

A Study of Navasandhi Nirtta and Sandhyavahana [An account of the Invocation of the Nine Gods who are Guardians of the Centre and the Other Eight Directions]

M. Balakailasanathasarma

*Swami Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies,
Eastern University, Sri Lanka*

Abstract

This is a special invocation for the gods who are guardians of the centre and the eight directions in the temple or in the village. As referred to more than once this religious programme of Navasandhi Nirtta blending beautifully music and dance items is indeed quite interesting. In the case of all the nine directions the Saivagamas give specific names of tala, raga, dance movements etc required to be performed. Even here different Agamic texts are not always unanaechimous on these names.

Navasandhi nirtta starts after the officiating priest recites a Curnika (Poetic text of Agama). This is followed by short performance of instrumentalists and Rudragamas.

Such performances are set to particular raga and tala and in the case of dance the particular bhava also has to be created besides the buddha the nirtta. All these must conform to the specific aspects of the particular guardian gods of the directions.

A critical inter-disciplinary study of the Navasandhi Nirtta from the view points of religion ritualistic dance and musical details will be quite interesting and useful.

1. Introduction

The teaching and life histories of the Saiva saints and sages reveal the fundamental principle that the human body is the temple of God. The image in the temple symbolizes God dwelling in the hearts of human beings.

The Hindu temple radiates a divine and pure atmosphere which goes a long way to elevate the mental and spiritual faculties of devotees. However, as the author says, it is only from the Agamic texts that one is able to understand how the structural elements and rituals merge and infuse an aura of divinity that pervades the temple, its activities and the environs. One marvels at these structural and ritualistic patterns as well as the concern the Hindu sages and saints had for this life and those that follow. Viewed in this perspective, this article is a study of the subject that will be purposeful in revealing the nava sandhi nirtta and sandhyavahana performed in the temple in its form, idea and modes of visualization.

The Total Content of the Temple

In order to understand the full knowledge in this regard, the structural and the ritualistic aspects of any limb in the temple are to be viewed as mutually complementary, and also the particular limb is to be seen in relation to the total content of the temple.

Various Agamic Sources

Subsequently the writer was able to collect a good amount of information on the subject from various Agamic sources, which he could not lay his hand at the time of the Annual Research Session, from oral discussion with traditional Sivacaryas (Chief Saiva Priests) and from close personal observation of mahotsava (Annual festival) celebrations at different temples in South India and Sri Lanka.

Brahma – Tala - Vidhi

This is a special invocation for the gods who are guardians of the centre and the eight quarters (Brahma – Sthana and Loka – Palas) in the temple or in the village. Firstly the acarya (priest) goes to the place of Nandi (Sacred bull) along with astraraja (symbol of Siva). Vinayaka and other Gods, the eight auspicious objects, group of dancers, vocalists, instrumentalists etc., and worship the Nandi – again. Then he goes to the central balipitha of the temple near the Nandi. He purifies it. If the centre or Brahma-sthana of the village is to be ritually sanctified water is first sprinkled on it and then he offers detailed worship to it. Then he delights its presiding divinity Brahma by arranging the orchestral group and dancers to perform particular tala on the drum as also, dance items and melodies.

The Eight Balipithas

In the same way the acarya (priest) goes to the eight Balipithas within the temple premises (or outside in the village) located in the eighth directions, from east to north – east and repeats the name series of rites but with distinct musical melodies, dance movement etc, for each the of them performed by accompanying music and dance party.

All the agamas refer to this programme which is important from the esoteric, artistic and cultural perspectives. Since the Brahma-tala is played on the drum for the central Brahmasthana it is called Brahma-tala-vidhi. It is also termed, Nava-sandhi nrta and Sandhyavahana on account of the invocation of the nine gods who are guardians centre and the other eight directions and such an invocation to gods is usually done in the evening time.

Dance and Music details

As referred to more than once this religious programme of Navasandhi nrta blending beautifully music and dance items is indeed quite interesting. In the second detailed reference to Brahmatalavidhi in kriyakramadyotika of Aghorasivacarya, there are even illustrations of songs on each of the nine divinities Brahma, Indra, Agni and often some of these seem to include svaras and jatis.

Besides, in the case of all the nine directions the Agamas give specific names of tala, raga, dance movement etc., required to be performed. Even here the different Agamic texts are not always unanimous about these names. However it will be worth while to know this technical information as given in the Kriyakramadjotika.

Analysis of technical details in Navasandhi NRTTA

Direction 1	Presiding deity 2	Tala 3	Raga 4	Nrtta 5	Pan 6	Instrument 7
Centre	Brahma	Brahma	Vankula	Samapada	Pancama	Chachaputa ¹
East	Indra	Jama	-	Bhujanga	Kaladesi	Cacaputa
South-east	Agni	Mattavarana	Varadi	Mandala	Kolli	Udghatita
South	Yama	Bhrngini	Ramagiri	Dandapada	Kausika	Militamattaya
South-west	Nirrti	Malla	Bhairavi	Bhujangatrasa	Nattabhasa	Lambuka
West	Varuna	Naga	Kunjari	Kuncita	Srikamara	Simhanada
North-west	Vayu	Bali	Desagiri	Bhujangalalita	Takkesi	Jhampata
North	Kubera	Gauli	Gaudhika	Akuncita	Kausika	Pancama
North-East	Isana	dhakkari	Tundira	Urdhvapada	Salapani	Kumbha

Some of the details are confusing since both the Columns 3 and 7 give names of talas and coloms 4 and 6 give the melody names under two different categories of raga and its synonym in Tamil musicological texts namely pan. However since the agamas refer to tala under the 7th column as on vadya it can be taken that this has a reference to the particular tala played on the percussion instruments. What can be said with certainty are the following facts.

1. The musical ensemble consisted of Vina, flute, mrudanga, maddala, sankha, kahala, mallari, kamsya, pataha, besides, Bheri.
2. The proclamation about the start of the mahotsava (annual festival) and the Curnika (songs) recited by the acarya were accompanied by the five chief musical sounds (Pancamahasabda²).
3. The dance was mostly pure (suddha nrtta) using rhythmic phrases (bols) and meaning full mimetic abhinayas were not employed. (kamika Uttara 6.89).

This fact is confirmed by the performance of the nrtta puspanjali and also the use of nrtta karanas and stances in the navasandhi - nrtta, see column 5.

Tanjore Quartette

The four brothers Cinnaiya, Ponnaiya, Sivanandam and Vadivelu hailing from Tanjore in the 19th century are known in the sangita circle as the Tanjore quartette who have contributed richly to dance and music in different ways. Starting from the ancestors of these four brothers and till the time of Sivanandam's two sons Mahadevan and Sabhapati³ (1832- 1904), the Navasandhi music and dance in the form of a kavuttuvam were performed by this ancient cultured family in the Tanjore Temple.

Two present-day descendants of this family. Sri Kittappa and Sri Sivanandam have brought out in notation the nine kavuttuvams in Tamil on the Navasandhi and on the five Gods Vinayaka, Subrahmanya, Thirugnanasambandhar, Candikesvara and Nataraja.

The original composer of the Navasandhi kavuttuvams which are the rich possession of the Tanjore brothers is not known. As is the usual format of this type of composition there are jatis at the beginning and end. In the middle are the chief characteristics of the particular god, the raga, tala dance etc, associated with the god, and the specific hand- poses to be used for performing at

each sandhi. It is noteworthy that the kavuttuvams agree well with not only the music and dance details but also with the description of the deities.

Conclusion

There is a Tamil adage that none ought to live in an area where there is no temple (கோயிலில்லா ஊரில் குடியிருக்க வேண்டாம்)

This is a meaningful statement for the temple as it radiates a divine and pure atmosphere which elevates the mental and spiritual strengths of those who live in its vicinity. However, it is only from the Agamic texts that one is able to understand how the structural elements and rituals merge and infuse an aura of divinity that pervades at these structural and ritualistic patterns as well as the concern of the Hindu sages and saints had for this life and those that follow.

However such a study is beset with many problems like the non-availability of critical editions⁴, of major texts like the Kamika, Karana and Kriyakramadyotika, that give the knowledge about these in scattered contexts. The disparity between the detailed theoretical details prescribed in the Agamas and the simple actual conduct of the rituals in the present-day temples etc also are to be noted.

A critical inter-disciplinary study of the Navasandhi Nrta from the view points of ritualistic, dance and musical details will be indeed quite interesting and useful.

Foot Notes

1. The correct form here may be "Caccaputa" which is known as a tala from Bharata's Natyasastra and other texts on Sangita.
2. According to Va-tula the five musical sounds emanate from the instruments of wood, metal, hole and conch along with vocal music Cp 307, Pancamahasabda of Dr.V. Raghavan, Indian Linguistics, Turner Jubilee Volume 1, 1958).
3. Pi—iii ,Preface in Tamil to Navasandhi (Madras 1964) by K.P Kittappa and K.P. Sivanandam (fourth in the line of the quartette).
4. The uncritical Grantha editions too are not available even in important libraries. The writer has therefore given the necessary citations (sometimes corrupt-too) from the original Agamas and Paddhatis for the benefit of the researcher in the filed and the interested performer of the ritual.

References

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- [15] Diehi C. Gustav, Instrument and Purpose – Studies on Rites and rituals in South India, Lund, Sweden, 1956.