

Some Evidences of Sanskrit literature in Indian Classical Dance Tradition

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ABSTRACT

Dance as a way of life is as old as humanity itself. It evolved as one of the activities of man. It is not surprising to assume that facial expressions, hand gestures and movements of various limbs were used as a means of expressions, one's own emotions even before the formation of language. These symbols along with sounds were converted into a form of language. The speech is a great opening for the systematized activities of man in all walks of life. At this stage through singing and dancing men collectively expressed their happiness. Of course, the songs and dance movements were spontaneous without any specific organisation. The growth and development in the field of religion, literature language and tradition led to the formation of systematic and stylised forms in the various branches of fine arts in Indian Classical Dance. Indian Dance has a specific and sentimental background. Dance styles as practised today in different regions of India are different from one another in their exposition although they have a common origin. Pre-historic dance was primitive. The Fine Arts of Indian Classical Dance forms are mainly the contribution of hindu religion and religious literature in Sanskrit. The Fine Arts of dance, music, drama, sculpture, painting and folk dance have common objective although they follow different means and techniques in their exposition. The subject of theory they deal it is supported by hindu thought, philosophy and mythology. The Sanskrit literature prescribed particular spirits to denote specific directions and purposes.

Keywords: Classical Dance, Fine Arts, Sanskrit literature, Tradition.

Introduction

The Fine Arts of music, dance, drama and theatre arts sculpture painting etc became the synthesising factors which were inseparable from one another and became one of the important modes of worship to please Gods. During the Vedic Age, Indian dance became a part of the rituals to propitiate and win the favours of Gods. The celestial nymphs were called Apsarās and the celestial musicians were Gandharvas and were treated as the masters of dance and music. Heaven is said to have had a band of Apsarās and Gandharvās to provide celestial entertainment to all the Gods and is. The Vedic references of dance clarify the point that this art existed even before drama. The origin of drama is to be found in the sacred dance accompanied by gestures of

pantomimic character. This gave birth to drama, after being combined with song and later enriched by dialogue.¹ The earliest reference to dance appear in the rigveda, while describing dawn, as revealing beauty like a dancer, removing the garment in the form of darkness. Here Ushas² is compared to a danceuse. In the Vedic literature the combination of vocal music, instrumental music and dance were known as "Śilpaka".³ 'Nṛtyamānō Amrtah'⁴ is found as a reference for describing dancing gods in rgveda. In the Atharvaveda the word "nrt"⁵ is found ("yasyāmgāyanti nṛtyanti bhūmyām martyam")⁶. The words "nṛtta" and "gīta" are used often, as "Nṛtyāya Sūtam Gitaya Śailūram"⁷ During the performance of sacrifices Sūtas for dance Sailura for music were employed. The ritual dance of Taittiriya Sarhita⁸ is found again in other parts such as

Tānrya Brāhmarā⁹, Aitreyā Araryaka, Baudhāyana Srautasūtra, Āpastambha Srautasūtra¹⁰ kātyāyana Srautasūtra¹¹ and so on. The minimum number of dancers was three, and in some cases it was six and eight. They carried pots on their heads and tapped their right thighs are recited "ehavya idam madhum idam madhu".¹²

Evidences:

Origin source- Vedas

The origin of hindu dance is described to the Vedas and is known as Pañcama Veda. Nātya Veda or the science of dramaturgy is considered as unique one and formed by selecting some characters from each of the four vedas, by the God Brahma, the creator. He selected speech and lyrical matter such as hymns and prayers, dialogues between the gods called Pārhyā from Rgveda, the historic expressions of gestures known as "Abhinaya" from Yajurveda, the musical part from Sāmaveda (the Sāmaveda is known for the melodious way of chanting the prayers and ritual hymns taken from the passages of Rgveda) and lastly the aesthetic flavour or rasa which contains emotional element from the Atharvaveda. Brahma compounding all these factors formed Nātya or Drama and attaching to it the dignity, purity and sanctity as to the other four Vedas and elevated the science of drama to a status next only to the four Vedas. The art and religions thought seek the same end and the hindu allegorical concept of divine aspect of dance really represent the manifold activities of God.¹³ The mythological references throw light on the Gods dancing on particular occasions with specific purposes. Śiva is the supreme lord of dance. The three duties, Srsti, sthiti and Laya are carried on by the trinity – Brahma, Virru and Maheswara respectively. It is well known fact that the laya i.e., destruction

of evil is represented through dance by Śiva who is represented through dance by Śiva who is the source of cosmic harmony and rhythm. The dance of Śiva, popularly known as Tārava, is of seven types.

Stotras

The court of Śiva Kailāsa where he dances is described in the Śiva pṛadosa stotra as follows. Saraswati plays on the virā, Indra as flute, Brahma holds the cymbals. Lakshmi begins a song, Virru plays on a drum and all the gods stand round him and enjoy the ecstasy of Śiva's dance.

Sūktas

Gandharvās, Apsarās, Yakshās, Patagās, Uragās, Siddhās and Vidyādhārās and Amarās, 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 the twilight.¹⁴ The dance of Śiva is represented vividly in many purānas, sūktas, stotras, prayers and other literary work in Sanskrit literature.

Epic and Purānas

Among the Gods and Goddess, next to Śiva, Pārvati is known as the best dancer. The lāsyā part of the dance as depicted by Pārvati is in contrast to Śiva's cosmic dance. Pārvati dances absorbing different forms for varied purpose. Apart from Śiva, Pārvati, kṛshṇa and Gopis, we also find the reference to other Gods and Goddesses as dancers and musicians such as dance of Indra, Dikpālas, Lakshmi Virru in the form of Mohini, etc. The Apsarās Gandharvās and Vidyādhārās are known for their divine Arts. References of dance, drama and music are found in the great epics, such as Ramāyana, Mahābhārata and also Bhāgavata. The recital of the Apsarās was arranged in the assembly of Śita Svayamvaram and Śita was a lover of art. Rāvara himself was a great musician who

played on the vīra to please Śiva. Mandōdari was equally good in the art of music and dance. Even today the traditional dance piece of kuchipudi style Mandūka Śabdham depicts the love music and dance by both Rāvāra and Mandōdari. Sri Rāma's birth was celebrated throughout Ayodhya and their happiness was expressed in the form of dance, drama and music by the people. Vālmiki trained Kuśa and Lava in music and they recited Rāmāyara in the court of Rāma. There are passages in Rāmāyara¹⁵ which have reference to naras and nātakas. The princes of Mahābhārata are described as proficient in sixtyfour disciplines including fine arts ulūpi and chitrāngada were the exponents of dance. Arjuna spent an year of ajñātavāsa opting the profession of Nātyāchārya, teaching dance to Uttara, the princess of Virātanagara. In Bhāgavata, we have several accounts of group dances by the gopis to the lute of Lord Krishna.

Bhāsyas

The Vedas were transmitted from generation to generation by recitation. Similarly Nātyaveda was also popular among artists in recitation form Pārini in his Ashrhadyāyi (5th century B.C), Patanjali in his Mahābhārya, specify the fact that the dance and drama flourished during their periods. The two authors Silāli and krisāsya have elaborately discussed about the principles for the actors, known as natasūtras. Unfortunately this work is not available to us. However, the earliest systematic work on the subject is Bharata's Nātyaśāstra, though we hear some names like Silāli and Krisasya, Tardu, Brahma, Vāsuki, Nārada, Vyāsa and Anjaneya. The oldest Nātyaśāstra, according to the work Yamalāshraka Tantra, is reported to have contained 36,000 stanzas. Śaradā Tanaya in his Bhāvaprakāśana (10th century A.D) mentions that an Nāryaśāstra containing 12,000

stanza had been abidged by Bharata to 6,000 stanzas for the convenience of study.¹⁶ Abhinavagupta treated Sadāśiva, Brahma and Bharata as the earliest dramatologists. Their treatise contained 36,000, 12,000 and 6,000 stanzas respectively. According to some critics the treatise containing 12,000 stanzas were the contribution of one sage known as Ādibharata. In the subsequent period of Bharata the work of dramatology was taken up by writers such as Dattila, Kōhala, Sālikarna and Bādarayana. Dattila who was the disciple and one of the hundred sons of Bharata, is supposed to have written a more comprehensive work on music (4th century A.D) Again the works of other writers are not available, only their names and some of their views are mentioned in the later works of other writers are not available, only their names and some of their views are mentioned in the later works.

Bharata Natyanastra

Next to Bharata's Nātyaśāstra the credit of writing on dramatology goes to Nandikeśvara of 5th century A.D. His two works Abhineyadarpara and Bharatārrava are of great importance as far as dance is concerned. It is believed that Lord Śiva taught Nrtaśāstra i.e, Pure dance containing Kararas and Angahāra with a great temple to Tanru to spread the pure dance in the earth. Tanru taught this part of dance to Bharata and made this style of dance popular. There were other reputed dramatologists such as kirītheadhara and Matrgupta whose original works are yet to be traced.¹⁷ In course of time many commentaries were written on Nātyaśāstra by various writers viz. Bharralollara, Udbhata, Sankuka, Bhattanāyaka, Utpala, Tutabhata, Bhatēndurāja and Abhinavagupta.¹⁸ Abhinava Bhārati of Abhinavagupta (10th century A.D.) is the only work available. In all the works dance is treated on par with dance and music.

In the early period when Sanskrit was dominant only Nandikeśvara's Abhinaya Darpa and Bharatārava were the works where dance was treated separate from drama and music. Even in medieval period when the regional languages became prominent, the chapters on dance were included in the works of drama and music. Indian dance drama, music and "histrionics have a common philosophy and the aspect of Rasa perhaps is the binding force of all arts. The works like Virrudharmottara Purāra and Agnipurāra compiled in 7th and 8th century A.D. contain chapters on dancing. Someśvara's Mānosollāsa is a great contribution of Karnataka where the regional art is emphasised. Sangītaratnākara of Sārangadeva assigned to 13th century is a monumental treatise on music with an elaborate 7th chapter on dance. A very important treatise in Kannada on dance is found written in late 16th century by Simhabhūpala known as lāsyā Ranjana. Śngāra Prakāsha and Sangīta Churamaṇi, are the other work worth mentioning.

Supreme Dancer-Nataraja

Despite these different authors and different languages from ancient to medieval times all thoughts on dance is concentrated around Bharata's Nāryaśāstra. It is treated as standardised text for aesthetic literature in Sanskrit. It is looked upon more on dramatology.¹⁹ Later the concept of Śiva's dance and treating Naraāja as the supreme dancer evolved the thought that Śiva was the originator of Tānraava dance and he danced various tānraavas to mark the events. The dance of Śiva is represented in the sculptures throughout India specially of medieval times, interpreted in terms of Tanraava postures. In Kāraagama, seven varieties of Tanraava are described in detail.²⁰ They are however, in the Sahasranāma of Naraāja nine types of Tānraavas are mentioned²¹ as following order:

Anandā Tānraava
Sandhyā Tānraava
Umā Tānraava
Gaurī Tānraava
Kālikā Tānraava
Tripurā Tānraava
Sarhārā Tānraava

Temple rituals

When we talk of Indian classical dance, we cannot forget that Indian fine Arts. They have grown along with temples either as part of temple architecture or as part of temple ritual or as part of temple festivals. Quite early in the history of temple, it was realized that among the several art forms dance and music alone could be used as the best form of spiritual expression. That was how the music and dance in temple complex came to have a pre-dominantly spiritual content and a religious orientation and that was how they became inseparable from temples and that was how our temples became the repositories of dance and music.

If we study the history of Indian dance as found in our temples, we find a progressive growth in its content, quality and excellence from age to age representing a new phase in its spiritual advancement. As far temples are concerned South India is studded with gigantic temples fascinating in their beauty and imposing in their appearance. Prayer of Vedic mantras and Saivagamic worship tradition are directed in fact, not to the ideal as such, but to the spiritual power which directs the universe and is conceived by the worshipper in the particular form that makes a special to him. The images of the deity are only a concrete symbol meant to aid the concentration of his mind.

But traditions have slowly been compromised and due to the change in people's lifestyle and advancement in science and technology, a number of art

forms have slowly died. The abolition of the devadāsī system brought a full stop to the dance traditions in the temples. Very few temples today continue to observe the dance traditions that were followed by their forefathers. Lack of funds and interest, changes in the socio-cultural backgrounds and Western influences are some of the reasons why we are left with no more than a few inscriptions to convey the cultural heritage of these temples. The artists who have been playing over generations have slowly moved into other more lucrative professions.

Conclusion

This research study on the present theme have two specific purposes, Firstly, establishing the importance of Indian classical dance and historical expression of the most ancient living Vedic religion, Śaivism and Sanskrit literature are evidence to know the Indian classical dance tradition. Secondly the Indian Dance is describing and expressing the Vedic rituals and agamic worship of deities in temples and sketching the devotional fervor of Indian classical dance compositions in Sanskrit.

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