and the play of the fan has been a well-known accompaniment. Throughout the ages, therefore, the dance has had a great part to play. But so far as India is concerned, its manifestations are well-known and familiar. The dance of Nataraja, the dance of Ganesha, the dance of Subrahmanya (after the conquest over Sura Padmasura), the dance of Krishna in two aspects-the Kaliyamardana and the Rasamandala, the fierce and the delicate-the dance of Kali,

the great Uddhata dance which

heralds the final cataclysm and the end of the world, all these are parts of the Indian heritage of culture.

Our ancients were analytical in their arts and their enjoyments. In the matter of the Fine Arts especially, they expended their power of analysis to the utmost of its possibilities. Bharata, for instance, divides Nartana, the great art of the dance, into what he terms the sacred and the secular aspects.

The sacred aspect is demonstrated by the Tandava dance and the Lasya dance, the Allegro and the Pianissimo to borrow terms from another art. The Desi dances are three-fold viz., the Nritta; the Nritya with the aid the Natya; Nritta being the dance with the aid of the feet themselves; Nritya, the movement of feet with gesture super-added, which developed into our Kathakali; Natya, the movement of the feet with gestures and with words. In order to epitomise the art of dance which culminated in the drama and those gestures which are of the essence of Indian dance, I can do no better than to extract a sentence from the *Mirror of Gesture*, written by Mr. Ananda Coomaraswami, a most discerning critic and art-lover. He says: "The song is to be sustained in the throat; its meaning is to be shown by the hands; its moods are evinced by glances; its rhythms are marked by the feet". That is an accurate summing up of intrinsic aspects of the dance. Bharata goes into minute particulars as to the building and furnishing of a theatre. Dealing *with* Natyasastra as the fifth Veda, he describes

the auditorium or Preksagrha, the stage or Rangabhumi and the green room or Nepathya. He demands that the seats should be arranged gallery-wise, or to quote his own words "as in a ladder". He sets out the right sizes of theatres, a large one being 128 by 64 cubits, a medium one 64 by 32 cubits and a small one 32 by 16 cubits (i.e , 48 by 24 feet). Very careful directions as to dress, demeanour, theatrical properties and other details have been laid down. Our dramas and dances have therefore had full literary treatment.

### The Veil of Defamation

It is only within the last 100 or 200 years that the word "nautch" came into vogue, the word being really Hindi: *nach* from Sanskrit *nritya*. But it also unfortunately signifies something more secular and deleterious than mere Nritya. A nautch began to be associated with those "sisters of shame" who had to earn their living by arts other than dance, but who used this art of dance as an additional means of allurements. With the degradation of the nautch came the degradation of the art, and the spiritual degradation accompanied the social. Some years ago, a good lady, Miss Tennant, came all the way from England to India and asked many persons to sign a covenant that they would not attend any dance or nautch performance. Many of them signed the covenant and now they themselves are the unrepentant breakers of that covenant. The position then was that we lived in a period when it only needed somebody else to come and say that

we must be ashamed of our selves. We



forthwith began to be ashamed of ourselves. It was taken for granted that anything connected with our culture must be necessarily imperfect, if not perverse. Any criticism directed against our culture was taken to be necessarily right. We were bidden to adopt the perpetual post of hanging down our heads in shame, and to contribute actively to our self-effacement. Those days are happily passing away.

### Classical References

Let us however look at the past history of the art. Some days ago, I was reading the earliest of Tamil romances, *Silappathikaram*, which is as old as the Christian era. In the third chapter of that book, Madhavi describes how she spent five years and more in learning the art of dance, because, without it, it would not be possible for any civilised being to live a full life. Arjuna was a dancer in the court of Virata. What do we find in Kalidasa's *Malavi- kagnimitra?* The Dance. According to tradition, the Emperor Samudragupta used the plectrum, borrowed from the Greeks and played on the zither whilst his wife danced in public. Udayana and his wife also practised the art. The dance, therefore, was not looked down upon; it was not despised; it was not one of the spurned sisters of the arts, but it was the foremost of them.

### A Comparative Estimate

There are amongst us friends who are acquainted with European systems of dancing, which also started, as ours did, as religious manifestations amongst the Greeks, as, for instance, in the Dionysian dance, and among the Romans, the Druids and the other nations in Europe. But the

dances of the West soon developed very largely on secular lines. A question may be asked as to what the main difference between the two systems is. I am answering that question to the best of my lights and shall, no doubt, evoke criticism. My task is, however, to draw pointed attention to one aspect of the matter, namely, that in the development of this art of dance, the art of Kathakali, the art of Gopinath's troupe, great care has been taken to see that each art is maintained' pure, and unalloyed by the influence of kindred but extraneous cultures. The secret and the *raison d' etre* of the European dances, as developed especially within the last two hundred years, is that it is like modern European painting and sculpture, regarded as a means of self-expression, the evolution of the artist's specific, individual personality. Thus it is that the European dance, which began with the *danse basse* and the *danse haute* and flowered in the stately and courtly ceremonies of the *Pauane*, *Courante* and the *Minuet* of France and the *Fandango* of Spain, and the courtesies and bows of the French and German court functions and the intricacies of the Waltz, have, with the march of time, adopted the jazz band and Negro melodies and quick and startling rhythms borrowed from many lands, and is now passing through such manifestations as the Bunnyhug, Texas Tommy, Charleston, Blues, Lambeth Walk (adapted from the revue 'Me and My Gal') as well as the South American dances, Samba, Rumba, Tango and Mexiase, and may I add the latest, Boomps-a-Daisy and Jitterbug which, I think, are quite recent. In each one of these forms of dance, the idea has been that

particular art-forms are utilised mainly for the purpose of manifesting the exhilaration and the emotion generated in man and woman who, in the main, performed in partnership. These dances are amongst the efflorescence of the present-day European personality which assumes remarkable and original forms in architecture, painting, sculpture as well as in music and dancing. These may be disturbing to some of us and may appear to be vehement and contortionist; but these are characteristics of this age and its mood. The Indian ideal has been different. Whether in paintings or in murals, whether in sculpture of those great forms of Nataraja, Krishna and Durga, or music or the dance, Indian art willingly adopts rigid rule-conventions, and subjects itself to very strict rules and disciplines and is anxious to eliminate the individual, and to concentrate on its interpretation of the universal. One result of such an effort is that our art *is* largely anonymous. Speaking of European art, the works of great masters like Rembr-andt, Titian, Raphael, Velas-quez, da Vinci, Benvenuto Cellini and Rodin attract thousands and millions but who knows the authorship of our sculptures and Images and murals? Who knows the artificers of Kanyakumari or of the great gopurams, mandapams, stone and wood carvings at Madura, Tanjore, Thiruvarur, Trivandrurn and Suchindram? Nobody. Indian art has eliminated or striven to eliminate the individual and the particular. It has striven to think of the individual as a fragment in a continuous existence, as an item of eternity, not as a protagonist of an art evolved for the purpose either of irnmortalisation or as the expression of the

person's longings, emotions and aspirations, or even as originating some idea precious to humanity.

Criticising such a conception, many competent persons have observed that in adopting this attitude and this approach, our art has suffered to no small extent. Opinions may differ, but nevertheless, there is no advantage in confusing the two different ideals, no point in defacing distinct boundaries. The ideal of Indian art has been the sublimation of ideals by the elimination of personality; and the Indian dance has identical objectives with other forms of Indian art.

With the best will in the world, Madame Pavlova, after her visit to Malabar, wished to combine the beauties and the graces of the Russian ballet and of the Waltz with the Katha-kali. One of the artistic consequences of a movement for which she was to some extent responsible was the art of Uday Shankar, Menaka and various others. I have the greatest admiration for these exponents of a combined art but I venture to say, and I say it with fear' and trembling and with the timidity 'of a mere amateur dealing with experts, that it is one thing to follow a particular art, say the Indian art, to the limits of Indian possibilities in sight of those ideals which it has set. before itself, and which may be circumscribed, but nevertheless, are definite; it is quite another thing to explore European art and its wonderful possibilities and blossomings, but for heaven's sake, let us not make an *olla padrida-a* confused intermingling of divergent ideals and ingredients ...

## The Place Of Language In Dance

Prof. C. V. CHANDRASEKHAR

The Oxford Dictionary defines language as a vocabulary and way of using it as prevalent in one or more countries and places. It also defines finger language as talk by conventional signs with fingers. The finger language must have been a predecessor to the spoken language. It is an accepted fact that language is not as old as man himself. Before the evolution of the languages there must have existed some means or methods of communication which could have only been through some signs of the various limbs of the human body, made more precise with the help of facial expressions. These changes of expressions are naturally an outward exposition of one's inner feelings. This mode of self expression, before language was evolved is the primordium of dance. Prof. Jespersen, the philologist has said that 'dance arose in primitive human mind on occasions festive or otherwise exciting'. Innumerable varieties of dance form, were evolved as a means of expressing various moods like joy, anger, sorrow, etc. If man could express all the moods and communicate through his body movements the *satvikabhinaya*, why then was the necessity of a language at all in dance?

We are well aware that even at a time when the different languages of the world are so highly evolved, we are unable to communicate with each other without a common link-language. In such a situation, the limitation of communication through

dance alone, as it existed, would have left it in the same stage of evolution as it existed centuries ago without the development of the language. So there is no doubt that language has been one of the major factors in the evolution of dance.

### Scope Through Literature

It would be worthwhile here to consider, in short, the history and development of dance and its literature. For Bharata to have written a treatise almost two thousand years ago on subjects of dance, music and dramaturgy, a very strong tradition of dance must have flourished and existed to enable him to codify the entire dance. Naturally, Sanskrit must have been the language prevalent, spoken and understood for the arts. His work was followed by many more. The Sanskrit plays of Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Harsha and others followed the *Natya Sastra* tradition. These plays were not just plays of spoken words and emotions but included the *angikabhinaya*- gesture language. The *Natya-dharmi*, (the mode of presentation in a stylised way) which as a rule is strictly to be followed in dance in contrast to the *Lokadharmi*, was also definitely followed in the *Purvaranga* of the play and occasionally in the course of the actual play. In the medieval period most of the regional languages developed, and along with them regional dance-styles also developed. Manuals on dance in various regional languages were written and the regional styles naturally followed them. I

mention these only to emphasise the importance of literature in dance, which is a product of the developed language. In dealing with the subject, I limit myself to the Indian dance, although the same rules should apply to dances all over the world. We in India are very fortunate still to be in the possession of dances from very primitive types to the most stylised and advanced classical forms. A review of these different dances would give even a layman an idea as to the part played by language in its evolutionary ladder.

### The Beauty Aspects

Some of the tribal dances even to this day are danced only to the beats of different drums with intermittent sounds and cries with no songs to accompany. We have the folk dances wherein lyrics conveying a particular legend or word composition suitable to the occasion are sung in simple folk-tunes and the dances that accompany these convey the mood of the song by simple movement. For example, a composition describing the birth of Krishna would only be portrayed as a dance of joy with movements of feet and hands thrown out in ecstasy. Here, it is the meaning of the song that helps the audience to understand and appreciate the dance as suitable to the particular occasion. Finally, when we come to the classical dances, the language of gestures and movements of every major and minor limb of the body are so highly stylised and codified, that the dancer is in a position to represent every word of the song with appropriate gestures, body movements and facial expressions. The spectator is thus in a position to enjoy every movement in

reference to each and every word uttered. We may mention here the *padams*, *kirtanams* and *varnams* in Bharatanatyam, which are musical compositions which the dancer interprets through the most precise technique of coordination of the word and gesture. Thus in interpreting a given lyrical composition of a *padam* or a *Javali*, the



three categories of (1) the meaning of the composition as a whole, (2) the meaning of each line in the composition and (3) the meaning of a word in a line viz. *Kavyartha*, *vakyartha* and *padartha*, are elaborated. In maintaining the *sthayi bhava* (the dominant mood) the *kavyartha* is projected to the audience and then the complimentary and transitory moods are projected through the *vakyartha* and *padartha*. After a word to word interpretation, the dancer can interpret each word with as many possible meanings as the word can offer, relevant to the situation, thus giving maximum scope

for the *sacharibhava*.

Therefore, the understanding of the song-text definitely helps the spectator in enjoying the dance. But very often we hear many a spectator say that what he enjoyed most in a Bharatanatyam concert was the *tillana* or other pure dance sequences like the *teermanams* (rhythmic sequences or syllables) in a *varnam*. How can we interpret this feeling of the spectator? Is it because he does not understand the song texts of the *abhinaya* or does he really enjoy the varieties of rhythmic patterns constructed in space with the help of *angikabhinaya*? Bharata himself asks as to why *nritta* (pure dance) was created if *abhinaya* was devised to bring out the meaning of the songs. In answer he himself says:

*Kintu shobhaam pramanayediti  
nrittam pravartitam  
Praayena sarvalokasya nrittimishtarrt  
svabhaavatah [ NS Ch. IV 51. 264 ]*

"*Nritta* is not concerned with any meaning of the songs. But it creates beauty. By nature man is fond of *Nritta*." Thus a spectator enjoys *Nritta*, not because there is no language involved in it, but more because, as Bharata says, he is fond of *Nritta* by nature as it creates beauty. This is further proved by the fact that even a person who understands the *abhinaya* also enjoys *nritta* because of its beauty and rhythm. But the place of language mainly concerns *abhinaya*. *Abhinaya* is to project something before the audience which would establish a rapport with the audience by creating the *rasa* in them. The understanding of even a few words in a song gives them enjoyment. In the first

chapter of the *Natya Sastra* dealing with the origin of dance, the gods headed by Indra are said to have asked Brahma to create a spectacle which could be both seen and heard. Commenting on this, Abhinavagupta says: "To see is to enjoy and hear is to understand". So, naturally understanding complements the enjoyment.

### The Role of Gestures

A person sometimes enjoys listening to a recitation in a particular language because of its beautiful composition of words, its metre, the syllables etc. He enjoys the sound and expression of the language and tries to compare it with his own language which he understands. This aspect of the language could be universal. But the language as such is not universal but conventional. Even a said language has so many dialects that universality of a single language becomes difficult. Similarly, the language of gestures is mainly conventional like a spoken language. But there are a number of gestures which are naturally and commonly used by people of all races speaking varied languages. Common gestures used for words like come, go, eat, sleep and questioning words like why, what etc. are universally used in the same manner, thus exposing the universality of the gesture-language partially. These common gestures with a little stylisation turn into precise dance gestures which are easy to follow. Very often the same gesture is used to show different meanings. Then arises the difficulty of understanding the particular meaning that the gesture is showing. This can only be solved with the help of the language. Although the gesture



would be the same, the position of the gesture and the meaning it conveys is different. As an example, one of the *asamyuta hastas* might be taken to illustrate this. The *tripataka* is shown with the fingers straight except the ring finger and the thumb which are bent. Although the *tripataka* would mean a particular type of flag, it is used to denote the following according to the *Abhinaya Darpanam* of Nandikeswara.

*Mukute oriksha bhaveshu  
vajre taddharavaasave |  
Ketaki kusume dipe  
vanhijwalaavijrimbhane ||*  
(1. 101 A.D. )

*Kapote patralekhaayaam  
vaanaarthe parivartane |  
Yujoyate tripataakoyam  
kathito Bharatottamaih ||*  
(1. 102 A.D. )

The crown, the tree, the thunderbolt, Indra, the pandanus flower, flame of the fire, the dove, letter writing, an arrow, to go round, etc. Unless one is aware of these usages or unless these are expressed to appropriate words of the song-texts, the dance would be meaningless except that it is a movement of beauty as mentioned earlier. Therefore, in the conventional gesture-language of the dance, the lyrics or the song- texts become important. Thus *angikabhinaya* without *vachikabhinaya* remains incomplete.



Bharata confirms this when commenting on the importance of speech in drama.

*Vaachi yatrashtu  
rriartarryo  
naatyasyaiuaa tanuh  
smrita |*

*Anganaipathya satvaani  
vaakyartham rryanjayanti  
hi ||*

NS cs. XV, s1. 2

“One should take care of the words (*vachikabhinaya*). For these are known as the body of the dramatic art. And gestures, costumes and make-up and acting of *satva* (merely) clarify the meaning of words.”

At times, the word used is the same and so is the situation but the different root-meanings of the word are presented through different sets of gestures. To quote Shri Junjuni Raja from his monograph on the

Koodiyattam (Sanskrit play enacted in Kerala, supposed to be the closest form of presentation according to the *Natya Sastra*), “Sugriva calls Rama by the word ‘deva’. The term is derived from the root ‘div’ which means to ‘desire’, ‘to rejoice’ and ‘to have splendour’. All these different meanings are shown through gestures while addressing Rama. You have cut off all the seven sala trees with one arrow; to such a great man killing Vali is only a sport.”



text verbatim or he performs a *sancharibhava* to a given sentence in a text by elaborating it, or even if he dances a *gatbhava*, as in Kathak, to a *Lehara*, (a single line musical composition played on an instrument and repeated over and over again) as the musical accompaniment, he is interpreting, his aim is mainly to convey the same to the audience before him. The language therefore doesn't become as important to the dancer as it is to the spectator. The performer, when he realises that the spectator is following every word of the song-text that he is interpreting receives an added enthusiasm to give out his best which feeling he does not experience before an audience which enjoys the dance just for its beauty. Thus, to perform a Tamil *varnam* in Madras, a *Kshetranga padam* in Andhra, an Oriya composition in Bhubaneswar or a *Tulsi pada* in Varanasi is not only a thrill but also a challenge as the dancer has to be very careful in his delineation. A similar situation is faced when a teacher of dance has to impart lessons in *abhinaya* to those who do not understand the language of the song-text. Here he seeks the help of the fundamental facility of translation in a language. He has to give a general idea of the theme, followed by word to word translation. But it is an accepted fact that even the best of translations do not bring out the same idea of the poet which he wants to convey through a particular word. So one who understands the text in the same language of its composition is in a better position to exploit the song-text. Otherwise, there is a sense of restriction which is felt by the dancer.

### Importance of the Song-Text

An amateur performer is always guided by the song-text as the words in the song-texts constantly remind him of his limitations. But to an ace dancer, the text almost remains as a basic skeleton over which he builds up the improvisation which are not set and rehearsed. But a single line of the song-text which the audience hears all the time becomes important to them, as they correlate the whole action with that text.

I mention below a line from one of the *padams* in Telugu, in Sankarabharanam. Kshetranga and others composed their *padams* mainly for the dance, portraying the various *nayikas* in each one of them. She longs for her lord Rajagopala. The *nayika* is *vasakasajjika*. The *sakhi* narrates her condition to the *nayaka*.

*Dari joochuchunnadi, needu priya*-'Your friend awaits you'-The dancer, after interpreting a word to word sequence goes on to improvise. I mention some of the possibilities of interpreting this single line which would be further divided into two parts. The first part-

*Dari joochahunnadi*- She awaits you.

1. She awaits you at the door step.
2. She turns around to look at the street by which you would come.
3. She stares at a person at a distance, thinking it to be you.
4. She is thrilled at the slightest rustle that she hears.
5. She watches.
  - (a) as she combs her hair
  - (b) as she is applying collirium
  - (c) as she dons a saree

- (d) as she adorns jewellery ...  
 (e) as she keeps tasty eatables for you  
 (f) as she makes a flower garland for you  
 (g) as she prepares the 'bed for you  
 6. She is lost in your thought.  
 7. She portrays your image in her eyes closing them.

The second part- *Needu priya-Your friend*.

Your friend who-

- (a) is fit to talk to you  
 (b) is an equal to you  
 (c) is fit for your embrace  
 (d) is loved by you  
 (e) speaks high of you  
 (f) heeds your words

There could be many more added to this list. A spectator may not follow actions of all these variations, but if he is aware of the meaning of the single line of the song-text he tries to correlate and enjoy.

What has language to do with a spectator who, say, is a foreigner? He does not understand the language of the song-text, the music that accompanies, nor the story element and he is not familiar with the culture either. However, he enjoys the dance immensely. Firstly he is surprised at seeing something, the like of which, he has never witnessed before. He is enamoured by the subtle movements of each limb especially the *mukhjabhinaya* (of the face and the eyes in particular). He is lost in the complexities of the rhythmic permutations and the total effect the whole dance produces. We can go back to Bharata and say that by nature, men are fond of the dance as it creates beauty.

But even to such a spectator, a detailed synopsis of the *abhinaya* performed followed by a demonstration of a song-text translated into his own language creates a sense of closer universal gestures from an *abhinaya* sequence and achieves a sense of satisfaction if his identification is found correct.

### **An Experience Recalled**

I would like to narrate here an experience I had with a group of ballet students in Russia. While presenting a demonstration lecture to the ballet artists at Theatre Estonia, Tallinn, I asked the audience to recite to me a poem in Estonian along with its translation for which I would perform the *abhinaya*. One of the dancer promptly was up on his toes and recited a poem which when translated read as follows:

"Amongst all the eligible suitors in our neighbourhood, I love the married one who lives round the corner."

The lyric, which burst the audience to a laughter, made me a bit nervous. But soon I composed myself and turned out the whole theme into a beautiful story through the language of dance, receiving the biggest ovation. I realised how a short lyric in Estonian could make the Estonians go crazy as though they had totally understood the art of Bharata.

Thus, we find the closeness of the language and *abhinaya* although fundamentally language differs from dance, in that the former is discursive while the latter has an element of simultaneity.

## VIVEKANANDA KENDRA SAMACHAR

Following is the detailed report of the activities of Vivekananda Kendra organised throughout India, with the Head Quarters at Kanyakumari.

1.	No. of visitors to Vivekananda Rock Memorial	19,43,379
2.	No. of visitors to Arise, Awake Pictorial Exhibition	19,300
3.	No. of visitors to Wandering Monk Exhibition	6,500
4.	No. of visitors to Gramodaya Darshan Park	2,125
5.	No. of visitors who stayed in Vivekanandapuram	1,71,816
6.	No. of patients treated at the dispensary	13,587

The following were some of the important visitors to Vivekananda Rock Memorial:

Date	Name of the Visitors
10.04.09	Justice Shri H.L. Gokhale, Chief Justice, High Court, Chennai
01.06.09	Shri Purushothambhai O. Solanki, Minister, Govt. of Gujrat
12.06.09	Justice Shri S.P. Sinha, Judge, Supreme Court of India, New Delhi
14.06.09	Shri Rajendra Ratnoo, Collector of Kanyakumari District, Nagercoil
26.06.09	Shri A.C. Mahajan, Chairman & M.D. Canara Bank, Bengaluru
24.09.09	Shri V.N. Joshi, Managing Director, Bina Oman Refinery Ltd.,
30.11.09	Gen. Deepak Kapoor, Chief of Army Staff, New Delhi
20.02.10	Shri K.M. Chandrasekhar, Union Cabinet Secretary, New Delhi

**Gen. Deepak Kapoor, Chief of Army Staff** wrote in the visitors' book at the Rock Memorial - *It is an honour and a privilege to be here. On behalf of all ranks of the Armed Forces, I wish you success, joy and happiness.*

**Shri K.M. Chandrasekhar, Cabinet Secretary:** *'A truly elevating experience.*

*It was great to sit in the meditation chamber and hear the primordial sound. Congratulations to all the officers and staff for maintaining this great edifice which stands testimony to India's history, India's cultural heritage and the contribution of all our people to the spiritual enrichment of the whole world'.*



More than 40 organizations and associations availed of the accommodation facilities for their meetings, seminars, etc. To name a representative few:

	Organisation	No. of Participants
01.	Kutch Kadura Pathitha Sat Sangh Mandal, Chennai	1,500
02.	Vazhka Vazhamudan, Nagercoil	430
03.	Postal Department Office Union, Chennai	400
04.	BSNL Employees Union, Nagercoil	300
05.	Horticultural Department, Pechiparai	250
06.	Rm.K.V. & Sons, Tirunelveli	210
07.	NSS camp for students of M.S. University, Tirunelveli	200
08.	Baval Engineering College, Namakkal	160
09.	All India Ayurvedic Conference	150
10.	Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidya Peeth, New Delhi	100

**Details of Shibirs conducted at Vivekanandapuram:**

	Shibir	From	To	
01	Acharya Prashikshan Shibir	01.04.09	25.04.09	80
02.	Personality Development Camp	08.05.09	10.05.09	58
03.	Sanskar Varga Shibir	23.05.09	29.05.09	333
04.	Karyakarta Prashikshan Shibir	05.06.09	20.06.09	13
05.	Yoga Shiksha Shibir	05.06.09	19.06.09	41
06.	Kendra Shiksharti Deeksha Shibir	08.05.09	31.08.09	21
07.	Youth Camp	24.07.09	26.07.09	38
08.	Spiritual Retreat	08.08.09	14.08.09	80
09.	Yoga Shiksha Shibir	01.12.09	15.12.09	54
10.	Varishta Karyakarta Prashikshan Shibir	05.12.09	15.12.09	30
11.	College students from 10 States	28.12.09	31.12.09	138
12.	Spiritual Retreat	05.02.10	11.02.12	94

Sri M. Hanumanta Rao, Treasurer, participated in the International Conference on Yoga Research & Cultural Synthesis at Kaivalyadam, Lonavla. His paper and presentation at the conference on Yoga & Value Education was declared as the best in its category (Yoga & allied subjects).

**Branch Centers:** All the 219 Branch Centers in 21 States carried out the planned programs in accordance with the prescribed norms. Regular Sanskar Vargas, Yoga Vargas and Swadhyaya Vargas and five Utsavs on account of Guru Purnima, Universal Brotherhood Day, Sadhana Divas, Gita Jayanti, Samarth Bharat Parva commencing on 25 Dec and concluding on Vivekananda Jayanti on 12 Jan were organized appropriately. They also conducted camps and competitions etc., to involve youth and others in this Thought Movement. These events brought a large number of men, women and children together to the Kendra fold. A few of the highlights were:

**In Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh,** in all 4 centres together 192 programs/camps etc were organized in which 14892 participated. Flood relief – during Floods in Andhra Pradesh - material costing more than Rs. 3 lakh was distributed among 2500 affected people.

**In Asom Prant** the 'Vijay Hi Vjay' Maha Shibir at Tinsukia from 6 to 10 January 2010 was attended by 712 students. All other programs and camps at different places attracted 72,000 and odd people.

**In Gujrat.** The Principal Education Secretary of the Government was the chief guest on Guru Purnima Day at Ahmedabad.

**In Karnataka,** at RT Nagar, Bengaluru, two Anandalayas and a dispensary once a week were the additional programs. On Sri Rama Navami Day, there was an Akhand Ram Nama japa and Ramayana Pathan followed by distribution of Maha Prasad for over 8,000 devotees. The wonderful part of the program was serving of food was done by the participants of Anandalaya & Samskar Varga along with their parents. At **Mangaluru**, 4 Anandalayas for 80 children, an eye camp benefiting 85 persons and a massive Raksha Bandhan were organized. At **Mysore**, Swami Nityananadaji, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mysore, and Shri Pramod Radkar, General Manager, RBI, addressed a well attended meeting on Vivekananda Jayanti Day. A personality development camp also was organized in which 45 students participated.

**In Madhya Pradesh Prant,** the major event was 'Vijay Hi Vijay' Maha Shibir at Bhopal for about 700 select college students from 50 districts of Madhya Pradesh and 6 districts of Uttar Pradesh. It was conducted by 308 Karyakartas from 26 to 31 December 2009. Shri Shivraj Singh Chauhan, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, inaugurated this mega event. As a follow up, Yuva Prerana Shibir were held at four places viz., Bhopal, Dhar, Gwalior and Jabalpur for 427 persons. An off-shoot of the 'Vijay Hi Vijay' was starting of 26 Anandalayas for about 1,000 children, by the participants on their own initiative with

the guidance from Kendra karyakartas. The personality development camps at Bhopal, Gwalior and Jhansi were attended by over 800 students. Maj. Gen. G.D. Bakshi addressed about 350 persons on Bharatiya Samrik Parampara at a **Vivek Vichar Paricharcha** program in Bhopal. About 4,000 people attended various programs during Samartha Bharat Parva celebrations.

In **Maharashtra**, six mandal-wise 'Vijay Poorna Vijay' Shibirs were conducted at Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Jalgaon, Nashik and Pimpalad for 560 students. These were part of the follow up of the Vijay Poorna Vijay Mahashibir organized at Shegaon in 2009. The new Mandal Vyavastha is evolving to spread the Kendra activities to all areas in a more planned way.

Nearly 19,000 persons attended the prescribed Utsavs held at various branch centers.

**Vivekananda Kendra Prashikshan Va Seva Prakalpa, Pimplad:** Five Balwadis, six women's awareness camps, five Anandalayas, two Adhyatmic Shibirs for 78 persons, a Vivekashrama for girls and boys, Shiva/Deepa Pujas attended by 1,500 devotees were the programs. Vocational training was given to 72 persons and implements and two cows were also given to indigent farmers as a part of economic development program. Over 8,000 persons were treated in 9 medical camps with the help of a doctor and 22 Swasthya Rakshaks.

In **Bhubaneshwar, Odisha**, 5,200 students performed a large scale Samuhik Surya Namaskar. On Vivekananda Jayanti Day. Swami Shiveswaranandaji of

Ramakrishna Math and Sri Dibyasingha Deb, Gajapati Maharaj, Puri, were some of the important persons who attended this program. Over 11,000 persons attended various programs in this State.

A plot of land admeasuring Acre 0.481 allotted by the Government of Odisha during 2008-09 on lease of 99 years for Rs 16,83,500/- in the Jagamara area of Bhubaneswar was given possession. The work of the Regional Centre-cum-Institute of Culture & Yoga Building is to begin.

In Sambalpur District, for organizing the activities of the Utkal Seva Prakalpa on full fledged scale, land admeasuring 18.40 acres in Mouza Amlipani. P.S. Jojomura was purchased for Rs 15,23,968/-.

In **Rajasthan Prant**, 7,800 students took part in essay writing competitions and 1,400 selected out of them attended 20 camps. There were also 18 youth camps which were attended by 1,065 students. The Utsavs were attended by over 6,000 people. A Balwadi for 35 children and Sanskar Vargas at 19 places for 327 children and Yoga Satras and Vargas for 470 persons were conducted.

A 2-day Kaushalya Shibir as a part of training in Vyavastha was organized for the members of all Samities in Rajasthan.

In **Tamil Nadu**, at **Chennai**, Vivekananda Kendra participated in a large scale Hindu Spiritual & Service Fair organized by Global Foundation for Civilizational Harmony at Chennai. Many distinguished guests like Shri S.S. Barnala, Governor of Tamil Nadu, Shri B.S. Yediyurappa, Chief Minister of Karnataka, Swami Gautamananda, Head,

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai and Shri R. Nataraj, Director General of Police, Tamil Nadu, visited the Fair besides a large number of people. On the occasion, Swami Vimurtananda, Editor, Ramakrishna Vijayam, released the 'Green Pathfinders' – Part II of Kendra Patrika. A personality development attended by 140 children with 100 parents was another event.

At **Coimbatore**, a 'Let us play an exam.' Camp was held for 793 students from 7 schools.

At **Tiruppur**, Vivekananda Kendra took under its aegis '**Anbu Illam**' a residential high school run on sound lines. The school had 187 students, 7 teachers and 10 supporting staff. Twenty eight students from this school who appeared in the X standard public examination 2009 have all passed, eleven of them scoring first class marks. Their extra-curricular activities were also noteworthy. On 26 January 2010 all

the students performed in perfect unison mass Surya Namaskar before the large audience, a rarely seen event for them. Many of them won prizes in sports and other events conducted by different agencies.

At **Madurai**, Five Yoga Satras were conducted for 217 persons. An introductory session about Vivekananda Kendra and a Swadhyaya Class were organized at Sourashtra College for Women. Note books and writing materials were supplied to 100 needy students. A personality development was attended by 71 students. A Kutumb Sammelan to stress the importance of family life for a healthy society and a Sat Sang on the role of Indian culture in day to day life were held. The five Utsavs were celebrated well with the participation of students and general public as under:

Guru Purnima	Universal Brotherhood Day	Sadhana Divas	Gita Jayanti	Samartha Bharat Parva
At two places	At 2 places	At 3 places	At one place	At four places
550 persons attended	510 persons attended	200 persons attended	55 persons attended	550 persons attended

At **Thoothukudi**, tailoring was taught to 55 Village girls. During Navaratri, Poojas were performed in various temples as a part of creation of organized work.

Sri. K. Balasubramaniamji of Palayam-kottai, Tirunelveli donated a piece of land admeasuring 4.5 cents valuing Rs 6.30 lakhs as his donation for establishing Vivekananda Kendra branch centre and organizing Man making & Nation building activities.

In **Kolkata, West Bengal**, many monks of Sri Ramakrishna Math attended some of the Utsavs and addressed the invitees.

### **Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalayas**

Sixty one Vidyalayas as listed below including 6 new schools in Arunachal Pradesh and 3 in Asom provided value education to 23,000 students. In Arunachal

the students of Standards in X and XII standards acquitted themselves creditably in the public examinations. Kum. Mausumi Bora of VKV, Tafrogam, stood first in the State in the X Standard public examination. Nine students from VKVs formed part of 10 member team to participate in national level Children's Science Congress at Ahmedabad. Kumari Taba Yahi, VKV, Yazali has been nominated as a member of a team of 25 students to represent India in an International forum. Nine VKVs at Amliang, Jairampur, Kuporijo, Koloriang, Nivedita Vihar, Oyan, Roing, Sunpura, and Ziro, participated in a State-level Science Seminar 2009. A team of students won the National Level On Line Quiz competition conducted by Department of Science & Technology, Government of India, New Delhi.

State	No. of Vidyalayas	No. of Students
Andaman	09	2,928
Arunachal Pradesh	30	10,503
Asom & Nagaland	18	7,575
Karnataka	01	354
Tamil Nadu	04	1,646
Total	61	23,006

Shri K. P. Rao, Principal, VKV Yazali and Shri. N. Kumaravel, Principal, VKV Banderdewa, were awarded Government of India's National Teacher's Award and CBSE Teacher's Award respectively. He donated the amount of Rs.25,000/- to Kendra stating that it rightly belonged to his Kendra which cared for him for the last 33 years and inspired him to reach such a stage as to be rewarded.

The highlight of the Universal Brotherhood Day celebration at VKV Itanagar was the presence of Gen. J.J. Singh, Governor, Arunachal Pradesh and Smt Anupama Singh as chief guests. The Governor after felicitating the state toppers in AISSE 2009 recalled his close contact with VKVs during his army days in Arunachal Pradesh and appreciated Vivekananda Kendra for its nation building activities. Sri A. Pandiyan, General Manager, North East region, Indian Oil Corporation who donated a mobile science laboratory van to the Vidyalaya and Sri Tapir Gao former M.P. and Susri Rekha Davey also attended function.

Some of the other important visitors to our various schools were:

1. Shri. Bosiram Siram, Education Minister, Arunachal Pradesh.
2. Shri Nabam Atung, President, Indigenous Faith & Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh.
3. Shri L. Khimhun, Secretary General, Rangfra Faith & Culture Promotion Society.
4. Shri Tapi Mara who climbed to the top of Mt. Everest.
5. Shri K.Kumar, Editor, Arunachal Front.
6. Shri Bhanghai Pasong, Coordinator, Arunachal Vikas Parishad in Kurung Kumey

For further info visit: [www.vkvapt.org](http://www.vkvapt.org)



### **Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalayas Asom & Nagaland**

Eighteen Vidyalayas – seventeen in Asom and one in Nagaland, with 7525 students functioned satisfactorily. Of these three were newly started. 397 students appeared for X standard public examination and 391 of them passed with 318 scoring first class marks. Out of 277 students who appeared for XII standard public examination, 249 passed out with 176 scoring first class marks.

In the competitive entrance examinations, VKV Tinsukia turned out the highest number of successful candidates, a record for any single school in the district. Yasin Shahtaz Emanee from VKV, Golaghat, who stood first in the State level Science Fair at Regional Science Centre, Guwahati, for his model, represented Asom in the Eastern India

Science Fair held at Birla Industrial & Technological Museum, Kolkata.

Su. Dipa Das Choudhury, teacher, VKV Badarpur received a Gold Medal from the University of Bangaya Sangeet Kala Kendra, Kolkata, for her contribution to Teachers' Training in Creative Dance. Sri Kalyan Deka, Teacher, VKV (NEEPCO) Doyang received Shilpi Prerana Award instituted by 'Uttar Purvanchal Niyog Sangvad' for his contribution to the cultural field. Two teachers, Shri S. Mohan Das, VKV Tinsukia, authored a book titled 'Bishwasar Abartot Bipanna Jaiba Baichitra' and Su. Nabanita Bhuyan, VKV, Umrangso brought out two science guide books for classes VIII & IX Standards.

Thirteen camps of different kind were conducted for 800 students and 6 training programs for 410 teachers and supporting staff members. The attendance at the Utsavs was as under:

<b>Attendance</b>	<b>Guru Purnima</b>	<b>Universal Brotherhood day</b>	<b>Sadhana Divas</b>	<b>Gita Jayanti</b>	<b>Samarth Bharat Parva</b>
Students	7,500	9,878	6,800	6,750	9,878
Others	545	13,000	545	1,400	16,500

Some of the VIPs who visited the different Vidyalayas were

1. Shri Nikhil Kumar, Governor of Nagaland
2. Dr. Tapodheer Bhattacharjee, Vice Chancellor, Assam University, Silchar.
3. Prof. Arup Kr. Sarma, Dean, IIT, Guwahati.
4. Sri Devasish Sarkar, General Manager, NECF, Margheritta.
5. Shri Kanak Gogoi, Scientist, Guwahati

A plot of land measuring 7 Bighas 17 Lessas was purchased for Rs. 172200/- in village Uhanipathar, Mouza Haleswr, P.O. Dipota near Tezpur for establishing Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya for the people of Tezpur.

The construction of infra-structure was undertaken in VK Vidyalayas – Ramnagar, Nalbari, Shuklai, Tezpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia.

### Karnataka

VKV, Kallabalu near Bangalore (started in 2001) had 354 students, 20 teachers and two supporting staff members. Justice Dr. Rama Jois, former Governor of Bihar & Jharkhand and currently a member of Rajya Sabha, was the chief guest on Universal Brotherhood Day celebrations.

### Tamil Nadu

Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya, Kanyakumari, had a strength of 1,308 students. In Class X, 66 Students passed in first class out of 73 appeared. In class XII 68 students passed in first class out of 74 appeared. The students performed well in various competitive examinations of other organizations. Shri S. Abraham Lingom, Vice Principal, received 'Asiryar Tilakam' – district best teacher award.

**Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya, Valliyoor**, had 608 rural students. Out of 16 students who appeared for X standard examination, 15 passed with 12 of them in first class. All the 11 students who appeared for XII standard examination passed with 8 of them getting first class. The school has built a reputation for itself.

### Vivekananda Kendra Pratishthan Trust

Thirteen Shikshartis working in different centers attended a Karyakartas Prashikshan Shibir and 21 others underwent Kendra Deeksha Shibir. The Trust selects suitable persons, trains and assigns them to various branch centers and projects. The wherewithal for the Pratishthan to take care of the needs of the Karyakartas comes from the generous contributions of patrons. The details of the patrons (as on 31-03-2010) are as under:

1. Annually donating	30,631
2. Lump sum	1,05,443
3. Perpetual	4,430

### Vivekananda Kendra Publications

<b>Chennai</b>	Vivekananda Kendra Patrika, English Half yearly, titled Green Pathfinders, Vol. I & II; Yuva Bharati, English monthly & Viveka Vani, Tamil monthly
<b>Jodhpur</b>	Kendra Bharati, Hindi monthly
<b>Solapur</b>	Vivek Vichar, Marathi monthly
<b>Palitana</b>	Vivek Sudha, Gujrati monthly
<b>Guwahati</b>	Vivek Jagriti, Quarterly in Assamese & English

Chennai Branch published two new books – Wandering Monk in English and Story of Rock Memorial in Malayalam and reprints in Bengali (1), English (8), Hindi (2), Kannada (1), Malayalam (2), Tamil (11) & Telugu (1). It also brought out calendars, diaries and some novelties which were all in good demand. Total Subscribers of Yuva Bharati

are 7473, Vivek Vani are 2910 and Vivekananda Kendra Patrika are 887.

**VK Hindi Prakashan Vibhag, Jodhpur** published **KENDRA DARSHAN** - Mananeeya Eknathji's letters and it was released in the hands of Param Poojaneeya Mohanraoji Bhagavat, Sarsanghachalak of R.S.S. Another book – **AMERICA ME SWAMIJI** was also published. The Hindi Prakashan Vibhag also organized Readers' and Subscribers' meetings at Jodhpur, Jaipur, Ajmer and Udaipur. Total subscribers for the Kendra Bharati are 4770.

**VK Asomiya Prakashan Vibhag, Guwahati** brought out translation of **EKNATHJI** in Assamese which was released in the hands of Sri P Parameswaranji during the All India Adhikari Baithak for 2009 held at Guwahati. Also, **VIJAY HI VIJAY** book for the College level youth program. The Sadhana of Service was reprinted. VK Prakashan Trust financially helped in bringing out the publications. Total Subscribers of **Vivek Jagriti** are 1100.

**VK Marathi Prakashan Vibhag, Pune** brought out Marathi translation of **VIVEKANANDANCHYA PRAKASHAT SAVARKAR** and **DAMYAVAR YOGOPCHAR**. It also reprinted many other titles. The **Vivek Vichar** is published from Solapur and has 2383 subscribers.

**Vivekananda Kendra Institute of  
Culture, Guwahati**

The Dibrugarh University has recognized the Institute as a Research Centre with effect from 24 September 2009. The notification by Dibrugarh University stated:

*"The Institute has constantly striven to examine and validate the systems from our point of view so that culture becomes the foundation of development. It is an endeavour that all seminars and field investigations, the basis of which is research, are conducted not to replicate west centric scholarship but to present matters befitting the magnitude of our traditions".*

On the Foundation Day (31<sup>st</sup> January) Shri Rajkumar Ajit Singha, a scion of the last Ahom king of Asom and renowned columnist and social activist conferred the VKIC SANMAN 2010 on Sri Chaoba Kamson, a Social Activist, from Manipur, As General Secretary of Tingkao Ragwang Chapriak Phome, Asom, Manipur and Nagaland, Sri Kamson helped to establish several temples dedicated to *Tingkao Ragwang*, to preserve the traditional faith and culture.

The survey team of the Rabha Documentation Project has recorded the traditional crafts, handloom products, rites and rituals, hymns, ballads, festivals etc. in Goalpara district. The harvest festival '*Sarbojanin Baikho*' at Nadiapara, the funeral ceremony '*Farkanti*', at Dorni and the hymns of *Bakai Puja* prevalent in Asom-Meghalaya border were covered. An awareness program during the *Peerahasu Puja* - a post harvest festival for the welfare of the livestock - was also conducted.

Two half yearly issues of the 'Quest' have been brought out on 'community festival' and 'the traditional marriage systems of northeast India'. This house journal Quest has been accorded International Standard Serial Number [ISSN] 0976 – 0040).

The VKIC Reference Library with 225 members has 5,024 books and subscribes for 27 national and international magazines and research journals.

Two 'Stress and Health Management Workshops' for supervisors and workmen of Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd. (PGCIL) in Misa, Nagaon district of Asom, were conducted. Sri K Bhuyan, DGM, was pleasantly surprised that Kendra had such programs and wanted to have a long term association. After seeing the impact of 2 Yoga Abhyas classes for 140 students of Asom Institute of Management, Dr. Shantikam Hazarika, Director, desired to integrate Yoga as part of the course and wanted the frequency of the course should be increased.

Eight personality development camps as part of Vijay Hi Vijay program of Vivekananda Kendra Asom Prant were conducted for 205 students of 14 colleges to inculcate a spirit of nationalism in them.

#### **VKIC Arunachal Pradesh Chapter**

In connection with production of a documentary film on Buddhist Monasteries in Tawang District, a team from Gujrat covered 4 major Gompas, including Ugyenling Gompa, the birthplace the sixth Dalai Lama.

Smt. Likhmoni Mein, Principal, Kalakshetra, Itanagar, in her address on "Indian Classical Dances and Arunachalee Dances - the Common Features." demonstrated many common mudras of the folk dances of Arunachal and Bharatnatyam.

During a panel discussion on the role of Nyubu (Priest) in the Nyishi and Nyegam Panam (expert in history and traditional knowledge) in Nyele, the self governing institution of the Nyishi pointed out that Nyele removed rivalries between parties and took them from Yalung (Dispute) to Tagung (Peace). Dr. Ligu Tacho, Chairperson, said that Lok-Adalat was nothing but another form of Nyele.

#### **VKIC Delhi Chapter**

The study group chaired by Sri I.P Gupta, former Lt Governor, Andaman and Nicobar, after finalizing the scheduled activities for the year discussed the "Common Bases of Hinduism".

#### **Vivekananda Kendra Arun Jyoti Project, Arunachal Pradesh**

Under the project for 'Development through Culture' 20 towns and 138 villages in 11 districts were covered through five manchs.

#### **Anaupacharik Shiksha Manch**

118 Balwadis with 2,584 children and 17 Anandalayas with for 338 children functioned well.

#### **Swasthya Manch**

27 Medical camps benefiting 2,800 persons and 9 awareness camps enlightening 500 people about health and hygiene were held.

#### **Mahila Manch**

4 Vocational training centers trained 64 girls and there was a good sale of the products made by the trainees.

**Yuva Manch**

79 students attended 2 'Pariksha De Haste, Haste' (write your exam. in a happy mood) programs. 75 youths endeared themselves to the thronging devotees during the annual mela at Parasuram Kund, by their service.

**Sanskrutik Manch (Cultural Wing)**

On Raksha Bandhan Day over 21,000 Rakhis were tied to various people apprising them of the significance of this symbolic expression of brotherhood amongst all members of the society.

For further info visit: [www.vkarunjyoti.org](http://www.vkarunjyoti.org)

**Vivekananda Kendra Medical  
Research Foundation**

The hospitals at Asom and the hospital at Bina in Madhya Pradesh functioned satisfactorily and filled up an important need of the people in the area. Vivekananda Kendra NRL Hospital, Numaligarh, Asom, provided services as under:

1. Outpatients	38,923
2. In-patients	1,753
3. Operations cases	349
4. Radiology & USG service provided	1,600
5. Patients attended at mobile medical camps	10,201
6. Pathology service	71,760
7. Blood transfusion	251
8. Physiotherapy service	2,265
9. Yoga service	2,529

**Vivekananda International  
Foundation New Delhi**

In the Vivekananda Kendra International Bhavan, a new activity with the name Vivekananda International Foundation started functioning.

Vivekananda International Foundation was inaugurated on 1 December by Justice Shri M.N. Venkatachaliah, retired Chief Justice of India. Mata Amritanandamayi gave her benediction. Smt Vani Jairam, the noted classical singer and a well wisher rendered the invocation song. Shri Ajit Doval, former Chief of Central Intelligence Bureau has joined as Honorary Director and a number of former senior military officers, diplomats, bureaucrats, and academics are on the advisory board and the executive council to guide the activities of the Foundation.

**The Organisation :** It is a New Delhi based think tank.

India's leading security experts, diplomats, scholars and philanthropists collaborate towards functioning of this foundation. By generating innovative ideas, thoughts and actions, it aims to evolve into a nodal centre of excellence that will propel India to her rightful place. The VIF brings together the best minds from India and other nations to dilate on key national and international issues. VIF promotes quality research and is a platform for dialogue & conflict resolution.

**Objectives :** Analyse India's external and internal security environment to offer



inputs to shape policies and response strategies.

Offer policy alterations to contain rising extremism caused by India's socio-ethnic disparities. Interact with civil society and offer institutional support for exchange of ideas among conflicting groups.

Critique public policy, the working of democratic institutions and constitutional bodies.

Evolve benchmarks for good governance and efficiency in public institutions.

Reassess, formulate and develop India's civilisational and cultural imperatives in an increasingly globalised world.

Promote initiatives that further the cause of peace and global harmony.

**Resource Centres** : The Foundation seeks to meet its objectives through six centres of study :

Centre for National Security and Strategic Studies – A hub for VIF's study on national security issues such as left wing extremism, militancy, North-Eastern insurgencies and demographic invasion from Bangladesh.

Centre for International Relations and Diplomacy – Dedicated global strategic issues, changing trends in international power equations, India's foreign policy challenges and options best suited to help India achieve its national objectives.

Centre for Neighborhood Studies – Deals with political, military, economic and other

developments in the neighboring countries and its implications on India.

Centre for Governance and Political (Development) Studies – Deals with political, military, economic and other developments in the neighbouring countries and its implications on India.

Centre for Economic Studies – Studies India's economic challenges in relation to domestic and international developments in trade and economic policies.

Centre for Historical and Civilisational Studies – Study of sociological and civil history for correct interpretation of historical findings.

**Activities** : To achieve these objectives VIF

Organises events, holds conferences, lectures, seminars and discussions with scholars and subject specialists

Interacts with the diplomatic community in New Delhi to project India's viewpoint and to understand the views and perceptions of other nations.

Engages policy makers on issues of topical interest and share VIF's views and concerns with them.

Develops institutionalized contacts with academic bodies, research institutions, select Indian and foreign think-tanks, universities and organizations representing the Indian diaspora.

Intends to publish books, monographs, policy briefs and special reports.

**Website** : [www.vifindia.org](http://www.vifindia.org).

VIF maintains a regularly updated website which offers :

Opinions, articles and features on international relations and diplomacy  
Exhaustive postings of news from Pakistan and Bangladesh, including Pakistani Urdu Media

Civilisational and relevant historical issues in the Indian context.

Features on security and strategic affairs such as left wing extremism, terrorism, illegal immigration, insurgencies in J&K and North-east.

Up-to-date round-up of news about the VIF, its current activities as well as a calendar of upcoming events, seminars, conferences, etc.

The following were the events during the December 2009 – March 2010:

01. A lecture by Shri Michael Chertoff, former Secretary, US Homeland Security before an elite gathering.
02. Release of the book - 'The Rise of Indian Military Power: Evolution of an Indian Strategic Culture' of Maj Gen.G.D. Bakshi, by Gen Shankar Roy Chowdhury, former Chief of Army Staff.

03. A presentation by Maj. Gen. G.D. Bakshi on 'Bose: Key catalyst of India's freedom' on the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

04. A lecture by Dr. Subramanya Swamy, former Union Minister, on China's increasing role in India's strategic calculus.

05. A lecture by Maulana Mahmood Madani, M.P. & leader of Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind on 'Terrorism – Response through Indian Ulema'.

06. A two day Seminar on 'Afghanistan beyond the London Conference: India's Options'.

07. A talk by Shri Shyam Saran on Climate Change.

Besides the persons mentioned above, other VIPs who visited the Foundation, were:

01. Gen. Richard Myers, former US Chief of Defence Staff.
02. Shri John Negroponte, Diplomat.
03. His Holiness Dalai Lama.

For further info visit: [www.vifindia.org](http://www.vifindia.org)

**Kerala : VK Vedic Vision Foundation, Kodungalloor**

A four day 'Sree Ramakrishna Bhakta Sammelan' was held in May 2009, preceded by a mini Kerala Parikrama with a decorated Sri Ramakrishna Chaitanya Ratha was taken from Kanyakumari to Kodungallur. Several senior monks of Sri Ramakrishna Maths like Swami Gautamanandaji, Swami

Sakranandaji, Swami Swaprabhanandaji, Matajis of Sri Sarada Math, well known speakers- Dr. Suvarna Nalappad, Dr. C. Radhakrishnan and Dr. H.G. Sudarshan attended the program which concluded with a grand Yati Puja to 30 monks and 15 matajis were well attended by the devotees.

A souvenir 'Viveka Tharangam' and 3 books in Malayalam: 1. Sadhana Panchamritam, 2. Jeevitha sayahanathil Anandhathinulla Vazhi & 3. Jnanadayini Sarada, were brought out on the occasion.

A mass Surya Namaskar by 600 children from 9 schools another important event of this center.

'Vishwa-Bhanu' – a bi-monthly in Malyalam was published and was well received by people.

#### Books Published

1. Jivita sayahnathil anandathinde vazhi
2. Jnanadayini Sri Sarada Devi
3. Viveka Tarangam (Souvenir of R.K.Bhakta Sammelan)
4. Surya Namaskar (instruction booklet)

The book Sadhana Panchamritam for daily reading, was reprinted. For further details:

#### Vivekananda Kendra Natural Resources Development Project, Kanyakumari

VK-NARDEP received award cum grant of Rs.1 lakh under "Idea – Innovate – Incubate" scheme for its paper "Bio-methanation plant with water Hyacinth, Ipomoea and Sea weed as input material" by National Research Development Corporation, New Delhi.

Many of its personnel participated in the seminars and workshops etc., organized by various government and private agencies. Two of its personnel spoke over All India Radio, Nagercoil, on 'Global Warming' and Azolla & its usefulness.

The Times of India, Rutag, IIT, Chennai, Organizer, New Delhi and Vivek Saptaha, Mumbai, carried articles on the work done by this project.

Besides Shri Narayan, Chief General Manager, NABARD, Chennai and Dr. K. Ajit, Ford Foundation, New Delhi, a good number of Self Help Groups members, farmers and students from outstations visited the Technology Resource Center.



*Whether you believe in spirituality or not, for the sake of the national life, you have to get a hold on spirituality and keep to it. Then stretch the other hand out and gain all you can from other races, but everything must be subordinated to that one ideal of life; and out of that, a wonderful, glorious future India will come - I am sure it is coming - a greater India than ever was.*  
- Swami Vivekananda

**The details of the programmes held by NARDEP are as under:-**

Programme	No.	Beneficiaries
Training in Cost Effective 'Green Architecture'		41
Training in Roof top rain water harvesting	1	20
Training in Sustainable Agriculture	10	405
Training in Production & use of High potncy compost etc.	3	32
Training in Azola Technology	20	270
Livestock Management	3	50
Training in Capacity Building for technology adoption	3	84
Training in Nutrient management for better farming	1	23
Training in Agriculture	1	20
Training of vaidyars etc in Indian System of medicine		1,495
Green Health home	89 Days	2,674
Green Health camps	3	737
Seminar on 'Varma' points	3	661
Construction of KVIC biogas plants		560
Shakti Surabhi biogas plants constructed		34
Awareness on & training in Shakti Surabhi biogas plant	22	57
Motivation training of Co-operative Society officials	1	23
Training of TWAD officials	2	66
Training of officials in PDS and human relationship	3	82

One thousand copies each of books titled 'Azolla' (Hindi), 'Rain Water Harvesting' (English) and 'Valviyal Chinthanaigal' (Tamil) were brought out. For further info visit: [www.vknardep.org](http://www.vknardep.org)

**Under Vivekananda Kendra Rural Development Programme**, conducted 40 Eye Camps in which 6,643 patients were screened & 1,911 were got operated in

Arvind Eye Hospital, Tirunelveli & were also provided post operation needs.

Supraja Foundation from Hong Kong has generously provided vessels for the Balwadis and also uniforms and toys for the children studying in them. State Bank of Travancore, Valliyoor Branch, donated a computer with all accessories. Six booklets were brought out.

**For further info visit: [www.vkrdp.org](http://www.vkrdp.org)**

### VIVEKANANDA KENDRA RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

This project functioning since 1982 continued its service activities in Tamilnadu as below with unflagging enthusiasm.

1	Balwadies	75	2,074
2	Sanskar Vargas	235	8,070
3	Competions for children from 1,138 Rural middle schools	125	22,500
4	Competions for students from 536 rural schools	9	2,643
5	Competions for students from 193 urban schools	11	2,194
6	Competions for 200 Plus 2 level institutions & Others		7,188
7	Competions for students of 137 colleges		16,717
8	Competions for college 16 professors & 74 teachers		90
9	Yoga Vargas & Satras	12	395
10	Swadhyaya Vargas	2	43
11	Deep Pujas	290	25,120
12	Amudha Surabhi : Collection of cereals from 2220 families		18.7 Tons
13	Anna Puja : Collection of cereals		47.5 Tons
14	Adopt a Granny Scheme		63
15	Education aid to girls		362
16	Marriage aid to girls		17
17	medical aid for the needy		35
18	Camps for children from 148 schools	3	220
19	Camps for Plus 2 students from 105 colleges	2	250
20	Camps for college students from 79 colleges	5	327
21	Camps for Sanskar Varga students	2	235
22	Personality development camps for students	11	759
23	Training camp for Balwadi teachers		42
24	Refresher training camp for Balwadi teachers & Others		150
25	Number of reprints of publications brought out	10	
26	Medical Centers	15	25,714



## Folk - Dances of Gujarat

PARUL SHAH

The important inroad by which art has entered the daily life of people is through the domain of folk music and folk dancing. In all cultures and civilizations of the world, human movement has worked as a vehicle of expression of joy and sorrow. The urge of outward



expression through body movement has assumed many shapes and forms at different periods of history and in different parts of the world. These forms of human

movement or dancing are different in content, theme and style. But they are similar in spirit of spontaneity, participation of audience etc. They cut down the economical and social barriers, bringing people of various communities and economical classes together.

Folk dances of different parts of the world have common links. Usually they portray the functions of daily life, rites and rituals, beliefs of performers in spirit and the like. They are performed throughout the year on social events like marriages, child birth, around the agricultural functions and during fairs and festivals.

There is total absence of self-consciousness and sophisticated stylisation in folk forms. They are ever renewing, at the same time keeping with the tradition. They are dynamic. There is re-creation and repetition going hand in hand.

The Indian subcontinent has various races, linguistic groups, different geographical and climatic conditions and many religions which give rise to rich folk dance forms. Here prehistoric forms have survived along with the growth of new forms, in spite of many historical, social and economical changes. There are various cultures existing side by side. The tribal people are the creators of what is termed as the tribal dances of India where the peasant society is responsible for ritualistic agricultural and seasonal folk dances. 'Gujarat has always been a land

of dancing since the days of Lord Krishna. Dance has been an integral part of the social, religious and cultural life of the Gujarati people. The folk dances of Gujarat ideally reflect the smooth merging of diverse social and cultural thoughts.

Gujarat lies in the West coast of India and comprises of Gujarat, Kutch, the Rann of Kutch and Saurashtra. Geographically it has fertile plains, lush green fields, sandy plains, bare rocky hills, flat salt-soaked lands and a long coastal line. The boundaries of present day Gujarat touch those of Pakistan, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and M.P. This rich fertile land has attracted outsiders throughout history who came as invaders, travellers and settlers. They brought with that; in their own ways of life, traditions and enriched the culture of Gujarat.

All these provide a rich ethnic variety of people. Ethnically there are tribes of Bhils, Kolis, Vagharis, there are agriculturists like Thebas, Kanabis, Meranis, Ahir, Rabaris, there are seafarers like Tandels and Kharwa, There is also a developed peasant community and urban society. The history of Gujarat is very interesting which is evident through the proto-historical sites, mediaeval temples and rich tradition of miniature paintings. Jainism flourished here for centuries. Vaishnavism permeated the classes and the masses. The tribal and peasant traditions co-exist, mutually influencing each other and yet remaining aloof.

The constant blending of alien cultures is responsible for the variety of folk dances found in Gujarat. These could be divided

broadly into the following groups.

(i) Dances of social pattern, performed at marriages, child births and other important social events.

(ii) Dances connected with agricultural functions like sowing of cotton and maize, cutting of ripe crop etc.

(iii) Dances of religious ceremonial patterns connected with festivals like Holi (festival of colour), Diwali (festival of lights), Navaratra (festival of worship to Goddess Amba).

The most popular and known folk dances of Gujarat are Garba, Garbi, Rasa, Rasada, Tippani, Padhar-Nritya, Dangi-Nritya etc.. Most of these dances have a circle or Mandala as the basic Choreographic pattern. As the circle signifies the completeness, the dances in the circular form show the richness of culture and fullness of life in Gujarat. It would be very difficult to describe and review this fountain head here and so I would concentrate on a few very popular dances of Gujarat.

Rasa which is supposed to belong to Kutch and Saurashtra is performed all over Gujarat. The Rasa traditions are as old as the Puranic period. In various parts of the country Rasa are danced in different manner.

In *Rigveda* we have mention of couples dancing in circles. But from the point of view of folk tradition, the description of 'Halli saka' a group dance, in the Harivamsa Purana is very significant. Here is a group dance, in a circular formation with the hands joined together forming a chain. The

time (Tala) is kept by clapping and is accompanied by singing. A young man (Krishna) stands in the middle of two damsels. The feet movements, toes, heels and legs first start their journey to explore rhythmic expression in measured steps, long, short, quick and slow accompanied in single, double and triple timings.

Later on, these Rasaka and Halli saka were described as two of the Upa rupakas in many Sanskrit treaties on Dramaturgy by authors like Kohala, Vatsyayan, Sarangadeva, Sharadatanaya, Bhoja and others. Uparupakas are the minor dramatic forms, having predominance of music and dance. These treaties denote Rasa or Rasaka, Hallisa or Hallisaka as the dances of the cowherds.

While in Hallisaka there is one hero and several heroines; there are as many men as women in Rasaka. Thus the main feature of Rasa is dancing in a circle by men and women, to the accompaniment of musical instruments and keeping time either by clapping or beating of two sticks. The number of dancers go from 8, 16 or 32 up to 64 couples, who also sing the song. There are three varieties of Rasaka described.

- (1) Danda Rasaka--Rasa dance where Danda or sticks are used.
- (2) Mandala or Tala Rasaka-Rasa dance where clapping is used.
- (3) Lata Rasaka-Rasa dance where dancers cling to each other and dance like a creeper to a tree.

This is the genesis of our mediaeval " Dandia

Rasa". Thus Rasa or congregational music belonging to the pastoral stage of society, dates in Gujarat from much an early date. In a wall painting in a Bagh cave we see a Rasa Mandala depicting women with sticks and cymbals to the accompaniment of musicians.

The Rasa of Shri Krishna in Gokula and Vrindavan on the full moon night of Aswin was naturally a favourite theme, with many of our Gujarati poets like Narsinh Mehta etc. He and many others wrote special



Rasa songs describing various stages of Krishna's life. They also wrote songs describing the agricultural cycles and seasons. Today the traditions brought by Sri Krishna to Saurashtra have gained much ground and have blossomed as one of the most popular, lilting folk dance forms, incorporating many local elements.

The religious history of Gujarat suggests that people followed Shakti worship. Later

on, with the coming of Krishna, Vaisnavism came to Gujarat. And as a result of these two major faiths, a new artistic form evolved 'Garba and Rasa'. As Krishna was a shepherd, the Rasa is essentially associated with agricultural cycle. It is performed on Vasanta Panchami, Navratra and Sharad Purnima, important festivals connected with sowing and reaping of grain. They are performed mostly by men and often complex designs of lotus, serpent, Nataraja are created while dancing in a circle.

The Dandia Rasa is the counter part of Garba or Tali Rasa. Dandia is a wooden stick or iron pipe, about a foot long. At the end tiny bells are tied to make the jingling sound when they strike each other. The dance has complicated rhythmic patterns beginning in a slow tempo and ending with a fast tempo. Each dancer in the

circle not only performs a solo dance with his own sticks, but also has multiple relationship with his partner on either side and opposite. The circle keeps breaking, forming various patterns. The local terms are 'Chokdi' 'Sathiya' etc. The sticks are beaten standing, sitting and lying on the floor and also jumping in the air.

Rasa dances are performed all over Gujarat by various communities. Basically they are same but each community has its distinct

pattern. 'Garba' is the most popular women's folk dance. Its origin seems to be from the tribals wandering about hunting. Gradually, it became an agricultural ritual and today it is a social dance at all levels of society.

The 'Garbo' or 'Garbha' is the life inside a woman's womb. An earthen pot with holes around the circumference and light burning inside symbolises so. Such a pot placed on the head of a lady is comparable to the starry dome of heavens, handled by Mahashakti. The dance in motion as well as songs came to be termed as 'Garba'. Garba dancing is performed by women only to get blessing from the Goddess Aroba. It is



performed for nine nights at a stretch during the festival of Navaratri in the month of October at every street corner of Gujarat. This being a dance of worship where all are expected to

join, the technique is very simple. No intricate foot work or body movements are involved. The dance in a circle is performed by simple clapping of hands in rhythms of three (Tin Tali) or four (Hinch). The songs are sung by the dancing group only. The songs of famous poets of Gujarat like Dayaram, Premananda and others are special Garba songs usually known to everyone.

The actual performance begins at night



after the women finish their house-hold work. All gather at the street corners. A photograph of the Goddess or a lamp is kept in the centre and around it the circle is formed. The dancing begins with slow tempo and reaches a fast tempo. The rhythm is kept by a Dholi or drummer who sits in the centre.

Sometimes women carry on their heads 'Mandavadi ' a small canopy made of

waist neck and hands. The musical instruments used for Garba are mainly the drum or dhol and Nal. But Rasa has Pavo (a double flute) Vansali (flute) Zanza (Discs) etc. The drummer ties his drums around the neck and moves inside the circle beating it.

Garba songs are mostly in praise of Mother Goddess Amba describing her form, powers and invoking her blessings. Also there are



bamboo chips covered with a red silken piece of cloth. They dance with it and later put it in the centre. Mandavadi symbolises the temple of the Goddess. Women wear saree in the Gujarati style. Each community wears different clothes. In Saurashtra, women wear embroidered petticoats (Ghaghra), a backless choli (Kapdu) and a head cover (odhani) with lots of silver and head ornaments. Males wear Kediya (shirt) Vajani (trouser) and Rumal a printed head piece with silver ornaments on the

Garbas describing seasons, and social themes of domestic and married life. As the Rasa dances have Krishna in their origin, most of the Rasa songs evolve around the life of Krishna at various stages from child Krishna to the flirting Krishna.

There is a tribal belt running in the South-east of Gujarat adjoining Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The furthest corner joining

Maharashtra of this belt is known as Dang.



It is a rich hilly forest of Tick and Bamboo. The Dangis are unique tribals, a blend of Gujarati and Maharashtrian culture mixed harmoniously with original Dravidians. The dance performed by the Dangis is called Dangi Nritya. Men and Women join hands, forming a chain or shrinkhala making serpentine movements with one leading. The movement is very fast, swift and create various choreographic patterns in a fraction of a second. Each variety of step is called 'Chala' and there are about 27 varieties of these chalas. One of the most amazing sights of this dance is the creation of a human pyramid. Another popular folk dance of Gujarat is Tip-pani Nritya. 'Tippani' is a stick, with a broad base, used to level the floor of a newly constructed house, read. The working women sing in unison while levelling the floor with Tippanis and move in graceful but strong movements in rhythm creating a spectacular dance with their colourful costumes.

These dances are performed by various communities at the time of a local fair or Mela, on religious festivals and social celebrations. The mela incorporates traditional institutionalised practices as well as local variations. The mela is a vast 'stage' where the 'audience' becomes the 'performer' or vice versa depending on the mood and pleasure of the participants.

In Gujarat, there are hundreds of melas conducted every year, at different places and times to celebrate a good crop or to worship a God or Goddess etc. All communities-Bharwadi, Koli, Ahir, Vaghelas

Rasari, Charan etc. to name a few participate. The Rasa and Garbas are seen at their best in such melas. Until say about the last 30 years, people outside were not so much aware of the folk dances of Gujarat.

But after independence, through Government efforts and with the help of some regional institutions, these folk dances have been popularised. These folk forms are now being protected, studied and documented. Ironically enough, in this very process the forms and content are violated. The real purpose is lost. These living forms have become static in the process of documentation and in the act of restaging them outside their context. These dances when performed during melas or social events are related to open spaces, an atmosphere of river banks of a hillock, a religious ceremony, harvest operations, participation of various communities etc. They are not limited to a 'performance time' of 2 hours.

Gujarat also has a rich folk theatre 'Bhava' popular mostly with rural audiences, dating back about 800 years. The whole night performances by professional male actors or Bhavayyas are looked forward and enjoyed immensely by elders as well as children. It comprises of singing, dancing as well as acting. The performers achieve instant rapport with the audience, and making indirect or direct jokes on social problems, act as mass education media. One wonders at the homogeneous blending of various cultures, faiths, social and economic conditions which have generalised such a vast variety of folk dances in Gujarat.

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## Folk-Dances of Punjab- BHANGRA

Dr.KAPILAVATSYAYAN

**B**hangra, the most popular and virile of the community dance of the villages of Punjab is closely linked with the ritual importance which is given to wheat. After the wheat crop is sown, the young men gather together in some open field under the light of the full moon in answer to the beat of the drum. The dancers begin to move in a circle, so that as many new-comers who wish to join can do so without breaking its continuity. The circle goes on widening until a large open circle is formed with the drummer as the leader. The leader, with a large drum hung in front stands in the centre and plays the *dhola* (the drum) with sticks. He is often accompanied by two or more singers who perform the function of sub-leaders. The rhythm of the dance is simple 2/4 or 3/4 and the song is also a simple melodic tune.



The words are couplets from the traditional oral poetry of Punjab, called *Boli* or *Dhola*. Although a couplet may be taken initially from a known piece of poetry, there is immense scope here for improvisation. With each new couplet, the dancers change their steps and respond to the singing of the couplets with typical refrains like *Bale-Bale*, *Oai-Oai* and *Vah-Vah*. The dancers naturally first begin with a slow rhythm, with an abrupt jerky movement of the

shoulders and a hop-step; this is followed by many vigorous movements of the whole body and the raising of both hands to the shoulder or above the head level. After the circle has been well established and the tempo of the dance has accelerated, the two main dancers dance within the ring in a kind of duet. This is followed by pairs emerging from different sections of the circle, dancing in the central arc and returning to their respective places in the

circle. The pairs of dancers can execute many variations, ranging from graceful to virile movements, circles, pirouettes, jumps and extensions of legs, jumps, and leaps. A skilled *Bhangra* dancer may even perform some highly complex acrobatic movement of the torso touching the floor, through a spinal back-bend or letting another dancer stand on his shoulders, while he dances on his knees. Since there are no rigorous rules of the *Bhangra*, it leaves an over-

whelming impression of fresh spontaneous vigour and vitality. Its movements are nevertheless characteristic of the masculinity of the Punjabi and cannot be mistaken for anything else. In choreographical patterns, besides the circle and the semi-circle, sometimes two-tier or three-tier circles of one group of dancers balancing themselves on the shoulder or arms of another group of dancers standing in a circle can also be seen. The whole formation moves in a fast rhythm. A dwarf is included in the party and he has an important role to play. So great is the impression of its vigour and vitality and so infectious is its spontaneity that the *Bhangra* has enhanced folk dances of others: also its free and spontaneous character has made it possible for it to travel to urban centres for all social occasions of merry-making without reference to its original Baisakhi harvest-ritual association.

The *Bhangra* was prevalent throughout Punjab in undivided pre-independent India and was not restricted to a single community or caste. Originally, perhaps it was a tribal dance of the immigrants of central Asia. Soon, it was associated with



agriculture naturally; today it has acquired a purely social secular character. The costume of *Bhangra* is the usual dress of the Punjabi peasant comprising a lower *dhoti (tahmat-lungi)*, a *kurta* and a waist-coat and a colourful turban called *pag*. While no other musical accompaniment besides the *dholak* was used originally, in some recent versions, other percussion instruments like the cymbals and *the jhanj* are being used.

### Jhumer

The *Jhumer* is another folk dance of the harvest season. Although it shares many features with the *Bhangra* it can be clearly distinguished from the latter on account of its thematic content and its emphasis on recreating the gaits of animals and birds. In the *Bhangra*, there is no attempt to show the movements of sowing and reaping the harvest; in the *Jhumer* all the functions of daily life are recreated and the pairs of dancers who come into the central area, often imitate the movements of the animals they rear. Two men become bullocks of the field, a third a plough and the fourth a farmer. The gaits of the animals, the ploughing of the field, sowing of the seeds and harvesting are shown step by step. The crops are cut and then the dancers again rejoin into a circle and dance very much in the manner as of the *Bhangra*.

### Karthi

*Karthi* is the only mixed dance of men and women, which used to be more popular in the hills, than in the plains. While the *Bhangra* and the *Jhumer* are not preceded by any ritual to a deity, in the *Karthi*, offerings are first made to a deity, at

harvest time This is followed by women leading the procession, and singing songs. The men follow, and then a circle is formed with men and women alternating and linking hands. The accompanying songs are sentimental, and tell of battles fought and victories won, of the union and quarrels of lovers. The tempo of the *Karhi* is slower than the tempo of the other two dances. There is much clapping of hands both singly and in pairs. While no wind instruments are used in the *Bhangra* and the *Jhumer*, a folk *shehnai* and other wind instruments are in evidence in the *Karhi*.

### Gidda

The *Gidda* is an exclusively women's dance, a counterpart of the men's *Bhangra*. Dressed gorgeously, the women gather together in the open courtyard to perform the *Gidda*. The *Gidda* is an ancient ring dance with simple graceful movements without crisp jerks and abrupt turns and twists so characteristic of the *Bhangra*.

The dance begins in a circle, which is then broken up into two semi-circles and sometimes into groups of four or six. As in the *Bhangra*, the pairs emerge from the circle to perform different variations on a theme. The couplets of the song describe their daily chores ranging from cleaning of the wheat to thrashing and to spinning,

weaving and embroidery. The sounds of the spinning wheel, the village well, the gurgling of the water, the beauty of the fields, and the tensions between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, love of the brother-in-law for the sister-in-law are woven into the fabric of the song. Sometimes, the movements are imitative of these chores or narration of episodes, at others they are purely



abstract. The dance ends in women pairing to do a 'spin'. Extended arms cross and hold the other dancer and the two together perform a *kikali*. In Kashmir also, we have a *kikali* of the women in the *Rouf*; a *kikali* seems to be typical sport and dance of the Women of North India.

In spite of the seeming contemporary paucity of a large variety of tribal and folk dances in Punjab, it must be remembered that this was the home of many ritual and trance dances, and many musical styles. The *Tappa*, an integral part of North Indian music grew out of these simple folk tunes.

## Folk-Dances of Haryana

SUDHIR K. SHARMA

If the folk-music and dances of a region are any expression of the general character of a people, the folk-dances of Haryana fully epitomise the energy and exuberance, vigour and vivacity, as also the religious fervour and aesthetic propensities of a people who have well proved their mettle in the battle-fields and diligence on the farms.

Folk-loreists believe that there is a surprising compatibility between the physical traits of a region and its folk-music and dances; the dances of Himachal have the soft quality of a fern tree tossing enchantingly with the touch of the mountain breeze, the dances of Bengal have the wavy movements of a meandering river tripping wantonly over shiny pebbles, the dancers of Rajasthan swerve and gyrate like gusts of sandstorms, whirling over the sand-dunes. And so too the folk-dances of Haryana have the forceful quality of the wind, the elegant movement of the standing crops, the wide sweep of its open fields and the ruggedness of its fruitful soil. It is an art in its unchiselled glory born out of the spontaneous feelings of the people who have accepted challenges with a smile.

There is a wide range of festivals and family celebrations when the village homes echo with the jingle of dancers' bells. There are dances for men, for women, and for both.

Though the unbridled joy is common to all, there are different dances to suit different occasions.

### The "Dhamal" Dance

The past hangs heavy on Haryana. Legend has it that this dance has its origin in the times of the Mahabharat. It is performed jointly by men and women in the open in moon-light during "phalgun" days (March). The men play on their "dhap" (a big flat circular drum with one flap-only) while women sing the full-throated refrain:

*"Dhap Medhur Bajaya, Chhora  
Leelgar Ka, Dhap Madhur .  
Apa Jamuna Ka Jat Ho jaye Re  
Magan".*

(The dancer's young son plays so sweetly on his "dhap" that even the waters of Jamuna get enchanted by it). This dance-form is popular in the Gurgaon and Mohindergarh districts of Haryana. The "dhap" itself is used for various aesthetic formations and choreographic effects. When the dance reaches its crescendo a dancer climbs upon "dhap" held by his co-dancer and gives individual performance atop it.

### The "Khorla" Dance of Women

When the *barat* (marriage party) leaves the village with the bride-groom, the house becomes the exclusive domain of women-



folk who in the evening do the "khoria" dance. In it the dance is not performed collectively but by individual women who come out of the group, give a dynamic performance of quick and lovingly mischievous movements to the waist, shoulders, hips and arms and pound the earth with youthful excitement. As one dancer recedes back to the line the next comes forward thumping merrily. The total effect of the "Khoria" is one of a variety programme strung on a common theme. This dance is also performed on the occasion of other family celebrations.

### The "Faag" Dances

The "faag" dances, as its name suggests are performed during the month of Phalgun (March). Haryanavis celebrate the crop-season with gusto and eclat. Both men and women, separately and collectively, utilise their free time in dancing away their cares. They enjoy the Sight of their crops

coming to maturity, The free mood of the season is well expressed in a folk-song sung during the folk- dances:

*Kacchi Imli Gadrai Phagan Mein  
Budhi ai Lugai Mastayee Phagan  
Mein".*

(The ripe tamarind has ripened in Phagan and even the old hag has run amuck in the intoxicating month of Phagan. Here tamarind is symbolical of young women's youthful yearning for their husbands).

Sometimes dialogue forms in songs are also used during the dance performances ... A most popular song during these dances is;

*"Phagun Aya Rang Bhara Re Lata",  
(Phagun, drenched in colour has come).*

### The "Holi" Dance

The "Holi" dance on the day of Holi evening on "dhulendi" (the day of colours) is only a



variation of the "Phagun" dance which is spread over the many days of the month. In the Holi dances, coloured water and powder provide the extra-visual appeal to the dance. In the thick mist of coloured powder and sprays of rainbow sprouts, dancers gyrate gracefully like lovely phantoms in a dream. For hours together the dancers regale the crowd. Men in a mood of frivolity wear women's costumes and exhibit their talent in female steps.

### The "Googa" Dance

Googa, known as Googa Peer, besides being a saint is also a popular folk-hero. Named after the Muslim saint, this male dance has religious over-tones too. Googa is worshipped both by Hindus and Muslims alike and his devotees as a respect to the peer, do this dance. The dancers attire themselves in bright yellow clothes and sing the exploits and virtues of Googa Peer to the accompaniment of a *dairu-a* special small drum held by one hand and beaten by a stick by the other. One of the dancers holds a long staff atop which are tied tufts of peacock feathers, colourful fans, and garlands. The dance begins with slow graceful movements and ends in frenzied ecstatic actions.

### The "Loor" and "Jhoomar" Dance

Both of these are women's dances in which in the former, women divide themselves in two groups and in the latter they form a crescent and each dancer by turn comes out of the line for a performance and then goes back. *Loor* which means a girl, is performed by teenaged girls and themes

like child-birth and marriage are sung in dialogue forms. The *Jhoomar* is a Haryanavi counterpart of the Punjabi girls' *Giddha*.

### The "Ghoomar" Dance

Ghoomar is essentially a dance of Rajasthani origin and is popular in those areas of Haryana which border Rajasthan.

Besides these major folk-dances of Haryana, there are regional variations. For instance, areas adjacent to "brij" like Faridabad, still, perform the *Rasa Leela* in a very artistic way. Colourful characters of folk-life like the snake charmers, also find place in the folk-dances of the State. Women often perform the *sapela* dance in which one acts the role of the village belle while the other acts as the snake charmer and they sing: Woman: "*Sapela Been Baja de Chalungi Tere Saath*."

Man: *Mahlon ki rehney wali tenay kutia laagay Udaas*".

(Oh! Snake charmer, play on your flute and I shall follow you. You are a dweller of palaces, you will not feel at home in my hut).

Thus Haryana dances are not only expressions of a particular emotion at a particular time but a spilling over of the general exuberance of the Haryanavi whether it is a family function, a festival, a religious ceremony or a hopeful time for a fruitful harvest.

It is a time when men and women become alive with the lilting rhythms of romantic folk-tunes bestowed on them by a rich cultural heritage.

## Folk-Dances of Madhya Pradesh

Dr. KAPILA VATSYAYAN

**M**adhya Pradesh is rightly known as the Heart of India surrounded as it is by Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. It shares physio-geographical features with the regions which surround it: it has many racial and ethnic affinities with other parts of India. Linguistically, although the predominant language is derived from the Indo-Aryan, there are tribal groups who speak dialects of the Dravidian and Mundari group of languages. One fifth of the population is tribal comprising over forty-eight tribes: there are the hill, plateau and plains people amongst these tribes and village communities.

### The Tribals

The tribes of the area can be divided into the Hill tribes who are either hunters or food-gatherers, the plains tribes who are predominantly either shift or settled agriculturists or who work as agricultural labourers and urbanised tribals who are today employed in mines and factories.

The hunters and the food-gatherers amongst these are the *Bhatras* who according to legend migrated from Warangal in Andhra Pradesh. All these tribes have dances of the hunt, reminiscent remotely of the hunt-dances of the Nagas but very different in quality. For some of these tribes the god of hunting is the Autga to whom a thanksgiving is offered through

a dance. The actual dance connected with hunting is elaborated in some of the tribes, not so in others. Only men take part in these dances. Besides the hunters, there are the nomads like the *Mang Garudi* who reside principally in Berar. On the camping ground they hold many festivities, including dances. The music and dance content of these nomads is minimal and not as highly developed as either the Himalayan nomads or the Banjaras of Andhra Pradesh.

The *Gonds*, the *Marias* and the *Murias* of various varieties are, however, dancers, par excellence of the area. The *Gonds* along with many allied tribes comprise a population of nearly fifty lakhs.

### The Festival Dance

The Karma festival provides occasion for the dance, amongst the *Gonds* as elsewhere. The women with interlocked arms dance in straight lines and rectangles. The rectangle is also a characteristic motif of the wall painting and pictographs of the *Gonds*. The men form a separate circular ring, and dance vigorously, displaying their prowess. After a while, some dancers climb on the shoulders of others and this two-tier formation moves in perfect *step*, bodies swinging to the rhythm of the drum and the claps of the women. Later, the dancers alight from the shoulders of the other dancers, get inside the dancing circle, and start threading in and out as if playing hide-and-peek. The drum beats faster and louder

and the formations break up in an uproarious tumult. In these dances, the torso is bent in front. The knees are bent and there is a circular pelvic movement.

The *Gonds* also perform *Jhumar* dances. These are meant to accompany their love songs. There are other songs, with social themes.

The Chaitra festival dance is another famous dance of the *Gonds* of Bastar district; it is performed after the harvest to thank goddess Annapurna for the harvest already gathered and to seek her blessings for the next crop. Men and women dance in a circle, in semicircles or in rows; all dancers hold each other's waist.

A peacock feather on the head is a distinctive mark and the dancers wear colourful costumes, adorning themselves with garlands of shells and pearls. As the dancers go round in rhythmic movements, their feet beat to the music of *the shehnai*, *nagada*, *timki*, *tapri*, *dholak* and *maduri*. Sometimes, the *singha* and *kohuk* aerophonic instruments are also played.

### Stilt Dance

Dancing on stilts is fairly common among the *Gond* children of Madhya Pradesh. The dance is popular in the Vindhya, the Satpura ranges, the plains of Chattisgarh and Bastar. The proper season for this dance is the rainy season from June to August. A dancer who has learnt to balance himself on the *gendi* can successfully perform it even in water or on marshy surface. The difficulty in balancing on the *gendi* accounts for the fact that this dance is generally confined only to children. Its

attraction consists in balancing and clever foot-work. Many dances are performed on the *gendi*.

### The Attire

The men wear white muslin turbans or occasionally silk ones. The turban is adorned with a coronet of peacock feather stems. Down to the waist they wear a close white *saluka* or blouse, below a *dhoti* of small width coming down to the knees, the end of which hangs loosely behind. On their necks hang necklaces of silver or gold coins or corals. Their hands are adorned with silver bangles and their feet with heavy brass or iron boat-shaped ornaments which tinkle to the timing of the rhythm. In their right hand they hold a staff, in their left a white kerchief or peacock feathers. The peacock is another important motif in tribal art: during the dance, feathers acquire the same ritual significance.

The costumes of the musicians are different from those of the dancers. They put on a shirt or a jacket and coloured turbans; they do not use cowries.

The women wear a coloured *dhoti*, wound close round the body down to the knees, one end of which goes up across their breasts to their backs. The knot of their hair is adorned with a coronet of palm or other leaves behind which hangs a net of corals. From their necks also hangs a chain of coins or corals. Besides the necklaces of coins or corals they wear silver *hansali* also. In their ears they wear heavy silver ear-rings from which hang small slender silver chains. Sometimes, this chain also goes over the head to the ear on the other side. Besides, they wear *bahunta* on their

arms, silver bangles on their wrists and *perry* or *todar* round their ankles. While dancing, in their right hand they hold *thiski* (a clapper) and in their left a coloured kerchief'.

### Gond Dances

The dances of the *Gonds*, particularly the *Saila* and *Rina*, are highly developed. Many parts of the human body are exercised and there is a wide range of movement. The formations change frequently. The men form a circle in the initial stages: this is followed by semicircles being formed in two's. The women form a separate circle: each group faces the centre of their respective circles in some phases, and backs the centre in others.

### Abhujmaria

*Kaksar* is a festival dance, performed by the *Abhujmaria* of Bastar. Prior to the rains, the Maria cultivators in every village worship the deity for reaping a rich harvest. To invoke the blessing of the deity, *Kaksar*, a group dance, in which young boys and girls take part, is performed. Boys put on a peculiar costume of a long white robe while girls are clad in all their finery. The dance presents to both girls and boys, a unique opportunity to choose their life partners, and marriage is enthusiastically celebrated afterwards. There is rhythm and melody in this dance. The melodious music, the tinkling of the bells combine to create an atmosphere of spell and enchantment.

### Gaur Dance

But all these dances-beautiful and colourful

fade before the resplendent beauty of the dances of the *Bison-horn* or *Seeng Marias* of Bastar. The dance is called *Gaur* after the name of the bison. Frisking, jerking of the bison is imitated. For the Maria boy his head-dress with horns and beads is his greatest possession. A group of these men wearing bison horn head-dresses and veils of beads and shells beat huge drums. The girls carry sticks called *tirududi* in their hands and wear heavy anklets: the two together dance in intricate formations. The girls form a row and then go around and through the men dancers. They do not usually sing, and even if they did, it would be lost in the thunder of the drums.

Most of these dances have no religious significance although the people believe in Shakti and Danteswari who is considered as the presiding deity during dance performances.

### Other forms

Many folk opera and drama forms have evolved such as the *Maancha* and the *Chhattisgarh Nacha* in Madhya Pradesh. Ballad singing is popular and pervasive and the stories of *Alha* and *Udal* hold audiences in the same manner as *Dhola Maru* in Rajasthan and *Malushahi* in Kumaon.

And yet, in spite of this rich variety and the long sustained tradition of oral literature, school of painting, sculpture and classical music, Madhya Pradesh does not have today a 'classical dance form' distinctive to it. This level in dance seems to have disappeared during the last fifty years or so.



## Natya Tradition in Maharashtra

SUCHETA BHIDE

Today Maharashtra does not have any living classical dance tradition nurtured and developed in the local environment like the Bharata Natyam of Tamil Nadu, the Kuchipudi of Andhra or the Odissi of Orissa. But interesting references can be found in the sculptures and treatises on music and dance of the Yadava period. They indicate that the dance and music tradition closely related to *Natya Shastra* was prevalent in Maharashtra prior to the Mughal invasion.

The earliest reference to dance in Maharashtra can be found in the Aurangabad sculptures of the 6th and 7th century. Cave No. VII has a beautiful panel showing a dancing girl with six female musicians. This dance posture can be identified as 'Katisamam' according to 'Natya Shastra'. Another important evidence of dance can be seen on the outer walls of the Amba or Mahalakshmi temple at Kolhapur. This temple belongs to the 8th or 9th century.

The life-size figure sculptures on the temple walls include female dancers in various graceful postures representing Goddess Parvati's 'Lasya'. The figures of musicians playing flutes, lutes and drums are also seen. The reflections of *Natya Shastra Karanas* like *Talapushpaputa*, *Karihasta*, *Prustasvastika*, *Diksvastika*, *Katisamam* can be easily seen in these figures. The

inscriptional references show that the Mahalakshmi of Kolhapur was the family deity of the Rashtrakutas the earliest dynasty in Maharashtra. The Rashtrakutas were great propagators of arts. The unique cave temple of Shiva known as 'Kailash' was carved at Ellora during the Rashtrakuta period-latter half of the 8th century. The Kadambas, Shilaharas and Yadavas were the next powerful dynasties in Maharashtra. Of these, the Yadavas are known as the greatest patrons of arts and devotees of



Shiva. Most of the old temples now found in Maharashtra and in Deccan belong to the Yadava period (1000- 1350 A.D.).

The Ambarnath temple (near Bombay) has many dance sculptures. The inscription inside the temple mentions that the temple was built in 1060 A.D. by king Mummuni. Most of the dance postures carved here can be identified according to the

definitions of *Sthanakas* and *Mandalas* as given by the old texts. The dance sculptures are also found on the Shiva temples at Jinnar (near Nasik), Jhodga (near Malegaon) and Khidrapu (near Miraj)

Several Sanskrit texts on music and dance were produced in Maharashtra prior to Islamic invasion. The well-known 'Sangeetha Ratnakara' of Sarangadeva is foremost among these. Sharangadeva was a court *Vidtoan* and musicologist of the Yadava King Singhana (1210-1247 A.D.). The 'Sangeetha Ratnakara' is considered as the most important treatise on old classical music. It also includes chapters on dance. The definitions of Hastas and postures given in these tally with those of *Abhinaya Darpana* and are followed in Bharata Natyam even today. The description of the thirty-six types of *Prabandhas* as given by *Ratnakara* includes compositions like *Oovi*, *Aarya* and *Charchari* which are typical Marathi compositions. These can still be heard in the traditional music of old Haridasa's Kathakaras. Another typical

Marathi *Prabandha* mentioned in *Ratnakara* is 'Dhaval - the type of songs sung at a marriage ceremony. Sharangadeva's contemporary was Parshvadeva. He has written 'Sangeetha Samaya Sara' which also gives many Marathi musical terms. Haripala-Deva, son-in-law of Ramachandra Deva Yadava, wrote 'Sangeetha Sudhakara' on music and dance. Another important treatise 'Manasollasa' was written in Maharashtra by the Chalukya

King, Somesvara III, in 1131 A.D., almost a hundred years before *Ratnakara*. This gives two Marathi Geetas as examples and mentions 'Oovi' as being the most popular *Prabandha* of Maharashtra. Jnanesvara and Narnadeva, two of the great saint-poets of Maharashtra have mentioned many musical terms and techniques in their writings. Namadeva has also mentioned the names of *ragas* and *talas* for their devotional compositions.

The Muslim traveller, Kena Batoota, has written a description of Devagiri (today's Daulatabad) in his travelogue. Along with the popularity and excellence of the dance



and music performances he has also described the palatial homes of the musicians and dancers, their wealth and high status.

The above-made observations make it clear that in medieval Maharashtra (or Deccan) dance and music were a part of the every day life of the people, and the music and dance were performed according to the old texts.

The foreign invasions started in the latter half of the 14th century. The Mughals came from North-East and Europeans from the West. Maharashtra had to bear the brunt of their direct onslaught. Comparatively away from these, the extreme southern provinces of India like Tamil Nadu could hold on to their art traditions and their social significance as a means to attain divine peace. In Maharashtra these norms were overshadowed by the political and religious onslaughts of alien invaders. Muslim fanaticism barred women from free movement. Under the command of Shivaji the great, came the first concentrated opposition to the Islamic invasion. The ballads (called Powadai in Marathi) sung in praise of the brave warriors took the place of the devotional 'Natya' forms. 'Lavani' an erotic musical lyric became more popular with the urban masses as a form of light entertainment in the latter Peshava period (first half of the 19th century).

Comparatively, the conditions were more stable in southern Maharashtra, The old forms of devotional plays like *Dashavatar*, *Kola*, *Jagar*, *Lalit*, and *Gondhal* continued to be performed uninterrupted as a part of the temple festivals. These forms still exist in their old technique as a

part of village life in Maharashtra. Goa at the extreme south of Maharashtra also offered shelter to Natya traditions. Fortunately, even with conversions to Christianity, the Portuguese rulers did not seem to have interfered with the cultural traditions of the land. Till fifty years back, Goa had the *Devadasi* tradition of music and dance. The *Devadasis* were maintained by the temple institution and they gave special music and dance performances (called 'Pene) on the occasion of temple festivals that were celebrated all the year round. They danced in front of the palanquin when the deity was taken out in procession, a custom similar to South Indian temple festivals. Their dance had a delicate grace and a classicism of its own. Today this tradition is in a total decadent form.

The reform of the Marathi theatre began in Central Maharashtra in 1842 A.D. due to the contact with Karnataka. A troupe of Yakshagana performers were visiting Sangli State. Raja Appasaheb Patwardhan, then the prince of Sangli and

the connoisseur of arts was so much impressed by their performance that he asked Vishnudas Bhawe, his protege to write and produce a similar play in Marathi. No



classical 'Natya' tradition was alive in Maharashtra then. This may be the likely reason why Vishnudas Bhave omitted the 'Nritya' aspect of the Yakshagana technique from his own mythological production. He adopted only such features of Yakshagana like *Sutradhara* (the conductor, commentator), the *Vidushaka* ( a comic character), *Nandi* (benediction), *Vigneshwara Stuti* (prayer to Lord Ganesh), mythological themes, absence of stage decorations, etc., which were in fact derivatives of old Sanskrit Natya.

Thus was launched the first reformed mythological Marathi play under the influence of Carnatic Yakshagana. Almost fifty years later started the golden era of Marathi theatre through the musical plays of Annasaheb Kirloskar and Kakasaheb. Khadilkar. The base of these plays was still mythological, yet the performances and decor started becoming more and more refined. The forte of these plays were the songs acted and sung by the great singer-cum-actors like Keshavrao Bhonsle, Balagandharva, Master Krishna Rao and others. These created a new tradition of drama-music for Maharashtra known as 'Natya Sangeeta'. Being more lyrical and full of emotion this light classical music thrilled the audiences more than the pure classical. But the inspiration for many of them came again from the popular Carnatic Kritis, Their original tunes were adopted to

the Hindustani *ragadari* way of singing with a perfect blending.

A parallel instance had happened at Thanjavur about 150 years earlier to the reformation of Marathi drama in Maharashtra. The Thanjavur Maratha rulers were overwhelmed by the beauty of Carnatic arts. Themselves being scholars they mastered the Carnatic music dance and drama techniques and wrote dramas and dance compositions in Marathi. They probably thought that the usage of their mother-tongue would help their brethren in Maharashtra to understand and enjoy the classical dance and drama and it would again take root in their homeland. Whatever may be the reasons, their efforts did not seem to have created the desired effects. However, in the past century, Maharashtra has made a great contribution to the development and refinement of North Indian Hindustani Classical music by way of many outstanding scholars and musicians.

Though Maharashtra has lost its original classical dance or drama tradition today, it certainly has the necessary cultural, musical and literary base. As a devout Bharata Natyam dancer, this author feels hopeful that taking inspiration from the Marathi rulers of Thanjavur, Maharashtra can evolve a new 'desi' mode of Bharata Natyam and thus enrich the great art traditions of this land.



## Folk - Dances of Rajasthan

DR.KAPILA VATSYAYAN

**E**thnologically, Rajasthan presents a varied picture: there are many tribes comprising of the *Sansis*, the hereditary criminals, the *Kamaras*, the *Banjaras* (the nomads) and the *Gujjars*, the *Kathods*, the *Bhils* (who are found in all parts), the *Bhila Mina*, the *Garasias*, the *Sehrias* and the *Rebaris*. The agriculturists sow *bajra*, *jawar* and maize; many agricultural cults revolve around the harvest of these. Camel and sheep provide the basis of animal husbandry. Dance forms such as the *Ger*, the *Gher Ghoomara*, the *Ghoomar*, the *Jhumar*, are performed at both the tribal and village level: indeed, the *Jhumar* has travelled upward and has become the regional dance of the urban centres also.

### Gher Ghernur

The *Gher Ghernur* of the *Sansis* is the simplest of the dances, both in content and form. It begins with a slow movement where men and women first dance in two separate lines and then form a circle with a man and woman alternating. The tempo of the dance increases gradually to a point where each person has both a rotating movement around his own axis, as also a revolving movement along the circumference of the circle. The hip movements are the most characteristic feature of this dance. There is both instrumental and vocal music accompaniment to this dance. The dance

is vigorous and there are no languorous movements.

### Of Ajmer

The *Sansis* and *Kanjars* from *Ajmer* have their own variety of dances which are different from the *Sansis* of other regions of Rajasthan. Nevertheless, these are also mixed dances which are performed on festive occasions to the accompaniment of a *dholak*, *jhalak* and *algoza*. As a particular dance develops, it gains in tempo and the women's movements have an unbelievable swiftness. Pirouettes, circle rotating and revolving movements abound. In all these torso is used as one unit, so are the lower limbs. Movements are circular.

The *Bhils* of Rajasthan have a variety of dances, which correspond to the agricultural cycle.

### Ghurner

The *Ghurner* dance is the very life-blood of the *Bhil* culture. Performed at all seasons, it is always accompanied by songs of love, glory or defeat. Men and women move in a circle, one half of men and the other of women. This *Ghurner* dance should be distinguished clearly from the dance of the same name prevalent in Rajasthan amongst the members of urban society; today the latter is a popular ceremonial dance amongst the aristocracy of Rajasthan. The *Ghurner* dance of the *Bhils* is a much more virile dance and is like the *Ghurner* dance



of the *Sansis*. *Ghumer* of the urban centres becomes a polite social dance of women.

### Raika

A mixed martial dance is the *Raika*. Men and women start in two rows. The men hold swords. Men sing, invoking the gods to grant them strength in order to defeat the enemy. Men and women then form a circle and move in steps, which are characterised by a sliding movement of one



foot and a shifting of the hip girdle from side to side. The dance begins slowly but reaches a climax, when the men brandish their swords in a frenzy.

### Jhoria

Amongst the dances which revolve around the life cycle is a marriage dance called *Jhoria*. The *Jhoria* literally means a wooden stick. The men form one circle, the women another one and they perform a vivacious dance to the accompaniment of the *dhol*,

*shehnai* and *nagara*. Other dances are also performed on the occasion of marriages. The gait of the women in all these dances, is the characteristic feature of the *Bhil* dancing of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. The body is held relaxed, the torso is used as one unit, but there are some curved movements demanding the use of upper chest and lower waist separately. While the tempo is fast, there is little use of strong energy. There is hardly any instrumental musical accompaniment; only the song of the women forms the constant base of the dance. They perform a *Garba* dance on the night of *Navaratri*. A pitcher, beautifully decorated, is placed in the centre and the women sit around clapping. Gradually, they get up and walk in unison round the pitcher.

### Gauri

*Gauri* is a religious dance-drama of the *Bhils*: it is performed by the *Bhil* men in the months of *Sawan* and *Bhadon*. The dance revolves around the worship of the deity Bhairavanath. The chief worshipper is the *Bhoya* who goes into a trance while dancing; others dance in circles around a *trishul* while keeping time with the *parat* and *thali*. Many different types of dresses are worn by the dancers, representing different characters. In form and style this is a ritual dance-drama, rather an occupational dance.

### Gher

The *Gher* dance is a favourite dance of the *Mina* tribe who are akin to the *Bhils*; this is performed during the Holi festival. As the dance gains in tempo, the dancers form themselves into circles. This is

predominantly a man's dance.

Also, there are the *Bhil* dancers of Jalore district, amongst which the *Dhol* dance is the most popular. Each dancer has a big drum (*dhol*) which he plays while dancing. Other dancers carry naked swords in their mouths.

### Valar

*Valar* is a typical dance of the *Garasias*. Its song is woven round the beauties of nature, the starry night, the moon, the mountain and the restless rivers; it is an expression of romantic feelings and is in a lyrical mood. The sentiments of the song are presented through suitable gestures. Artistically, the dance is highly developed; unlike other tribal dances it seeks to establish a correlation between the word, sound and the gestures. Also the open strong movements of the men of the deserts give place to more languorous movements.

### Tera Tali

The *Komar* tribe performs the *Tera Tali* which is an elaborate ritual with many elements of dance. It is generally performed by two or three women who sit on the ground. *Manjiras* or small cymbals are tied to different parts of the body of the dancer. The dancer's face is covered with a veil and a naked sword is held between the teeth: a decorated pot is balanced on the head. The dancer holds a *manjira* in each hand. It is said that there are thirteen different ways of striking the *manjiras* and perhaps thirteen *manjiras* are tied to the body of the dancer. Thus equipped, the women squat on the ground and produce a variety of sounds. Sometimes, in the

course of the dance, many imitative actions signifying the grinding of corn, the milking of the cow are also portrayed. The sitting position does not change, but the women shift or slide on the ground. Movements of the upper limbs are intricate. The dance is accompanied by men who sing the song to the accompaniment of *ek tara* and *manjirus*.

In contrast are the dances of the sturdy tribe of *Sidh Jats* who live in the remotest part of the Thar desert. They are followers of Guru Gorakhnath and are famous for their yogic feats. A huge fire is lit, big drums and pipes play the music, and a song is sung. The dance is performed to this accompaniment. A group of *Sidh Jats* jump into the fire and dance vigorously in a normal manner for an hour or so. This fire-dance takes place in March-April during a *mela* (fair) held in memory of Guru Jasnath.

### Geeder

*Geeder* is danced by the tribes of the Shekhavari area. It begins fifteen days before Holi. In this, only men take part. Drums are kept on a raised platform and the dancers form circles. Sticks are also used. It resembles the *Gher* in many ways. In this and other dances, we observe the coalescing of the levels of agricultural functions and myth.

### Kachhi Ghori

*The Kachhi Ghori* is very popular in the eastern part of the State. As the name implies, the dance is a presentation of horse-riding. The horse used in the dance is made of two small bamboo sticks with two baskets tied to each end. An

artistically prepared head of a horse is fixed to one of the baskets and a bunch of flex-fibre to the other. The dancer, dressed as a bridegroom in flowing costume and with sword in hand" adjusts the horse" on his waist in such a way as to create a realistic effect. Movements are jerky and angular.

In a typical *Kachhi Chori* dance (performed mostly during marriages) four to five dancers take part at a time and dance to the accompaniment of the *dhol* and *turahi*. Rajasthan is the home of a number of ballad and dance forms also: the most famous amongst these is the *Pabuji-ki-Par*. It is like the *Ramola* and the *Maiushahi* of Kumaon. The *Pabuji-ki-Par* is painted, sung and danced

### The Costumes

The costumes of the dancers of Rajasthan, whether tribal or urban society, have many common elements. The closely gathered *ghaghra* (skirt) is common to all the tribes and castes of Rajasthan. The design and the type of the skirt varies from region to region and the kind of material used also changes from level to level but bright-coloured prints are common: particular



prints are earmarked for special groups. The women wear long-sleeved *cholis* and have very large beautifully printed *dupattas*. The ornaments are of both silver and gold. The *Bhil* tribes use silver, but the sophisticated women of the aristocracy prefer gold ornaments. A characteristic feature of the head ornament is the *bodla* which is a gold ornament with stones and is worn in the centre of the forehead: this is also a common ornament for the lowliest and the highest. The characteristic costume of the men consists of a tightly worn *dhoti* with a traditional *bandi* and a turban. Although the type of the *dhoti* as also the long-sleeved *bandis* vary from

region to region in Rajasthan, the manner of draping is common to practically all the communities of Rajasthan.

The deserts, the sand-dunes, the few oases of greenery, the history of wars fought and won, the romantic tales of love have all contributed in giving Rajasthan its rich and ornate culture with a distinctive regional character. Solo skilful artists, professional musicians, dancers and acrobats are the repositories of many traditions of the performing, plastic and the decorative arts.

## Folk - Dances of West Bengal

Dr.KAPILA VATSYAYAN

The history of Bengal is all too well-known to be retraced. Although early archaeological remains are few, and there is little evidence of monumental architecture and sculpture before the establishment of the Pala Sena kingdoms, it is common knowledge that the region shares its early history with the rest of India. Between the 11th and 18th century, Bengal broke up into a number of small potentates who seemed to have been content with their particular local culture. However, this was also the time of the spread of Vaishnavism. The songs of Jaidev, Vidyapati and Chaitanya entered every home and hamlet. Different forms of Vaishnavism, such as the Sajiva Vaishnavism were overlaid with Gaudiya Vaishnavism. The contemporary traditions of music and dance have to be viewed against this ethnic and historical background.

Makara Sankranti is an important festival in all parts of Bengal. The *Tusu Parab* is held in Birbhum on this occasion. Groups of young girls gather every evening throughout the month of Pousa (December-January) and sing songs which have been termed by the generic term *Tusu*. On the day of Makara Sankranti the groups go out of the village to a nearby tank or river with the goddess *Tusu* symbolised in small clay figurines or sometimes merely as cowdung balls. After a sacred bath they return to worship and make offerings of rice to

the deity. Different groups meet, sing songs near the river-bank or the pond and compete with each other. The songs are accompanied by simple group movements: there is no other accompaniment.

The men also have their particular songs and dances for the occasion: these are known as the *Bhaduriya Saila*. The dance content is more predominant here: men dance in circles clockwise and anti-clockwise. During the preharvest rites of *Bhadra* and other festivals like the *Chhata Parab* are held.

In Chaitra, another type of composition known as the *Jhumar* is sung and danced. *Jhumar* can be sung and danced by only men or women or both depending upon the particular occasion. The *Jhumar* at *Chaitra* is a typical men's dance which is accompanied by drum (*madal*) and cymbals. At the time of the transplanting of the paddy only women sing and dance the *Jhumar*. This is then known as the *Ashariya Jhumar*. This typical agricultural ritual dance and music was perhaps later taken over by the professional dancers called *Nachnis*. Special songs were composed for these dances under the patronage of the small nobles and *jamindars*. Names of many *Jhumar* composers such as Dinbandhu Narottam and Ram Krishna etc. are known. Into the agricultural songs of transplanting paddy was impregnated the theme of the love of Radha and Krishna and other stories of mystical union. The basic tune of the

*Jhumars* remained more or less the same. The development of the *Jhumar* provides an interesting instance of an old form absorbing a new content.

The agricultural dances have gradually given place to dances which are purely devotional or religious in character. Practically each different sect has its own music and dances. The worshippers of Shakti dance in the Chandi mandir of Siva, in the dance hall called *Gambhira* and those of Vishnu in the *Natmandir*. All these pavilions are specially constructed for the dance in front of the shrine. The *Gambhira* festival is held on this day. So also is the *Chakar* festival on Chaitra Sankranti in Tarakesvar where Siva is worshipped. *Gazan* dance is performed by men dressed in saffron robes who carry a *dhanuchi* (incensed burners). This is exclusively performed by men; the musical accompaniment is provided by decorated drums and brass gongs (*Kanshi*).

The ballad singers, the boatmen, the fishermen and the professional musician dancers, actors, acrobats and even jugglers have their distinctive songs and dances. The *Bhatiyali*, a popular light music form, can be traced back to the boatman's music - the *baul* to the mendicants and the *gazi* to others.

A characteristic feature of these is the musical accompaniment which consists of a one stringed instrument called the *ektara*. The dance movements are, by and large, restricted to short sequences which

intersperse the singing. The footwork is elementary, but the movement of the pelvic girdle is difficult and characteristic. It is freely used by men singing the songs to indicate a dramatic moment.

The martial dances of the Raibenshes and the Dhals, however, tell a different story. The dances of the Raibenshes of Burdwan and Birbhum seem to be the last surviving vestiges of war-like traditions. The technique of the dances is so vigorous that there has been a new interest in teaching these dances to educated boys and girls of urban centres specially by the *Bratachari* organisation. Essentially the dance is a series of vigorous physical exercises, in which the erect torso has an important part to play. The dancers begin in a single file and then make a circle. Hops, jumps and circles are characteristic. Skills with the shield and the spear and the *trishul* are common. A percussion instrument accompanies the dance.

To a totally different category belongs the *Jatra*, the traditional theatre form of Bengal. The *Jatra* is performed by travelling troupes under the management of a man called *Adhikari*. Although, originally, the *Jatra* may have

had only the theme of Radha and Krishna, today *Jatras* are written and performed by writers and dramatists of rural and urban centres. Its format resembles the structure of the other folk theatre forms like the *Nautanki* of Uttar Pradesh and the *Bhavai* or *Tamasha* of Gujarat and Maharashtra.



## MANIPURI DANCE

DARSHANA JHAVERI

**M**anipuri dancing developed in the North-eastern part of India, has two simultaneous traditions, namely, Animism and Hinduism. Laiharoba festival, invoking village gods has mainly the dance of the priestess describing the primitive concept of cosmology. Since the last two hundred years, due to Gaudiya Vaishnavism, dance and music developed into a most stylised, classified and dignified art form around the theme of Lord Krishna and Radha. Dance and music were the integral parts of the religious lives of the people. Innumerable gurus and artists delved deep into the Vaishnavite Sangeet Shastras and literature as well as manuscripts available in Manipur on dance and music. Inspired by them, they increased the store-house of dance movements, talas and rhythm patterns and musical compositions. They evolved their own system of music and dance and even wrote various manuscripts.

Throughout the year, each and every social and religious festival is celebrated with different forms of dance and music—e.g. dances with drums like *Dhol*, *Dholak*, *Dafat*, *Khajari* in Holi festival, dance with claps in Ratha Yatra festival, dance with cymbals in Jhulan Yatra, dance with sword and spear in Durga Pooja, and dance with *Kartal* and drum in Natpala in different social and religious festivals such as birth, marriage, shraddha and before Rasleelas.



The themes of childhood pranks of young Krishna as well as the divine love of Lord Krishna and Radha pervade in most of these festivals. Rasleelas and Sankirtans are the highly developed dance-forms revealing the high aesthetic religious feeling of the people of Manipur. Rasleelas go on for 8 to 10 hours in the temple courtyard from dusk to dawn. The religious people of Manipur shed tears of joy experiencing it as the real spirit of the Lord. All the technical elements mentioned in the Sangeet Shastras are found in Rasleelas such as *Nritya*, (Pure

Dance), *Nritya* (Interpretative dance) and *Natya* (Theme expressed through four kinds of *Abhinaya*).

The songs are sung in *Padavali* language such as Brajabali, old Bengali, Sanskrit, Braja and now into Manipuri language written by the devotional poets like Chandidas, Vidyapathi, Gyandas, Jayadeva,



etc. They have a variety of talas ranging from four beats to sixty-eight beats and their various rhythm patterns as well as

dances on *Nritta* and *Nritya Prabandhas*, Manipuri dance is one of the most graceful and lyrical dance styles of India. The swaying movements of the neck and torso are inspired from the bamboo trees tilting in the breeze. The movements are rounded, continuous mingling into each other like the waves of the sea. There is an equal

emphasis on the movements of the different parts of the body. The meaning of the songs is conveyed through hand-gestures facial expressions and body movements in a subdued, dignified and suggestive way.

In the Rasleelas, thirty to forty girls wear the gorgeous costumes consisting of a mirrored stiff skirt, upper half-skirt and a veil creating an ethereal effect. In Sankirtan, male dancers with *Kartal* and *Mridang* wear white dhotis and

turban creating a serene and dignified atmosphere. In the festival dances, women wear the hand-woven and embroidered phanek with stripes and white thin scarf. A traditional and classical Manipuri dancer has a great challenge to present these dances into the modern theatre having different demands. She should first have a thorough knowledge of technique as well as traditional dance and its other related aspects and then should present it in terms of modern concept of recomposing and rechoreographing it, keeping the original form and spirit intact. Such creative work within the tradition will enrich and strengthen the old classical tradition.

## Folk- Dances of Arunachal Pradesh

NIRANJAN SARKAR

**D**ance in India has variegated forms, It is like a necklace composed of beads of varied hues, shapes and sizes. Dance in Arunachal Pradesh is only one of those beads, the totality of which makes the heritage of this art in India.

Dance is the stylised rhythmic movement of any or all parts of the body to express some emotions, ideas or to narrate a story. When a dance is accompanied by significant gestures and attempts the narration of a series of events, it becomes pantomime.

family, village or the whole community. The second sub-group comprises of those dances performed in ceremonies related to agriculture and domestication of animals to secure a good harvest and increase of domestic animals respectively. The third sub-group is associated with the funeral ceremony when the soul is guided by the priest (t') its abode in the land of the dead and to prevent it from haunting its old residence. It is generally believed that if the soul returns to its old home, the bereaved family suffers diseases and



The dances, performed by the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, have been broadly divided into four groups. The first group is the ritual dances which form part of a ritual. This group may again be divided into five sub-groups. The first sub-group includes those dances which form part of the various rituals performed to secure prosperity, good health and happiness of the dancer, his

deaths. The fourth sub-group consists of the fertility dances. These are magical in the sense that the imitation of the movements of coition is believed to promote fertility. War-dances make the fifth sub-group, which are on the decline with the stoppage of internecine feuds and raids. In the old days, when an expeditionary party was successful in killing



an enemy or more, the victors used to perform a ceremony on return, so that the spirit of the slain could do no harm to the slayer. Only among the Idu Mishmis, the victim's family also used to perform rites praying for success in taking vengeance. Dance formed a part of this ceremony. Some of the tribes still perform this ceremony with the dance, when a tiger is killed. Its purpose is to prevent the spirit of the tiger from harming the slayer. The war-dance used to be prevalent among almost all the non-Buddhist tribes.

The second group is the festival-dance which forms the recreational part of a particular festival. The third group is the recreational dances which do not form part of any particular festival or ritual. These are performed on occasions which inspire its participants to express their mirth through these dances. The fourth group is the pantomimes and dance-dramas which narrate a mythical story or illustrated a moral. So, these are educative in purpose. The Buddhist tribes have a large repertory of these.

### **The Tangsa Dances**

Long long ago, the Tangsas did not have any dance. A man was returning from his field when he heard a tremendous noise inside the jungle he was passing through. He became inquisitive and stealthily approached the spot. There he saw a big assemblage of monkeys performing a dance

in an open place. He was enchanted by the dance and marked it in all its details. On his return to the village, he told the villagers of the marvel he had seen in the jungle. The villagers also organised a dance-party and performed a dance imitating the movements of the monkeys and that was how they learned dancing. The Tangsas do not have any special costumes for dance, but wear their usual



dress. Men wear a check lungi and a shirt or banian ; women, a skirt and a blouse. Some of them have a scarf also, A few may have a turban. Several sub-tribes (Jogli, Lungri, Moshang, Longphi, Kimchin, Lang-shing, Tolim, Morang, Rongang, Tikhak, Yangkuk and Sangbal) of the Tangsas used to perform the Khatang ceremony in which the worship was accompanied by human sacrifice. In that ceremony, they used to perform dance and the drum was played in accompaniment. With the advent of administration in this area, this ceremony is no longer practised

and along with it has gone the drum as a musical instrument. They believe that the playing of the drum was part of the ceremony. That being so, if they play the drum without performing the ceremony itself the deities may be vexed and may afflict them with trouble in the form of disease and death. Four sub-tribes (Longchang, Ponthai, Saban and Moglum), which never performed the Khatang ceremony, however, use the drum in the dances of the Mol festival. The only other musical instrument, played by all the sub-tribes, is the going.

They do not like to perform dances out of season but only during the appropriate festivals as they think that such performance may enrage the deities who may as a consequence make them suffer from some calamities. The war-dance and the dance in connection with the Khatang ceremony are no longer performed.

#### **Kukjong Festival and Dance**

This festival is celebrated by eight sub-tribes (Lungri, Moshang, Longphi, Kimchin, Tolim, Morang and Sangbal) in the month of December-: January. They start clearing the jungle for cultivation after the festival, which lasts six days. On the first day, all the able bodied men of the village, go out on a community hunt. They return on the third day and the bag is equally shared excepting the headman, who is allotted a larger share. The women prepare large quantities of beer. At night, a grand feast of meat and beer is followed by dance. The feast continues on the fourth and fifth days followed by dancing at night. They abstain from work on the sixth day. The clearing of jungle is taken up from the

seventh day.

All, men and women, youth and adult, go round all the houses in the village where they , dance and sing in a circle round the hearth. The movements are the same as that of the main circular movement of the Sapoloro dances of the Champhang festival. There is no special costume for the occasion and no musical instrument is played.

#### **The Wancho Dances**

The Wanchos do not have any myth about the origin of the dance. They perform the dances only during the appropriate occasions. They do not have any dance which can be performed now and then simply for merriment. There is no formal training, but in each dance, children of even six or seven years old join. They learn the movements by imitating those of the elders. No musical instrument is played to the accompaniment of the dances.

#### **Ozele Festival and Dance**

This festival is celebrated in February-March after the sowing of millet. It lasts for four days as was observed in Longkhau village. The dance is performed from about 9p.m. to 11 p.m. inside the chief's house. Among the male-folk-, boys, youths and adults take part while among women, only girls and these young married women who have not yet got an issue and have not joined the husband's family, take part in the dance. The dancers, dressed in their fineries, stand in a circle, surrounding a bonfire. The girls stand on one side of the circle holding each other's hands. The male dancers hold a sword in the right hand and



most of them place the left hand over the shoulder of the dancer to the left. The male dancers start singing when all take a short step with the right foot to the right, flex the knees with an accompanying forward swing of the sword and gently bring the left foot up to the heel of the right one. They repeat this sequence of movements. When the singing of the male-dancers, ends, which is generally on the eighth or ninth step, all stamp their right foot once on the ground. The female dancers take up the singing in reply. They stamp the right foot twice on the ground during their turn of singing, once generally in the fourth step and the next at the end of the singing which generally falls on the ninth step. Again the male dancers take up the singing and thus the dance continues .

All the male dancers have a cane basket hanging at the waist over the buttocks. The basket is decorated with coloured straw tassels, monkey skulls or wild boar's tushes. The straw tassels of the baskets are decorated with coloured beads. The straps of some of the baskets are decorated with white conch-shell-discs. Each basket has a bell fitted at its bottom. The tinkling of so many bells is the only musical sound. All have anklets of straw and girdles of one or two loops of red cane or of bands of cowries or beads just below the knee. The boys and a few youths are naked but others wear a loin-cloth which is white or light blue in colour with two red stripes at the ends decorated with small beads of different colours. This loin-cloth is tucked in position with a cane waist-band which is about six inches broad ...

The armlets are either of ivory, brass or red cane loops. The handle of the sword is decorated with coloured goat's hair. All wear some bead necklaces. Some wear necklaces of coins. The ear decorations are tufts of red woollen threads or ear-plugs of wild goat's horn or ear-plug decorated with red seeds. Some have head-dresses made of bamboo, silver-shaped in a cone and decorated with horn-bill feathers. Some have red cane head-dresses decorated with wild boar's rushes, The hair up to the middle of the crown is brought forward and cut so that the fringe reaches just up to the top of the forehead while the hair of the back is kept long and tucked round a red or yellow coloured rectangular piece of wood, called the *khapak*, Some of these *khapak's* are studded with small pieces of glass while some are decorated with carvings of the human figure or human skull or with a tuft of coloured goat's hair. The sides of the head are shaven.

The girls of the Wangham and Wangcha groups keep the hair long arranged in a tress, but the girls of the Wangpen group have their hair cropped. Some of the girls have head-dresses made of palm-leaf shaped into a cone and some of these head-dresses are decorated with feathers. They also wear ear-rings. The upper portion of the ear-lobe has one small red slick pierced through it and projecting like a horn. The neck and breast are covered with a profusion of bead-necklaces of different colours. The hand is covered completely with metal bangles and armlets. A few have coloured rugs mostly red while others have a white cloth wrapped round the waist.

On the back dangles a bunch of small metal bells, tinkling all the time and also a longitudinally halved conch - shell.

### **The Idu Mishmi Dances**

The Idu Mishmis have a ritual-dance and a fertility-dance. The ritual-dance is performed by the priest or



priestess in the ceremonies of Ai-ah, Ai-ih, Mesalah and Rren. The fertility dance is performed on the last day of the Rren ceremony.

### **The Ritual Dance**

There is no definite myth about the origin of this dance. According to local tradition, the first priest who officiated in a funeral ceremony was Chineuhu and his brother, Ajjiuh, was the first priest who officiated in the other three ceremonies in which this dance forms a part. As this dance *is* associated with the priestly office only, these two brothers may be said to be the originators of this dance.

Besides the priest, there are three or, occasionally, four other dancers who are selected from amongst the spectators. In addition to the usual dress which consists of a loin-cloth a short-sleeved coat, and a sword slung on the right side, a leather bag slung on the left side and a few bead-

necklaces, the priest wears a few other articles. These articles are an apron with particular designs, a head-band decorated with two or three rows of cowries, a necklace studded with the teeth of tiger and bear and a few metal bells. A priestess wears these special articles in addition to the usual Mishmi woman's dress of a skirt, a long sleeved coat and bead-necklaces. The priestess is generally accompanied by female dancers. The accompanying dancers wear the usual dress.

The dancers stand in a line, the priest is second either from the right or left. During the dance, one dancer standing at one end of the line plays a small drum slung from his neck. The priest and the other two dancers play a very small semi-globular single-membrane drum, striking it with a bamboo-stick which is kept tied to the drum with a string. The fifth dancer, if any, plays a horn bugle. When there are five dancers, the priest stands in the middle of the line.

He sings a line of invocatory song while all the others play the musical instruments, flex the knees bobbing up and down and alternately raise the right and left heels and stamp these on the ground in time to the drum-beats. When the priest finishes singing the line, others repeat it in chorus. Again the priest sings another line of the song which the others repeat in chorus and thus it goes on.

After a prelude of flexing of knees and stamping of heels, they place one foot forward and immediately bring the other up beside it. If in the first step' the right foot is taken forward, then in the next step it is the left one. After each step, they flex the knees. Thus, they dance forward to the accompaniment of drum-beats and invocatory song. When they have danced forward for some distance, they dance backward with the same movement. Thus they dance moving forward and backward.

Sometimes they break away from the line formation and the four dancers standing in the four corners sing an invocatory song, play the musical instruments and dance flexing the knees and raising the right and left heel alternately and stamping these on the ground. Now and then they change positions dancing all the time but facing inward. Sometimes they dance in a circle following one another with tripping steps.

In another movement, they dance sideways either in a clockwise or anti-clockwise direction. They stand in a semi-circle and in the anti-clockwise movement, they take one step with the right foot to the right and immediately bring the left foot beside the right one. Thus they dance in a circle,

flexing the knees after each step.

The movements of the dance are known to all. Whenever or wherever there is the ritual dance, three or four persons act as the accompanying dancers. If anyone of the accompanying dancers is not sure of the next movement, he keeps a close watch on the movement of the priest and imitates him. Thus, by imitating the movement of a priest, he learns it.

The priest does not demand any money for his priestly services, but the performer usually remunerates him according to his ability. The payment generally ranges from two to five rupees in the ceremonies of Mesalah and Ai-ih, from thirty to fifty rupees in the Ai-ah ceremony while in the Rren ceremony it ranges from sixty to one hundred rupees, in addition to ten seers of rice and a quantity of beer. The remuneration may also be paid in kind e.g., with handloom coat, brass utensils or pigs. The dancers accompanying the priest do not receive anything.

The parents of a new-born baby have to observe ten days' taboo, during which they do not take part in any social function and so in dance also. The taboo for death is five days and that is to be observed by all the members of a bereaved family. A priestess can officiate in any ceremony or conduct a dance when she is in her menses, if she thinks herself fit. If a man consumes the meat of a jungle animal, he cannot join in any social function for five days. A priest in such circumstances refrains from officiating in any ceremony for five days and others, likewise, do not take part in ceremonial dances during the period.

Women do not take pork, chicken, beef or the meat of jungle animals, except the porcupine and jungle- mouse. So this taboo has little relevance to them.

### Digaru Mishmi Dances

The Digaru Mishmis have no myth about the origin of the dance. They have two types of dances called Buiya and Nuiya. The Buiya dance has two types of movements and it is performed for entertainment while the Nuiya is a ritual-dance performed by a priest.

### Buiya Dance

This dance is performed on any festive occasion like the Duiya, Tazampu and Tanuya festivals which are performed for the prosperity and good health of the performer and his household. The Duiya is the biggest and costliest of these three festivals. It is performed for propitiating the god called Ring. The Tazampu which is smaller than the Duiya festival is performed in honour of the god Jobmalu, who is lower in rank than Ring in the Digaru pantheon. The Tanuya which is the smallest of these three festivals is performed for propitiating the god Jumdummeih. All these three festivals are performed by individual households. Mithuns or pigs are slaughtered and an enormous quantity of beer is brewed for the entertainment of the villagers and other invitees. This dance may also be performed after a feast arranged by a family to entertain the fellow villagers who co-operate with it in opening a new field.

The dance is performed in the passage which runs along one side of the house from the front to the rear. Men and women

take part in this dance. There is no limit to the age of the dancers although generally children and old persons do not take active part in the dance itself but merely sit by as spectators. There is no special costume for this dance, so they perform this dance wearing their usual dress. The male dancer wears a loin-cloth a sleeveless jacket, a turban and ear-rings. The female- dancer wears a blouse, a long skirt reaching down



to the ankle with a short one wrapped over it and a side-bag on the left side. They wear necklaces, large silver-ear-plugs and a silver fillet with its strap studded with coins or cowries.

The dancers stand in a line, one behind the other, in the passage. One of the dancers plays a drum while another plays a gong. Cymbals are played, if available, by another dancer. Keeping time to the

beats of the drum, gong and cymbals, the dancers take one step forward with the right foot, then gently bring the left foot up to the heel of the right one gracefully flexing the knees. Next, they take one step forward with the left foot, bring the right foot up to the heel of the left one flexing the knees as before. They dance forward repeating this sequence of movements till they reach the rear of the passage when they turn back and dance up the passage with the same sequence of movements. Thus they dance up and down the passage of the house. They may or may not sing to the accompaniment of the dance. When they sing a song, it may be solo or in chorus.

There is another movement when they dance with skipping steps but with no accompanying song. The skipping steps of the female-dancers are lower and graceful while those of the male-dancers are higher and more vigorous.

The dancers get no remuneration. There is no formal training but they learn the dance movements by imitating those of the elders. In case of death, the near kins do not take part in dance till the funeral ceremony is performed. The women under menstruation do not take part in the dance. The parents have to observe a taboo for eleven and ten days for the birth of a son and a daughter respectively, when they cannot take part in dance.

### **The Khampti Dances**

The Khamptis, who are Buddhists, have no myth about the origin of the dance. They have many dance-dramas through which they unfold some stories or depict mythical

events bearing ethical lessons. These dramas are generally staged during the religious festivals of Potwah, Sankian or Khamsang, constituting the entertainment part of the festivals. If the youths are resourceful enough and have a liking, they may organise a drama on any occasion. The musical instruments, played to the accompaniment of these dramas, are the drum, gong, cymbals and flute.

The Khamptis observe some religious rites and practices called the Nawah for three months during the rainy season. During this period, they lead a life of sober restraint. They abstain from taking intoxicating drinks. They do not kill any living being nor do they join in any entertainment. The older people engage themselves in prayers and in reading the scriptures. They also pay periodical visits to the monastery where they make oblations to Lord Buddha. The religious observance on the last day of the Nawah is called Potwah. It is followed by a period of about a week devoted to merry-making during which a drama is staged.

The Sankian festival is celebrated in April-May and involves the ritual of pouring water on the head of the image of Buddha in the monastery.

There are three stages through which the novices have to pass before they attain monk-hood. In the first stage, the novices are called Kapi. When they attain a certain standard of religious scholarship, they pass on to the middle stage when they are called Chousang and then to the final stage when they are called Cham an. The Khamsang festival is observed at the time when the novices pass from the Kapi to the



Ohousang stage. It is generally observed every third year. But it may vary at the discretion of the head-monk.

The dance is called *ka* and the dance-drama is called *kapung* (*ka*-dance; *pung*-story) and actually means a story depicted through the dance. There are always a few aged persons who were good dancers in their youth and their help is sought at the rehearsal of a play- help which they give freely. The rehearsal of a drama starts about one month before a festival. This may be done in the monastery or in any house of their choice. At the time of the rehearsal which is generally done after dusk, they do not wear the costumes. The well-to-do villagers invite the drama-party when the drama is staged in the front courtyard or in some suitable open space near their house. Women do not take part in the drama. "The female role, if any, is played by a man in woman costume. After the performance, the party is given a remuneration of seven, fourteen, twenty-eight or forty-two rupees-always an amount divisible by seven. They purchase with this money the costumes and masks used in the dramas. The surplus, if any, is shared by the members of the drama party. If death has occurred in the house of a member of the drama party, he cannot take part in a

drama until the funeral rites have been performed.

### Ka Fifai Dance-Drama

The Ka Fifai drama is woven round the theme of the traditional belief that ghosts appear and kidnap girls or men and trouble them.

The participants 111 the drama consist of a man, his daughter who is kidnapped, the ghost who does the kidnapping, the Ministers of the State who make preparations for war against the ghost, the King of the stage in which the girl's father is a subject, and the king's men who go out to capture the ghost. The drama opens with a man and his daughter walking in



the garden. The ghost appears and captures the girl, and immediately the man greatly aggrieved rushes to the king's court to inform him of the incident and to beseech him to rescue his daughter. The king's anger is aroused at this news and he calls for his Ministers and asks them to prepare for war. The King's men go in search of the ghost and bring him before the king, who severely warns him never to do such a thing again. The ghost frightened bows before the king and with this ends the drama.

## ASSAMESE DANCE

PRADEEP CHALIHA

### Ojapali and Devadasi Dance

The heritage of classical dance in Assam is of remote origin. There is an intimate relationship between this style of dancing and the theory as propounded in Sanskrit treatises on Dances of India. These classical forms of Assamese dances are divided into many forms such as the Ojapali, Devadasi, Shri Shankari dance etc. Here I am giving short notes on two forms of the old Assamese dances, namely, the Oja-Pali and the Devadasi dance.

The "Marga Nritya" or the classical dance of Assam dates back to the age of the Mahakavyas.

The well-known Chinese pilgrim, Huen-Tsang, who paid his historic visit to

Kamrupa, that is ancient Assam, during the regime of King Bhaskar Varma in the 7th century A.D. had referred to the dance which prevailed at that time.

The existence of "Dalutragana" that is a temple danseuse or devadasi was distinctly mentioned in the copper plate of King Shri Vanamala Varma, who ruled in 9th century.

In Assamese dances, Hastas (hand gestures), Shirokarma (movement of the head), Padachari (foot-work), Karana (Posture), etc. are performed after the manner of Natya Shastra or Sanskrit treatises on dance. The foot-work in an Assamese classical dance is extremely intricate and is called "Gati" or "Bulan". It always reflects the theme of the dance in its infinite variation, speed and pattern.



There are "Hasti Bulan", i.e., the slow majestic steps of the elephant, "Ghora Bulan", i.e., the swift galloping steps of the horse, "Maira Bulan", i.e., the majestic



steps of a peacock and so on.

The dancer playing the role of the King moves his feet in a majestic grace. The sages move their feet in a way expressive of their being in meditation. The youthful princes move with rhythmic grace and a warrior moves in quick strides.

There are several kinds of "Karanas" or "Bhanges", i.e., poses of the body in an Assamese dance. They are expressive of meaning and require to be mastered by long practice. Those postures of the body accompany the movements of the head, neck, eyes and feet. The mastery of the

movements is a matter of long practice under expert guidance.

The hand gesture is called "Hasta", commonly known as Mudras. They are performed either with a single hand (Asanguta Hasta) or with both the hands (Sanjuta Hasta). Those gestures that are expressive of meaning are called "Shree Hastas" and those performed only for the sake of beauty and rhythm are called "Nritta Hastas". The combination of all the Hastas will be nearly one hundred.

### Ojapali

Ojapali dance is a prominent form of Assamese dance, and in this form, song predominates. Only small cymbals called "Khuti Talas" provide the musical



accompaniment to songs. The Oja (Sanskrit Upadhyaya) who is the leader of the chorus and an expert in dance, dances with a song on his lips and dramatic movements of the body. Emphasis is laid on the Hastas or Mudras. His companions known as "Pali" (Sanskrit Palita) i.e., assistants repeat the



song following the master closely. The "Oja" expresses the meaning of the song with synchronised movements of the hand, eyes, neck, head and feet. There are three kinds of Ojapali dances, namely-Vyasageet Oja", "Suknarayani Oja" and "Ramayani Oja".

### **Vyasageet Ojapali**

The Ojapali of Vyasageet mainly sings the songs of the Vaishnava cult. Here, the themes of the dances are adopted from the stories from "Bhagavata", "Mahabharata" and "Hari- vamsa". The make-up of a Vyasa Oja differs from that of a Suknarayani Oja. The Vyasa Oja wears a long white skirt, a tight-fitting jacket, a turban of a particular shape, anklets and various other gold ornaments of the neck, hand and ear.

### **Suknarayani Ojapali**

The other Oja named Suknarayani chants mainly the hymns of the snake goddess, Manasa composed by Sukabi Narayan Dev, an Assamese poet of the olden days. The theme of the dance is the story of "Behula and Lakhindar" which is mainly connected with goddess Manasa. The costume of this kind of Oja consists of a long shirt known as "Chapkan". a white "Dhoti", a chaddur, a pointed turban, and various gold ornaments of the wrist, neck and ears.

### **Ramayani Oja**

The third variety of Oja, Ramayani Oja, puts the costume akin to Vyasa Oja, and sings only the songs from the Ramayana. Unfortunately, this kind of Ramayani Ojapali is disappearing slowly. All the three kinds

of Ojapali dances have reached exquisite perfection in Karana, i.e., posture and Angahaara, i.e., gesture.

Another kind of Assamese dance is "Nati" dance of devadasis. This dance is performed by the devadasis or professional female dancers attached to the temple. This devadasi dance was mainly performed in Shiva temples such as the Parihareswar Shiva Temple at Dubi, Biswanath Shiva Temple at Biswanatha, (near Tezpur), the Shiva Temple at Dergoang near Golaghat etc. Nati dance was performed at only one Vishnu temple of Hayagriva Madhaba at Hajo near Gauhati. Nati dance at any other Vishnu temple of Assam is not known. Unfortunately devadasi dance tradition is now becoming a thing of the past. The devadasis lead a virgin life. Their costume is exquisitely designed and artistic.

The devadasis of Assam dress their hair in coiffure at the top of the head and adorn it with flowers and put a thin veil over it. They wear a long skirt reaching down to the ankle and a blouse with long sleeves. A long shawl known as "Riha" is put tightly over the breast. One peculiar and striking aspect of this devadasi dance is the performing of swift somersaults in the middle of a dance by the devadasis. This practice is not seen in any other traditional school of Indian dance. This devadasi dance is accompanied by music with mridanga and mandira.

There are both the slow and the swift movements in rhythm. There is a delicate and rhythmic blending of the Tandava and Lasya elements in Assamese dance.

## Waiting In the Wing

USHA JHA

**N**ot very long ago, I had ambitions of becoming a professional dancer. I spent hours at the feet of my *guru*. I even went aggressively vegetarian. But my debut as a professional dispelled all my illusions about my calling in life. Our little troupe, which consisted of two dancers, my *guru* and our orchestra of three, was invited to Lucknow. Starry-eyed, I signed my first contract-for a substantial sum plus a stay at Lucknow's top hotel, travel expenses (by air, of course) and all that.

"Go ahead and order what you want-it's all on the house!" we (the other dancer was a French girl studying *Odissi*) said grandly to our musicians. They took us at our word. There were press interviews, flowers in the room, a car at our disposal. "Ah, the life of a *prima donna!*" I mused relaxing in the only air-conditioned room that Lucknow's "best" hotel could offer.

The show was tremendous! A huge packed hall, applause, garlands, speeches, more garlands. Success! We were reeling under its impact. It was all too heady. "Now off with the grease paint!" called out our sponsor. "We are all having dinner together. And, of course, the payments and things", he muttered into his collar, getting typically coy at the mention of money.

He bowed and smiled his way out of the green room, and that was the last we saw of him. We waited for several hours, *sans*

grease paint, getting more tired and hungry by the minute. When we finally returned to our hotel, the Manager didn't think all this was very funny at all. Nor did the rest of the troupe. Finally, after a sleepless night, the French girl and I sneaked out early in the morning leaving my unsuspecting *guru* and the musicians as hostages, until we got to Delhi and were able to cable some money to the hotel to set them free.

Instead of opening the road to riches, my entry into the big, bad world of professionalism set me bad by Rs. 2,500. Somehow the spotlights have never looked so bright and beckoning to me since. But I didn't know then that, even at this price, I was one of the lucky ones. At least I had had the bouquets and the press reviews. Other young hopefuls spend their money and don't even get a chance to dance.

### Dancing As a Career

To settle on dancing as a full-time career today requires grit, especially if it is to be the only means of earning one's bread and butter. We have from the younger generation, Yamini Krishnamurti, who has climbed the peaks of her profession. Yamini has made many sacrifices and her devotion, her *sadhana* has been total. In financial terms, these have paid off; today she can set her price and be sure of getting it.

But how many other younger dancers have reached this level so far? They can be



counted on the fingers of one's hands. Birju Maharaj (if you stretch the "young" a bit) and Roshan Kumari in *Kathak*, Padma Subrahmanyam from Madras who dances Bharatanatyam and, perhaps, one or two others have now gained a secure place in the audience's affections. For each one of them, however, there are a dozen others, with as much training and imbued with the same high ideals, who lurk like shadows in the wings of the dance-world, waiting for a chance to release their energy in one frenetic burst at some music and dance

with their own enthusiasm. I was told by a friend running a fashionable Dance Academy in New Delhi that most of the students there are literally marking time before getting married. Apparently, classical dancing adds "a vital new dimension to one's matrimonial potential!"

### Opens Many Doors

Full 25 years after Independence, the stigma cast on classical dance by the Victorian values of the first generation of Indians has worn off. Matrimonial ads now carry the legend: "Well versed in culture and dance."

Another reason why some young girls take dance lessons is that it is a pleasant way of knocking off adipose fat—a *guru* at the Triveni Kala Sangam in Delhi once told me!

Then, dancing can also open the door to the film world. Ever, since Vyjayanthimala burst through the doors to



jamboree, or at a semi-private full-length performance before retreating once again into the limbo of hopeful inactivity. This sad state of affairs is all the more surprising because today dancing is the rage among the daughters of the bourgeoisie. Young girls take to classical dancing for a startling variety of reasons—, most of which poor Nandi-keswara could hardly have dreamt of. Their interest is usually sparked by parents who infuse (inflict?) their daughters

stardom, followed more recently by Hema Malini, dozens of star-struck teenagers, particularly in Bombay, have been practising their "bhangis" and "chakkars" with a new devotion. Gopi Krishna, a *Kathak* dancer who has taken part in more than one film, has a large number of hopefuls in his school; one of them, Padma Khanna, is today a dancing "star" (*Johnny Mere Naam*) who owes more to the fact that she can contort her *Kathak* to suit the whims of

the director than to the purity of her *tatkars* and *tihais*.

Out of every hundred such Sunday dancers emerges one utterly serious student whose personal, environmentally and parental interest has led her to seek in dance, not a pleasant diversion, but an intensely persona means of expressing her creative urge. For her, the greatest hurdle of all is to find a good *guru*. There are so many not-so-good ones who have it all worked out-the way to affluence, They start a girl off with group lessons in the general class. A few months in this unwieldy group and the student feels or her parents feel she is getting nowhere and she soon settles for private lessons-the nearest thing to a *guru-sishya parampara* at a minimum of Rs. 150 for twice-a-week sessions. Dancing, of course, is a supplement to a "good convent education" which this class of parent has to afford. So between curricular and extra-curricular, the family should be prepared to set aside Rs. 250 in nurturing this young talent. To ask how many can afford this would be purely rhetorical.

### Publicly Launched

Then comes the *arangetram* day, when our young hopeful is quite literally launched on to the public stage. Traditionally, the *arangetram* was a simple, dignified, almost religious ceremony presided over by the deity, the *guru* and a small audience of learned pandits who came to assess the pupil. Today's *arangetram*, like today's marriage, is a different matter altogether. The hall is usually air-conditioned. The pandits in the front row are usually

politicians, film-stars, diplomats (an invitation to even a minor Third Secretary may yield a bonanza in the form of an invitation to dance abroad) and other office-bearers of various Sanghs. The lesser pandity is made up of community bhais and *bouffanted* socialites. The last thing they are likely to have in common is a love (let alone knowledge) of classical dance.

And such *arangetrams* cost the dotting parent dear. In a city like Bcmbay, the damage can amount to anything from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 12,000 or even more. It must be said also that there are very few *gurus*, however traditional they may be and howsoever pristine their style, who are averse to this form of ostentation. A breakup of costs in a typical *arangetram* would go like this [in 1972]:

Hall:	Rs. 350 to Rs. 850
Brochure:	Rs. 500
Invitations:	Rs. 300
Orchestra:	Rs. 400-Rs. 500
Costumes:	Rs. 800
Taxi fares:	Rs. 50-Rs. 100
Jewellery:	Rs. 1,500

Of course the smart thing to do is to cover the cost by soliciting advertisements for the brochure. If the dancer can find a regular registered society to sponsor her debut, so much the better. But not so many societies or business-houses are itching to launch new dancers. So the parents are forced somehow to scrape together enough to meet these expenses. Many are undoubtedly buoyed by the hope that their daughter will rake it all back in once her career blossoms.

But more often than not, the flower is nipped in the bud by an early frost. If a dancer has some influential connections, something in the form of a benefit performance or a charity recital can be organised. After several such performances in which the dancer or her poor parents go from door to door selling tickets, soliciting advertisements and being nice to new editors and critics, the big moment comes—some small society in an out-station mofussil hears of her by some strange word-of-mouth osmosis and tracks her down. But the dancer's travails are far from over. She has found a platform—but to dance there she will have to spend more money. The typical small society may offer a tidy Rs. 250 and transport. She knows that this is exploitation, but what can she do—a performer has to perform. She needs a platform and an audience. The Rs. 250 may just about manage to cover the fees of her vocalist and her drummer. For the rest—the dance leader (*Nattuvanar*), who is usually her *guru*, and the instrumentalist, for her dresses, her hotel and her food (not to mention the orchestra, her parents must pay. And so it goes, on and on. Soon the parents realise that they are chained inexorably to a financial tread-mill. "Is this what I scraped and scrounged for? How much longer can we payout of our pockets to keep our daughter performing?" Indira Pillai's father used to ask.

### Regional Sentiments

A true lover of the dance, he had given her the best training in the Tanjore style of *Bharatanatyam*. He had taken a house in Tanjore (the family comes from Kerala) just in order that his daughter may drink

at the fountain-head of *Bharatanatyam*. After years of training and a number of performances in Tanjore, he took the bold leap into the unknown—he brought Indira to Delhi, the centre of the Sangeet Natak Academy. At Sapru House, critics and savants cheered her. Here was unquestioned talent—a big future lay ahead, they said. One never heard of her again except in the odd report in the local papers of an Onam Day celebration at some small college. Then I saw her face staring out of a Malayalam film-poster. Her father had died and Indira had been forced to abandon the lyrical graceful *narya* of Tanjore for a more lucrative but less aesthetic form on celluloid in her Home State.

I deliberately mention "Home State" because regional chauvinism is nowhere as rampant as in the dance-world. *Bharatanatyam* is the preserve of the South: "What Bharatanatyam can someone from outside Madras or Andhra do?", the Secretary of a leading Bombay Sabha asked me in a matter-of-fact way. An official of the Sangeet Natak Academy once told me that when in 1968, a non-Oriya exponent of *Odissi* was sent on a cultural delegation, a leading exponent of *Odissi* from Orissa sent him a letter of protest—only an Oriya can really know what *Odissi* is all about was her plaint.

Yes, Konarak is theirs, Chidarnbaram ours, etc. etc., so it goes on, *ad nauseam*. Can a *Bharatanatyam* dancer from Benares pierce the armour of utter disbelief he encounters in the hallowed Sabhas of Madras? Can a *Kathakali* dancer trained in Baroda be regarded as anything other than quaint, no matter how great his talent, by

the pandits in Trivandrum and Trichur?

Dancer Kamadev from London, who divides his time between Madras and London, say that the sub-divisions are even narrower. A Brahmin Sabha would like to invite a Brahmin dancer, a Mudaliar Sabha would prefer a Mudaliar. He says: "Of course they pay the artist no more than Rs. 250 or Rs. 350". So it is very important for a dancer not only to be born into the right environment, family and society but also the right region. (A favourable caste would also be a great help!) "No dancer can think of making a go of it purely on the strength of his virtuosity in India. I enjoy performing here but, for 'living', I would arrange a full three or four months of chain bookings through a good impresario abroad and take my *guru* and orchestra with me. The rest of the time I would like to teach in London", Kamadev explained.

Most of these problems arose because, like classical music, dance has only recently forsaken the temple and the palace for the public auditorium. And as in the Europe of Mozart and Beethoven, the public concert of festival as an institution is in its infancy. What dance needs is a broad-based impresario system. There are a few in the country who consider themselves impresarios. But most of them are small agents out to make a fast buck rather than to promote a great art. One genuine exception to this rule is Brijnarain of Bombay whose dance and music festivals have become land-marks in Bombay's cultural world. He has made it his mission to give young aspirants a break and organises the *Kal Ke Kalakar* (Tomorrow's Artists) festival every year. He is able to

pay every artist Rs. 300 to Rs. 500 for this festival and, for the public, entrance is free. Of course, singing or dancing at the *Kal Ke Kalakar* festival does not pay. A dancer from, say, Orissa may spend Rs. 1,000 extra on travel and on paying her musicians. But even this small break is, after all, a break.

Brijnarain also runs a major festival in the Swami Haridas Sammelan, to which, as a rule only those who have appeared in *Kal Ke Kalakar* are invited. The payment here is far better. But to make both ends meet, he and the other organisers have to collect advertisements worth Rs. 50,000 each time. And even this is not the end of it. For, the harsh fact is that India's new elite, people who will buy two silk sarees or a case of smuggled whisky without batting an eyelid, would not even think of going to a dance or music recital.

"I was once invited to dance at a conference in Mathura, and the terms were travel fare and food. Being Mathura, the food was fantastic, they assured me, made of *shudh* ghee!" Ritha Devi, who has been in this game for many years, told me, "I turned it down, of course! I prefer eating 'fantastic' food in Bombay in my own house! But they sent me a brochure of the festival and I saw that even on these bizarre terms they had managed to get a dancer, after all. For the young dancer it is an 'investment', so they payout of their pockets-for no *guru* or orchestra would be satisfied with just food cooked in good ghee by way of payment. We have all done this at the beginning, but it rarely pays off. "One has to keep spending out of one's own pocket", she explained.

Then what, in today's dance world, is the way out of this vicious circle? Rajendra Shankar, who is the brother of the great sitarist Ravi Shankar, has done something which I feel is along the right lines. He has brought out a journal for his artists' association, *Sancharini* and allows dancers to advertise in it. The journal is distributed to all universities, music societies, sabhas and the like. He also on a few occasions arranges a chain of bookings for semi artists through his vast and varied contacts. But *Sancharini* charges no money-no impresario's cut! "We do not want to make a business of it. We are only interested in helping artists", he told me. Here was the nearest thing to a regular impresario system-why shouldn't it become more organised?

Another possibility is for the National Centre for the Performing Arts to take a more active part in giving promising young artists a break. Naturally one cannot expect an infant institution to do everything at once, but the patronage of a presiding body like this could be just what young dancers and musicians need. Perhaps the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the Sangeet Natak Academy could also do more to fill the void created by the lack of an impresario system. The precedent set by the famous dancer Indrani Rahman who invites young guest artists to dance at her recitals is laudable



and should be taken up by other senior dancers. But all these organisations will come up against one immovable obstacle: the high cost of arranging a show. The Bhabha Auditorium costs Rs. 1,000 for an evening and a 5 cm. single-column advertisement in *The Times of India* costs around Rs.80. When the only funds allotted to a large State body like U.P.'s Sangeet Natak Academy is just Rs. 58,000, schemes for launching impresarios and young dancers, pension benefits and schemes for old artists, insurance guilds, etc. seem like unadulterated pipe-dreams.

If a dancer breaks her leg and has to stop, it is just very unfortunate Nana Kasar, who is a well-known teacher of Bharatanatyam in Bombay and who has studied under Guru Chockalingam Pillai had a heart-attack. He was forced to suspend classes and *nattuvangam* programmes for a long time. With a large family to support, this is not easy.

### Many Roles of A Dancer

The classical dancer in India plays a remarkable plethora of roles she has perforce to be her own publicist, maintain her bit of public relations: she is her own agent and manager. If after all this she



has enough energy and gift to go on dancing she is indeed remarkable. The dancer may emerge all the more tougher for it but not without a touch of bitterness. "I have spent well over Rs, 45,000 on my daughter's dancing", said the father of the brilliant young dancer Sucheta Bhide. "But I want her to dance only before the right audiences". Sucheta is indeed lucky but there are so many who have had to give up these vigorous standards.

### **Dance Sans Professionalism**

And yet people do dance. They are being churned out of our dance academies, some are sent out armed with degrees, diplomas and certificates; there are universities in India which turn out a regular bunch of graduates every year. The largest casualty is marriage. For the others, the choice is very difficult. To give up one's personal life and sacrifice all for the sake of one's career is indeed a big decision. One respects and appreciates Odissi dancer Sanjukta Panigrahi's success all the more as she is a professional dancer in the true sense of the word. Kanak Rele is another dancer in this category.

"I don't dance for money!" is something several dancers are eager to assure you. Why shouldn't one dance for money? Was one taught gratis? Or docs the image of the *nautch-girl* accepting *salaamis* in silver coins thrown at her, colour our pseudo-professionals?

"It is these very dancers who ruin the chances of our sincere artists", said Guru Kalyanasundaram of the well-known Raja Rajeshwari Bharatanatya Kendra. "When negotiating with an organiser one should

maintain a definite standard of payment. There can be no bargaining of one's artistic values. What happens is that the pseudo-professional hears of the negotiations and promptly contacts the same organiser [or half the price. Even if one does not actually depend on it for one's three meals, there are incidentals-costumes have to be replenished (a single grand Kanjeevaram saree costs upwards of Rs. 400), tailoring, polishing jewels, blouses which get worn out very fast and all this cost money. An Argentinian dancer, Myrta Barvie, who had danced several years in the West and then at Kalakshetra, was shocked at this lack of professionalism: "If you don't need the fees, then throw it out of the window. But take it, insist on it, for the future of other dancers depends on it".

The Government is also doing a great deal to help the artist. It has contributed a very great deal to their social recognition by showering Republic Day honours on them, sending them out on missions abroad, giving scholarships (25 each year for music, dance and drama of Rs. 250 a month), and soon. All this has helped enormously. "If even 5% of these make the grade, it will have been worth the trouble and the expense", explained Dr. Narayana Menon, who has been on the selection committee for years.

But this is not really enough. A lacuna remains to be filled. The dancer needs help in the period between her long years of training and reaching the commanding heights of her profession-if she ever gets there.

# THE RAMAYANA IN INDIAN DANCE AND DANCE-DRAMA

MOHAN KHOKAR

**T**imeless and deathless is the *Ramayana*. And it did not take all these centuries to discover this. The ink had not dried on Valmiki's manuscript, as it were, when the Lord, Brahma, is said to have appeared before him and pronounced:

*As long as in this firm-set land  
The streams shall flow, the mountains  
stand, So long throughout the world, be  
sure, The great Ramayana shall endure.*

Truly prophetic words, but what possibly neither Valmiki nor the Lord reckoned with was the formidable extent to which the *Ramayana* was destined to penetrate and permeate the whole fabric of the moral and cultural life of the people. For, as the passage of centuries has shown, the *Ramayana* has survived not merely as a monument of epic poetry or even as a cherished scripture, each thought of which is enshrined in the minds and hearts of the people, but it has also found or inspired representation in countless forms-translations, regional adaptations of the story, plays on the theme, effusive outpourings of saints and exalted devotees, sculpture, carving, iconography, painting, music, dance and theatre.

## The Two Avatars

The *Ramayana* is one of the most profoundly venerated books. The genesis

of the Rama story can be traced to Vedic times, but it was left to Valmiki to knead the theme into a coherent, integrated narrative and also to impart to it its epic dimension. At the time of writing the *Ramayana*, the motivation was not-religious, for Rama had not yet attained godhood. The cult of Vishnu existed, albeit in embryonic form, in the Vedic period, but it is only from the beginning of the Christian era that Rama came to be recognised as an *avatar*. And as in the course of time did Vaishnavism come to attract more and more people into its fold, so also did the popularity of the Rama faith spread and consolidate its hold.

The bed-rock on which Vaishnavism has built up its vast following is devotionism as implied in the adoration of a personal being coupled *with* complete disregard of ritualism. The *avatars*, all incarnations of Vishnu, are gods super-naturally revealed to man. And of the nine avatars that have so far manifested themselves, the seventh and eighth, that is, Rama and Krishna, respectively, have the strongest hold in popular imagination. Rama represents the epitome of all that is pious and virtuous in life and deed while Krishna is seen for the most part as a playful figure in his early years and as the propounder and exemplar of one of the greatest precepts of devotion and duty in his later life. Both Rama and

Krishna find a dominant place in Indian literature and art.

### Rama Plays

Apparently, the first occasion for the Rama story to be used in histrionic representation is the one cited in the *Harivamsa*. This work, which is regarded as an appendix to the Mahabharata and also accorded the status of an independent *purana*, was written within four to five centuries of the *Ramayana*. This means that even at that remote time, when Sanskrit drama had just taken birth, the enactment of the Rama story was known. The event described in the *Harivamsa* relates to the presentation of a piece from the Rama saga in which the role of Rama is taken by Krishna's son, Pradyumna. What is of consequence to us here is that the description suggests, in no uncertain terms, that the performance was not in the nature of straight drama but of mimetic dance. Our present study, if we may remind ourselves, also concerns the place of the *Ramayana* only in dance and dance-drama.

That there has long been the system of staging Rama plays through a combination of dance and drama is also endorsed by a brief episode in Bhavabhuti's *Uttararama-charita*, of the 8th century A.D., which recounts how, on the request of Valmiki, Bharata Muni himself mounted a piece from the *Ramayana* on the stage, basing the presentation on the canons of dance, drama and music he had evolved and enunciated in his magnum opus, the *Natya Shastra*. Again, though the *Natya Shastra* is silent on the subject of the *Ramayana*, Abhinavagupta's great commentary on the work, the *Abhinavabharati*, while discussing

the techniques of the *ragakavya*, which is a composition rendered through song and gesture by a single performer, gives two examples-the Raghavavijaya and the Marecchavada, both of which are taken from the *Ramayana* theme.

### The Bhakti Movement

The medieval period in North India saw the arrival of the *bhakti* movement, and this straightaway cast its spell on every aspect of life, including art and literature. One line of this movement, spearheaded by Ramananda, a Vaishnava preceptor, gave great impetus to the worship of Rama. And it was a result of this impetus that the celebrated *Ramacharitamanas* of Tulsidas came to be written. Several situations in this work have a distinct dramatic ethos, and there is also a sizeable sprinkling of dialogues right through the poem. This suggests that possibly Tulsidas had in mind the presentation of the work as a spectacle. In any case the most famous of the Rama plays, the Rama Leela, is based on the *Ramacharitamanas*, and this has been regularly staged in North India from practically the time of Tulsidas.

### Suitability of Theme

Rama and Krishna being the two major god-heads of Vaishnavism, the *bhakti* movement too took two directions, one for Rama and the other for Krishna. Like the *Ramayana*, the Krishna theme too came to find an eminent place in the performing arts. It is understandable, in this regard, that Krishna enjoys greater importance in dance, and Rama in drama. One reason for this is that Krishna is himself reputed to be a dancer and an adorable one at that; his

character and temperament lend themselves admirably for interpretation through the dance. Rama on the other hand, is for the most part plain human, and humane, excessively so in fact, and these are hardly qualities to tickle the imagination of spectators. Another reason is that the Krishna story is made up of several little incidents, each of which offers a pithy, self contained episode. excellently suited for presentation as a dance vignette. The Rama story, in turn, is one long series of events, all inextricably linked with each other and not easy to treat in isolation-just the material for theatre in the form of dance-drama or drama.

### A Favourite Theme for Koodiyattam

Of the various forms of classical dance and d a n c e - d r a m a obtaining in India today, the oldest is the Koodiyattam of Kerala. References to this art in literature and chronicles suggest that it was in vogue even as early as 1,500 years ago. At any rate, Koodiyattam is the only form of theatre we have at present that fits in with the concept of the ancient Sanskrit drama. The repertoire of Koodiyattam comprises some two dozen plays, nine of -which are considered particularly important and are the ones commonly staged. Of these nine, four are

on the Ramayana theme: the *Abhishekanataka* and *Pratimanataka*, of Bhasa, the *Ashcharyachoodamani*, of Shaktibhadra, and the *Mahanataka* of Hanuman , The *Ramayana* story is in fact accorded such a pride of place by the Chakkiars, or performers of Koodiyattam, that even in plays that have no bearing on it they invariably find occasion to cleverly induct the *Ramayana* theme into the over all denouement.

### In Assam

Our next form, in terms of evolution, is the Ankia Nat of Assam. This is a variety of dance-drama devised towards the close of the 15th century, by the great Vaishnava saint and reformer, Sankaradeva. He wrote six plays, of which five relate to Krishna and one, the Rama Vijaya, deals with the Rama theme. Also



to Assam belongs the Ojapali tradition, in which a choral group recites episodes from mythology accompanying this with simple gestures and dance. One of the most popular pieces in the Ojapali repertoire is the *Geeti Ramayana* of Durgabara; this work is additionally important for it represents one of the very few compositions which, though soaked in the bhakti of the Vaishnava genre, is written by a poet who

does not profess the Vaishnava faith.

### Ramanattam

In the first half of the 17th century came into existence a form of dance-drama in Kerala, known as the Ramanattam. Actually, this was brought into being as a challenge to another form, the Krishnattam, which then held sway. Both Krishnattam and Ramanattam are composed in eight parts, each suitable for one night's performance. As the name indicates, the Ramanattam concerns itself only with the *Ramayana* theme. After it was created and presented, the style proved so successful that very soon plays modelled after the Ramanattam came to be written on other themes as well. As the art thus no longer confined itself to the Ramayana, it came to be given a new, more apposite name- Kathakali, story-play.

### Other Forms

The Kathakali art has scores of plays, known as *attakathas*, specially written for it. On an overall count it can be said that about a quarter of these pertain to the *Ramayana* theme. Some of the well-known *attakathas*, in this context, are the Ravana Vijayam, Lavanasura Vadham, Bali Vijayam and Seeta Swayamvaram, The Kathakali also gave rise to a form of solo dance, the Ottan Thullal, which was brought into being by a famous poet of Kerala, Kunjan Nambiar, in the first half of the 19th century. Kunjan Nambiar wrote over 60 Thullals, about a quarter of which, such as the *Kartaviryarjuna Vijayam*, *Seeta Swayamvaram* and *Ahalya Moksham* draw their inspiration from the *Ramayana*. Also to Kerala belongs another type of solo

dance, the Mohini Attam, which was created towards the middle of the 19th century, under the patronage of Maharaja Swati Tirunal.



The very first item in a Mohini Attam presentation, the Cholkettu, offers the story of Rama in a nut-shell.

The Bharata Natyam, which is one of our principal classical dances, too carries a good number of items on the Ramayana theme. The songs used in these items, however, were not specifically composed



for the dance but are drawn from the whole range of poetry in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Sanskrit. The *kritis* of Tyagaraja and the *keertanams* of Arunachala Kavi are among the more popular numbers in this category. The scope of the material available in poetry is in fact so vast that fresh pieces are being appropriated by the art all the time. As recent examples of this are the Navarasa *sloka*m from the *Ramakarnamritam* and the Bhavayami *keertanam* of Swati Tirunal. The Bhagavata Mela Nataka, which represents the dance-drama form of Bharata Natyam also carries one play, in its repertoire of twelve on the Rama theme, the Seeta Kalyanam.

The Kathak dance, which centres almost exclusively around the Krishna theme, carries a handful of items on the Ramayana story in its style. Binda Din, whose compositions constitute the bulk of the songs employed for expressional work in Kathak, has written a few pieces pertaining to Rama and Ravana. Though not much in vogue now, the mimetic sequences of Kathak known as Gats, formerly included such themes as Ram Baan, Lav-Kush and Seeta Janani.

The Manipuri dance, too, concerns itself almost wholly with Krishna. However, formerly, during the time of King Garib Nawaz, who ruled in the first half of the 14th century, the Rarnanandi cult of Vaishnavism with Rama as the supreme deity was acknowledged as the State religion and as part of this a *pala*, or dance and music ensemble, was attached to the Palace at Imphal and as compositions this *pala* took songs from the *Ramayana* theme, including some from the *Vaishnava padavali*.

Later, the Ramanandi faith was integrated with the Radha-Krishna cult, and as a consequence of this the *pala* too shifted its allegiance from Rama to Krishna. Another dance which has Krishna as the central character. is the Odissi. In the tradition of this there is nothing on the Rama theme, but, of late, Oriya songs about Rama, from such sources as the Baidehisha Vilasa, have come to be incorporated into the style.

The Kuchipudi of Andhra, is a form of dance-drama that was born in the wake of the bhakti movement in the South. One of the most celebrated plays in this tradition is the Ramanatakam, which was quite commonly staged till about thirty years ago. The Kuchipudi technique also carries items of straight expressional dance known as *sabdams* and some of these pertain to Rama, the best known example of which is the Ramapattabhishekam. Another *sabdam*, the Manduka, describes how the stunning Mandodari emerged from the womb of a frog and later ravished Ravana and became his wife.

Another dance-drama in the classical mould is the Yakshagana, of Karnataka. This gives exhaustive. treatment to the *Ramayana* story. Apart from a series of eight plays that embrace the entire Ramayana theme, there are some twenty other well-known works on the subject, These carry such titles as Ramaswamedha, Ravana vadha, Lava Kusha, Kusha Lava, Subahu Kalaga, Marimukha Kalaga, Panchavati, Bali Sugriva and Athikaya. As in practically all other forms of dance-drama, in Yakshagana, too, there is no play that covers the entire *Ramayana* in a single night. All the plays that there are in the tradition project only

snatches from the monumental saga.

Only one tradition of dance and dance-drama now remains in the list, and that is the Chhau. This has three distinct, though related, aspects one of which belongs to Seraikella, in Bihar. another to Mayurbhanj, in Orissa, and the third to Purulia, in West Bengal. In the Seraikella and Purulia versions all characters wear masks. The *Ramayana* is represented in all three styles, but only in a token way in Seraikella, a little more freely in Mayurbhanj, and very extensively in Purulia. The Seraikella Chhau has just one piece on the Ramayana, the Samudra Sashana, while the Mayurbhanj carries five numbers-Rama Shoka, Jambab, Kumbhakarna, Seeta Vivaha and Lava-Kusa. In the Purulia Chhau, the entire span of the *Ramayana*, beginning with Sindhuni Vadh, or the curse of the blind sage on Dasaratha, and ending 'With Rama's coronation, is covered in nineteen scenes, which are presented in unbroken continuity and in a single night.

The *Ramayana* theme has also found extensive representation in the various traditions of the puppet theatre in India, but as these belong to a different genre they are not within the scope of the present study. The same can be said of the system of dance and dance-drama obtaining in countries that have a cultural affinity with India, such as Burma, Laos, Kampuchea, Thailand and Indonesia.

Coming to our time, that is, from the revival of Indian dance and dance-drama that was ushered in the first quarter of the present century, it is evident that the *Ramayana* story has consistently provided inspiration for new works and new experiments in choreography. Why, the first two plays that Rabindranath Tagore ever wrote for presentation as dance-drama-the Valmiki Pratibha and Kal-Mrigaya, are drawn from the *Ramayana*. The pioneer of the free style in Indian dance, Uday Shankar, presented the whole *Ramayana*, at his centre in Almora, in the form of a huge spectacle in a shadow-play, using human figures. One of his leading pupils, Shanti Bardhan, produced the Ramayana with the dancers adopting movements stylised after the manner of puppets. Other leading choreographers, such as Guru Gopinath, Debendra Shankar, Amala Shankar, Sachin Shankar, Narendra Sharma, Padma Subramaniam and K. Shekharan, have all offered their own versions of the theme. Perhaps the most significant contribution, however, has been made by Rukmini Devi, who has presented the epic story in several parts, in the Bharata Natyam style and with music by some of the top stalwarts in the Karnatak tradition.

We can say it again. Timeless and deathless is the Ramayana. And, so far as its place in the Indian tradition of dance and dance-drama is concerned, if the past is any index of what can be achieved one can be Sure that the future, too, has plenty in store.

## The Art And The Artist

K. S. RAMASWAMI SASTRI

The supreme charm of Bharata Natyam as a classical art is due to a combination of various elements. It combines footwork and finger gestures and harmonious synchronised movements of the neck and head and face and eyes and eyebrows and eyelashes. It combines beauty of pose and movement with charming expression of emotion. It combines intellect and imagination and spiritual charm with pure physical charm. The dance-artist must enter into the spirit of every movement and gesture and look and should not do so in a mechanised and mechanical manner. She must merge her ego in the charm of the dance and its interpretation of emotion. As the great author and art-critic Sylvan Levi says well: "Indian genius produced a new art, which the word *Rasa* summarises and symbolises and which condenses it in one brief formula "the poet does not express but suggests". Suggestion (*dhvani*) and spirituality are the two eyes of the goddess of Bharata Natyam.

Bharata Natyam as it is learnt and rendered in Tamilnadu is a truly classical art in tune with the aesthetic classics in India and especially *with* Bharata's *Natya Sastra*. It is a difficult but fine art and requires intense application in addition to a glowing inauguration and intellectual concentration and spiritual outlook, if it is to be rendered well and express fully the inner spirit of the "Art of Indian Dance". The dancer must

enter the inner spirit of *Atma* of the natural phenomenon or the human personality or the Divine Being that she wants to express by look and gesture and rhythm. She cannot express the soul of a peacock or the soul of a swan by merely arching her neck. She cannot express the soul of a human being by exhibiting merely external peculiarities. Nor can she express the Divine Soul by merely indicating the weapons or the ornaments of a God. She must, when dancing in accordance with *Kriti* (musical piece) enter into the *bhava* (the emotional urge) which is the soul of the song. The excellence of a dance consists in the harmony of soul and heart and head with eye and looks and gestures and bodily movements and rhythmic feet. The dancer must enter into the spirit of the *mudras* and not merely exhibit the *mudras* in a mechanical way. She must weave them into the dance as a supreme poet weaves words into a perfect lyric. She must submerge her egoistic personality in the emotion of the theme. Only then her intuition would become vibrant and active. She must have perfect poise and self-control. Any kind of imbalance and exaggeration would kill the essence of symmetry and harmony which is the soul of the art. Art and artificiality can never go together. She must use costumes and ornaments not in a spirit of tawdry exhibitionism and garish display but in a spirit appropriate and economical selectiveness. By economy I do not mean vulgar cheapness but vigilant aesthetic

economy. She must allow the dominant emotion of the poem or the songs to rise from her soul in a natural way and rejoice in the sunlight of the *bhava* (emotion) or the aesthetic glory of the poem or the song even as the lotus flower rises from the mire and see the sunlight and rejoices in it. She *must* pray to the deities of Song and Dance-Sri Krishna and Sri Nataraja-for their grace. She must be rooted in tradition but must not get buried in it. She must express tradition through originality and originality through tradition. When the divine emotion possesses the dancer and the dancer's emotion possesses the cultured audience and the emotion in dance and originality can be displayed in of the audience possesses the dancer, a perfect work of art will be born. She will receive from the audience in vapour what she gives back to them in a flood. There must thus be a thorough unity of spirit among the musicians and the dancers and the cultured audience. Only then the real *Bharatanatyam Dharma* (the culture of Bharata Natyam) will coincide with *Bharatiya Dharma* (the culture of India) and will grow from more to more without suffering any eclipse or decay or death and will attract the minds and hearts of all at all times and in all climes. That was the essence of Natyam dances in

temples and the dancer must regard the dance-hall also as a temple and the audience as worshippers of the Goddess of Art.

It is important to remember that the realm *abhinaya* is a vast realm in which there is great room for originality and creativeness. The traditional forms from *Alarippu* to *Tillana* have definite contours and cannot be meddled with, though even within the traditional boundaries there is room for the display of originality and creative presentation. Just as there are gamakas

or grace-notes in music there are grace-gestures in dance and originality can be displayed in them. But in the realm of *abhinaya* there is no limit to the songs taken up for presentation and interpretation through dance or to the freedom of the artist to invent new gestures to portray new situations, incidents and ideas. it is wrong to suppose that Bharata

has fixed finally and rigorously in Chapter IX of his work all the finger-gestures in a final and a literary manner. he has nowhere forbidden new symbols and gestures for new ideas. Thus there is as much ample room for the exhibition of *Manodharma* (aesthetic individuality and creativeness) in the art of dance as in the art of music.



## KUCHIPUDI DANCE

V. PATANJALI

A fall-out of the recent cultural explosion is regional chauvinism. Even the very nomenclature of some arts have acquired regional overtones. Protagonists of each art form make vociferous claims of hoary antiquity—and as if it is an attendant feature—sublime artistry. One is inclined to take it all as local patriotism not always backed by an understanding of the tradition and the technique. And indeed, the same degree of ignorance is seen among writers and critics of traditional arts, if authentic accounts of the form are not available in English. In the case of some arts one just does *not* get a standard reference book—may be, those who write do not have first-hand knowledge and knowledgeable persons do not or cannot write.

The case of Kuchipudi (pronounced Koochipoodi) is none too different. The lack of recorded and dependable evidence has made writers spread round thin material to fill newspaper columns or brochure pages.

### Siva Leela Tradition

Like Bharatanatyam, the name of Kuchipudi is modern. No identification of the form's base is possible from its nomenclature. However, if one gets to analyse the style's conventional names, one may get a glimpse of its traditional moorings. In Kuchipudi village, they refer to their art as 'Bhagavata natakam', 'Yakshaganam', 'Bharatam' or



'Bharatanatyam', Veedhi natakam etc. Now, Kuchipudi dance is all these and something more. Kuchipudi may be the Kelika of the classical texts.

A major question is whether Siddhendra Yogi, the patron-saint, was the father of the dance. Or, was his contribution limited to ridding the local rustic dance-form of its angularities and giving it a classical base? It is difficult to accept the suggestion that



the Yogi innovated a form where no tradition of dance existed at all. Tradition has it that a widely popular dance-oriented entertainment form identified as Siva Leela was in existence in parts of the Andhra



region. However, no evidence is available about the form or the content of these dances.

The 13th century work *Basavaparana* of Palakuriki Somanatha talks only of *Perini*, Even *Panditaradhya Charitra* which describes the various dance forms of that time does not mention Siva Leela. According to one oral tradition, items like the Ardhanareeswara performed by the

Kuchipudi Bhagavatulu as *Pagati-vesham* are reminiscent of the ancient Siva Leela tradition. Whether one gives any credence to this or not, it is agreed on all hands that since Veera Saiva cult held an aggressive sway over the entire tract between the 11th and the 13th centuries, the Bhagavata tradition of Kuchipudi might have come into vogue only after 1300 A.D.

### Survival Through the Ages

The *Devadasi* tradition of the 12th and the 13th centuries having degenerated and the folk theatre having lost its lustre, the artists of Kuchipudi might have taken up the task of salvaging the ancient tradition. Into this conducive situation, Siddhendra made his entry with a Vaishnavite ideal and artistic zeal. However, the reference to the Gajapathi kings dating back to 1499 A.D. complicated the problem. An order issued by Pratapa Rudra Deva states that groups of dancers, including the *Telinga batch*, would render *Geeta Govinda* as part of a daily ritual before their family deity at Puri-Lord Jagannatha.

The issue gets further entwined when it is noticed that the tradition of singing and interpreting *Geeta Govinda* had been introduced in the areas bordering Kalinga Desa towards the close of the 13th century. One view is that the dancers chosen for the daily ritual at Puri were from the Srikakulam area. Narayana Teertha, the celebrated composer of *Krishna Leela-Tarangini*, and believed to be the guru of Siddhendra Yogi, who visited Puri on his way back from Varanasi, might have introduced the *Geeta Govinda* tradition of music and dance. *Let me, therefore,*

*humbly put it that attempts at fixing the historicity of the Kuchipudi tradition is an exercise in futility.* Suffice it to say that according to the local tradition, Siddhendra Yogi composed *Parijata-apaharana* as a dance drama (Narayana Teertha is also credited with having written *Parijata-apaharna* as a 'Yakshagana') and made the male members of Brahmin families perform it as a devotional exercise.

The drama also set the tradition for the development of *Kalapams*. Indeed, Siddhendra's work is better known as *Bhama Kalapam*. Authors on dramaturgy in Sanskrit do not appear to be familiar with *Kalapam*; they knew it as 'a poem written in one metre'. *Kalapam* is an innovation on the classical *uparupaka Srigaditam* with accent on presentation of a single *bhava* by means of *nritta* and *nriya*. *Bhama Kalapam* is essentially a dialogue between Satyabhama (Sri Krishna's consort) and her maid Madhavi.

### **Pagati Vesham**

It is said that originally Krishna and Gopika also figured and at the commencement of a performance, Madhavi (Vidushaka) and Gopika entertained the audience with music and dance. With the entry of Krishna, a romantic dialogue ensued between him and Gopika. It developed into a highly philosophical dissertation on *atma-paramatma* relationship, interrupted occasionally by Vidushaka, the jester. This sequence was taken out of *Bhama Kalapam* and fashioned into an independent item known as *Golla Kalapam*. The jester takes the place of Krishna in the dialogue. Again, *Kalapam* led to the evolution of the

Veshakathas which in course of time are believed to have developed into the the *Pagati veshams* performed by the itinerant Kuchipudi artists.

The Kuchipudi fare is based on *Srimad Bhagavata* and the *Ramayana* and is classified under *vachikaabhinaya* (each artiste is required to sing the lyrics which will enable him to get into the emotion easily right from the beginning.) Tile music of Kuchipudi is taken straight from the style of the *bhajana-kootams* of the Andhra villages. No doubt it is lively and sizzling and offers immense potential for variegated rhythmic patterning, but sounds rustic. Kuchipudi has yet to evolve its art music for the dance theatre like the music of Bharatanatyam.

### **Bhama Kalapam**

In technical and procedural aspects, Kuchipudi dramas conform to Bharata's formulation of classical drama. The performers here however, derive scientific sustenance from Nandikeswara's *Abhinaya Darpana*. A performance opens with *Gurustuti* and *Naandi* followed by Poorvaranga consisting of *punyaha vachana*, *Indradhwaja praushta*, *dhoopa*, *deepa*, *pushpanjali* and *ambastava*. All through this prefatory ritual Daruvus (combination of music, movements and mime) are executed creating a scintillating effect.

*Prahlada natakam*, *Rama natakam*, *Usha parinayam*, *Chenchu Lakshmi*, *Sasirekha parinayam*, *Nala charitram*, *Dhruva charitram* and *Tripura* are among the popular dramas in repertory of the Kuchipudi artistes; but the earliest and the most

celebrated work which has been synonymous with the style is *Bhama Kalapam*. It may even be said that the entire infrastructure was developed on the basis of this composition by Siddhendra. *Bhama Kalapam* deals with the famous episode from the *Bhagavata* in which proud Satyabhama insists that Krishna bring to her the celestial *Parijata* plant from Indra's



garden. The play which opens with a lively *Pravesa Daruvu*, employs the *Samvada* and the *Abhinaya daruvus* numbering about 90. Till three-four decades ago, *Bhama Kalapam* was performed on three consecutive nights and Sathyabhama would

remain behind the curtain held by stage attendants throughout the opening night's performance. She throws over the curtain her ornamented plait of hair called 'jada' studded with 27 stars symbolising the constellation, the five-hooded mythical serpent and tiny golden images of the ten *avatars* of Lord Vishnu. The *sutradhara* recites devotional slokas and offers *arati* to the 'jada'. This is called 'jada bharatam'. The curtain-look of Bhama is a kind of challenge that if anyone could excel the performer in artistry, he would cut the plait off in full view of the audience.

In the play, Satyabhama is *swadhina-patika*, *kalahantarita* and *vasakasajjika*, alternately. The eternal oneness of *atma* and *paramatma* is the essence of *Bhama Kalapam*. Presently, there are about a hundred manuscripts of the composition available but it is generally agreed that the text followed by the Kuchipudi performers is not entirely authorised by Siddhendra. The earliest reference to Kuchipudi performance is available in the Machupalli Kaifiyat issued in the year 1502 A.D. It states that Veera Narasimha Raya, the ruler of Vijayanagara, and his consort witnessed a show presented by a visiting group in his palace.

The royalty was impressed by the balanced presentation of *natya dharmi* and *Loka dharmi*. The latter aspect consisted of down to earth interpretation of secular issues. The artistes exposed the misdeeds of the chieftain of the Siddhavatam region Sammeta Guravaraju. In doing this, the performers were only fulfilling Bharata's dictum that theatre must serve as a sugar-coated pill to correct the wrongs in society.

The Kuchipudi performers employ the seven types of *Tandava* with variations of *gati*, *karana* and *chari* and the Desi five-fold *Lasya*. The *pushpanjali* and the *subhaleela* numbers were added to the dramatic proceedings at a later date.

### Bhagavata Mela

The Kuchipudi players were patronised everywhere both by the laymen and the informed and were the honoured guests at many a princely court. After the fall of the Vijayanagar empire, when the Kuchipudi performers reached the Tanjore court, they were received with great admiration. The ruler, Achyutappa Naayak, bestowed a munificent land grant on the artistes. The artistes' colony outside Tanjore known as Melattur (Achyutapuram) soon became a veritable centre of *Bhagavata Meta*. This tradition of staging *Bhagavata Mela Natakams* continues to this day. During the annual Narasimha Jayanti Festival dance-dramas based on the *Bhagavata* and the *Ramayana* are staged for nine nights consecutively.

The Nawab of Golconda, Abul Hasan Tanesha, who was a great patron of art, conferred the title of the Kuchipudi village on the artiste families. In 1763 A.D. two officials of the Nawab, Mosalikanti Ramojipantulu and Kandregula Jogipantulu, executed the deed in favour of the families-Vedantam, Vempati, Bhagavatula, Pasumarti, Josyula, Mahankali and Eleswarapu. From this, we come to know the families traditionally devoted to the art form. And perhaps as a return gesture, the dancers included *salam jatis*, formal salutations, like *salaamu*, *dhissalaamu* and

*diddhissallaamu*.

### Limited Repertoire

The need had already been felt for quantitative as well as qualitative development of the repertory. Siva Narayana Teertha's lyrical poem in Sanskrit, *Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini*, with its song-ending *sabdams* afforded immense scope for dance depiction. The *Bala Gopala Tarangam* in the raga Mohana with rhythmic *gati* variations of as many as 35 complex types, is one of the many *Tarangams* included in the fare. Jayadeva's *Geeta Govinda*, *padams* of Kshetreyya and other major composers, Dasavatara *nritya*, *sabdams*, *kandardhams*, *tillanas*, etc., were added. (However, *Bhama Kalapam*, *Taranga nrityam*, and *Mandooka* and *Krishna sabdams* continue to be the inevitable numbers on the bill. This, incidentally and unwittingly, prompts people to remark that the repertoire of Kuchipudi is severely limited). With these items, Kuchipudi lost its essential feature of *vachikabhinaya* and the element of drama leaned more more on *nritya* and *nritya* with a pronounced accent on *abhinaya*.

The dramatic themes being mythological, the costumes and make up of Kuchipudi performers had other wordly flavour. Male characters had an elegant *kireetam*, *sankhachakra*, *bhuja-keerti*, *kama paira*, *ganda-bherundapataka*, *dhoti* and *kurta*. Women, particularly, in the role of Satyabhama, had an elaborate *aharya*. There were also body ornaments, *kantha abharana*, big and *small jada*, *sikha*, *ragidi*, *chandravanka*, *surya*, *tamalapaku*, *mogalireku*, *ketaki*, *turayi*, *papatapinji*,



*kamma, cheru, jookalu, kamapatra, tayettu, tajubandu, dandakadiya, pochee kankana, addabasa, billa, molatradu*-the list can be unending. And one can't even identify many of these ornaments today.

The characters of Narasimha, Chaturrnukha Brahma, Sakti, Diti, Hanuman, etc., use masks, locally known as *karaala*.

### Initiation

In the ancient gurukula system, a syllabus for training was unknown. Depending on the mental resources of the student, the teacher would initiate him into new and more complex numbers. The custom has been that a boy of five is taken to the temple of Sri Ramalingeswara and initiated into the *natya-veda* by holding the *patakihasta* and pronouncing *ta.. tai tai ta ttam*. After over five years of grounding in the basics of music and dance, the boy is introduced to the elements of *abhinaya* along with teaching the *panch a kavyas*. Following this seven-year period, the boy is allowed to observe the performance of veterans. He graduates only after successful completion of these exercises. By now, he realises that the oral tradition he has been raised on is much more useful and dependable than the rules written in the texts. Indeed, this was what was emphasised by Bharata and Nandikeswara.

### Origin of the Style

Coming to the complex issue of the distinctiveness of Kuchipudi as a dance style, it is rather difficult for one to emerge unscathed. When all the classical dances in the country swear by the *Natya Sastra*,

it would be futile to try to establish any distinctive feature for any of our dance styles. However, the social, cultural and political histories of the regions concerned as well as the particular commentary on the *Bharata Sastra* followed by each, afforded scope for the cultivation of the dance art according to local genius. Thus, Kuchipudi evolved as a form based on the



*vachikabhinaya* aspect with emphasis on presentation of *sanchari bhavas* along with sprightly foot-work. In other styles, it is one-at-a-time and not simultaneous. Secondly, the *Bhagavata mela natakam* staged in the Kuchipudi Melattur tradition, is the only form that conforms to the detailed description of Bharata's first dance-drama, *Amrita mathana*. And one may even say that the entire *padaabhinaya* tradition of South India, had its origin in



the Kshetreyya *pada-abhinaya* style perfected by the Kuchipudi performers either at home or elsewhere.

### Lack of Patronage

The British ascent to power in the 19th century signalled the decline of indigenous arts in South India. Lack of patronage cost it heavily *in* term of sustenance. The missionary zeal of stalwarts like Vempati Venkatanarayana, fondly referred to as Kaliyuga Satyabhama, Tadepalli Perayya Sastry, Chinta Venkataramayya, Vedantam Lakshminarayana Sastry and others kept the art alive *in* all its traditional purity. However, it was by the artists of the following generation that Kuchipudi as a dance form began to be known outside the confines of Andhra, Vedantham Raghavayya, Vempati Satyam and Chinta Krishnamurthy, were among the outstanding teachers of the art. And Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma emerged as the most gifted portrayer of Satyabhama.



Kuchipudi *is* a popular dance form now. The credit for that is due to mainly three persons: Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma, Yamini Krishnamurthy and Vempati Chinna Satyam—the two celebrated exponents and

the third a dedicated teacher who made nearly every noted danseuse in the country learn Kuchipudi also. Now both Vedantam and Yamini have taken to teaching and *it* is incumbent on the former to keep the dance-drama tradition alive and growing while one would expect Yamini to continue

to explore the possibilities of expanding the solo dance repertory.

Chinna Satyam is often accused of compromising with the pristine tradition and to his critics one would like to tell; traditional art forms must be able to adjust themselves to the changing socio-cultural values in order to be preserved and fostered. The acceptability of Kuchipudi depends on its adaptability to new and novel themes. Many of our young performers like Shobha Naidu, Swapna Sundari,

Raja and Radha Reddy and others have already begun experimentation. The future must belong to them. And if the academies mean business, Kuchipudi can take *its* place among our major dance styles.

## The Veedhi Bhagavatam of Andhra

Dr. V. RAGHAVAN

**K**arnatak music and dance still have strong bonds with Andhra. In traditional dance-drama, the Bhagavata Mela Nataka of some of the villages near Tanjore in Tamilnadu are an offshoot or a graft from the Kuchipudi Bhagavata plays in Telugu country. Many of the technical terms of Bharata Natya and a considerable part of its *compositions-sabdhas*, *varnas* and *padalu*-are in Telugu. The Kuchipudi tradition is the best known of Telugu dance-drama forms but this is not the only one. In drama and dance, from most ancient times, as the history of the *Dasarupaka* and *Up arupaka* traditions of Sanskrit with more complete forms, lesser ones concentrating on select aspects, are secreted and perfected. In Karnataka, where we have the Yakshagana, we also have the form taken from it called *Tala-maddale* in which without roles or make-up, the participants sit down and go through the play orally.

### The Early Phase

When Kuchipudi Bhagavata attained its high water-mark, it gave birth to a derivative solo performance called the *Veedhi Bhagavata* or *Gollakalapa*. The masters of Kuchipudi themselves thought of this new type and it evolved through women-artistes of courtesan families (*Kalavantula*) who were proficient in the solo dance-art of *Nautch*. The Kuchipudi tradition did not permit women to play female roles in its Bhagavata stories and the *Nautch* had its

own repertoire of detached pieces and love-songs. By crossing the features of these two, the form named Veedhi Bhagavata or *Gollakalapa* was developed and a line of capable teachers and accomplished exponents refined it to a degree acceptable to the connoisseurs. In fact, it became for a time very popular over a greater part of Andhra.

The credit of discovering the art in its last lingering phase goes to All India Radio, Vijayawada, and late Sri Y. Satyanarayana, who was with that station for sometime. Later through the Music Academy, Madras and the Madras State Sangita Nataka Sangam, I had the opportunity of bringing it to a wider public and to the students and lovers of the dance in Madras. The artiste who expounded the art in Madras was Smt. Annabathula Venkataratnam of Mummdivaram, a symbol of ripe and masterly exposition, who, after some decades of retirement due to lack of public appreciation and support, had been persuaded to recapture the accomplishment of her younger years.

As already said, it is the *Bhagavatas*, those Brahmin scholars learned in Sanskrit and *Natya Sastra*, who were responsible for originating this form and giving it a shape. Instead of young boys, courtesans versed in Bharata Natya were absorbed into the art. Instead of disconnected lyrics, a sustained Bhagavata-theme or episode was substituted. These women-artistes

(*Kala-vantula*) had already behind them a heritage of music and dance and some knowledge of Sanskrit, puranic myths and the rhetoric of love and *nayika-nayak-bhava*. It was now necessary only to strengthen their knowledge of Sanskrit and widen their general acquaintance with the tenets of religion and philosophy. In fact, if as evolved, this form would shed its dance and gesticulations, and follow more strictly the trend of a single puranic devotional story. It would result in another form, still popular, active and effective, at least in Tamilnad, the *Hari-katha* or *katha-kalakshepa*. In this, as in *Veedhi Bhagavata*, there is only one main exponent, usually a male though women are not unknown, accompanied by music and oral exposition. Supported by thematic songs and verses, this presents a devotional doctrine with illustrative stories of Prahlada, Dhruva etc.

### Characters

The *Veedhi Bhagavata* has a single female-artist, the main dancer; she is supported by a secondary female-artist. To put across the ideas more effectively, as much as to entertain, humour (*hasya rasa*) emerges; and for this a Brahmin, in more or less the *Vidhushaka's* role plays the interlocutor. It is this dialogue or argument in which the chief lady, representing a milk-maid (*golla*), carries on with the Brahmin, that provides

the *Kalapam*. The *golla* always scores. She cross-examines the Brahmin as to his real Brahminhood and expatiates on what a real Brahmin is according to the *sastras* and



under the torrent of her questions and Sanskrit quotations from the *sastras*, the poor Brahmin is left breathless.

The *Vidhushaka-Brahmin* may also come off in his role of a comedian and vehicle of wisdom. Wherever a song introduces a character, grandiloquently, the *Vidhushaka*, starts off on a parody of the song, a comic

technique which is found in a more sustained manner in the traditional Koodiyattam presentations of Sanskrit plays in Kerala. The *Vidhooshaka* for instance may begin by parodying the *nayaka* and *nayika*. The Vidhushaka does not involve any new character; the player who began as *Sutradhara* and introduced the performance, himself takes on the Vidhushaka's role. He is a versatile and multi-purpose character, the constant companion of the lady and also her chorist.

### The Performance

The performance begins as with any traditional dance-drama. A curtain is held by two stage-hands and the main character performs behind it, her dance to the entrance-song as sung by the chorist. The classic *ragas* of Karnatak music are used in the songs. The *mridangam* supplies the rhythmic accompaniment. *Jatis* are orally recited and intricate rhythm patterns give the dancer's footwork sufficient scope for artistry. These songs are similar to the *darus* found in the dance-drama compositions and to each of these the *gollabhama* dances. She interprets the theme in the songs closely through *abhinaya*. The art of *abhinaya* is in full evidence, and by the very nature of the theme, the range of the ideas is wide, and there is greater scope for improvisation and interpretation (*kalpana*). With its elaborate display of *nritta* and *nritya*, the *Gollakalapam* takes its place among authentic forms of the Bharata Natya arts and possesses adequate potential for skill and beauty of exposition.

The Veethi Bhagavatam when it became popular, was requisitioned for temple festivals, on occasions of marriage and other happy celebrations in the houses of rich patrons.

### Some Pioneers

Among the authors of compositions on *Bhagavata*-stories for this art, and among those who, as *gurus*, trained courtesan dancers as media for presenting this art form, may be mentioned Ravuri Kamayya and his brothers Noorayya, Venkayya and Satyamgaru, Vempati, Venkatanarayanagaru, Vedantarn Lakshminarayana Sastri, and Bhagavatulu Dasaratha Ramiah. The brothers trained the Chittazallu family of courtesans and other *Kalavantulus* of note. Over a dozen talented dancers of this class who spread and maintained this art are still remembered.

The Veethi Bhagavatam had to face the same dilemma as other traditional forms of dance and dance-drama in the recent past. It used to be performed for the greater part of the night and a full performance spread over three nights. This length of time is no longer feasible and the same neglect and unhelpful conditions which led to the decay of other traditional dance and dance-drama arts affects this art also. Kuchipudi dance-drama and Bharata Natya have been rehabilitated and it is hoped that lovers of art and institution which have been established in Andhra, as elsewhere, for reviving the local art-forms, will devote their attention and resources to the Veethi Bhagavata, or Bhamakalapa too.



## BHAGAVATA MELA - DANCE DRAMA

S. NATARAJAN

**B**hagavata Mela dance-drama, though curiously enough now surviving only in one village in Melattur, is really of All India importance, because it is found to be a living exemplification of Bharata's conception of Natya as a dance-drama adumbrated nearly 2,000 years ago in his *Natya Sastra*, the earliest and most authoritative treatise on the art followed by most of the later writers through the centuries.

The Bhagavata Mela tradition seems to have come into prominence from the time of Thirthanarayana Yogi, the author of Krishna Leela Tharangani in Sanskrit. He composed a number of dance-dramas. He followed the tenets and modes of Bhakti as exemplified in the 'Bhagavata' lore and composed his dramas accordingly.

Those who sang the praise of God and expounded Bhakti came to be called Bhagavathars and the dance-dramas enacted by them as *Bhagavatha Natya Mela Natakas*.

The more popular dance-dramas of

Melattur Venkatarama Sastri were in vogue not only in Melattur but also in five other villages in Tanjavur district, namely Salimangalam, Uttukkadu, Sulamangalam, Nallur and Tepperumalnellur.



As the object of enacting these dramas was devotion to God, the practice of presenting them only before temples came into vogue. Conceptions of art for earning one's livelihood or art as a pleasant pastime has no place in that tradition and it is so even today. Though, now a days, religious faith and devotional aspect may not have so much importance to connoisseurs of art as before, one cannot but be struck by the high aesthetic value and appeal of these dance-dramas.

The famous dance-dramas that are usually staged are *Prahlada Charitram* and *Harischandra*. The mask of Narasimha is worshipped before it is adorned by the actor who plays the role of Narasimha.

As Telugu was the court language in Tamil Nadu from the time of Vijayanagara kings down to the time of the Maratha princes of Tanjavur, the Bhagavatha Mela dance-



dramas were composed in that language. Character roles in these dramas became the properties of particular families inherited from generation to generation. In this way, the art has been a part of the lives of the people in the villages.

All the characters, including feminine ones, are presented only by young men. Age-long social connections do not allow women to mix- with men on the stage. As a part of the annual Narasimha Jayanthi festival, this is conducted. These dance-dramas are expounded with music of high class Carnatic tradition, dance and *abhinayas* in classical Bharatanatya technique, poetic speeches and appropriate dramatic action. This dance-drama may resemble the Kathakali of Kerala in being all-night shows without the stage settings of modern dramas and in having such features as *Pathra Pravesam* (introduction of characters). Unlike in ordinary dramas, every actor in the mela drama has to be a dancer



trained in Bharatanatya technique.

It is true that the present-day standard of these dramas is not what it was during the hey-day of former generation of master-artists. All the same, even at the present day, one cannot but be struck by three notable features, namely, classically pure and appealing music, fine *nattuvangam* and *sastric abhinaya* of an elaborate and imaginative type. The music is provided by no less a *vidwan* than the master conductor Balu Bhagavathar Subbier.

As a classical dance-drama according to the conception of *Natya Sastra*, the Melattur Bhagavata Mela art happens to be the only surviving link that connects us to the present day with our ancient national theatre tradition. As such, its national importance and value have to be adequately recognised and realised by the art circles in India that count.

## KOODIYATTOM

D. APPUKUTTAN NAIR

**K**oodiyattom, the unique temple art of Kerala, is probably the only surviving form of the traditional presentation of Sanskrit drama. The performance is confined to the temple theatres known as *Koothambalams*, the performing artistes belong to specific temple-dependent communities known as Chakkiars and ambiars. The Chakkiars are the actors and the Nangiars of the Nambiar community undertake female roles to the accompaniment of the *Mizhavus* (pot-like drums covered with animal hide) and *Edakka* (a small drum played with a stick), *Kurumkuzhal* (a small wind instrument similar to a Shehnai) and *Kuzhithalam* (a small pair of cymbals).

The Sanskrit plays usually presented on the stage, belong mainly to those of the Trivandrum Sanskrit series, namely, those of Bhasa, Kulasekhara Varman, Sree Harshan, Mahendravikrama Pallavan and Bodhayana, apart from *Ascharya Choodamani* by the Kerala dramatist, Shakti Bhadrans.

### Abhinayas

The Koodiyattom as it is presented today was choreographed some ten centuries ago by King Kulasekhara Varman with the assistance of his friend Tholan, The form of presentation is highly stylised in *Aharya Abhinaya* (make-up.) costume and scenic spectacle, *Angika Abhinaya* (gesture) and *Vachika Abhinaya* (oral rendering). There

is no attempt at realism. In fact, the attempt is to present Puranic characters in a superhuman form, in an epic setting-nor can we claim a close adherence to the canons laid down in *Natya Sastra* in the presentation of this dramatic art form.

In *Angika Abhinaya*, in which *Hastha Mudras* are liberally used in descriptions, conversations, and dissertations, the *Lakshanas* codified in *Natya Sastra* or the various other texts in Hindu dramaturgy are not faithfully followed. The *Hastha Mudras* are taken from *Hastha Lakshana Deepika* which draws from the Tantric mudras prevalent in Kerala. The other movements of the body, belonging to the *Angika Abhinaya* particularly the *Charis*, *Gatis* and the movements of the various *Angas* and *Upangas* of the body also do not closely follow the canons prescribed by the *Natya Sastra*.

In *Aharya Abhinaya*, the make-up and costumes do not copy the external features of the characters either in facial make up, head gear, clothing or ornament. The make-up is symbolic of the nature of the character presented on the stage. At the same time, there is no typifying of characters as in Kathakali. While in Kathakali, Vali and Sugreeva wear the same costume, in Koodiyattom, their costumes are different. Vali, as the more kind and powerful of the two, possessing noble traits of character with certain aspects of amorous expression towards Tara, ha make-

up which brings out those characteristics.

In *Vachika Abhinaya*, the text of the Sanskrit drama is rendered by the actor with intonations reminding us of the *Yajur-Vedic* chantings of the Nambudiri Brahmins of Kerala. There is no attempt at making the speeches naturalistic. Even *ragas* (*swaras* as they are called in Koodiyattom) do not have the solfa symbols of music. The prose rendering also abound in certain intonations, which make for greater stylisation.

### Split Presentation

Koodiyattom plays are not presented in full. Presentation is so elaborate and there are such lengthy excursions into various fields that it makes presentation time-consuming. Hence nowadays these plays are presented only in parts—each part being known by a different name. Thus, *Swapnavasavadatta* is presented as six different performances, each performance confining itself to one *Anka*. (One Act). These *Ankas* (Acts) are also known by different names. Thus in *Swapnavasavadatta*, the *Ankas* are called *Brahmacharyankam*, *Pandattankam*, *Shebhalikankam*, *Svapnankam*, *Chithrabhalakankam*, etc. In *Prathigna Nataka*, there is one *Anka* called *Manthrankam* which takes 41 days to perform. This is an oral exposition by *Vidooshaka* of all things under the Sun. Similarly, the *Anguliyankam* of *Ascharya*

*Choodamani* lasting for twelve full days tells the full story of the *Ramayana* including Vanarolpathi by Shri Hanuman, by hand gestures alone.

Since one *Anka* (Act) of the drama alone is performed at one time, there is a prelude to this performance called *Nirvahana* during



which one of the characters sum, up the story presented in the earlier acts of the drama and possibly the earlier stories. This 'Nirvahana' takes very many days and if this 'Nirvahana' is 'rendered' by the *Vidooshaka*, it is an oral exposition. Other characters use hand gestures for this purpose.

### The Performance

The performance can be classified into two parts on the basis of the relative importance of the *Vidooshaka*, the comic character. Thus, performances like the first act of *Subhadra-dhananjayam*, the first act of *Stapathisamvaranam*, etc., are *Vidooshaka* dominant where there is greater

emphasis on *Vachika Abhinaya* (oral rendering). The *Vidooshaka* talks in Malayalam. He interprets the Sanskrit *slokas* recited by the characters in Malayalam and recites parodies of these *slokas* and expounds the various laws of nature in a very humorous manner.

### The Elaborateness

The most important characteristic of Koodiyattom is its elaborate interpretation of the Sanskrit *slokas* or stanzas through hand gestures by the various characters and by oral expositions of the *Vidooshaka*. The *slokas* are enacted in such a way that the inner multiple meanings of the various *slokas* are explained to the audience. Even incidents, anecdotes and philosophy which have only an indirect and very remote bearing on the meaning of the *slokas* can be indicated by the actors. In *Abhishekanataka* in the *Thorana Tudha Ankom* there is a *sloka* in which Ravana speculates that the reason for a monkey devastating the palace in Lanka is due to the disrespect he showed to Nandikeswara. Nandikeswara had cursed him, saying that he would be ruined by a monkey. In enacting this *sloka*, the actor describes in detail Ravana's war with the Devas and the Asuras; he details the preparations for the war, the triumphant journey thereafter, a description of Lanka, his expedition to win over Vaishravana and the blocking of



Pushpaka Vimana by Mount Kailas, the vivid features of Mount Kailas, the quarrel between Parvathi and Siva and so on. The *Angika Abhinaya* of this *sloka* takes 3 to 4 hours to perform.

Such elaborate and lengthy *Abhinaya* of the Sanskrit *slokas* may seem tedious to an indifferent audience. For their entertainment, there are the humorous oral expositions spiced

with some vulgarity by the *Vidooshaka*. The *Vidooshaka* also expounds the famous *Purushartha* or the four ultimate attainments in human life. This is a satire on the follies and foibles of human life by which he recounts the exploits of a group of adventurous high caste Hindus to attain the four aims, namely, *Rajaseva* (waiting upon the King with flattery, gossip, etc.), *Asanam* (greedy enjoyment of an enormous feast), *vinodam* (sexual enjoyment with a prostitute) and *Vanchanam* (betrayal of the prostitute whom he has enjoyed). These four *Purusharthis* are interpreted in place of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*. This oral exposition usually takes more than four days, during which there will be much pointed satire at the way of living of highbrow society, involving the audience.

All told, Koodiyattom is unique in its presentation of classical Sanskrit drama through the vitality of the folk medium.



## ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THULLAL

P. K. SIVASANKARA PILLAI

**K**erala is rich in literary and artistic traditions. The celebrated classical dance drama, Kathakali, has placed Kerala in the forefront of the civilized countries of the world.

Thullal is yet another Kerala art which is fostered, encouraged and taught in Kerala Kalamandalam. If we remember that the genius, traditions and temperaments of a people are most reflected in their traditional arts, we could without any hesitation say that the art form of Thullal is a mirror of our cultural life. It is more so, when viewed in the light of the statement, "The character of a people is often learnt from their amusements, for in the hour of mirth, the mind is unrestricted and takes its natural bent." Thullal is a most amusing and mirthful dance recital...

### Thullal-Its Artistic Form and Technical Details

Thullal literally means dance. But the term connotes a particular school of dance. It has a history which throws much light on the literary, artistic and cultural life of medieval Kerala. This art form is the cumulative product of all the traditional theatrical arts of Kerala, both folk and classical. In ancient times, the wisdom of the epics and mythology was conveyed to the people by different classes of story tellers. Chakkyar Koothu is perhaps the best example of the tradition which the highbrow class of society fostered and

encouraged. And hence, that art form in its evolution attained a high degree of sophistication. But the medium resorted to by the folk for their self-expression, entertainment and propagation of mythology was art, especially narration, music and dance. Kerala, in ancient times, was very rich in the patterns of such theatrical folk art forms which had singing and dancing as their integral parts. The art of Thullal was evolved as a system out of the various singing and dancing art forms of the people incorporating apt features of classical styles so that by the harmonious blend of the folk and classical forms of arts it represented the accumulated aesthetic experience of all sections of the people high and low. The themes were drawn from the never failing myths and epics of India.

As the main objective was the propagation of knowledge and enrichment of literature through the medium of art, spoken word and songs became the most powerful component of communication. The songs were sung to the accompaniment of acting and dancing with varying foot works. Based on different styles of narrative singing, rhythms of dancing, foot work and make-up of the dancer, three varieties

of Thullal were evolved in course of time. They are:

**1. OTTAN THULLAL:** It consists of a variety of rapid metres well suited for



amusing narratives and it is vigorous in execution. The Thullal actor who presents this type has a fascinating costume. His face is painted green. With a round headgear of multi-coloured tinsel and gold, a breast plate to match, a circlet of jingles round his ankles and wearing a frilled skirt round his waist, he sings and dances to the sounding of the cymbals and beating of the drum. Along with singing and dancing, the player acts the incidents narrated in the songs.

**2. SEETHANKAN THULLAL:** It has metres of medium cadence for the songs used and rhythm to suit. In contrast to the picturesque appearance of the dancer in Ottan Thullal, the dancer in Seethankan has his face unpainted, except for a few black lines, on the eyebrows and eyelids to heighten the expression of the eyes. He wears a crown made out of the tender leaves of coconut palm, with frills of the same material adorning his wrists.

**3. PARAYAN THULLAL:** This has a slow narrative style for singing, with slow graceful elegant steps, movements and hand gestures. The make-up of a Parayan is very simple except for an ornamental headgear and a red cloth round his waist. The dancer smears the whole body with charcoal paste.

**Kunchan Nambiar**  
**Originator of Thullal Art**

The history of the origin and development of this form is well known to all lovers of Kerala arts. More than two hundred years ago, there appeared in the arena of Kerala culture a most extra-ordinary poet, the like of whom is hard to be found. His name



was Kunchan Nambiar. He belonged to a family of artistes who had hereditary functions associated with the performance of Chakkyar Koothu in Hindu temples. Striking the *Mizhavu-a* particular kind of drum to set rhythms of the Koothu performance-was the main function, at which Nambiar also had his training during his boyhood. Though born at a place called Killik- kurissimangalam in Palghat district, the major part of his life was spent at Ambalapuzha in Alleppey District and at Trivandrum. To these places he migrated as a court poet following the political fortune' of the ruling kings of those days. It was during his days at Ambalapuzha that

he invented the art of Thullal and personally performed the same for the first time. There is a traditional account relating to the circumstances that prompted Nambiar to invent such a popular art form. Kunchan Nambiar, while playing the drum at a performance of the Chakkyar Koothu, had the misfortune to produce a wrong note on the drum and the irate Chakkyar administered a sharp ridicule. Nambiar, the youthful poet felt highly mortified. Immediately after the performance, he set to work devising an altogether original form of entertainment. When the Chakkyar began his Koothu the next day, Nambiar produced the first performance of his Thullal at a place nearby within the premises of the temple. The new entertainment so greatly fascinated the people that the audience that had assembled before the Chakkyar abandoned him and flocked to see Nambiar's Thullal. This story has very little relevance when tracing the historical background of the origin of this art form except that the incident narrated might have served as an immediate provocation to Nambiar for an improvisation of the art to which he had already given form and content. The social and historical conditions which processed the poet and his art form were many.

Those were days when the literary scene of Kerala was in the grip of highbrow attitude. Sanskrit reigned supreme and an abstruse formalism was in vogue. The Kerala stage patronised by the aristocracy within the premises of the temples was dominated by the highly sophisticated art forms such as Koothu and Koodiyattam. The common man was left behind, unable to share the

delights of scholarly poetry and drama and the spiritual enlightenment of religious literature. At the same time, Nambiar found a vast body of folk literature in the lower strata of society in the form of songs and ballads as also various types of folk arts which though low in standard were characterised by the qualities of spontaneity and naturalness undreamt of in the creations of intellectuals. Nambiar's genius saw the wonderful opportunity offered to a poet and artiste for a synthesis of these different literary and artistic tastes from which could be evolved a new art form with a new purpose. He boldly seized the opportunity with an adventurous spirit. And he emerged as a performing poet-a unique event in the cultural field.

Nambiar was a born poet with a marvellous command of words and versification. He was equally proficient in Sanskrit and Malayalam. He had profound scholarship in all fields of knowledge of his times with abundant store of ancient lore. The output of the poet has been prodigious. There are about fifty poetical works to his credit as Thullal compositions. All of them are on puranic themes. But the compositions have the unmistakable stamp of the poet's originality based on his worldly wisdom and outlook. He very cleverly adapted the puranic themes to the environment of contemporary Kerala life with a view to make those episodes serve him as a powerful media for social criticism. This local colouring is sometimes interwoven with interludes of allusive satire on popular morals and manners which have had their biting effect on society. And no wonder



that the Thullal composed in the language of the people, replete with fun and humour designed as a theatrical art blending many streams of literary, musical, rhythmical and histrionic traditions of the people blazed out into popularity which they still enjoy.

#### **Thullal as a Visual Art**

Even though the spoken word is the most important component of Thullal, effective use is made of dance and music and the histrionic technique of gestures to make it most attractive to the audience as a visual art. It is evident from the poetical compositions that the poet was an adept in the classical dance technique as enunciated in the *Natya* and *Sangeetha Sastras*. In one of his poetical works, he

has indicated the style of singing, the order of hands, feet, eyes and emotional expressions during dance.

*The song is to be sustained in the throat;*

*Its meaning to be shown by the hands;*

*Its moods are evinced by glances ;*

*Its rhythms are marked by the feet,*

This is an accurate summing up of the intrinsic aspects of the dance according to classical texts. But the most enlivening and dynamic components are the folk tunes and folk rhythms profusely used. It is surprising to note the innumerable variations that we come across in the reckoning of the folk tunes and rhythms used in Thullal music. Sometimes even scholars of music are taken aback by the easy manner in which these complicated variations are performed by expert artistes of Thullal.

The footwork in Thullal calls for appreciation almost to the exclusion of its other features. The varieties of the gait and rhythmic movement are dependent upon the foot work, graceful and elegant as well as spirited and eloquent. The poet has emphasised the beauty of footwork as an integral part which should go in combination with singing. He had so much mastered the native genius of the folk that in one of his works he has even codified the folk rhythms with rhythmic arrangements of syllables to form scales of the time measure.

Thullal is a most popular and unique art form that has become indelible in the cultural history of Kerala.

## KATHAKALI - The Total Theatre

M. K. K. NAYAR

Colour, intensity of detail, stylised movements and rarity of aesthetic expression make Kathakali a most unique theatre. Over the centuries it has retained its novelty and appeal to the old and the new alike. Its themes are from mythology, its roots religion, yet its admirers embrace the most tradition-bound and the radical alike. It dazzles the novice and subdues the connoisseur to helpless surrender. It draws the world to it and intrigues those who probe it. Why does all this happen, one is bound to ask, To understand it one has to travel back through the centuries into the lush green valleys of palm-fringed Kerala.

### The Back-drop

Legend has it that the narrow strip of land called Kerala that lies in the South of India between the western ghats and the Arabian Sea emerged out of the sea by divine dispensation. Anyone who visits Kerala could see that the landscape differs in every aspect from the rest of India. The people too, to a considerable extent. How could such a distinctly different area appear as a part of the Indian sub-continent? The more one saw Kerala, the more one felt that legend alone could explain it.

Whatever be the origin of Kerala, it is true that the people who inhabited it and their culture differed substantially from their neighbours across the mountains. Here was a race, virile and warlike with chiselled



features and scrupulous in personal cleanliness. Their women were healthy and handsome, proud of their long tresses of hair and ability to stay young even after mothering a dozen children. They worshipped serpents and Bhagavathi (the Mother principle). Every *tarawad* (the joint family household) headed by a *Karanavar*, the head of the household, had its own *Kavu* (a bushy growth of trees) where the serpent was sacredly fed and worshipped. The village had its own *Kavu* where there was the temple of Bhagavathi (also Devi). Nature was bounteous. Rich soils and heavy rains gave the people a prosperous agriculture-based economy. Farming was their main avocation except when wars had to be fought.





Their life was simple. Everyone was trained in farming and fighting alike. They had *kalaris* (gymnasias) where they got training in the art of combat and the use of different weapons. Agility of the physique was paramount. Rigorous massage with medicated oil was an annual feature of one's life.

These people of Kerala had their own codes of conduct in peace and war. In peace, they were extremely benevolent and fond of recreation. In war, they were steadfast and fought to a finish. There were times when wars in Kerala among the different chieftains carried on for over a hundred years. Men moved from one end of the country to the other, fighting. Many of them never returned home. So, a different land tenure system was established *Marumakkathayam*, (the matrilineal system

of succession) according to which ownership of land in a family was vested in the woman, the eldest male member being the manager of the properties.

As a result, religion and rituals took the complex turn seen elsewhere in India. The priests' influence increased rapidly and it was not difficult for them to secure the most privileged position in society. The ruling Nayar race believed that anything that was *Devasvom* (belonging to a temple) was sacred. So, in war, *Devasvom* properties were all safe. Soon, *Brahmasvom* (belonging to a Brahmin) also acquired the same immunity. There was a practice earlier, for a person starting on a war mission, to transfer his properties to the nearest temple as that saved it from expropriation by the victor. Now transfers took place not only to the temples but also to the priests. In war-torn Kerala, no wonder, the priests very soon became the owners of the major portion of the country. Legends were also raised giving divine blessings to this economic transformation of society. Thereafter, society looked up to them for favours. They had their own laws of inheritance. They continued to follow them. They had their own rigorous laws of marriage within their community. But they would marry into other communities too. Others welcomed it as it improved their social status then.

### **Influence of Folk-Drama**

Sanskrit got recognised as the language of the gods and the elite. Religious rituals called for proficiency in Sanskrit. Knowledge of Sanskrit was a social status symbol. The Namboodiri brahmins, the land owning class,



had enough leisure to devote themselves to literature and recreation with abandon. The dance and the drama attracted them more than anything else. The popular folk-forms of ritual plays like *Darika Vadha*<sup>(1)</sup> influenced the new forms of dance and drama that they evolved. These folk art forms were full of colour and demonstrated a tempo of furious frenzy. Deep saffron and black symbolised evil. Green or bluish green was used to denote goodness and nobility.

### Koodiattam and Koothu

When it was decided to evolve a new pattern for the presentation of Sanskrit drama, the choreographers picked up these colours to accentuate character build-up. Over a period of time, Koodiattam, the ancient Kerala way of presenting Sanskrit dramas came into vogue. It called for professional specialisation in histrionics. Those who chose this profession were called Chakyars. It was a full-time profession calling for very rigorous training. Naturally, those who took to it could not also perform priestly functions at the same time. So, in course of time, Chakyars became a caste of their own, confining themselves to the theatre. Along with Chakyars, women of the Nambiar community took part in the drama. Among Chakyars, there were extremely talented actions. They came out to do mono-acts and entertain audiences at convenient hours. Koodiattam, the drama, usually commenced after dinner and went into the early hours of the morning. And it went on for several nights continuously. But the *Chakyar Koothu* or the mono-act performance was usually done in the day or in the evenings



and always ended before dinner. A *koothu* was a piece of entertainment limited in time but unlimited in hilarity. It was a combination of the various factors that go to entertain an intelligent audience. It abounded in social satire. The Chakyar treated the king and the beggar alike. To hold together an audience by sheer gift of the gab was not easy unless accompanied by extraordinary histrionic ability. This was what made Chakyars inimitable and paved the way for a theatre which excelled everything else in its finality of aesthetic expression.

A leisure-laden class of *Sahridayas* (connoisseurs) when they abounded in society, could devote considerable attention to the perfection of evolving art forms. Thus it was that Koodiattam received enviable nourishment and meticulous care of detail. Dramas were specially written to suit this stylised system and it became a

must for every major temple to include a Koodiattam performance during its festival season.

### The Auditorium

Acoustics was important for both the drama and the mono-act. The architects of Kerala arts were therefore commissioned to produce the perfect piece of acoustic excellence. That was how the *koothambalams* in the temples of Kerala came to be designed and built. Their acoustic excellence had to be experienced to be believed. And it was in these *koothambalams* that the famous plays *Tapati Samvarana* and *Subhadra Dhananjaya* of King Kulasekhara Perumal of Kerala of the eighth century A.D. were enacted. To present seven acts, it took them as long as two months. The introduction itself could take four days. There could be no more evidence of the existence of an extremely discerning, leisure-loving class and the dominant place the drama occupied in the cultural panorama of Kerala from ancient times.

### Krishnattam

As the centuries rolled by, another addition to the theatre was Krishnattam. Those were days when the Zamorins ruled the northern half of Kerala with their capital at Calicut. Sometime in the first half of the sixteenth century, the reigning Zamorin was one Manavedan, a great scholar and patron of arts. He wrote a drama based on Krishna's life and choreographed it into an elegant art form, called the Krishnattam (the play of Krishna). He also gave it a dance base. The script was in Sanskrit and the artists, Chakyars.

Krishnattam, became quite popular very soon. It copied the costumes of Koodiattam but improved upon them. For certain characters, it also used masks. Being a new art form directly promoted by a powerful ruler, Krishnattam became a regular feature in important festivities. Its novelty drew to it many people away from the Koodiattam stage. The *rasikas* who patronised Krishnattam and Koodiattam were the same, the elite members of society who had learned Sanskrit and could appreciate its literary depths.

### Ramanattam

Malayalam, as a distinct language, had come to stay by then. Ezhuthachan's famous works, the *Adhyatma Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, were household possessions all over Kerala. The language had arrived with its own distinct diction, rhetoric and imagery. Every Nayar household considered it a matter of prestige and later, a matter of routine to get the children, both boys and girls educated.

Earlier this was confined to Sanskrit works like *Raghuvamsam* and *Sriramodantam*, but after the emergence of the mellifluous master-pieces of Ezhuthachan, *Manipravala*, the judicious mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam used by him to evolve a charming style of his own became a popular theme of study and emulation. Poets, who earlier had confined themselves to writing poetry in Sanskrit alone took to composition in *Manipravala*. A new awareness of the seamier side of life was spreading among the middle classes. The highly Sanskritised Koodiattam and

Krishnattam were too high-brow for them. They needed something lighter, something that could hold their enthusiasm. As it always happened at the time of such a need in the cultural history of any people, the Raja of Kottarakkara came forward with his new theme, the *Ramanattam*.

Compared to the Zamorin, Kottarakkara was a lesser Raja. He was the chief of a small principality at a place about eighty kilometres to the north of Trivandrum, the present headquarters of Kerala State. He was a great scholar and had grasped the essentials of the drama extant then. He composed a play based on the *Ramayana*. As it took eight days to present a Krishnattam play, he too devised his play into one for eight days. The essential differences between the two were that, while Krishnattam was all in Sanskrit and was enacted only by Chakyars, Ramanattam was in Manipravala style and performed by the Raja himself and his Nayar soldiers. That was the beginning of Kathakali, the classical theatre of the people of Kerala.

Opinions differ on the exact dates on which these plays were composed by the Raja. Reliable research scholars place the period somewhere between 1575 A.D. and 1630 A.D. The Raja himself supervised the training of the actors who were all chosen from his army composed wholly of Nayars and led by their chieftain, Kittu Kurup. Costumes were improvised, the typical Kerala colours, bluish green, red and black dominating them in the facial make-up. The actors learnt their words by heart and sung them while acting. After a few performances, they got confidence to go

as a troupe and give performances in different parts of Kerala. Dancing and a sense of rhythm came naturally to the Nayars as their training in physical combat and warfare conducted in the *Kalaries* (gymnasia) was imparted according to a *tala* (time beat). Religious rituals from the early days involved dancing accompanied by music and drumming. Over the centuries, music mostly in folk-song style, developed and acquired a distinct pattern of its own in Kerala. Music drew the Nayars to it and they wove it attractively into their ritualistic dances. So when *Ramanattam* was introduced by the Raja of Kottarakkara, it was easy for him to integrate an already existing style of music and pattern of dancing.

### **Kathakali**

Within the first two decades of the emergence of Ramanattam as a distinct form of theatre, it became clear that the actor could not do justice to music, dance and action at the same time. Dance affected one's breath; music demanded a steady breath. It was between 1630 A.D. and 1640 A.D. that the Raja of Vettathunadu, a great lover of arts came into the scene to develop this art form. By then, the Raja of Kottarakkara was no more. Vettathu Raja was a great scholar and connoisseur of the drama. He was ably assisted by his versatile army chief, Sankara Nayar. It was at their hands that Ramanattam got refined into Kathakali. They introduced many reforms, the most important of which was to provide a musician, to sing the entire dialogue so that the actors could be fully free to interpret it with gestures and movements.

Thereafter, the actor could concentrate on specialisation in *abhinaya* (aesthetic expression) leading to the present state of stylised perfection. The Raja also improved the system of costumes and make-up. Masks used earlier by demons and monkeys following the practice in Koodiattam or Krishnattam were done away with. Instead, faces were painted with appropriate colours. It was the Raja-Sankaran Nayar combination who introduced two of the most beautiful components of the Kathakali performance, namely *Purappatu* and *Thiranokku*,

### Thotaya

Earlier, at the commencement of the performance there was only a simple formality. That was called *Thotaya*. It was an invocation and consisted of an epitomy of the dance movements. The actors playing the role of Rama and Lakshmana would perform *thotaya* to the accompaniment of *maddala* (the drum played in a horizontal position with bare hands.) The order and sequence of movements to be followed were prescribed by the Raja of Kottarakkara. The play commenced thereafter.

### Purappatu

*Purappatu*, the formality introduced by the Vettathu Raja followed *thotaya*. In this case, the heroes of the play made a formal debut before the audience by holding the *thirassila* (curtain) down with their hands and giving an opportunity to the spectators to see them and their make-up close at hand. The movements that formed a part of *Purappatu* were again pure dance. After this formality was over, the play could

commence.

### The Chenda

The most notable contribution of the Vettathu Nayar combination was the introduction of Chenda, the vibrant drum that since then became the core of the accompaniments. The chenda is held vertically and is usually played with drumsticks. Earlier, as in Krishnattam, only the maddala was used.

### Thiranokku

*Thiranokku*, another formality introduced by the Vettathu Raja was a stylised debut



of evil characters or characters of extraordinary prowess. To register an intensive impact on the audience of the entry of a powerful character', this method was thought of. As the drums play relentlessly to the prescribed *tala* the character brings down the *Thirassila* and projects himself or herself to the audience. The expressions used on this occasion would typify the *bhava* (the aesthetic emotion) that dominated the succeeding scenes.

### Music

Kathakali was on its way to growth and popular enthusiasm. *Kalaries* (centres of training) were getting established in different parts of Kerala. One of them that made a significant contribution during the period to improve its showmanship was at Kurichi near Kottayam in the erstwhile Travancore State. The teachers at Kurichi introduced two musicians instead of one. The first, the leader, using a gong controlled the *tala* of the actors and drummers as he sang the dialogue. The second one used heavy cymbals to keep the accompaniments at a high tempo and repeated the songs to enable the actor to complete his interpretation. The first one acquired, in course of time, the status of a stage director and came to be known as *Ponnani* and the second one, *Sankidi*.

### **Kottayam Raja, the Preceptor**

The next important period of development of Kathakali was during the time of the Raja of Kottayam in North Kerala who lived between 1665 A.D. and 1725 A.D. He was a great scholar. He was also a great connoisseur of the drama. He was drawn to Kathakali early in life. He trained himself as an actor of inimitable repute. His histrionic talents were legendary. He found that the stories of the *Ramayana* were devotion-oriented and so did not give adequate scope for the effective display of all the nine *bhavas*. He therefore decided to write stories based on the *Mahabharata* where men were men and women were women. The *Mahabharata* offered unusual scope for the display of all the *bhavas*. He wrote four famous plays, *Kirmeera Vadha*, *Baka Vadha*, *Kalyana Saugandhika* and *Kalakeya Vadha*.

He was ably assisted by Chathu Panicker, a talented artiste and a highly imaginative leader of men. Together they not only laid great stress on scientific music but also took pains to prescribe in meticulous detail the stylisation to be followed scene by scene. It was the Raja Panicker combine who made *Sringara* the most delightful and inevitable component of Kathakali. The slow development of the *bhava* through a highly stylised combination of expression and movement became a standard pattern in Kathakali called *Pathinha Pada*; its stylisation and choreography received attention at his hands more than anything else.

Kottayam Raja and Chathu Panicker together made many remarkable contributions. They recognised the need for a high standard in the musicians and drummers. They also recognised that artists of such high quality should receive the approbation of the audience. They seldom got the opportunity to display their ware to advantage while the play was on as all attention was on the actors. So the Raja and Panicker introduced an interlude between the *Purappatu* and the commencement of the play. That was *Melappada*. Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*, the great lyric in Sanskrit that had immortalised the love of Radha for Krishna was a popular work in Kerala at that time. It had, earlier, inspired the author of Krishnattam. Kottayam Raja was also inspired by it considerably in his handling of the *Sringara rasa* in his plays. The poem commencing with the words '*Manjuthara*' in *Gita Govinda* was adopted by the Raja to enable the musicians to display their proficiency before



the audience. The piece was sung to the accompaniment of the drums and cymbals. At the end of it, the drummers came forward and demonstrated their dexterity before the audience. The combination of the singing of *Manjudhara* and the display of drums following it, was named *Melappada*. Thus, after Kottayam Raja's reformation, the performance began with *Thotaya*, followed by *Purappatu* and *Melappada* before the story commenced. This format has continued till today.

### **Travancore Maharaja and Kaplingad Namboodiri**

The next major development of this art form followed soon after. That was during the time of Maharaja Karthika Thirunal's reign of Travancore State between 1758 and 1798 A.D. Poet, statesman and connoisseur of arts, the Maharaja wrote a number of plays and constituted a permanent troupe for regular performances in the famous Sri Padmanabhaswamy Temple at Trivandrum. As luck would have it, another great lover of Kathakali entered the scene at the same time. That was Kaplingad Namboodiri. An aesthete of no mean standard, a scholar of enviable proportions and a fanatic devotee of this art form, the Namboodiri joined hands with the Maharaja to make Kathakali, the most enjoyable theatre art. Makeup for each type of character was specified and compliance ensured. Costumes were prescribed with an eye on showmanship, colours being chosen with particular reference to mythological tradition and effectiveness on the stage. Stylised movements were systematised and the training programme drawn up in detail. The

Maharaja's reign lasted nearly forty years. That was long enough to stabilise all such reforms and ensure them as a permanent feature. The palace troupe, as the permanent troupe was called, attracted the best talent. Over a period of time, it became an established convention that a Kathakali actor could be deemed to have graduated only after he was permitted to join this troupe even if only for a day and perform at the Sri Padmanabhaswamy Temple.

There is very little change in the Kathakali that we see today as compared to what had emerged after the Maharaja and Kaplingad Namboodiri had given it the overhaul and trimmings.

### **Abhinaya in Kathakali**

*Abhinaya* is histrionic expression or histrionic representation. It is the essence of theatre. In Kathakali, *Abhinaya* dominates.

*Abhinaya* has been broken down into four distinct dramatic elements, each separately identifiable and fully developed. They are *Aharya* (Make-up and costume), *Vachika* (the spoken word), *Angika* (gestures) and *Satvika* (aesthetic emotional expression).

### **Aharya**

The first impact of Kathakali on one who sees a performance is made by its colourful make-up and costumes. *Aharya* thus plays an important role in the build-up of the Kathakali atmosphere. The make-up or costume in Kathakali was not invented overnight. It was evolved over a period. Kathakali presented themes of gods, demons and supermen. It was necessary, therefore, to create the necessary

atmosphere to generate an impression of unearthliness in characters. The ancient traditions of folk-arts of Kerala were there to draw from. The choreographers of Kathakali freely used what was available in folk-arts like *Thira*, *Koodiattam* and to some extent, even *Krishnattam*. Then they



improved upon them. Character was considered more important than individual features so far as make-up was concerned. Thus a noble character, be it god or man could be presented with identical makeup. Similarly an evil one, be it a demon or a man could use a common make-up too. Classification of characters by their basic qualities therefore, determined the costume.

Basic qualities are three: *Satvika*, *Rajasa* and *Thamasik*. *Satvika* stands for the noble, generous hero, usually described as the *Dhirodatta*. Gods, noble kings and princes are brought under this group. Examples are Indra, the king of gods, King Nala, King Yudhishtira and the Pandava brothers. For such characters, the face is painted green, symbolising inner refinement, poise, heroism and moral excellence. Green is *Paccha* in Malayalam. So these characters have come to be generally referred to as *Paccha*. The face is marked off by a white *chutty* beginning from the middle of the chin and rising on either side of the face along the jaw bones in a bow-shaped curve. The *chutty* is terraced inside and it serves to project the face as a miniature stage for expression. The face is painted bright green, lips, brilliant coral red. Eyes are drawn out in black border lines and eyebrows neatly pencilled. On the forehead a *Vaishnava* mark is given in red and white.

Consistent with their basic qualities, the characters in *Paccha* are dignified, graceful and aristocratic in their bearing and movements. They do not open their mouths even when they smile. Systematic training has made it possible for the actor to smile and even laugh effectively without opening his mouth. They wear *kiritas* (headgear) made out of pith and wood, and elaborately decorated with mosaic.

Among characters generally classified under *Paccha*, there are some variations to suit specific requirements. Krishna stands out among them. Krishna's headgear is different. Instead of a *Kirita*, he wears a *muti*. It is a coronet, decked with peacock plumes. While *Paccha* characters generally

Wear red jackets and white skirts, Krishna wears a blue Jacket and a dark blue skirt. Krishna also wears a large garland representing *vanamala* (the garland of wild flowers). Krishna's costume is also used for Vishnu. Rama and Lakshmana also appear with the same headgear.

### Katthi

The second broad classification, namely, the *Rajasa* type are *Dhiroddhathas* representing ambition, might, arrogance and defiance. They are *Pratinayakas* (villains) as against the *Pacchas* type that denotes *Nayakas* (Heroes). Kings among *Rakshasas* (demons) or *Rakshasas* (evil ones) among kings fall under this category for purposes of Kathakali make-up. Examples are Ravana, Kamsa, Duryodhana and Kichaka. The make-up is called *Katthi*. The green background of a *paccha* make-up is broken by a knife-shaped red patch with a white border line, drawn close to the upper cheek bones. On the forehead, at a point close to the root of the eyebrows and at the tip of the nose, *chuttippoos* (white balls) are fixed. The make-up is intended to project defiance, arrogance and a savage majesty. *Katthi* characters wear inside their mouth a pair of canine teeth which they can bring out at will while expressing wrath. In keeping with their character, they move about in arrogant majesty as though they were a law unto themselves. The characters are generally sensual and pleasure-seeking as much as they are headstrong and valiant. There is no difference between *Paeaha* and *Katthi* characters so far as the headgear or the costumes are concerned.

There are some variations among *katthi* characters to emphasise specific differences. An unusually wicked, fierce or wily *katthi* character is indicated by a larger knife-like pattern, like additional red patches over the eyebrows and sometimes a black beard too. In Kathakali, *katthi* is a preferred role. Every leading actor would be keen to perform a *katthi* role and win approbation as it has wide scope for the display of his histrionic expression.

*Katthi* characters are permitted to make weird noises to accentuate their expression. These noises vary in appropriate density in relation to the mood; from cooing while courting to rearing when angry.

### Thati

*Thati* is the generic term used for the make-up of characters that typify the *Tamasik* quality; namely, vicious and vile characters, cruel and power-crazy. Red *Thati* is the prominent one among *Thati* characters. Examples are *rakshasas* (demons) like Baka, wicked men like Dussasana and Susharma. The make-up is distinctly different from *Paccha* and *Katthi*. The white *chutti* frame work common to *Paccha* and *Katthi* is absent. Instead, the attempt is to project an embodiment of elemental, untamed passions, mighty and overpowering. Bright red and deep black combine the colours painted on the face to remove any suggestion of softer graces or restraint. The eyes are made ferocious with a patch of deep black around them. The lips are painted black giving them a lurid look. On each cheek a white pattern is made, looking like bristles. The white balls affixed to the

tip of the nose and to the forehead are much larger than those used for *Katthi*. The headgear is very much larger than the *kirita* and its rim, fitted *with* red wool. He roars like thunder and moves about in aggressive hauteur. Everything about this character denotes beastly ferocity and brawny might.

Among *Thati*, an important variation relates to Kali, the evil character in the story of King Nala. The make-up is equally ferocious; but he wears a black beard instead of a red one.

A further variation is used for the monkey kings, Bali and Sugriva of the *Ramayana*. Though they are not classed as demons, they are still fabulous animal kings possessing brute force. The difference is provided by a white curved patch on either side of the chin.

*Sudarsana chakra*, the all-annihilating discus-like weapon of Vishnu is also given the Red *Thati* costume.

Black *Thati* is used for jungle tribes and aboriginals. They represent the elementary man, primitive, uninhibited and alert. The face is fully painted in black with bracket-like patterns in red and white around the eyes. Lips are painted dark red. and at the tip of the nose, a flower like *chuttippoo* is worn. His headgear is also peculiar. It is black in colour built with peacock feathers and is shaped like a lotus capital. He wears a black beard and carries a bow and arrows and a sword. He makes a simple noise resembling a bird's chirp. Examples of such characters are the *Kattala* (hunter) in the story of King Nala and *Kirata* (Siva in disguise as a hunter).

### Minukku

Apart from the three basic categories of make-up, there are some others of note. Of these, *Minukku* is a common name given to the make-up of women, *rishis* (sages), messengers and Brahmins. *Minukku* really refers to the facial make-up alone. The painting is done in flesh colour in a simple manner. Lips are painted red and the eyes and eyebrows accentuated. The make-up signifies gentleness, restraint, poise and spiritual qualities. The costumes are unostentatious. There are no bulging skirts, blazing overcoats or imposing headgears. A *rishi* wears a *Jatamukuta* (like hair tied up over the head). A Brahmin merely covers his head with a piece of cloth. A messenger wears a turban.

The costumes of feminine characters (other than a demoness) are indeed a class by themselves. In Kathakali, it is almost always men or boys who play the roles of feminine characters. There are, therefore, no natural advantages for display. Not only that. The costume should not also expose the man behind it. So it is very carefully designed. The make-up is also delicately arraigned. A light golden yellow paint *is* used for the face. Powdered mica is sprinkled over it. The eyes and eyebrows are delicately elongated with a sensuous curve. The hair is dressed into a knot, near above the forehead, a little to the left. Over this, a light coloured veil is worn, extending to the waist. A tight-fitting red jacket covers the body and arms. A gilt breast plate with two red breasts fixed on it is worn on the chest and a white scarf drawn over the neck covers them. An ornamental belt is worn over a white sari

pleated *with* folds. And then there are the ear-rings, necklaces, armlets and bangles. Feminine characters' movements are in the *lasya* style as contrasted with the masculine *thandava*.

### Hanuman's Costume

For Hanuman, the make-up and the costume are both unique. Hanuman's costume is referred to both as white *thati* and *Vattamuti*. The upper half of the face is painted black and the lower half red. Lips are painted black and a white moustache pattern is drawn on the upper lip. The nose is painted green and there are two ovals in red on the forehead. A white *chutty*- like pattern is provided on either cheek. A white woolly beard is worn over an enormous white fur coat. The headgear resembles the helmets worn by French colonial officers in the eighteenth century.

These constitute the main costumes. Then there are variations for the swan, serpent kings, Narasimha (man-lion-an incarnation of Vishnu) and so forth. Most of the male characters wear long silver nails on the left hand fingers. They help enhance the elegance of the *mudras* .

Kathakali actors' eyes are always reddened by the application of a flower (Solanium pubescence). The crimson eyes not only add a sense of contrast in colour but also provide a vibrant, sensitive instrument for effective expression. All this takes time. To get an actor ready for the stage, it usually takes between four to five hours.

### Vachika

The *Vachika* component of *abhinaya* in

Kathakali is provided by the two musicians who sing the *slokas* and the *Padas* from behind the actors. The *slokas* constitute the narrative portion which may include introduction of the characters appearing in the scene, the events that have taken place in between scenes and so forth. The *Padas* constitute the dialogue. They are all set to specified *thalas*. The style of singing is known as *Sopana*, derived from the patterns adopted for singing hymns at the temple precincts.

### Angika

*Angika abhinaya* has a major role to play in Kathakali. As the actors do not use the spoken word, they need an effective gestural language to converse among themselves. So Kathakali has evolved its own elaborate language of gestures.

The basic component of this language are the *mudras* (*hasta lakshanas* or hand gestures). The language of Kathakali has been drawn freely from Bharatha but has been enriched to express almost everything under the sun. The gestures can be generally classified as

**Imitative:** to show an elephant, a lion, a deer, a snake and so forth

**Descriptive:** to show things like fire, river, mountain, city, house, etc.

**Expressive:** to express different moods like courteousness, anger, impatience, contempt etc. and

**symbolic:** to indicate destiny, Heaven, Hell, God, etc.

To express something, be it a word, an idea or a sentence and to convey the full



meaning of it, it is not enough if the hand gestures alone are employed. The facial expressions must accompany the hand gestures. Intensive and ruthless training for a period of a dozen years or more enables the actor to bring under perfect control every part of his body solely for the sake of aesthetic expression. His eyes are ever vibrant, his facial muscles eloquent, his finger-tips creative and his whole person the very embodiment of rhythm. The language of Kathakali is thus an integrated effort of the limbs, the eyes, the facial muscles and the movements of the body. It is stylised, yet eloquent.

### **Satvika Abhinaya**

*Satvika abhinaya* is the core of Kathakali, It is the perfection of *Satvika abhinaya* attained in Kathakali that has made it the total theatre. *Satvika abhinaya* is also known as *Rasa abhinaya*. *Rasa* is aesthetic flavour or sentiment. In a drama all the various aspects of *abhinaya* should culminate in the delineation of *rasa*. Traditionally, the principal aesthetic emotions are nine. They are:

<i>Sringara</i>	(amour)
<i>Veera</i>	(Valour-Heroic)
<i>Karuna</i>	(Pathos- Pathetic)
<i>Adbhutha</i>	(wonder)
<i>Raudra</i>	(Wrath or fury)
<i>Haasya</i>	(Contempt-Comic)
<i>Bhayanaka</i>	(Fearful-fright)
<i>Beebatsa</i>	(Disgust-revulsion)
and <i>Shantha</i>	(tranquillity)

In Kathakali all these are delineated with consummate skill which comes out of the rigorous training the actor has to undergo. It is not mere technical excellence that is

aimed at. The actor merges with the role portrayed. His description, for instance, of a lotus, its blossoming and its folding up at dusk does not come out of mere training but of dedicated observation of the lotus in a pond from dawn to dusk and assimilating the very spirit of its life.

### **The Stage**

The stage of Kathakali is the simplest imaginable. The only equipment needed on the stage is a huge coconut-oil-fed lamp towards which all movements converge. The curtain used is a small rectangular piece of cloth called *Thirassila*. The drums used are the *chenda* and the *maddala*. The *Chenda* is not used during *Lasya*. The other musical accompaniments used are the *Chengila* (the gong) and *ilathala* (the cymbals).

### **The Traditional Performance**

In the truly traditional style, Kathakali is played throughout the night in the open air. It starts in the evening with *Kelikottu*, the formal announcement when all the drums and cymbals are played in the courtyard for a while. At about 9 o'clock in the night, the *maddala* is played for a short while in front of the oil lamp. This is followed by *Totaya* when one or two players perform an invocational piece. After this, the musicians sing the first *sloka* of the story of the night. This is followed by *Purappatu* and *Melappada*. After the *Melappada*, the story begins.

### **I1akiattam, the Forte of Kathakali**

One of the unique features of a Kathakali performance is what is called *Ilakkiattam*. The term is used to distinguish it from

*Cholliattam*. *Cholliattam* means dancing to the words sung by the musician. The musician can sing only what is written in the poem. When the artistes act to express the meaning of the *slokas* and the *padas* sung by the musician, it is *Cholliattam*. At the end of it one should normally expect the curtain. But the curtain does not fall so soon in Kathakali. The characters continue to converse with each other by the use of gestures and *Hasthalakshanas*. Depending upon the talent and standing of the artiste on the stage, this conversation can occupy anything from five minutes to a few hours. An artiste of high calibre can make the scene most effective and delightful.

Traditions and conventions have determined the occasions when *Ilakiattam* could be elaborate. To cite one example: the story is *Bali Vijaya* in which Ravana, at the instigation of Sage Narada, goes to Bali, challenges him to a fight and gets thoroughly humiliated in the end. In the scene in which Narada, with his inimitable technique, infuriates Ravana against Bali, the great Lord of Lanka decides to go and teach Bali a lesson. The *pada* ends there. Thereafter, both Ravana and Narada enter into a long dialogue. The incident can be developed from Ravana picking up his famous Chandrasasa, the sword presented to him by Lord Shiva and Narada making fun of him by saying that any-one would laugh at the idea of a hero like Ravana using a sword, to vanquish a mere monkey instead of carrying a small piece of rope to tie it up. This could give an opportunity to Ravana to explain to Narada what Chandrasasa meant to him. He could

describe his triumphant battle with Vaishravana, the Lord of Wealth; the capture of the *Pushpaka Vimana* (the legendary aeroplane), his storming of Mount Kailas and the way in which he threw up the whole mountain as if it were a feather and so forth.

Depending upon the talent and the mental horizon of the artiste, he could make the scene an unforgettable one. Ardent devotees of Kathakali look forward to scenes of *Ilakiattam* rather than to any other portion of Kathakali. Other occasions when *Ilakiattam* is done are where a character takes an opportunity to describe a forest (*Vana Varnana*), the heaven (*Swarga Varnana*) and so forth.

### Literature

The plays of Kathakali are written in the form of *Attakathas* by eminent poets. There are about a hundred such plays which are popular. In addition to the Raja of Kottarakkara who first choreographed this art form, the great composers include the Kottayam Raja, Maharaja Rama Varma and Prince Aswathi Thirunal of Travancore, Unnai Warriar, Irayimman Thampi, Vayaskara Moossu and Kilimanoor Koil Thampuran. Unnai Warriar's play on the story of King Nala spread over four days is reputed to be the most outstanding of them all. More and more plays get written all the time. But very few make the mark. Literary or poetic excellence alone does not make a Kathakali play. It is the dramatic content of it and its effectiveness on the stage that matter.

### Versatility of the Artistes

The hundred and odd plays have more than a thousand characters. The unique feature of the Kathakali actor is that he should be ready to perform any role without notice. Usually, the role allotted to an actor is announced only when he enters the green room. The musicians too have to sing the entire play from memory. The ruthlessness with which the artistes have to be trained to attain this stage can well be imagined.

### Training In Kathakali

Traditionally, the system of training in Kathakali is the Gurukula style. Boys are caught young, at the age of ten to twelve. They stay with the Guru. The training starts in the early hours of the morning. To begin with, the student has to undergo a rigorous course of physical exercises and daily massage with medicated oils so that the body becomes supple enough to provide the necessary grace in movements and gestures. Separate exercises are prescribed for the eyes, the brows, the chin, the lips, the head and the neck. The eye gets special attention as it contributes most to an actor's excellence on the stage. It is necessary that the artiste gains a good background in Malayalam and Sanskrit and an ability to appreciate poetry. It is also essential that he becomes familiar with our vast mythological lore. So he is given daily tuition on the epics and literature. Once the body exercises have prepared him for further work, he is put through the various dance movements. From the second year of the training, *Cholliattam* would begin. This is done for a few hours every day. The dialogues in the form of *padas* are sung in the background and the Guru directs the student to express the meaning in

stylised gestures and movements. It takes six years before a student can attain the minimum standards of technical excellence. During this period, he gets an opportunity to play minor roles on the stage. The Guru's task is over when he has satisfied himself that the student has achieved technical excellence and has acquired sufficient knowledge of the epics so that he could effectively project the appropriate character of the role performed. The development of the actor into an artiste of distinction depends entirely on his own initiative thereafter.

### Dancing in Kathakali

In Kathakali, the drama and dance are so blended together that one cannot separate the one from the other. Dancing in Kathakali is not mere *Nritta* (pure dance) but *Nrithya*, (interpretative dance) existing side by side with *Nritha*. At the end of every segment of the dialogue, there is a *Kalaasa*, a dance sequence that provides the punctuation. *Kalaasas* vary according to the mood and circumstances; they vary according to the characters doing it. The *bhava* dominating the situation dictates the nature of *Kalaasa* employed. If it is *Sringara*, the *Kalaasa* is slow, gentle, rounded and graceful. The *Kalaasa* that precedes a challenge to battle or when there is righteous indignation would be brisk of movement and expressive of heroic sentiments. *Kalaasas* in war could be breath takingly vigorous while those of feminine characters could be the very embodiment of grace and beauty. *Asta kalaasa* is the most intricate of all *Kalaasas*. It is done on rare occasions when a character is under the influence of an overpowering combination of emotions of

exhilaration, pride and satisfaction. The drums and cymbals accompanying the *Kalaasas* emphasise their quality with special reference to the *bhaua* involved. Dancing in Kathakali is employed to accentuate the dramatic element, to enrich the lyrical tone and to build up and sustain the entire fabric of the drama on rhythm.

### Sophistication And Power

When Kathakali stormed into the *Theatre de Nations* in Paris in 1967, it created history in the Western theatre world. Edmond Gilles, the leading critic of Europe, admitted, "It is, in fact, the loss of meaning in the theatre of the Western world that had impressed us most, when we came away from this demonstration of Kathakali and it seemed as if there were no limits to what we have yet to learn from the Eastern theatre". Keith Dowhurst of the *Guardian* said after seeing Kathakali at the Sadler's Wells in London in 1970 that, "It is a total art form of immense sophistication and power". According to Clement Crisp of the *Financial Times*, "This amalgam of everything from low comedy to the noblest expression of man's relationship with the divine has become inevitable for the theatre festivals of Europe and the British Isles". A traditional Kathakali performance runs through the night and the *Mangala sloka* is sung in the dawn.

### Training Institutions

The most significant institution that imparts training in Kathakali is the Kerala Kalamandalam perched on the banks of river Bharathapuzha at Cheruthuruthy, a

sleepy hollow, about 110 Kms. from Cochin. Founded by the late Poet Vallathol, at a time- when classical art forms were in a lamentably distressed state, this Academy of Classical Arts is the nearest approach to a Gurukula. The Kalamandalam is financed by the State Government. Another institution that does yeomen service to



Kathakali is the Kottakkal Arya Vaidyasala, located at about sixty kilometres from Kozhikode, Founded by a great philanthropist, late P. S. Varier, the institution is owned by a trust and is managed with competence and imagination.

The Udyogamandal Kathakali Theatre is another institution which has established reputation for imparting training and showmanship throughout the world. At Pakalkuri, forty kilometres to the north of Trivandrum, Kalabharathi, an institution founded under the leadership of the late Guru Cheng annul Raman Pillai is the only one that imparts training in pure Kaplingad style today.

## Mohiniaattam

Dr. (Smt.) KANAK RELE

The mighty ocean churned on and on. These were no ordinary disturbances arising in the bowels of the ocean many thousand leagues beneath the surface. Those were not the elements that whipped up the ocean. This was no seasonal upheaval to determine the seasons, to determine the destiny of the Universe. On whirled the mountain Mandargiri with the serpent Vasuki twined around it. The *devas* and the *daanavas* were the churners, churning away the ocean to get at the essence of life, existence. *Amrita* was the reward. The magical *amrita*, the elusive potion that every living being thirsts for to achieve immortality, unending youth. On and on churned the ocean whipping up mountainous waves and liberating great force, a force that was capable of sinking the earth. The ocean emptied all the unparalleled treasures that it had in its depths. Out came the *kalpavriksha* and the *kaamadhenu*, and ultimately, Lakshmi. All were relinquished to the *devas*, The only reward was *amrita*. At last, the great storms were allowed to subside; Mandargiri to stop whirling and *Vaasuki* to rest. The

*daanauas*, true to their creed, grabbed the *amrita*.

a Lord: a Mighty Saviour! Save the universe from this awful calamity. There is nothing left but darkness with the *amrita* in the hands of the *daanavas*, and Maha Vishnu, the Saviour of the universe, came to the rescue.

### Mohini

A heavenly glow, heavenly music, silver bells tinkling beauty unsurpassed-MOHINI. Mohini, the lotus-eyed, enchanting one and all with her celestial dance-Mohini the Enchantress. Oh! the heavenly enchantment. Shut your eyes a while to perpetuate the imprint of this enchanting sight in your mind. Forget everything just a while. This is Mohini--the Saviour is Mohini and this is a dance not of destruction but of enchantment in the very air that you breathe, in the music and in the twinkling toes of the dancer. What if she orders you to shut your eyes awhile in order to steal *your amrita*? The vision of her divine being will enchant you forever in your dreams. What is *amrita*, immortality, when this divine form fills your





vision and senses with the enchanting dance, the celestial dance, the dance of the celestial enchantress--Mohiniattam.

### Mythology

Mythology. A magical word. Indian traditions have always found an impeccable ally in the Hindu pantheon, The Indian mind is so conditioned as to accept as gospel truth all that is decreed and propagated by the mythological themes. Hinduism as a way of life lays down a set of tenets to be followed by those who wish to tread the right path. The principle to be propounded is so woven into the texture of the theme that its message is manifest as such only to the learned and the initiate, to those who are seeking it. It is then left to these people to interpret and preach these aspects to the general mass of ordinary people.

India has always been the melting pot of different cultures of the races that periodically swept down her fertile plains and made her their permanent home. To lay down tenets that would be acceptable to the temperaments, beliefs and inclinations of all these ethnic groups was a herculean task. A way had to be found which was an envelopment of the multiracial society and at the same time so very simple as to be acceptable to the ordinary simple mind. And what could be better than to achieve it by utilising the traditions that dated to prehistory-mythology? It could be said that our very inspiration, the mainstream of creativity, is drawn from mythology and divinity. Essentially a race of worshippers of beauty, it is only fitting that Indians should give

the impregnable shield, a veneer of divinity to everything that is beautiful and thus to be worshipped-to be preserved intact and inviolate, to be passed on from generation to generation.

Actually, beneath these surface ethno-cultural interactions, there lay the strong layer of the earliest culture which was a throwback from the indigenous pre-Aryan races and comprising of images and impressions which were linked to prehistory. This resulted in the religious practices acquiring high ritualistic fervor revealing intimacy with magic formulae of the Tantric cult. The belief in magic, sorcery and witch-craft and their practice helped to maintain contact with the unseen and mysterious forces. And thus the Hindu pantheon came to be used to represent the fundamental struggle between good and evil-the *daanvas* emerging from the depths of the nether world to challenge the *devas*. And man was encouraged to hope for a deliverance from such a confrontation through the alliance with the supreme and benevolent power which is always victorious. This benevolent power itself could liberate a tremendous magical force which could shake the universe. It could create great natural disturbances, plot great wars and unleash calamities-all creations of the magical divinity. A mesh net of spell was magically cast to create illusions-*maaya*. But every now and then the beauty-worshipping romantic spirit flowered. And again and again this same benevolent power would assume a form of great beauty, this time casting a magical spell of sheer enchantment-Mohini the enchantress employing her guiles to

enslave the evil forces.

Our mythology registers a number of these clashes between Mohini and the *daanvas* or *asuras*. And in many such instances it is Mahaa Vishnu, the life sustainer, who assumes this enchanting form. An enchanting dance, the resultant divine force, the fruit of that romantic spirit which flowered again and again; Mohini dancing the dance of the enchantress-Mohini Aattam.

### **The Style and Grace**

The art history of India abounds in instances which illustrate her rare quality of assimilation and synthesis which is perhaps the secret of her culture and art flourishing in an almost unbroken continuity for several millennia. So it is easy to accept the fact that while at one time the dance must have been, in fact was, almost identical in all parts of India, it eventually developed variations and styles like the dialects (*Prakrits*) and then on to the modern languages imbibing local geographical and social traits and characteristics. Against this factor it can be seen how the four better known dance styles of Kathakali, Bharata Natyam, Manipuri and Kathak came to be developed and practised as similar and yet very different dance styles.

Until very recently it was presumed that these were the only classical styles of Indian dance. Then in an imperceptible and dramatic manner, styles like Kuchipudi, Odissi and Mohini Aattam were discovered in their native setting and brought out on the urban stage to the delight and wonderment of the modernised art lovers.

And there being a subtle permeation of the regional folk practices in the classical dances there emerged robustness and vitality which added not only distinctiveness and verve but also beauty and enjoyment. Out of all these, Mohini Aattam is perhaps the best example of such a fusion. Foundationally a product of the interaction of two cultures and their artistic creations-the Kerala and the Tamil-it has in its framework the beautiful lyrical elements of the social folk-dances of the graceful Women of Kerala.

Kerala is, and justifiably so, renowned for the magnificent Kathakali which was and to a greater extent still is the exclusive preserve of man. Its severe demands and exclusive admittance of men seemed to seek, very naturally, a more graceful and flexible dance form suited to the women. The existing matrix of social dances performed by the women on festive occasions provided a beautiful skeleton which could be filled with the flesh and sinews of the classical practices as codified by Bharata in the *Naatya Saastra* and its resultant dance practice and repertoire which was flourishing and was extremely popular in the adjacent Tamil and Telugu provinces. And as would be natural, Mohini Aattam exhibits great affinity to the theatrical tradition backing Kathakali.

### **Antiquity**

There are different opinions regarding, its antiquity. There are some scholars who would date it as early as the *Silapadikaaram* (2nd century A.D.) and yet some others who would date it to the 10th century A.D. basing their surmise on two

inscriptions. The Chokkur inscription seems to be the earliest (932 A.D.) reference to dancing girls in Kerala using the word *nangayar*. There is also an epigraphic record of 934 A.D. from Nedumparam Tali prescribing the quantum of payment to the *nangayars* and *nattuvanaars* (dance-masters). A book called *Vyavahaaramaala* in Sanskrit written in 16th century A.D. has a Malayalam commentary written in 1709 A.D. where it prescribes the royalty to be paid to Mohini Aattam players and other artistes. Later, Kunjan Nambiar, the creator of *Ottanthullal* mentions Mohini Aattam. The reference to Kunjan Nambiar brings us to the glorious period of the Travancore Maharajahs. The most note-worthy for Mohini Aattam being Sri Kartika Tirunaal Ramavarmaa (1758-98 A.D.) who wrote the *Balaramabharatham*, a standard work in Sanskrit based on the *Natyasastra* with a strong bias towards dancing. The king himself mentions that he is writing



on the prevalent practice of his times. Also Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer in his *Kerala Sahitya Charitam* (Part III pp. 327) writes: "The Maharaja (Kartika Tirunaal) was very pleased on witnessing Dasiyaattam which came from *para desa* (Tamil-nadu). He arranged with Karutedat Chomatiri, one of his courtiers, to promote and spread in Kerala this art form in the name of Mohini Aattam for the first time."

And now we come to Kartikka Tirunal's

illustrious successor-Swati Tirunaal. For a long time, many of the historians were under the impression that it was in Swaati's court and at his instance that Mohini Aattam came into being. Almost everyone based their opinion on the fact that Swaati's exquisite lyrics were predominantly used in Mohini Aattam. Also, after Tanjore's King, Sarfoji's death, two brothers--Ponniah and Vadivelu-(of the renowned Tanjore Quartet responsible for shaping today's Bharata Natyam repertoire) migrated to Swaati's court. Swaati himself was a musician and a poet of exceptional merit.

It seems certain that with his highly developed aesthetic and artistic taste, Swaati realised the great potential of this lovely art and accorded it patronage and improved its status.

This would easily explain the fact that the Mohini Aattam repertoire runs parallel to that of Bharata Natyam, which is very natural since the Tanjore *vidvaans* would influence the entire process and Swaati's *kritis* would

naturally provide fitting accompaniment. And yet there are a few dissimilarities.

### Similarities and Dissimilarities

A traditional Bharata Natyam recital today has the following *items*-*Alarippu*, *Jatisvaram*, *Sabdam*, *Varnam*, *Padam*, *Jaavali*, *Slokam* and *Thillanaa*. But in Mohini Aattam, we find that there is no item similar to *Alarippu* and instead *Cholluketta* is danced as the invocation. But this practice

appears to date back to the ancient times. The *Chollukettu* is followed by a *Svarajati* or a *Jatisvaram*. The *Sabdam* that follows in Bharata Natyam is absent in Mohini Aattam; it appears that it has got merged into the *Chollukettu*. Then comes a *Padavarna* -a taxing item in both the styles which beautifully blends *nritta* (pure dance) and *nriya* (expressive dance). There are *Padams* in plenty in Mohini Aattam. The other items are *Slokam*, *Jaavali* and *Tillaanaa*.

One of the most glorious and individualistic characteristics of Mohini Aattam is that it uses almost all the major languages of the South as also Sanskrit.

Technically, the basic posture of the feet resembles that of Kathakali excepting that the foot is planted flat on the ground and not on its edge as in Kathakali. The foot-work greatly resembles Bharata Natyam but there is no vigorous stamping as in Bharata Natyam.

The body movements are rotary-very graceful and flowing giving a fullness to the torso which balances the upper and the lower parts of the body in perfect harmony giving to Mohini Aattam the fascinating picture of the undulating palms of the Kerala sky-line and its rippling back waters. The simple and soft costumes and jewellery identify Mohini Aattam with the soft pastoral charm of Kerala.

The rich *abhinaya* of Kathakali is softened and made more subtle and yet it is definitely

more exuberant and eloquent than the detached representations of Bharata Natyam. Soft, imbued with grace and delicacy it appears to be richer and more dynamic. Mohini Aattam has the emotional depth of Kathakali and the visual and ennobling appeal of Bharata Natyam.

A special mention must be made of the *nayanaabhinaya* of Mohini Aattam. The merrily dancing eyes and the gaily fluttering eye-brows of a Mohini Aattam dancer create a devastating atmosphere full of mischief and bewitchment-totally suitable to Mohini, the enchantress who has come to enchant. Yet this enchantment does not mean overstepping the limits of decency and decorum. Rather it is human activity of the highest order; of decency and decorum which create a rare feeling of satisfaction and happiness without arousing the base feelings or hurting the sensibilities of ordinary decent human beings. The Mohini casts the net of her *maaya* and envelops the entire audience stilling their inherent *asurik* tendencies. Mohini never lure, only enchants.

It is worth mentioning here that at the turn of the present century this lovely dance style had reached SUI such a pass that only three or four items from its once rich repertoire were practised. But due to the efforts of a few dedicated dancers, the present author being one of them, this dance style is coming into its own and is accepted as one of the major classical dance practices of our country.

## Bharatanatyam

SMT. CHITRA VISWESWARAN

Each nation in this world is characterised by certain features peculiar to that particular country. With India what is decidedly striking is the attitude towards life and all that forms part of it. The Indian mind tends to interpret all happenings in the world in philosophical terms. And Philosophy here is in turn closely connected and interwoven with Hindu religion. In India these two fields run along parallel lines that often fuse into one. They can never be separated and they form the very essence of our sociology and education. To us they are not merely subjects of abstract study to be confined within the portals of educational institutions. Rather, they form the very woof and warp of our society upon which our way of life is hinged.

It is then but natural that art too has religious and philosophical undertones. In ancient India it formed an important part of religion and was essentially a mode of worship, Natyam, vadyam, and gitam were the paths that led one to the attainment of 'moksha' or spiritual salvation.

It is of great interest to note that the origin of dance in our country is traced to divine causes. The sacred art of dance is said to have been the brain-child of Brahma, the creator in the Hindu Trinity of gods. The term 'dance' is used in our country for want of a more appropriate equivalent of the Sanskrit 'natya' which embodies a combination of dance, drama

and music; in Indian art these three are closely related and can never be completely diversified from each other. The dramatic scriptures of our country are said to have been brought into being by Brahma at the request of the lesser gods. The blessed Brahma framed the *Natya Veda* culling parts from the four *Vedas*. From the *Rig Veda* he drew forth words, from *Sama Veda*, singing, from *Tajur Veda*, gesture and from *Atharva Veda*, flavour (vide Chap. I, Bharata Muni's 'Natya Sastra'). Brahma taught this science of 'natya' to Bharata Muni and his hundred sons and Bharata compiled the rules and norms of this artistic science (or one may say a scientific art) into his famous treatise 'Natya Sastra'.

All classical dances in India can be traced back to this 'Natya Sastra'. Due to varying local and social factors that always influence art, dance in different regions took on various hues. For instance, the 'Kathak' dance of the North was usually performed in the courts of royalty. Repeated invasions, political and religious upheavals kept the art away from temples. The South was comparatively unaffected by these frequent political and social changes and so the popular classical dance-form, 'Bharata Natyam', was largely practised there in temples, though later on performances in courts also became common due to royal patronage. Social factors such as those mentioned above have gone a very long way in moulding



dance-forms into what they are today.

Bharatanatyam, which is the cultural heritage of Southern India, especially of Tamil Nadu, is said to have derived this name from Bharata Muni himself. Secondly, 'Bharata' itself means dance. Yet another school of thought propagated by Vedanta Desikar declares that the word 'Bharata' is actually an acrostic comprised of the syllables 'bha', 'ra' and 'ta' which respectively stand for 'bhava' (facial expression), 'raga' (musical note) and 'tala' (rhythm); these three certainly form the essential aspects of Bharatanatyam and there can be no dispute regarding their Importance.

A dancer portrays emotions and expresses ideas through the vehicle of her art. Naturally the portrayal would carry no weight if devoid of facial expression. 'Tala' or rhythm, lies at the very foundation of all dance-forms. Without a complete awareness of 'tala', a dancer can perform no dance at all, for it motivates the artistic presentation. Lastly, inspiration is necessary for the dancer and this comes through the medium of music which is always a must in a Bharatanatyam recital. Besides, what is dance but music of the body. There is music in dance and dance in music.

Technically speaking, Bharatanatyam has been divided into three distinct categories: 'Nritta', 'Nritya' and 'Natya'. 'Nritta' is pure dance where the spot-light is on 'tala' or

time measure. 'Alarippu', 'Jathiswaram' and, 'Thillana' are apt illustrations of this group.

Here no meaning is conveyed and the fundamental emotion is that of spiritual joy and ecstasy. These dances can be either done with or without music. Originally, 'Alarippu' was performed only to the utterance of drum syllables. In present times these syllables are set to music and



provide a melodious background to the dance.

In 'Nritya' a fusion of 'Nritta' or pure dance and 'bhava' or facial expression can be perceived. 'Varnam', the most elaborate and intricate piece in Bharatanatyam recital

which poses a challenge to the capacity of the dancer belongs to this category. Here intricate combinations of 'adavus' (or steps accompanied by limb movements) are interwoven with lines of the song. Expression through the language provided by the lines of the song is seen here.

To the 'Natya' category belong dance-dramas wherein each character is represented by a different dancer. Though essentially a style distinguished by solo presentation, Bharatanatyam is well-known for some of the traditional dance and ballets performed over the past few centuries. To this class belong the renowned 'Kuravanji' ballets, of which 'Cutrala Kuravanji', is the oldest extant composition. Today we find a number of new dance-dramas being staged many of which are commendable productions.

These are then the distinct classifications found in all schools of Bharatanatyam. The style with which I am directly associated is a substyle of the Tanjore School of Bharatanatyam and is called the Vazhuvoor style. Needless to say, like all the other modes, this one is also characterised by 'Angasudda' (perfection of limbs and movements), 'bhava' and 'tala'. But just as every school of any art lays emphasis on some aspect dear to it, this style gives importance to grace; the very grace in gesture that Nandikeswara's 'Abhinaya Darpana' throws light on; the very grace that transcends all art which is aesthetically appealing and spiritual is found here. To this effect the sinous and lyrical lines of South Indian temple sculpture are adapted, to suit the dance-form. The

'Karanas' and 'Sthanakas' expounded in the 'Bharatarnava' and 'Natya Sastra' find expression in the medium of this classical dance mode. In this respect it is revealing to study the sculptured carvings in the temples of Southern India. Of these temples, the most significant from this point of view, is that of Siva-Nataraja at Chidambaram. In this temple are found reproductions of the 108 'Karanas' spoken of in the 4th chapter ('Thandava Lakshanam') of Bharata's 'Natya Sastra'. Vazuhvoor Ramiah Pillai has played an important role in incorporating these sculptural poses in Bharatanatyam, for these had gone into oblivion in the recent past. His master-piece of artistic creation, "Natanam adinar", set to the song composed by Gopalakrishna Bharati, is full of these 'Karanas' and help in making the dance striking and appealing.

The various schools of Bharatanatyam may differ-but this difference is just superficial. Fundamentally they are all the same and along with all other forms of our art pertain to and pertain towards one spirit-a spirit that can be called Divine; a spirit that is omnipotent and omniscient. Because of this universal and spiritual quality it appeals to one and all. The painter finds colour in it; the sculptor, beauty in the form; the religious, a spiritual appeal, and the philosopher, esoteric implications. It is thus a universal art. As long as man can feel, as long as he can pray and think, this divine art will continue to live and capture the hearts of millions.

## DANCE CAN PLAY A THERAPEUTIC ROLE

SMT. SUDHARANI RAGHUPATHY

**T**o-day, dance all over the world has reached the height of perfection and finesse and has evolved into such a great art that it has become one of the major factors representing the culture of a country. In fact, Bharata Natyam of South India is considered one of the most highly developed arts in the world and a very vital form of art reflecting the ancient culture of India.

Dance has been a vehicle of culture from ancient times. It was not only a means to propitiate the gods, but also an entertainment, for various social functions like birth and marriage. With the passage of time, the dances acquired new forms and became more systematised. There sprung folk, tribal and ritual dances and the more sophisticated court and classical dances.

Since the art of dance is audio-visual, certain standards in beauty are considered necessary for a dancer; also perfection of the limbs. The female form has always fascinated man, including sculptors, painters and poets and the female dancer seems to be more prominent in the field, though of course there are male dancers also.

Rhythm and movement are the life-breath of dance. At some time or another each one of us has exhibited our emotions through movement. Rhythm and movement

are within us and a systematised and stylised form of movement, synchronised with rhythm, acquired through training, make dance an entertainment projected on the stage.

Can all of us dance? Why dance! Can all of us walk, run, jump in the normal way known to us since creation? Can we say that since, God created man in his own image, we are all perfect? According to Darwin's theory, man occupies the highest rung in the ladder of evolution. Why then do we see deformities? Man's child is said to be the most hapless of living things. It has to be fed and nurtured for quite a few years till the child becomes independent: Why then are deformed children born? Many reasons have been given. (1) Genes; (2) Marriages within the family; (3) Diseases; (4) Malnutrition and (5) Drugs.

The result is that the child is not accepted by society and it is unable to become a part of it. For no reason of its own it is rejected. Can this be prevented? Can this problem be over-come? Great strides have been made in the field of medicine to overcome the deformities. Is this possible through dance? Since it is a physical involvement, can it be used as a corrective for deformities?

### Therapy and Exercise

An affected child becomes the butt end of ridicule by all other children who have eyes

only for the naked truth. Children are no diplomats. An inferiority complex develops in the deformed child because it feels different from other children. The affected child can regain part of his self-confidence through the expression of dynamic co-ordinated movement wiping out the inferior feeling generated within the child and also in the parents. It should help to boost the morale of the parents of the afflicted children. It is also important that the parents are in the right frame of mind to guide the children to feel normal.

Can dance movements be incorporated and used as a probable corrective? A dancer is said to be the most coordinated person in the world. Can part of this coordination be achieved in the deformed children?

Bharata Natyam is considered one of the most beautiful forms of dance in the world. Why, it is a yoga in itself. Yoga in India from time immemorial was considered the best medicine for good health and the unique corrective for many physical and mental ailments. Bharata Natyam is an art wherein every part of the body is used - eyebrows, cheek muscles, toes and so on. The earliest and greatest treatise on the art is Bharata's *Natya Sastra*, a monumental work that deals with all aspects of dance, drama and theatre. As one reads through the pages of the

*Natya Sastra*, one is wonderstruck at the variety of every possible movement of the body and limbs conceived of by man and so methodically systematised and codified by the sage. It is no wonder then, that when we view the various styles of dance in the world, similarities in some of the

movements are recognised, Bharata lays down the number of movements for the eyes, eyebrows, cheek muscles, waist, hip, chest, shoulders, knees and what not. Surely, dance is a good exercise for the development of the body.

There can be no dance without music. Music is an integral part of dance. Music can be very soothing to the nerves. Why, our tradition says that once when a great musician sang a particular melody, it brought rain and another singing a different melody melted rocks. If nature could be stirred with music, then surely the rational mind of man is bound to react instantaneously. We have melodies for the different times of the day, for the different seasons and so on, which touch the depths of the soul. Hence Bharata Natya is referred to as an audiovisual experience.

Dance helps in (1) Concentration; (2) Exercising the limbs; (3) Acceleration of circulation; (4) Correcting certain faults; (5) Growth, physical and mental; (6) Relaxing the body and mind and (7) Imagination of the child, the most important aspect.

A child lives in a world of fantasy. Dance is a world of fantasy which is meaningful and gives an opportunity for self-expression. A combination of all these factors may have a therapeutic value. Hence the experiment to teach dance i.e. Bharata Natya with proper exercise, breathing, diet etc. as a probable corrective work with pleasure.

### **New Horizon**

Actually dance should be taught as part of deportment callisthenics, not just

therapeutic for the afflicted persons, but also for the development of beautiful human beings with a healthy and broad outlook on life, creating sensitivity and an awareness of the outside.

Such a school seems to exist in Japan. It is called "Tokushu Gako" meaning special school. This is Japan's special physical culture for primary and secondary school children. There are institutions for each of the following:

(a) Eye (b) Mentally retarded; (c) Deaf (d) Delicate children and (e) Physically deformed.

The purpose of these schools is to make the children physically independent and to gradually integrate themselves in social and professional activities. Shiju Oka provincial government, runs a special school called Urishiyama for physically deformed children. It has spacious airy buildings with plenty of light. If necessary, the walls could be removed to make the rooms into a hall. Pulleys and levers are used and also bar exercises. Music and movements are

also taught. The Japanese are basically very artistic people. They convert everything into a work of art. So even here the atmosphere is made beautiful for the children to combine work and pleasure, to reach the goal.

A question may be asked-why choose Bharata Natyam? It may be because it is

the style of dance learnt by the author, but there are other reasons also. It seems to be the most balanced of dance forms. As an author wrote: Bharata Natya is a composite art of rhythm, music, poetry, colour, sculpturesque poses, suspension of movement, symmetry, everything in beautiful balance.



Hence this experiment of teaching dance not only for stage glamour and publicity but as a therapy and as a probable corrective for physical deformities and disabilities in children. In my experience as a teacher in this field, a moderate improvement is visible in the affected pupils. Time will prove how much more successful this experiment will be.



## YAKSHAGANA BAYALATA

K. S. UPADHYAYA

**Y**akshagana Bayalata is an exquisite folk dance-drama played mostly in the South and North Kanara districts of Mysore State. The genesis of this folk art is still a matter of controversy, but it can be stated that it has much affinity with the various regional forms of dance-drama performed in India such as the Kathakali of Kerala, the Bhagavatha Mela of Tamilnadu, and the Veedhinatakam of Andhra Pradesh.

Yakshagana is known in different parts of Karnataka by different names. While in the plains of North Karnataka area it is termed *Doddaata*, in old Mysore area it is known as *Moodalapaya*. Its more refined form prevalent in the coastal districts of Karnataka is popularly called *Yakshagana*. Akin to Yakshagana, there is another folk art very popular in South Kanara district, namely, *Yakshagana Bombeyaata* (Puppet Show). This has also a hoary tradition of over three hundred years.

### The Origin

Expert opinion of scholars on these various form, of popular dance-dramas trace their origin to the Sanskrit dance-drama which was in vogue in India during the 4th century A.D. Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy a renowned critic and research scholar, has opined that ancient Shaivites were practising a *Natya Sastra* which was in no way inferior to the *Natya Sastra* of Bharata and that the centre of this *Natya Sastra* was the famous

Nataraja Temple of Chidambaram.

That these dance-dramas were distinctly different from the Sanskrit dramas was apparent. Sanskrit dramas were a combination of prose and poetry in *champu* style and the characters therein had to learn by rote the dialogue and there were no dance movements. But in Yakshagana it is different. Yakshagana is essentially a dance-drama with the characters depicting their roles effectively through dance, keeping step with the accompanying music.

There is no historical and written evidence to trace the origin of the name *Yakshagana* given to this form of music. Scholars have felt that like *Gandharvagana*, this form was named *Takshagana*. *Gandharvagana* became *marg* music while *Yaksha-gana* became popular as *desi* music. Those who specialised in this form of *desi natya shastra* were known as *Yakshas*, They became a community by themselves having taken up this art as a profession.

### The Difference

It is quite natural and understandable that there are several similarities between this kind of dance-drama and the drama traditions of the neighbouring areas. If, however, we examine these different traditions, part by corresponding part, we shall find differences and distinctive peculiarities. Take the system of singing, or the style of dancing, or costumes, or the make-up techniques employed in each

and make a comparative study; the individual character of each of these traditions stands out unmistakably. For instance, in Yakshagana Bayalata there is dialogue but, the Kathakali, Ottanthullal and Ramanattam traditions employ gesture instead. Kuchipudi is particularly full of these.

### The Main Features

Let us now consider the main features of Yakshagana. Firstly, it is a dance-drama combining dance and music. It must,

therefore, have a story, a theme. The story is taken from the Puranas mainly dealing with the ten incarnations of Vishnu and that is why this is otherwise called *Dashavatara Aata*. The theme is the triumph of good over evil, or right over wrong, of the gods over the demons.

Each story is in the form of a minor epic containing about two or three hundred stanzas in the various metres. These are set to music and sung by the *Bhagavatha* to the accompaniment of two percussion instruments called *chande* and *maddale*. The *maddale* is a variation of the *mridanga* but the *chande* or *chande vaadya* is peculiar to Yakshagana and is especially used in warlike scenes and scenes of terror. Each of such stories set to music is called a



*prasanga* and there are today about 125 such *prasangas*.

Devidasa, Parthi Subba, Venkata, Nagappaya, Rama Bhatta and other folk writers have composed a number of well-known *prasangas*, influenced as they were by political works of Kannada poets, Kumara Vyasa, Kumara Valmiki and others. All these writers belonged to the 17th century and after.

So far as the music is concerned, though only a few *ragas* are at present in vogue, eighty known *ragas* have been identified by experts as having been used. The main feature of these is their emotional appeal. There are different *ragas* to express the emotions of anger, heroism, pity, horror, fear etc. An 'angry' *raga* accompanied by

the frenzied beating of the *chande* and the appropriate dance of an actor may resemble the challenging roar of a lion in burst of fury and have a blood-curdling effect on the spectator. The minimum duration of a *prasanga* is about 3 to 4 hours.

Although these *ragas* bear the same names as those in Karnatak music, they are entirely different in the mode of style of singing. The derivation of the *raga* is so vastly different from that of Karnatak music that Yakshagana music is distinctly a separate system altogether.

The distinct features of Yakshagana music are that, though the *swam prasthara* may be the same as either Karnatak or Hindustani style of classical music, the *gamaka* and *alapana* style here is unique. We should be proud that the *suddha* Yakshagana music remains evergreen only in the Kanara districts. This system is transmitted by the guru to the disciple, who was to devote a lifetime of labour in order to master it. As already noted, the main feature of this system of music is its emotive power.

War-like emotions are derived by *ragas*, *Gandharva*, *Bhairavi*, *Kambhoji* etc. The *ragas Nilambari*, *Anandabhairavi*, *Todi*, *Saveri*, *Regupati*, *Punnaga Thodi*, *Mohana Kalyani* etc. depict the emotion of sorrow. *Madhyamavathi*, *Todi*, *Arabi*, *Sri*, *Shankarabharana* etc. depict pity. *Nadanamakriya*, *Mukhari* etc. excel in the depiction of the terrible and the bizarre, and others like *Mechu*, *Kore* and *Davalara* also are in vogue. During the course of the entire performance of the one-night session, the *sruti* will have to be altered

at least 8 to 10 times.

The second feature of the Yakshagana dance-drama is that there is no pre-meditated prose dialogue. It is improvised by the actors and is based on the musical stanza, sung by the *Bhagaoatha*. While the *Bhagaoatha* sings a stanza, the actors dance and when he stops singing they interpret the stanza in the form of a dialogue or a monologue as the case may be. Thus each stanza of the *Prasanga* is elaborated and expounded by extempore dialogue. It may also be noted in passing that all female roles are played by male actors.

Thirdly, the dance form of the Yakshagana is peculiar to this art. It is more primeval than refined. Like the *ragas*, it highlights primitive human passions and emotions, especially fury and terror. These two emotions are more constantly evoked as the stories deal mostly with battles, scenes of violence and carnage. There is a variety of foot-work and movements which appropriately express these emotions. The actors dance to the music sung by the *Bhagavatha* and to the resounding beat of the *chande*. In Bharata Natya terms, the dance form can be said to be more of the *tandava* variety, although there are *lasya* movements also.

### Adaptation of Themes

Bharata's *Natyashastra* has in itself various special features of the different dance traditions of this great country, in a more or less codified form. The 108 *Karanas*, the 33 *pindi bandhas*, 32 varieties of *charis*, *niraalamba charis*, 6 *sthanas*, the *prayoga nyayas-Bharatha saathiva*, *vaarshajanya*

and *kaishiki*, while using the weapons, the *atikranta*, *vichitra*, *lalithashankara*, *suchioidhdha*, *dandapada*, *oihritha*, *alaaiha* and other mandalas expounded in jumps, the face-to-face battle movements and other *gati pracharas* are also identified in Yakshagana by Bharata Natya experts. These features are still preserved in the various Yakshagana troupes here even to this day. Instances like, Gaya on his *gagana samhara*, Kaurava entering the *dwaipayana sarovara* Arjuna starting out on the chariot for his *vijay yatra* in *Ashvamedha Partia*, Kaurava on his *ghosha yaatra* and game-hunting expedition, Sita Rama-Lakshmana fording the river, Arjuna climbing the Indrakeela mountain, Babhruvaahana getting down into the *patalaloka*, lust ridden Keechaka entering his sister's *Vanitha vihara*, the last day's *ratharohana* scene of Karna, who at the same time is grief-stricken at the loss of his son and roused with the revengeful spirit against Partha, depicting the contrary feelings of *veer a* and *roudra* and such other scenes which are exhibited in different foot-work by the Yakshagana artistes. This will apply also to the *trivida rechakas*. The Yakshagana artistes, it may be noted, did not become adept in the art by a thorough study of the *Shastra*, but learnt the art by hereditary talent and also by keen observation and practice.

The theme for the *prasanga* having been drawn from Purana stories, in Yakshagana there is a special feature known as *voddolaga*, which presents the important characters to the audience. There are *voddolagas* both for *nayakas* (heroes) like Rama, Dharmaraja and also for

*prathinayakas* (villains) like: Kaurava, Ravana and other *rakshasas*. The classical *mudras* and foot-work displayed by the important characters during this *voddolaga* scene and partially hidden behind a curtain is something significant. *Shivabhaktas* like Hiranyakasipu, Ravana etc. very effectively display in tune with the tala, the various daily ablutions and *pujas* offered to *sivalinga*. *Hastamudrika* plays a significant role in this type of *abhinaya*. *Shikhara mudra* is used to denote heroism and authority; *Mrigashirsha* and *kataka mudra* to denote. *Danta Dhavana*; *pallava mudra* for *Bhasmadharana*; *pataka mudra* for looking at the mirror; *mushti mudra* for displaying strength, *karatari mukhamudra* to denote assurance of protection, are among the six important *mudras* that could be noticed in the *voddolaga* scene. The various characters push aside the curtain and enter the *rangasthala* (stage) with foot-work of the mixed type of *tandava* and *tandava lasya* depending on the character of the hero or villain whom the actor wishes to portray and also to depict the essence of the story. A very special feature of the *voddolaga* dance is the *bidithige* (*chande* beats), which is different for each character who makes his entry into the stage. This feature of *bidithige* helps a spectator to identify the character in *voddolaga*, even from a long distance just by hearing the beats. An experienced artiste of Yakshagana who might be an adept in the various techniques of the dance-form, learnt either instinctively or by observation, many a time, may not be aware of the names of the characteristic intricacies of the various *mudras*, steps or foot-work. They are ignorant of the

*lakshanas* or its history.

### Costume and Make-up

A very important feature of Yakshagana, however, is the costume and *aaharya abhinaya*- make-up of the actors. It is at once beautiful, colourful, bizarre, as also frightening. The art of facial make-up or *mukha varnik*, as this art is called, has a long tradition. Different characters have a different facial make-up. The most terrifying to behold is that of the *rakshasa* character. The effect of fear and horror instilled in the observer is to be appreciated only by seeing it. Words cannot adequately express the effect of make-up of such characters. Head-gear and dress also play a distinct role in the make-up. There are different types of head-gear for different characters, such as the hero, a king, a prince, minister, a *rakshasa*, a *kiratha*, a *gandharva*, etc. The *kore*, turbans of a *kiratha-gandharva's* red turban, the impressive *varnik* of a *Rakshasa*, Kama's black turban, the *kedige mundale* (small turbans) of characters like Arjuna, Babhravahana, Sudhanwa which are prepared afresh on each occasion, beautiful crown (*mukuta*) of Hamsadhwaaja, Kalamlabhoopa, and such other head-gears, have resulted in a valuable contribution of Karnataka-like Chalukya and Hoysala *shilpa*-to Indian art- and cultural traditions. Dr. V. Raghavan, a great authority on Indology has to say: "Yakshagana make-up is decidedly more graceful, richer and more closely related to the ornamentation found in our sculpture than the Kathakali make-up".

A unique feature of the items used in the

make-up is that they are made from purely indigenous materials-light wood, paddy stalk, arecanut bark, bamboos, waste jute, cotton etc. There are different kinds of *bhujakriti*, arm-bands, *kataka*, waist-bands, *virakaccha* etc. In fact, the make-up is so devised that characters like Lord Krishna, Arjuna, Babhravahana, Ravana, etc. can be distinctly identified by their make-up.

Dress is generally of deep colours with patterns consisting of squares with alternating colours. The most essential feature of the costume and ornaments is the colour and glitter. The mere sight of it is thrilling to the spectator who is transported to the glittering *puranic* world of gods and demons. The Gudigars, a class of craftsmen of South Kanara and Shimoga districts of Mysore State, have excelled in this art.

The total effect produced by the rousing music of the *Bhagavatha*, the rattling beats of the *chande*, the frenzied dance of the actors and their brilliant costume and colourful make-up combine to transport the spectator in a crescendo of music and dance to the din of ancient battle-fields and deeds of valour.

### The Stage and Setting

As the name itself suggests, Yakshagana Bayalata (*bayalu-field; aata-play*), is a play staged in open fields of paddy after the monsoon when the harvest has been carted home. The stage-rangasthala as it is popularly known-is a square ground with a bamboo pole stuck in each corner to mark off the outer edge; its only decoration being bunches of fresh mango leaves, green and tender, festooned from pole to pole.



About 30 to 40 feet from this is the green room, *chowki*, in popular language. Here, in the blaze of torches, now fast being replaced by petromax lights-the characters do the make-up. It is a peculiar characteristic of Yakshagana Bayalata that each actor acts as his own make-up man and serves to impart an individualistic stamp to the traditional patterns of design. The torches and the brown soil and the

observes almost all the details given for *poorvarang* abhinaya by Bharata in his *Natya-shastra*. Here it is called *sabhalakshana*. The first of these dances is the dance of the *kodangis*, or trainees, and begins after sunset. This is followed by a prayer to Lord Ganesha. After *puja* in the *chowki*, the man who plays the jester in the drama (*vidushaka*) carries the image of the deity to the *rangasthala*



deep green vegetation around, canopied over by the dark blue sky, provide a most enchanting backdrop for the play.

### The Preparations

The play is preceded by a few traditional dances to keep the audience engaged as well as to allow enough time for make-up. In fact, the Yakshagana Bayalata is the only traditional dance-drama which still

accompanied by the *Bhagavata* and drummers and offers it a ceremonial *arati*. The argument of the drama to be enacted is given at this moment through recitation of one or two brief songs. The stage is then engaged by two small boys made up as cowherds (*Bala Gopalaka*), and they dance for a while, and when they make their exit, two female characters come on the stage and do some *lasya* dance.

After these preliminary dances, the *uoddolaga* begins. Most of the important characters make their appearance in this scene, but they stand with their backs to the audience and dance behind a curtain which only half reveals them. Female characters do not show themselves in this scene. After the *Nayaka* who gives the *voddolaga* finishes his dance along with his retinue and is seated on an improvised dais, the *Bhagaoatha* very respectfully elicits a self-introduction of each character as also the background of the story by putting questions.

### The Different Roles

The stellar role in Yakshagana is known as *Eradane vesha* (second role) because traditionally, *Bhagavatha* plays the first role. Besides this, generally there are five other roles. *Purusha vesha* (hero), *Sthree vesha* (heroine), *Rakshasa vesha* (demons), *Hasya* (jester) and *Moorane vesha* (third or minor roles). All these roles require intense training in dance and diction and background knowledge of the Puranas. The training is mostly by observation and by an expert in the art passing it on to someone in the family.

The most important person in the play is the *Bhagavatha*. It is he who runs the whole show. He controls, guides and directs every little thing. He is the *Sutradhara* without whose approval nothing can happen. It is he who sings the songs of *prasanga* and it is on his rendering of them and on his appreciation of the subtleties and conflicts in the play that the success

of the show depends. Every character makes obeisance to him on entrance.

The play ends shortly before sunrise, with the rise of the morning star in the distant horizon. The *Bhagavatha* sings the final benediction *mangala*, offers *aarti* to the gods and returns to the *chowki* for prayer and thanksgiving to Lord Ganesha.

### Lack of Sponsorship

Every Yakshagana troupe is generally sponsored or patronised by a temple. Sometimes, to propitiate the deity for begetting a child, in time of trials and stress, devotees offer to organise a drama by the troupe of the temple.

Those troupes which are mostly maintained by the several temples in the two Kanara Districts are today finding it a strain to maintain the tradition. On an average an artiste in a troupe is paid about Rs. 1,500 for the six months he is engaged by the contractor of the *melas* (troupe). This is hardly sufficient for him to maintain himself and a family. So the artistes are either giving up this profession or turning to troupes who perform solely with an eye to popular appeal.

It is a pity that such a noble art as Yakshagana which, if performed in the traditional way, should give pleasure to and uplift a vast mass of our people, should have come to such a sorry pass. Unless we give some thought to this matter and think of ways to keep the art alive, we will lose this precious treasure.

## A Glimpse Into Odissi Dance

Dr. MINATI MISHRA

Indian art has its origin from religion, and philosophy. All the forms of Indian art, be it music, dance, painting, sculpture, architecture or literature, have their roots deep in the religion of the country. As such, Indian art is a spontaneous expression of sincere devotion to god. The word *sadhana* which means continuous pursuit of meditation is very often associated with it. This association gives a perception of life-long devotion to Indian art. Devotion means complete concentration to reach the goal. The artist in his devotion is united *with* the Almighty and feels himself as one complete whole.

The background of Indian dance is more antequated than the history of man or the history of a nation. It is the history of the soul of India. Dance is not something meant for mere demonstration, but it is something aimed at self-realisation. Dance is a form of Yoga.

It is a means of achieving unity in consciousness. It is a path towards God and Salvation.

### Dance and Religion

Dance is intimately connected with religion.

All original themes of the songs adopted were only on gods and their deeds. It was always held in a brighter sphere and was considered to be the path that could be adopted for attaining *moksha*. It is like the union science, (*Yoga Sastras*) which is the means of attaining spiritual freedom.

Dance being an art with an origin of divine attributes is intended for spiritual contentment. Unless an aspiring student really understands the real point of view, believes in its divine origin, the truth of the *Vedas* and *Shastras*, he or she cannot depict the art in its true sense. His

performance will be a pantomime, devoid of soul. Dr. Coomaraswamy says that there







is absolutely no room for any amateur in the field. An Indian artist is a professional and often dances for an audience of inspiring critics.

According to the Indian view, the power to experience aesthetic emotion is inborn and it cannot be acquired by mere study. Dance is the rhythmic philosophy that gives us tranquillity, patience, hope and unruffled joy like a lamp in a windless place, that does not flicker. All the forces of life are looked upon like a forest whose thousand moving arms are led by Lord Nataraja, the master of dance. Everything has its place, and every wing has its function; all take part in the divine concert, creating a most beautiful harmony. Religion and art are the names of one and the same as experienced

by the lover. Truth is reality as experienced by the philosophers and beauty is the reality, as experienced by the artist, and these are the three phases of the absolute, and it is through the collective work of art that the artist is able to communicate his experience.

There must have been at one time one system of classical dance in India. One area might have been cut off from the other and each area might have developed a local medium of its own. The influence of folk-dance may have

been assimilated in this form and this could have resulted in the development of new characteristics in seclusion.

### **The dance**

Odissi dance which is the typical classical form of Orissa, has its origin in the temples of Orissa. As the temples are the seats of cultural life in this State, the Odissi form of classical dance has rightly been associated with its day-to-day activities. Odissi dance is a peculiar form of Indian dance. The rhythm, *Bhangis* and *mudras* used in Odissi dance have a peculiar blending. It is based mainly on the theme of infinite love of Radha and Krishna.

The earliest mention of this form of classical dance is found in the *Natyashastra* of Bharatamuni which dates back to sometime

between 2nd century B.C. and 2nd century A.D. Four styles namely, *Avanti*, *Dakshinatya*, *Panchali* and *Odra Magadhi* were mentioned in this monumental and authoritative work.

Again we hear mention of seven styles of dance in *Abhinaya Chandrika* by Sri Maheswara Mahapatra, namely, *magadhi*, *Souraseni*, *Karnata*, *Kerala*, *Odra*, *Gouda* and *Panchanada*. Here we can refer Odissi dance to *Odra* style.

Siva and Parvati images found in Soro (Balasore) have used the *abhaya* mudra which is the earliest of mudras to be found in Orissan architecture. We can find the mudras of *dhyana*, *abhaya* and *bhumisparsa* in the dancing Heruka in Tandava pose at Ratnagiri, Orissa. For evidence, one has to take the Konarak temple into consideration, one of the last milestones of Indian architecture. Since the Konarak is a *lasya* conception, the dancing forms on the walls of this temple are also of *lasya* type. Every inch of the *Natamandir* is sculptured with the carvings of dancing girls and musicians. Dancers holding the drum, cymbals, mirrors, flute, show excellent expression of the dance-forms. The most fascinating of all is *Alasa Kanya* an expression of relaxation. It is a magnificent example of sculpture. The highest expression of Odissi dance was there in *Nayika bhavas* in Konarak temples as well as in the Ananta Vasudeva temple at Bhuvaneshwar. These are our evidences in stone. Let us now turn to living evidences.

History tells us that the practice of dedicating dancing girls to the temples in honour of the gods, was prevalent at one

time throughout India. *Devadasis* or dancing girls dedicated to gods were attached to the temples in Orissa, Saurashtra, Maharashtra, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, The institution of *Devadasis* is now extinct everywhere except in Orissa.

*Devadasis* in Orissa are known as *maharis* meaning *mahat-nari*, We can find the earliest mention of the *deuadasis* attached to temples in 9th century A.D., where the inscription states that Kolavati, the Queen of the Kesari King, Uddyota, built a temple of Shiva and dedicated dancing girls to it. The Ganga dynasty came thereafter to power. Cholagangadeva who ruled from 1077 A.D. to 1147 A.D., built the temple of Jagannath at Puri and employed *Devadasis*, After Cholagangadeva's death, Anangabhimadeva came to power and he built several temples and also built the *Natamandir* in the Jagannath temple. It was intended for performances of the *maharis* and musicians in honour of the Lord.

*Maharis* are of two kinds: *Bahar gani mahari* and *Bheetar gani mahari*, The *bheetar gani maharis* alone were allowed to enter the *Bada Devla* or sanctum-sanctorum. They were also allowed to sing *during Bada Simhara*. The *bahar gani maharis* are not permitted to enter the innermost sanctorum of the temple. They danced in the *Natamandir*.

*Devadasis* or *maharis* were the only ones who used to keep this dance tradition intact and kept it alive generation after generation. The *maharis* attached to the Jagannath temple were all Vaishnavites, but the *maharis* at Bhuvaneshwar were



attached to Shaiva temples while those at Jhankad and Kakatpur, were dedicated to Shakti,

On the copper-plate inscription of Purushotam Deva, it is mentioned that there were two *Sampradayas* of *Nachunis*-one of them was from the South and another from Orissa. They used to dance along with Sri Jayadeva's *Geeta Govinda*. Before *Geeta Govinda* was introduced, *maharis* used to dance only the *Nritta* portion (rhythmic) and *abhinaya* with mantras. But after Jayadeva's *Geeta Govinda* became the part and parcel of the rituals, the *maharis* performed *abhinaya* with different *bhava* and *rasas*. Another exponent of Odissi dance is Ray Ramananda. He was a musician, dancer, and dramatist. He taught this dance and presented *Jagannath bhava Nataka* before Lord Chaitanya and convinced him that singing and dancing are also forms of prayers.

Then we find that the Gotipua system was

introduced. It emerged from the *Satasahi Akhada* at Puri. The Vaishnavite followers did not approve of dancing by women. Hence, boys dressed as girls began to



dance and for the first time Odissi dance came out of the temples and began to be performed in public. During this period, Vaishnava poets composed innumerable lyrics in dedication to Radha and Krishna and the Vaishnava poets chose this dance of Gotipua as a medium of publicity of their cult. In the Gotipua system as contrasted to the other forms, one can find a jerk in the movement in place of the smooth transitions from one movement to another.

At present this Odissi dance has been reshaped and is presented in a lyrical and most graceful style.

Odissi dance includes both *Tandava* and *lasya* elements. *Sabdaswara-pata* and *Bandha* are of mainly *Tandava* style and exist in a crude form in some remote places and it needs a good deal of refinement. *Sabdaswarapata* are of various types .relaxing to different

deities such as-Shiva, Kali, Vinayaka, etc.

An example of *Sabdawaswarapata* relating to Shiva: -

" *Dharigida Giditaka Narigida Giditaka  
Nada udaya vira diga digambara  
Sankara rupabhaya  
digi digi kesa-tandava trisuladhara  
ta jhen ku tin jhen ku  
jhana jhana ta tijhana ta .... etc,*

Odissi dance is taught on the technique laid down in Bharata's *Natya Shastra*, Nandikeswara's *Abhinaya Darpana* and Sri Maheswara Mahapatra's *Abhinaya Chandrika*.

The main *bhangi* of this form of dance is *Tribhangi* supposed to have been taken



from the *Tribhangi* of Sri Krishna and the *Chhauka* pose (half-seated) of Lord Jagannath. There are other important *bhangis* such as *Adabhanga*, *abhanga*, *Atibhanga* which are very much special to Odissi dance. Besides these *bhangis*, there

are many others mentioned in *Abhinaya Chandrika*-such as *Abhimana*, *Sukachanchu*, *mardala*, *Akunchana*, *Sarakhepa*, etc.

Odissi has a rich variety of *mudras* which are based on *Natyashastra*, *Abhinaya Darpana* and *Abhinaya Chandrika*. Hand gestures play a very important role in Odissi dance as they are used in conveying the meaning in *abhinaya* and are used in rhythmic (*Nritta* part). According to *Shastras*, we use-  
*Asamjukta hasta* (Single hand)  
*Samjukta hasta* (Double hand) and  
*Nrutta hasta* (Dance hand).

Apart from the *Shastras*, there are some traditional *mudras* which are not mentioned in any other *Shastras*-

They are *Gabakhya*, *Bana*, *baloya*, *tambula*, etc.

In Odissi dance we have *Nabatata* system: They are

- 1) *jhampa*-7 beats
- 2) *dhruba*-14 beats-According to tradition it is known as *sarimana*
- 3) *matha*-10 beats
- 4) *rupika*-6 beats
- 5) *tripata*-7 beats
- 6) *ata* (Kuduka)-of 12 beats
- 7) *ekatali*-4 beats
- 8) *ada tali*-7 beats or 14 beats
- 9) *adi tala*-8 beats

Apart from these *talas* . .we have *Fati tala* which is of 7 beats and *Nisaruka. tala*. Different *chhanda* like *jhoola* of (*Tisra chhanda*) and *Pahapata* of *chatusra chhanda* have got their own unique beauty in Odissi dance. These *talas* may vary according to *different jatis*, such as *tisra*,

*Chatusra, Khanda, misra, Sankirha.* Different types of *bhavas, rasa, Nayaka, Nayaka, caris, mandalas, bhramari, Karana., Utbhavana,* etc., play a very important role in Odissi dance. *Ekapada bhramari* and *biparita* (opposite) *bhramari* are inevitable in this dance.

Odissi embraces *Nruua, Natya* and *Nruiya* in different items of its repertoire which is as follows:

### 1. The first item is *mangalacharana*:-

This is a dance where the dancer dedicates herself to the Lord and begs excuse from the Mother earth for stamping her feet on her, begs apology from the audience for any shortcomings and salutes to her Guru. This item is divided into three parts: -

- a) *Bhumi Pranama*
- b) *Deva or Devi Stuti*
- c) *Sabha Pranama*

### 2. Then follows :-*Sthayee Nrutya* or

#### *Batu Nrutya*

This is an item of pure *Nrutta*. It begins with a series of sculptural poses like veena, mardala, flute, manjira, etc. and is performed in a very graceful and stylised manner.

### 3. The third item is *Pallavi*:-

The movements of this dance are extremely graceful and lyrical. This is accompanied by both music and rhythm. Music and rhythm are given equal importance as the dancer proper. A tune is

sung in some *raga* and is developed in different varieties. *Sargams* may not be added. *Bols* with rhythmic syllables come in between to enrich the beauty of the item. A number of passages of *Nrutta* are performed in stylised poses and movements.

*Pallavi* is again divided into two kinds: -

- (a) *Vadya Pallavi*
- (b) *Swara Pallavi*.

### 4. *Abhinaya*: The fourth item is *abhinaya*.

This is done through facial expressions depicting different *bhavas* and *rasas* with the help of different *hastes* and action to bring out the meaning and mood of a song. No performance is complete without the performance of an *ashtapadi* from the *Geeta Govinda* by Sri Jayadeva. Songs by Oriya poets such as Banamali, Gopalakrishna, Kavisamrat Upendrabhanja, Kavisurya Baladeva Rath are performed by the dancers depicting various moods.

### 5. Last item is *Mokhya Nrutya*:-

This is an item of pure *Nrutta* (rhythm) and performed in a fast tempo, to the accompaniment of rhythmic syllables.

The dancer becomes ecstatic, and through the ecstasy the dancer's soul and mind are merged with that of god.

Dance, be it of any kind, is considered as an effort to come near god and experience true happiness.

## MAYURABHANJ CHHAU

Dr. KAPILA VATSYAYAN

..... **A**t the outset one is obliged to refer to the controversy over the word *chhau* as used for the three forms prevalent in Mayurabhanj, Seraikala and Purulia. Some scholars have been of the opinion that the word *Chhau* is derived from the word *chhaya* or shadow. This opinion was held by many performers, including the Raja of Seraikala. Others, however, have strongly challenged this view and have drawn attention to the fact that the word *chhaya* is derived from (a) the word *Chhau* which in turn may well be connected with the Sanskrit word *Chhadma*, meaning disguise, (b) that the word may be derived from colloquial Oriya where *chhau* means to hunt or attack stealthily. The secondary meaning of the word has been considered as *chauni*, meaning a military camp from which the present Hindi word *chauni* emerges or *chauni* which means an armour and finally *chhank* which means an attack. While it is not necessary to resolve the controversy, it is significant that these forms should take their name from a function or a vocation rather than from a caste as in the case of *Bhagavatmela* forms or from an activity of a whole community in the process of a pilgrimage such as a *yatra* or procession theatre forms known to other parts of India. Judging from the fact that many sections of society take part in all the three types of *Chhau* and that in most cases they belong to the



military class it would be reasonable to accept the third interpretation although the idea of a disguise is inherent because in at least two of the forms masks are used.

### The Dance Tribes

.....Mayurabhanj Chhau dance is prevalent in the South-eastern part of Orissa. Adjacent to the State of Mayurabhanj lies the States of Seraikala and Purulia, today part of the States of Bihar and Bengal respectively. Within the region there are a large variety of tribes who, in turn, share many common features with the tribes of

Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. These tribes range from the Munda group of the Austric and the Indid, even if anthropologists differ on the classification.

Agriculturally, many of the tribes of the region are shift-cultivators and some are tool agriculturalists. Many propitiation rites are common to this tribal group of people, and the agriculturists particularly have rites which revolve around the installation of a pole as a symbol of fertility. Many dances of the Hos and the Oraons are held at a place away from their actual living area where the pole is installed before the Jhum (shift-cultivating rites) ceremonies begin.

Linguistically, these tribes belong to the Munda group of languages and are inheritors of a non Indo-Aryan stream.

A close look at the community which performs the Mayurabhanj Chhau dances show that although the dance is an expression of a village culture, it has carried forward many purely tribal elements. We may identify one or two of these elements.

The group of people who perform the dances are almost without exception people who are called the Scheduled or Backward Classes. Among the categories listed in the Constitution of India are the Nats, the Bhands, Bhumiya, Paiks and others. Mayurabhanj Chhau is performed by the priests from amongst the Scheduled Classes. Herein lies a tell-tale key of the interaction between different levels of Indian society ranging from tribal to village and to the high castes. In the propitiation rite a connected with Mayurabhanj Chhau there it one which revolves around the establishment of a pole at a place which

should be a few miles away from the village.

Two occasions are considered appropriate [or the dance. One is about the Dusshera time (this was introduced some years ago) and the other at the Chaitra Parva. For our purposes this second occasion is of great significance. We may remember that the Chaitra Parva is celebrated throughout India as the great harvest festival. We see immediately two simultaneous levels of operation; the first, a takeover from the propitiation rites of the tribal groups on the occasion of shift-cultivation and the other the rites and celebrations connected with agricultural harvest. Over these two levels is superimposed a third one, for the ritual today comprises worship of Lord Siva. It is important to note that there is no icon worship during the festival. The pole continues to represent Lord Siva. The devotees are called *Bhaktas*, a word which also is often vulgarised into the form *Bhaktas*.

About a fortnight before the Chaitra Parva festival, a select group of people are enrolled for undergoing the ascetic practices connected with the ritual. They fast, take a ritual bath, visit the temple of Goddess Ambika and then proceed to offer worship to Lord Siva at the consecrated place. Is this not reminiscent vaguely of the Kavadi and Karaga dances of South India? The ritual concludes in the *pata* ceremonies observed during the last four days preceding the Chaitra Sankranti. The *Bhaktas* are not ordinary people. After their initiation they have to perform-a fire-walking ritual called the *nian pata*, which we observe is absent from the Seraikala Chhau festival.



They perform another rite where the devotee is suspended by his feet on a pole over a flaming fire. This ritual is called *jhela nata*. Finally, they hang in suspension by their arms while a pole makes a complete revolution of a T shaped structure. There is also some walking on thorns. These and other ceremonies come only on the 26th day of the month of Chaitra when a pitcher of water is brought out to herald the beginning of the festival.

The earthen pitcher is painted crimson with vermilion and is sanctified with mantras. The *ghata* represents Maha Shakti and is called *Fatra Ghata*.

It is perhaps not necessary to dwell further on the significance of these rituals which precede the dance festival. Here is an amalgam of ancient rites, fertility ritual and deity worship. A dance emerging from this background would naturally not be termed classical. However, even from this background could it be termed folk?

While we may not answer this question at this stage, let us now go on to the dance itself. On the first day of the festival which roughly coincides with the last three days of the month of Chaitra corresponding to April 11th to 13th, the Chhau dancers proceed not to the area where the ritual has been performed but to the temple of Bhairava. The teachers or the gurus of the dancers are not called *gurus*, but are called *ustads*. Obviously some syncretism has taken place. The *ustads* and musicians worship Bhairava and also initiate new dancers on that date.

The initiation is done through tying a piece of red thread on the right wrist of every

dancer. The *ustads* and musicians are given new *dhotis* to wear. The preliminaries over, the whole assembly performs the ritualistic *pranamic* dance.

A characteristic feature of the dance is an offering of the leaves of wood-apple and flowers mixed with the earth collected from the practising area of the dance. All these are tied in a piece of red cloth which is kept inside a proscenium stage-19th century building. Each dancer offers his *pranams* to these articles which were first offered to the Lord Bhairava. Without pausing to describe the performance of the Mayurabhanj Chhau, let us speak at this stage of the other rituals connected with the performance. At the end of the ritual, at midnight, another pitcher or pot, this time called the *nishi ghata* or the night pitcher, or sometimes also the *Kamana*, the *desire ghata* is worshipped. In many ways this *ghata* also represents *Shakti*. Another ritual connected with the dance is the offering of a specially prepared dance to the Sun-god. This is performed some time during the festival. Perhaps it is pertinent to recall here that sun worship is common to many tribes, villages and to the sophisticated, high-class Brahmins of Orissa.

### The Dance Proper

Now to the dance itself. There are many ways in which we can analyse the form which is presented before and after the rituals described above. We can look at it from the outside to find out whether it has any relationship to other forms prevalent in the area or any connections with forms outside the region of Orissa. We can look

at it from the inside, that is only from the point of view of movement and the treatment of the human body which is the instrument of expression again with a view of investigating these relationships and connections.

There is no known recorded history of Mayurabhanj Chhau. There are also no texts. In short, from the outside, it would appear that the form is purely *desi*, folk or popular, dependant or oral traditions. However, a close look at the chronicles of the Kalinga kingdom and of their principalities tell us of a flourishing martial tradition where warriors were maintained in large numbers called *Paiks*. The sculptural tradition reinforces this evidence by the prolific depiction of war-scenes; shield and sword play and acrobatics. This ranges from the reliefs of Khandagiri and Udayagiri caves to the medieval monuments of Bhubaneshwar and Konarak. Much later in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, the scroll-painting tradition of Orissa called *pat* painting emerges. While the Krishna theme dominates the content of these paintings, there is evidence here also of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Many characteristic postures and stances of Mayurabhanj Chhau have a close affinity with the stances and postures arrested in stone, line and colour in these reliefs and in these paintings. From the evidence of sculpture and painting, it would appear that the *Mayurabhanj Chhau* dancers were not unaware of the principles of the treatment of the human form, as it is known to the sculptors of the 'great' tradition. In content also, the Mayurabhanj Chhau incorporates the dances of *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*,

and those revolving around Siva and Krishna. In addition there are dances which definitely depict only martial drill. These include numbers like the *astra danda*. Besides the above theme there are also others which revolve around everyday life, such as hunter dances and the trick dances using poles, ropes and pots.

The occasion of the dances, the themes of the dances and the postures and stances clearly establish the relationship of Mayurabhanj Chhau to dances prevalent in the regions of Seraikala and Purulia. It also exhibits the processes of multi-layering of many moments of historical developments. It may also be possible to establish the relationship of Chhau with other dance-drama forms of India, particularly the Jatra of Orissa and Bengal. A distant similarity of narrative and dramatic form can also be seen with some forms of the Andhra Pradesh and the Karnatak regions.

This external evidence has to be correlated with the actual techniques of the dance. Once we enter into the dance style itself, we find that it has shed almost all features of tribal, folk and village dance and has acquired a distinctive stylisation which is a characteristic feature of the dance forms commonly termed as classical. The normal yardsticks of identifying a dance form as classical have been the existence or non-existence of a rich body of composed poetry, namely the *sahitya*. A second yardstick has been the existence or non-existence of a musical composition which is based on this *sahitya* and set to a *raga* system. A third criterion has been the existence or non-existence of a complex

system of mnemonics set to 'a particular metrical system, namely the *tala*. The fourth criterion has been the existence or nonexistence of a self-imposed limitation of movement in relation -to space. Finally, there is the last touchstone of the relationship of the word to the note, the word and the note to the rhythm, and the word, the note and the rhythm to the gesture. Mayurabhanj Chhau can be analysed from all these points of view and also from the point of view of its own distinctive principles of movement and with the question whether or not it responds to any of the criterion enumerated above, and the final one of the principles and conventions of improvisation.

The dance begins with *Rangabaja*. This can be performed behind the screen or in full view of the dancers. It is essentially a musical invocation, almost reminiscent of the *Purvaranga* and the *Parvappada* of Kathakali. The *dhumsa* sounds, the *dhol* and the *mahoori* create the mood; their collective permeation is both powerful and a necessary prelude to the dance. Today it is performed in full view of the evidence. This is followed by the instrumentalists playing a tune to which the different characters appear on the stage. This phase is known as the *Chali* meaning literally 'walking'. The characters appear in their different *dharans* or stances. The particular stances and gaits establish the character without the aid of masks in contrast to the other forms of Chhau, namely the *Seraikala Chhau* and the *Purulia Chhau*. After the *Rangabaja* and before the opening of the actual play, there is the appearance of two characters called *Kaji-*

*Paji*. The dialogue between the two which is an amalgam of dialogue, mime and movement is called the *Vidusaka Pranalika*, again reminding us of the *nata-nasi* or the *sutradhara* and *nati* of the Sanskrit theatre.



After the characters appear in their specific *dharana*, the *nach* begins. The word *nach* is obviously derived from *nritta*; in this portion there is the introduction of the theme but little dramatic action or the taking forward of the story. The dance content of the dance style is contained for the most part in this section of the dance. The first of these is the *Rukmara nali*, a close parallel of the *Parikhanda* exercises of Seraikala. *Natki* is the final phase performed to an accelerated tempo, where the dramatic action is heightened. Although there is some weak accompaniment, *sahitya* is very thin and minimal: the dance-drama is presented in the in to the accompaniment of a wind instrument called the Mahoori, a type of Shahnai, a string instrument called Teula and to a variety of percussion instruments such as the *Dhol*, the *Chadchadi*, (a short cylindrical drum played with two thin sticks)

*Nagada* and a *Dhamsa*, a bowl shaped large drum played with two blunt and heavy sticks. The Dhol leads the drums; the melody is played by the Mahoori, the Teula and sometimes a bamboo flute. The tunes played by these instruments have a great deal in common with both the folk tunes and Orissi songs. Some *ragas* and *raginis* of Hindustani classical music can also be discerned. Mayurabhanj artists claim 36 *raginis*. However, there is here no word-note and basic *tala* relationship as in the classical, what we have termed at the neo-classical forms. There is only a general type of relationship between the sung or played melody, the *tala* and the dancer's gestures. There is, however, great complexity in the playing of the percussion instruments. There is rigorous system of *tala* and of *bols* maemnonics which are interpreted and presented by the dancer. There is also counterpointing between the rhythmic syllables of the *dhol* and the *chadchadi*.

The dance itself, like Seraikala Chhau can be broken up into *topkas*, *uflis* and *bhangis*. Like other classical styles of Indian dance, *Mayurabhanj Chhau* begins with two basic stances or postures. These postures are quite distinctive but have a strong affinity with the stances of the sophisticated Orissi. Bharatanatyam can be understood as a rhombus or a series of triangles in space, Kathakali as a square or rectangle, Manipuri as a figure of eight and Kathak at a straight line, Orissi as a *tribhanga*, Mayurabhanj Chhau in contrast, has an open *tribhanga* and *Chaska* (akin to an open grand plie of western ballet or the *mandala sthana*) as a basic motif. While in the *chauka* the weight of the body is equally divided

along a central median (the *madhya sutra*), in the *tribhanga* it is unequally divided and there are three distinct deviations from the central median. All *topkas*, *uflis* and *bhangis* emerge from these two basic stances. Although there is a close affinity between the Orissi and Mayurabhanj in respect of the basic stances the manner of building up a movement varies greatly. All the units of movements are again classified [from the point of view of the nature of the movement, i.e. (i) strong and precise, (ii) quick, terse and cutting and (iii) fluid, liquid and elastic. These are known by expressive terms such as the *Hathiyara dhara* (holding of weapons) *Kalikata* (softest end of a spring) and *bhanga* (bending). The first denotes stances and open positions and strong masculine movements of sword and shield, the second the nature of terse or cutting movement with abrupt stops, and the third fluid liquid torso movements which are continuous. One type of movement can be distinguished from the other, even if they are poised in a different order. While no parallels in terms of *tandava* and *lasya* can be discerned, it may not be too far-fetched to see that *Hathiyaradhara* and *Kalikata* suggest *tandava* movements and *Kalibhanga*, *lasya* movements.

Thus there is *nritta*, *nritya* and *natya* and *tandava* and *lasya*. The torso is used in synchronisation and in counter-opposition to the movements of the lower limbs. The leg movements are more definitely broken up into a few distinct categories judging from their name, the path of movement of the lower limb, the foot, particularly, the ankles and the toes. Some *uflis* derive their name from the functions of an Oriya house-

wife, both as she prepares the mud-house floor and as she decorates herself. These are *Gobar-koodha* (picking cow-dung from the floor), (ii) *Gobar-gola* (mixing cow-dung in water), (iii) *Chhadadia* (spreading the cow-dung mixture on the court-yard), (iv) *Choonchadia* (plastering the floor with cow-dung and water), (v) *Chinchra* (scrapping the earth), (vi) *Kharka* (sweeping the floor with a broom), (vii) *Thoontida* (decorating the floor with rice paste as in Kolamas).

Others take their name from household chores, such as:

- (i) *Basan-maja-cleansing* utensils
- (ii) *Haladia* bata-grinding turmeric on a stone slab
- (iii) *Dhan Koota-pounding* paddy
- (iv) *Dhan Pachhuda-winnowing* the de husked rice

A few relate only to toilet, such as:

- (i) *Gadhua-pouring* water on the body
- (ii) *Matha jhada-after* the bath drying the long hair by a jerky movement of the towel.
- (iii) *Moonh pochha-wiping* the face with a towel
- (iv) *Sihtaphada-parting* the hair with a comb
- (v) *Sindhoor pindha-putting* dot of vermilion on the forehead
- (vi) *Jhoontia maja-cleansing* the toe-ring
- (vii) *Udhooni chata-putting* the two ends of a scarf over the shoulders
- (viii) *Chhalka-walking* ecstatically

(ix) *Thamka-walking* lyrically.

Those that suggest other functions or operations are:

- (i) *Kantaka-cutting* clown the thorny, shrubs
- (ii) *Kanta-nikala-removing* the thorns from the path
- (iii) *Batachim-splitting* a bamboo in two

Those that represent martial movement are:

- (i) *Antemoda-to* kill by trampling on the abdomen: this may well indicate only the movements of the abdomen.
- (ii) *Khanda hana-sometimes* also called *Jitahana-implying* killing with a sword.
- (iii) *Habsa-to* kill with a heavy instrument.
- (iv) *Uska Janka-to* lift up and then to press hard.

Lastly, there is a group which suggests the gaits of animals. There are:

- (i) *Harin-dian-leaping* gait of a deer
- (ii) *Shaula-dian-fish* jerking out of water
- (iii) *Baga topka-crane* stalking
- (iv) *Baga Machha khoja-* crane searching for fish
- (v) *Masikadchiti-monkey* somersaulting
- (vi) *Hanuman-panipia-monkey* drinking water
- (vii) *Bagh-panipia-tiger* drinking water
- (viii) *Chingdichitika-jerks* of a lobster when pulled out of water



*(ix) Chheli-dian-goat jumping*

It will be obvious from the groupings of these *uflis* that they can be such as to incorporate agricultural functions, daily routine, war-drill and animal gaits: besides there are those of the walking of human-beings and some emotions. Again layers of artistry from pure representation to abstraction is seen. When analysed from the point of view of movement one finds that these

*uflis* are reminiscent of the *Charis* (*Bhaumis* and *akasaki* of the *Natyasastram*) some *sthanas* (such as the *mandala sthana*) and the special category of *karanas* described in the *Natyasastra* as the *Vrischika karana*, the last two are most significant. We had observed a similar pattern in the case of Seraikala.

As pointed out earlier, the *Vrischika Katana* is suggestive of a class of movement, derived from its descriptive name meaning scorpion legged. They are varied such as the *Vrischika lata*, *Vrischika urdhva lata* and many others. They are found on the walls of many

temples. They are captured in stone in India from the earliest times, beginning with the Khandagiri vidyadhara. This is followed by the flying *gandharvas* on the stupas of Sanchi, Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Deogarh, Elura, Ajanta, the medieval monuments of Virupaksha, Khajuraho, Bhubaneswar, Konarak, the southern monuments of Mamallapuram, Halebid, and Sarangapani. Here are dance poses which depict one extended leg while the other is in folded: an elevation from the ground is

suggested through the movement. This particular movement is in non-existent styles normally called classical. In both Seraikala and Mayurabhanj, it constitutes a very important aspect of the style. Indeed the entire movement vocabulary of *Mayurabhanj Chhau* is based on it.

The *Mayurabhanj Chhau* emphasizes this movement more than any other dance style in India and achieves a classical perfection



distinctive to it. Without using a *sastric* terminology the dance style incorporates many elements of high classicity. Judging from the many ways in which the extended leg is used in this style and in the depiction of the dance in sculpture and references to it in dance texts it would appear that the movement was popular in India from the 2nd century B.C. and that certain dance styles must have used it to great effect. At some point possibly about the 13th-14th century it lost popularity. From

the pure visual impression of contemporary Mayurabhanj it would appear that the dance style preserves a movement pattern of great antiquity. However, in the absence of any further textual evidence on the subject no further deductions can be made. Nevertheless, this feature of the dance style gives a distinctive quality which distinguishes it from any other style. Whether this is the contribution of tribal dance, or martial exercises, or the reflection of a classical tradition related to the *Natyasastra*, its kinetic value is dominant. While many dance poses arrested in stone cannot be identified with any of the contemporary classical styles, they can be seen in Mayurabhanj Chhau.

From an initial standing, a *tribhanga* or a *chaska*, (i.e. the *santa sthana*, or *vaisakha* or the *mandala sthana* of the *Natyasastra* terminology,) many extensions of one leg and elevations and pirouettes are achieved. Space is covered in figures of eight or spirals, and the sculpturesque pose at the end of a sequence is characteristic. Although there are many common points between Seraikala and Mayurabhanj, the latter exhibits a complexity of movement in the treatment of the torso, and the lower limbs. While Seraikala is lyrical, Mayurabhanj leaves the impression of a strong, well defined movement:

The repertoire of the dance style is also revealing. It extends from simple themes, such as hunting, fishing, as in the dances known as the *Shabar Toka*, *Shikari* to animal dances like the *Mayura nritya*, to those which revolve around nature such as *Mali Phula* to dances which revolve around myth such as Pavan Pootra Hanuman to

Nataraja, Parashurama. Epic and puranic stories constitute the theme of group dance-drama, such as Tamudia Krishna, Garuda Vahan, Kailash Samudramanthan, Ahalaya Uddhara, Gita Upadesha, Kirata-Arjuna, and Kailash Leela. There are two groups performing these-the Uttar Sahi and the Dakshini Sahi and their repertoire differs somewhat, although there are many common features.

In each of these numbers, the evolved vocabulary of dance movement, along with a clearly identifiable structure of choreography both in body movements and floor choreography is in evidence. While a dance like the hunter or *shikari* is vital and powerful, numbers like on *Phul-Mali* are graceful and lyrical. The number on Nataraja is perhaps the most authentic survival of the various poses of the *tandava* described in the *Natyasastra* and the *Agamas* and seen on the sculptured walls of temples. Many dancers of the 'neo-classical styles' have of late tried to reconstruct the *Karanas* on the basis of their representation in *Brahadesvara*, *Sarangapani* and *Chidambaram*. The result has been of academic interest without achieving an inner artistic coherence. The Mayurabhanj Chhau *Nataraja* number is conclusive proof of the fact that the seemingly unplausible poses, with many leg extensions and elevations, were no doubt part of a living tradition which has survived in the *Mayurabhanj Chhau*. The transition from one pose to the other through a well defined path of movement would be a lesson in Kinetics for any professional dancer, and yet Mayurabhanj Chhau is considered a folk dance as opposed to the

classical forms. This number along with some others like the *Gita Upadesh* is further evidence of our hypothesis, that often what we have considered as the classical part of high art it survives and is fostered in socio-economic milieu of the contemporary socio-economically backward groups or levels of society which we consider as the tribal or rural. As we have said before one explanation of this may be that the tradition of the arts was a pervasive tradition irrespective of socio-economic hierarchy and that while the pace of change at the more affluent levels in some matters was faster although in adhering only intellectually to the texts on the socio-economically backward group it has continued over a longer period. It also points to the fact that we must not consider either the *Naiyasastra* or classical Indian iconography an exclusive preserve of the upper classes. As Kosambi has pointed out in his book, 'Myth and Reality', tribal elements entered into the making of myth and legend which we today identify as only classical or high. The *Nataraja* as a number would perhaps also be an eye opener for many a scholar of Indian iconography whose work has been restricted to textual and sculptural evidence of the *nritta murtis*. The Mayurabhanj Gander sustains a tradition perhaps unselfconsciously and is not aware of its historical value and aesthetically satisfying qualities, but this does not make the quality of this art inferior or of doubtful scholastic values.

The treatment of the theme of *Tamudi Krishna* is similar with many interesting interlocking patterns of group dancers

which recall the *pindi-bandhas* of the *Naiyasastra* tradition. Floor space is fascinatingly divided between the Gopalbalas and Radha and her companions. Diagonals, horizontal and vertical lines with one line moving backward and the other forward, the formation of pairs in a *mandala* and the overlapping of circles makes the number a rich piece of choreography. In the *Gita-Upadesa* without the use of the text of the *Gita*, the tenth and eleventh cantos become alive with a poignancy and vibrancy which make it clear that the group of dancers, tribal or schedule castes are not unacquainted with the moral and ethical values of the *Gita*. Will we say that this is the travelling of the high or great tradition to the rural or tribal levels, or will we call this the continuation of what we term as the 'great tradition' in a socio-economic milieu, which otherwise is the preserve of the little traditions? Also this and other numbers tell us of a continuum between tribal, rural and pre-industrialized urban society, and we do not see that the tribal society is divorced from the sacred matrix. The vibrancy and vitality of these continuities also tell us that these dances are not 'mere messages' received from high class society—a point made by many sociologists; instead they speak of a common inheritance which is fostered through the ritual and the dance instead of the spoken and the written textual word. The difference is at best a difference of the methodology of understanding while the *Mayurabhanj Chhau*, etc., know the heritage through the ritual, the movement of the dance, and the sound of the music without cerebration and intellectualisation, the literature society knows it only through

the 'word written' and not through the whole range of the experience of life.

The tradition has been maintained by the *Ustads*, whose genealogies can be traced back to 200 years or more. The genealogies of the princely states who patronized the arts can also be traced back to a few generations. There was also much interaction between Seraikala and Mayurabhanj during this period.

Thus we have here a complex phenomenon where tribal, village and the urban culture, the *Margi*, the *Desi*, the *Natyadharami* and *Lokadha-rami* have come together to make a new whole. Many moments of historical past coexist and many processes of acculturation and assimilation are in evidence.

Here then is the problem before us: certain forms such as Chhau cannot be categorised as purely *Margi* or *Desi* or *Sastric* and *prayoga* exclusively if adjudged from the point of view of only one yardstick of either *sahitya*, *svara* or the *bhanga* or *tala*. All factors, racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and those of content and form of the particular style have to be taken together for a meaningful understanding of the Indian artistic pattern. Our analysis will have also shown the interconnections between this dance style and others in adjacent areas like the Seraikala Chhau and the Purulia Chhau. From the point of internal technique it shares many features with Odissi. Thus as in life, the dance form also presents in a very significant manner, a distinctive form, which has connections both with folk and classical styles in the

area, and with other forms at particular levels in adjacent areas.

To go back to our initial analogy of the spheres and the levels of the disc, it would appear that *Mayurabhanj Chhau* stands in an intermediary position like the Lai-Haroba of Manipur. It is connected one side with the *danda nata* of the Chhaddiya dancers of the Ganjam and Narendrapura districts and is also connected with the *Gotipua* and the *Mahari* and Orissi tradition. While it sheds some of the characteristics of the Chhaddiya, etc., it assimilates or is overlaid with Indian myth and legend, epic and the puranic content. However while incorporating the content and achieving a stylistic form with a structured grammar it does not use the *sahitya* or the literary word. The *Gotipua*, the *Mahari* and now Odissi dance successively chisel the stylistic features of Mayurabhanj Chhau, particularly movements derived from the *tribhanga* and the *chauka* but they shed the epic dramatic content and become solo forms, revolving around only the Krishna theme or Vaishnava cult. The word sound and meaning relationship absent from Mayurabhanj is predominant in these forms. Together all move around a distinctive regional Oriya axis.

This is almost a parallel phenomenon to what we had seen in the case of Manipur, i.e. of the interaction of the different levels of the disc. Also the other movement of *Mayurabhanj Chhau* as a distinct level having connections with similar forms in adjoining areas, such as Serai-kala and Purulia, is clearly in evidence.

## Kathak Dance As An Art-Form

Dr. S.K. SAXENA

**W**hat is Kathak dance? It is the art, I may answer, of so perfecting the use of body-as gesture, movement, posture and pace-that within and upon the unceasing flow of *laya*, the dancer is (in the end) able to work up the more or less articulate beauty of form, expression and rhythmic utterance in diverse and largely identifiable ways; and is, in addition, free to vary the course of dance in accordance with both the *rasikas'* responses and the friendly challenges or stimuli that the drummer may at times offer, Kathak is an art-form.

Is it at all proper to speak of Kathak as art? It may seem needless to project this question; for, Kathak is already regarded as one of our major classical dances. But I would here say that if we ponder *how* Kathak is an art, we are likely to gain in two ways. First, it may help us see, if but imperfectly, how creation is to be done in the region of this dance. Secondly, it could enable us to discover or refine the criteria for evaluating dance in this style.

Now, Kathak is an art in so far as it shares the basic features that are commonly, if not unquestionably, ascribed to all art. If properly contemplated, art takes us away from our everyday concern with things, and offers instead its own inner world for indwelling and disinterested delight. Further, what it comprises is no mere jumble, not even a mere juxta position of elements, but their intense organization. Now, such



features of import and structure are all freely present in our experience of Kathak, and even in the essentials of this dance form.

Thus, to begin with, the body of the danseuse does not here seem simply what it does in everyday life. It is transfigured, carefully adapted to the ends of dance. Our word for the body so adapted is *ang*. And when the role of *ang* in dance is said to be pivotal, what is meant is that the artist has to meet two conditions that are inter-linked: first, that the dancing figure should look winsome all along; and secondly, that it should never lapse into mere every day bearing. The first would require the artist to avoid free use of representations of such gods and goddesses in, say, *vandana* as do not look good to the eye (as *Durga*, for instance); and the second,



to remain specially careful in respect of posture during those moments of inactivity that separate the completion of a pattern from the beginning of another, or while waiting to re-enact in dance an intricate pattern being played by the drummer as a kind of friendly challenge.

The break-away from daily life is effected quite early by *thhat* with which a Kathak recital often begins, and where the bodily bearing is very different from its every day manner. As for the rhythmic patterns, they are not (as a rule) meant to copy anything in life. And there is an element of make-believe even in the basic *bols* of *tatkar*. For, as they are danced, the syllables *Tha, Pra, Tha Tha, Tehi* hardly sound different from one another; yet they are *taken to be* different. *Nritya*, it is true, has to build upon themes taken from the every day world. But here too the Kathak has to keep the difference between art and mere life. This can be done in three ways at least:



### The Important Elements

First, the distinctive gait of the *taala* being used and the moment of its *sarna* may not be hidden for too long in *abhinaya*. (I need hardly add that its rhythm-as accompaniment and ingredient -is what quite distinguishes dance from movement in daily life).

Secondly, all the elements of a situation from life being danced may not be represented. Thus, in presenting a *panghalki-gat*, the dancer need not portray, by distorting his face, the (actual) strain of pulling a full, big bucket from the well. If such restrictions are not heeded, dancing will forthwith lose its basic abstraction as art, cease to engage our imagination and will only appear amusing to the knowledgeable.

Finally, whatever is taken for treatment from life should be shown with such loving





care for detail, such delicate etching of line and movement with fingers and arms-and, what is more, with such a definite and expressive use of glances and bodily turns-that contemplative attention may yet remain glued to what is *shown on the stage*, instead of moving away, due to lack of visual charm, to what it *indicates in life*. If thematic items are danced in the manner here suggested, the representational element will only help us follow what is danced, not take us away to matters extra-aesthetic. Nor is the inner disposition of elements any less important in Kathak than in the other arts. This I may develop as follows:

First, the *ang* is to blend not only with (a) the meaning of the theme but with (b) the varying accentuation or flow of rhythm, and the auditory character of its *bols*. The former need is quite common knowledge. But the latter is a subtler requirement. It is met instinctively by those whose minds are deeply imbued with the sense of *laya*, and is not consciously realized by all those who profess to know Kathak dance. To

illustrate, when the basic *bols* are being danced, the eyes-and/or the open palms-may tend to turn heavenward where the syllables are *Tha, Pra* and so be true to the phonetic *openness* of the syllables; and the look may quite aptly droop or/and the arms curve inwards-where this character is replaced by the gently self-gathering quality of *Tehi* (I have here in mind what the late Sri Lacchu Maharaj actually did, with remarkable effect, in the All India Kathak Dance Seminar held at Jaipur in 1969). But, in a simpler way, the requirement in question *is* met even by average dancers. Thus, where the syllable to be danced is *Throm* or *Kadaan* they do manage to produce some semblance of the heard character of the *bol* (say) by using two hands above the head to work up the effect of bloom or sparkle, and by regulating footwork suitably. Or, as is borne out in the dancing of beautiful, little *tihayis* and bits of footwork by Birju Maharaj-which he often does quite early in the recital, may be immediately after the opening invocation-*ang* may be manifest as *the direct attuning of the gestures in accordance with the varying manner of the movement of rhythm*. Here, *the intentional avoidance of a rhythmic stress is also visible joy (or mischief) suffusing the dancer's visage; and the completion of a dainty pattern danced itself brings about an upward, finalising flourish of the hand*. The gestures, in such cases, are not codified *mudras*; and *ang* is the body as responding to the feel of rhythm. The bodily expression, here, is of course identifiable, but it is inwardly affirmed and plastic, not rigidly set.

## UDAYSHANKAR

### MONI BAGCHEE

*Source: "Bhavan's Journal"*  
November 6, 1977.

It was a memorable occasion. The year was 1937 and the date was the 12th of July. Uday Shankar had just returned to India from his triumphant tour of Europe. A grand reception was accorded to him by no less a person than Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan. There was a select gathering if I remember alright. Tastefully decorated, the whole environment was solemn in the best tradition of the place. The poet welcomed the dancer with the following words:

"Your motherland welcomes you today not with a garland of victory but with one sanctified with her blessings. Do you receive the same today again and again, from my hands. You have brought into the open, Indian dancing from the cloistered darbar halls of the Maharajahs and temple sanctuaries, lifting it to its former dignity of an art form. The spring breeze coaxed the spirit of the woodlands into multifarious forms of exuberant expression. Let your dancing too wake up that spirit of spring in this cheerless land of ours; let her latent power of true enjoyment manifest itself exultant language of hope and beauty".

Uday Shankar did not disappoint the poet, nor his numerous lesser countrymen. As a dedicated soul to his Muse, Shankar believed that there are no bounds to the depths or to the expansion of any art, which, like dancing, is the expression of life's urge. "We must never shut it", said the great masters once, "within the bounds

of a stagnant ideal nor define it as either Indian or Oriental or Occidental, for such finality only robs it of life's privilege which is freedom". Truly so, culture knows no boundaries. And this is why Uday Shankar could put India on the cultural map of the world.

A legend in his own lifetime, Uday Shankar was born in 1900 in Udaipur, where his family, originally from Jessore (now in Bangladesh) had settled. The eldest son of Dr. Shyam Shankar Chowdhury, an educationist with an average interest in music and art (he was for sometime private tutor to the Maharajah of Jhalwar). Uday spent his childhood at Ghazipur to watch a cobbler dance, and he repeated it at home. Dressed as a girl by his mother who had no daughter, he danced to whatever music he heard. His younger brother Ravi Shankar is a noted sitarist. Uday was sent to a school at Varanasi and then to the J. J. School of Art, Bombay. In 1900 he went to England with his father and was admitted to the Royal College of Art, London. He started his training in plastic art under the guidance of Sir William Rothenstein, the Principal of the College, and completed the five-year course in just three years. He won the coveted Spencer Prize and many other awards.

#### A Turning Point

June 30, 1922 was a memorable day in his life which might have contributed towards

his final decision to choose a dancer's career. He was asked to do a duet dance at a St. James Park function in aid of a hospital. Amongst the distinguished spectators was King George V himself. The sword dance was highly appreciated and he was congratulated by the King who shook hands with him saying: "Good, jolly good. You have done very well".

He tried to master the Western technique, but was dissuaded by Sir William, the college Principal, who gave him a month's leave of absence and sent him to the British Museum where a huge pile of books on Indian art was placed before him. A new world was opened before him and he emerged from the museum altogether a changed man. He had been deeply impressed by the frescoes of dancing figures. Art was not to remain his first love any longer. He took on a job as a cabaret dancer but had to leave it soon and search for new avenues. The search ended when he discovered the Nataraja image in Ananda Coomaraswamy's book on Indian art.

### **His Achievements**

Although he faced considerable financial difficulties and much hardship, Shankar succeeded in building up a ballet group for an Indian dance show. The first presentation of that group

in India was at the Empire Theatre, now renamed Roxy, and he was immediately hailed as an artiste of exceptional sensibility both by critics and public. In the early thirties, Alice Boner, a Swedish painter, helped him to organise a European tour with Indian dances and musicians. This troupe included his brothers Rajendra

Shankar, Devendra Shankar and the sitar maestro Ravi Shankar (who was then a dancer), his cousin Kanakalata, that talented French woman Simkie, and even his uncle, Kedar Shankar Chowdhury. In 1935, he met Miss Amala Nandi whom he married six years later. After an extensive tour of Europe, Uday Shankar took his



company to U.S.A. and toured that country from coast to coast. It may be mentioned here that many renowned musicians like Temirbaran, Krishnachandra Dev (that immortal blind singer of Bengal), Sachindeb Burman, Ali Akbar, Bishnudas Shirali and even Ustad Alauddin Khan joined him and he formed an Indian orchestra. He toured round the world with his troupe holding high the banner of Indian dance and music.

He founded the Indian Culture Centre for Dance, Drama and Music at Almora in 1939



with the ungrudging help of Leonard Elmhurst. It was a residential school where music and dance were taught in an entirely original and strictly scientific method. But the centre had to be closed down during the Second World War. It was revived in 1965 in Calcutta and with the help of Smt. Amala Shankar. It was around this time that the shadow-play " Ramalila " was first produced and it brought fresh laurels to him.

It was during this period that the seeds of the film " Kalpana " germinated in his mind. Though they hailed it as a landmark in Indian cinematography, it was a colossal financial failure. In this film we have the motion picture record of some of the famous dance performances of Uday Shankar. During the Tagore centenary year of 1961, he produced Tagore's " Samanya Kshiti " in ballet form. The following year he was made a Fellow of the Sangeet Natak Academy which earlier had awarded him the National Award for Creative Artiste. Rabindra Bharati University awarded Uday Shankar the honorary D. Litt. degree in recognition of his services in the furtherance of Indian culture. Finally he was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in January 1971. Anna Pavlova discovered the talent of Uday Shankar and she made this prophetic utterance: "I am convinced that he is made for dancing".

As a dancer, he was original, as a choreographer, idealistic. His genius was stirred, at the end of his career, by the agonies of a diseased era. He was the first person to present an Indian ballet with an Indian thellle, accompanied by a musical

score in which no foreign instrument was used. The school of dancing he originated was the outcome of a rigorous training in and deep study of classical Indian dancing; combined with his own creative genius. The result was a scintillating synthesis. His early choreography, it may be pointed out here, drew much inspiration from Indian temple sculpture on the one hand and, on the other, the presentation technique of the Western ballet. Notable examples of this synthesis were his famous items like " Shiva-tandava ", " Gajasurvadh ", "Kartikeya", "Indira", and " Labour and Machine".

His main achievement was the blending of the Indian classical style with the various folk-dances. "Much of my inspiration came from Indian mythology which I have re-created with my imaginative ideas about dress, decor and music in its many dimensions". Thus said Uday Shankar once to the writer of this tribute. That he lived the life of an artiste is evident as much from his successes, spanning more than 40 years, with the world his stage, as from his failures. His dance centre at Almora did not work ; it called for qualities or organisation he did not have. He made a long film "Kalpana" which was brilliant only in parts; commercially it was what they call a flop. He had to work right up to his 70th year. He could not help dancing, and dancing was pot work for him in the conventional sense, although his discipline as a dancer and showman was famous. He danced his way through life, and he danced his way to death. The stage is empty.



## Temples As Patrons Of Dance

Dr. K. V. RAMAN

The two institutions which extended patronage to the arts of music and dance in ancient and medieval India were the Palace and the Temple—the former in the metropolis and the latter in rural areas. In the temple, the arts were part of the 64 offerings or *Shodasopacharas* to the Lord Spiritual and the same were extended to the Palace and the Lord Temporal. From the seventh century onwards, the temple vied with the court as more and more grants came in pouring into the coffers of the temple. The simple place of worship became a vast establishment catering to the social and cultural needs of the community. It is interesting to study how in South India the temples began to play a vital role in fostering and cultivating the fine arts. Because of their economic stability, royal patronage and the social support, the temple flowered into a vibrant cultural centre. That was the time when art and religion were inextricably intertwined. The Lord was considered as the source of all art and so art was sacred and spiritual. It should be performed in His august presence and should be a humble offering to Him. The art should be a vehicle not only to delight but also to elevate the devotees to spiritual heights. This was the underlying belief in integrating the arts like dance and music with the temple rituals. Hence we find land-grants given by the kings, nobles and the common folk for employing and fostering dancers' and musicians in the

temples. Special pavilions were built in the temples for the performance of dances—*Koothambalam* (or *Natana-Sabha*), *Nritta mandapa*, and *Natya mandapas*. There was a dancing-hall at Nagai called *Natya-salai* in 1062 A.D.

A record dated 1425 A.D. from Tiruchendur (Tirunelveli district), speaks of gifts for dancing girls who danced during the *Mahapuja* and *andikkappu*. Even during the Pallava times, the Mukteswara temple, Kanchi and the Adipurisvara temple at Tiruvottiyur maintained a large number of dancing women (*adigalmalar*) and musicians for singing and dancing during the puja service and festivals. The women dedicated to dancing were called *deveradiyal*, *talicheri-pendugal*; *kuthis*. These ladies on account of their proficiency in dancing were held in high esteem by the society.

The practice of employing dancing girls in the temple increased during the Chola and Vijayanagar times. Rajaraja the Great who was an ardent patron of cultural and artistic activities employed 400 dancing girls in the Brihadeswara temple he built at Thanjavur—drawn from different parts of his kingdom. He made ample provision for their continuous service in the temple and donated lands, houses and cash. A long list containing their interesting names and titles is found among the inscriptions of the temple. A number of singers, drummers, dancing masters were also employed to

assist in the performance of the dances. The dance masters were respected and honoured with titles like *Nrittamarayan*, *Nritta-perariyan*, etc. The lands granted to them were called *Naituvakkani*. The lands granted to the dancers were called *Kuttukani*. In the temple at Attur near Tirunelveli, there was a theatrical hall and a troupe of actors to enact dramas (*natakas*) on the occasion of *Avani-tirunal*. The hall was called *Alagia-Pandyan Kudam*.

The inscriptions also give details of various dance models or styles that were practised by them. Thus at Thanjavur both *Aryan* and *Tamilian* models were performed. A Pandyan record mentions that *Sakkai-Koothu* was performed in a Siva temple at Dalapatisamudram by three women in the month of *Chitrai* and *Purattasi*. At another temple (Tiruvengavasal) near Pudukottai provision was made for the performance of *Santi-Koothu* by a lady. It is also stated that she could perform nine kinds of *Koothus*. In the Ranganatha temple at Srirangam, members of particular families called *Araiyaars* perform even today dances in the temple. They would wear special dress and sing Tamil songs with hand gestures and mudras. This is popularly known as the "Araiyar-Sevai". This particular practice was in vogue in many other Vishnu temples also.

In the temple sculptures also, we see a link between the temple and dance. Our artists took delight in depicting the dancing girls as ornamental friezes in the temple structures. The basement of the temples at Tribhuvanam and Darasuram contain



several sculptures of women dancers, single and in groups accompanied by musicians and drummers. The Vishnu temples at Tiruvallarai depict scenes of Krishna's dance with the gopis. One has only to visit the Great temple, Thanjavur or the Sarangapani temple, Kumbakonam, to see the importance given to the dancing in our art motif. Why should all the *Natya-Karanas* of the *Natya-Sastra* be sculptured on the walls of the temple and around the sanctum? They are obviously meant to delight the Lord and the devotees who go round the temple.

The artistes and the devotees conceived of their gods as the masters of dance as seen from the beautiful icons like Siva as Nataraja (*Kuthapiran* or *Adavallan*), Krishna as *Kaliyanardhana* or as performing *Navanita-Natya* (dancing with butter ball), *Natya Saraswati* (as at Halebid), *Nritta Ganapati* (as at Gangaikondacholapuram). The art of dance swayed the imagination of the artists in such a profound way that the whole temple pulsed with dance forms investing divinity to the art.

## Therukkoothu-The Folk-Theatre Of Tamilnad

SMT. SHYAMALA BALAKRISHNAN

The most popular form of folk-theatre in Tamilnad is the "Therukkoothu" or the street play. 'Yakshagana' of Karnataka is similar to the Therukkoothu. The theme of Therukkoothu is generally a puranic story. The enactment is in typical folk-style, by the folk, for the folk. It centres round the festivals and temples of the villages and is generally staged during the warm months, February and August. What began as a pastime or recreation, by the villagers for the villagers developed gradually into a professional art. Hereditary actors belonging to particular families formed themselves into troupes and went round from village to village, exhibiting their histrionic talents and receiving in return money, grain and other articles of utility from the villagers. Like many other folk forms of Tamilnad, the Therukkoothu is an all night show. It is enacted in street-crossings (and hence the name, 'Theru'-Street+'Koothu'-Play), or on the threshing floor in the fields. Nowadays a small shamiana of, say, 15 feet by 17 feet is erected in some places. No raised dais, front screen, wings or screens, backdrops are provided. Lighting is by two or more big torches placed at the two front extremes.

Music, of the classical, semi-classical and folk-types dominates the show, serving dialogues and conversation as well. Occasionally, however, there are prose renderings. Acting is accompanied by dance

of the rustic type. Whatever be the story, the inevitable characters are the 'Kattiakaran' (Herald) and 'Komali' (Buffoon). The theme is usually a puranic story taken from the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagavatha*, etc. Invariably, such themes have some moral and they emphasise the importance of faith in god. Background music is supplied by an orchestral group consisting of a 'Mukhavina' (a small wind instrument like the Nagaswara) a 'Thuthi' (a bag pipe), Mridangam and 'Tala' (Cymbals).

The play usually begins with an orchestral overture, followed by invocation songs addressed to various deities and, lastly, to the 'Guru' (Teacher). This part of the play will sometimes take even an hour. Immediately after this, the 'Kattiakaran' appears and introduces the play in the form of a discussion with the 'Komali'. Every character of the play appearing for the first time on the stage comes behind the "Thirai Cheelai" piece of white cloth held by two persons. This improvised curtain does away with the need for a front curtain. The responsibility for providing indigenous lights and "Thirai Cheelai" for the play belongs to the *dobhi* of the village for which he is paid in grain or cash. Nowadays petromax-lamps are also used. The manipulation of the 'Thirai Cheelai' is done in a skilful, artistic manner, creating suspense and thrill in the audience. In the beginning "closeups", so to say of the

character's head or feet, as the occasion may demand, are presented. The cloth is then removed and the actor is presented fully to the audience. This type of front curtain is used also in Yakshagana, Kathakali, Bhagavatha mela and Kuravanji Natakas (which are semi-classical and classical dance-dramas). The 'Kattiakaran' unlike the Sutradhara of Sanskrit plays who appears only once in the beginning, appears on the stage till the very end of the plays. It is he who links the scenes and announces the appearances of characters and scenes in advance. The actor once again announces his own arrival in the form of a song and comes out of the "Thirai Cheelai". He then goes round and round singing and showing gestures to the accompaniment of loud music in the background. The dancing, though simple, is brisk, and the gestures very lively. Every line of the song sung by him is repeated in chorus by those of the music party. Not only the mridanga and tala players, but his co-actors on the stage also join in the choral singing! This is indeed very interesting.

At intervals, the 'Kornali' appears on the stage and creates jokes and narrates comic stories by song, speech, grimaces and dance. While he thus spreads mirth and merriment among the audience, he affords opportunities for his co-actors to rest and get ready for the next scene. He also helps to break the monotony or heaviness of feeling if the theme is serious or pathetic. Sometimes an actor known as 'Pala vesham' (actor of many parts) also appears, sings and acts and makes the audience laugh. These actors besides other factors mentioned add to the simple charm

of the performances. Thus, the play carries on, from about ten in the night to the early hours of the morning. Some plays, like the *Mahabharata*, drag on for many nights.

Costume and make-up is an elaborate affair. Important characters like, Hiranyakasipu, Duryodana, Dharrnaputra, Bheema, etc.



wear headgears made out of light wood called the 'Punna' and lavishly decorated with white and coloured mirror pieces and gilt paper. They also wear huge ornaments, all made of the same stuff as the headgears, on the hands, shoulders, neck, chest, etc. Facial make-up is done with indigenous coloured powders known as 'Aritharam'. Female characters are also portrayed by men. Gentle characters use yellow and white, decorated with yellow dots. Red is used for the villain and white underneath red with black dots is also

painted. Blue mixed with black is applied on Bheema's face. Blue or Green is used for Krishna. Thus, they have specific colours for specific characters which help both the actor and the audience in the appreciation of roles. The make-up, costume head-gears and other ornaments of a therukkoothu performer remind us of the Kathakali of Kerala. Short skirt-like dress full of pleats, pyjamas, dhotis, richly embroidered velvet coats, waistcoats, jibbas are all used. Actors without head-gears wear turbans. Masks are occasionally used as, for instance, in Hiranya Vilasam, for Narasimha. All characters wear ankle bells on their feet.

*The* lyrics and dialogues for a play are generally written by a learned man of the troupe. Printed books of such plays are available during village fairs and festivals. The tunes of the songs are popular folk-melodies with occasional touches of classical modes here and there. One could spot out forms of ragas like *Nattai*, *Devagandhari*, *Chenjurrutti* and *Sahana* in their music. There is no voice lending: the characters themselves sing their songs. When an actor sings he holds the figurative centre of the stage; the other characters follow his song in chorus and become a part of audience, as it were. The same thing happens to another actor when his turn comes. Only one character dominates at a time, all others just helping to stress the importance of the former. This is an interesting technique in the subjective rendering of the art.

The orchestral party sits on a bench placed behind the actors. Grand effects are produced by such simple devices as

exploding crackers at the time of entry of heroic characters like Bheerna in *Mahabharata* and by blowing out sparks of fire from the mouth (containing chemicals in a mud-saucer) to denote extreme anger as, for instance Hiranyakasipu in 'Pahlada'. All these delight the simple-minded rural folk and transport them to the land of sheer imagination. They sit gaping at the actors throughout the night or nights-the long summer nights- enjoying thoroughly their open-air-theatre with the sky as canopy. The songs though simple, sometime contain big philosophic thoughts and ethical principles. The moral of a play is always that good will triumph and evil will perish. These rustic plays have a large degree of direct elemental appeal capable of moving and uplifting the folk. Good Therukkoothu troupes may be said to be mobile educational institutions for they try to inculcate, through the medium of Art, in the minds of the masses, a deep love of god, good conduct, social virtues and a capacity to distinguish the good from the bad. Their pent-up emotions find release, against evil-doers and in sympathy with virtuous characters and in the end they feel highly refreshed, elated, and enabled.

North Arcot, South Arcot and Chingleput Districts in Tamilnad are famous for this traditional art. There are parties in other districts also, differing slightly in regard to details. A Therukkoothu party generally *consists* of 12 to 16 members. But I should mention here of an interesting party in Coimbatore District consisting of only 4 members who enacted a drama that needed more than 10 persons. The accompaniments were a "Thuthi" (bag-pipe)



Mridangam and 'Talam' which were played by 3 persons out of the 4. The fourth one was dressed in a woman's apparel and the accompanists played the other roles even as they were playing on their respective instruments! I wondered at the crowd that had gathered and the interest evinced by them in witnessing such a play which was a little more than dramatic monologue. This tiny party somehow kept the audience spellbound and was earning genuine appreciation from them. On enquiry I found out that there were several other such parties travelling from village to village in the District. The actor and his accompanists received gift after gift, in kind, from the audience. The simplicity of it all was so touching.

In the tradition of Indian Art, music, dance and drama always went together. Bharata's *Natyasastra*, the oldest extant work on stage-craft, is also a treatise on dance and music. No wonder, therefore, that our drama has to this day, largely kept up the character of dance-drama or musical-drama. (Ballet and opera correspond approximately to these). While the art of the city has succumbed to prosaic ideas of the modernists who champion 'realism', the rural stage has, (thank! god!) more or less preserved the poetic nature of the art and has not given up the symbolism of music and dance.

Recently, however, a change is noticeable. In a survey of folk arts taken up by the Madras State Sangitha Nataka Sangam of which Therukkoothu formed a subject, it was painful to note that most of the traditional Therukkoothu troupes had given

up their old techniques and taken to doubtful modern theatrical methods. The music being replaced by hybrid film tunes, the dialogues becoming more 'realistic' and changes in their traditional costumes and make-up too, have become common. It is, however, heartening to find out that there are still a few who carry on their original traditions in spite of the difficulties they have to face. One such troupe belongs to the Purisai Village in North Arcot District, which is perhaps the best of all extant Therukkoothu troupes. The troupe known as Raghava Thambiran troupe is led by Sri Raja Thambiran and Natesa Thambiran, (After the demise of Natesa Thambiran, the troupe is led by his able younger brother Kannappa Thambiran), both of them belonging to a family of traditional Therukkoothu actors. The troupe has gained high popularity by their performances at the Madras All India Radio and at the III Folk-Dance festival conducted by the Madras State Sangitha Nataka Sangam in 1961. The Sangam also encouraged the troupe by giving them a very decent sum of grant towards purchasing new dress and make-up materials, after which a grand performance was also held in Madras City under their auspices. To enjoy such folk-arts, one needs genuine love and appreciation of the rustic simplicity of the art and the people participating in it. There may be artificiality in it. But it has to be enjoyed with a child-like faith in its culture and tradition. These arts fully deserve to be preserved for they have been partly responsible for the unbroken continuity of our national heritage.

## CHAKKIYAR KOOTHU

MRINALINI SARABHAI

The first of the sophisticated, stylised and scholastic dance-dramas of Kerala, was the performance of a particular community called 'Chakkiyars', who recited the ancient Puranic stories in the temples. These men were eminent scholars and in their discourses, while quoting from the Sanskrit texts, explained in Malayalam to the people, the meaning of the sacred *slokas* in a particularly witty manner. While *Koothu* is a solo performance, the *Koodiyattam*, is a dance-drama closest today to the ancient traditions of the Sanskrit stage. Usually the plays chosen are those of Bhasa, but there are also the dramas of the Pallava King, Mahendra Vikrama and of Kulasekhara Varman. Though the *Aharya Abhinaya* is of the same pattern as the *Kathakali*, it is more simple in style, the most marked difference being that the actors of *Koodiyattam* speak, sing and



dance as in the *Bhagavata Mela Natakam* of Andhra. One of the important characters of *Koodiyattam* is the Vidushaka, who recites in Prakrit and Sanskrit and then explains the story in Malayalam. Huge drums called 'mizhavus' are used as accompaniment along with cymbals (Kuzhittala) and verses are recited in varied ragas, each raga chosen for its sentiment. The *idakka* is



also utilised along with the *Kombu* and *Kuzhal*. As in *Kathakali*, the conch is used as an instrument whenever necessary.

Usually only selected portions of the plays are performed. After the period of training the students give their primary recital. Selections from the *Balacharitam* are chosen for their first performance on the stage. An interesting fact in *Koodiyattam* is that women, not only sang but also took

part in the plays. They were called 'Nangyars' and belonged to the Nambiar community. The Nangyars were experts in music, acting and singing. Many of the dance movements, as in the *Natya Shastra*, have special names, but the texts for the mudras are the same *Hastalakshana Deepika*, as is used in *Kathakali*.

After *Koodiyattam*, the intoxicating lyricism of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* swept Malabar. This devotional poem with its deepest roots in 'Sringara Bhakti' originated in Bengal and became a favourite piece in Kerala, as a dance of Krishna, Radha and her Sakhi known as 'Ashtapadiyattam'.

It was about A.D. 1660 that the Zamorin of Kozhikode, Manadevan Raja, wrote eight plays on the life of Krishna, to be performed in his own temples, usually at Guruvayur. The dancer's make-up is similar to *Kathakali*, though the *chutti* is smaller and used also by women characters. Beautiful and awe-inspiring masks are employed frequently. One of the loveliest items is the dance of Krishna with the Gopikas and here the transition of the folk-dance into the classical form can be clearly visualised. Apparently, this dance is akin to the various *Kalis* of Kerala, the *Kolkali*, like the tras of Gujarat, the *Kaikottikali*, danced by women during the *Onam* festival and the *Thiruvadiralakali*, the maiden's worship of Manmatha God of Love.