

VISION OF MUSIC AND DANCE IN INDIAN AESTHETIC CONTEXTS - BASED ON THE HINDU TEMPLE RITUALS

Maheswarakurukkal Balakailasanathasarma

Abstract

Music and Dance are the holy fine arts in India. The spiritual side of music has taken deep roots in our land as the people have all along been more prone to spirituality. It is primarily because of the spiritual influence of the temples. South India is a land of temples and every village invariably has a temple. In fact, the temple is the centre around which a village developed. These temples have not only been functioning as places of worship but also as centers of all fine arts. These art forms grew adjuncts to religion and the temples with their vast endowments had a regular establishment with artists like singer's composers, musicians, dancers, instrumentalists etc for offering musical service in its sacred precincts. The abundant epigraphically and inscriptional evidence bear testimony to all these fine arts and the hymns that have been preserved over the years. Thus, all forms of music and dance became indispensable items of worship (rituals) in the temples of South India. This present research paper establishing the importance that a music and dance composition could evolve in projecting the underlined relation of music, dance and temples. The music and dance world are beholden to the great composers for their excellent Kṣētra Kṛtis – but for them the importance of music and dance in recreating the historical impulse would have been lost. Therefore, we understand that the vision of Indian aesthetic contexts in music and dance based on the Hindu temple rituals.

Key words: Aesthetic context, Music, Dance, Fine arts, Temple rituals

Introduction

According to the Hindu belief God is sarvavyāpī – omnipresent and pervades the entire Universe and can be realized in any place through prayers, anuṣṭhānas (rituals), meditation and spiritual sādhanās (practice). His presence is always more explicitly felt and realized in a temple. Therefore, visits to such holy and sacred places have been our tradition that is being followed to these days also. The holy pilgrimage is conducted with utmost humility, purity in thought, word and deed. Keeping this in mind our fore fathers had setup time-honored tradition customs and tenets in the form of meditation, nāmasaṅkīrtana, bhajanas, reading of sacred books, satsaṅga, etc. These rituals were prescribed to us thousands of years ago, with the sole idea that an ardent devotee and an earnest seeker can feel the presence of God and derive much spiritual benefit (Gcethe Rajagobal 2009, p.1).

According to Hindu philosophy and mythology, music, dance and Gods have always been identified with each other. We cannot imagine any God without a particular instrument. Many of the important deities have their own instruments and are worshipped as embodiment of music, dance or fine arts. Lord Śiva is the embodiment of Nāda playing the damaru and also the performer of the tāṇḍava (the cosmic dance). Lord Brahmā is the origin of music inspired by Sāmaveda (Sāmaveda 5.23.2)

There has always been a perfect unison of nāda with Paramātmā (supreme power) and in this unison one can find the “Transcendental Power-nāḍopāsana”. The one who created us is the Almighty (Geethe Rajagobal 2009, p.3). He can only be seen from within. This is the philosophy of our life, and a man who acts according to this philosophy is believed to see this power within himself and shun suffering for him as well as others.

Classical music and dance

Classical music and dance had a natural affinity with the temple and religion. Not only are the themes almost religious, the performances of music and dance were carried on in temples where it was free for the public. The implication is that those who came to the temple, at least while they were within the temple, are in an elevated form of mind and do not look for cheap entertainment. Almost all the rulers (kings) in south India gave importance to the fine arts. They built many fine temples in those days (We must remember that in those days temples served the same purpose as the modern auditoriums), and patronized artists. Traditionally a balance was struck between the king, who ruled like a feudal lord and patron, and the power of religion (Geethe Rajagobal 2009, p.9).

All arts and sciences prospered under the wings of the temple generously supported by the king. On the other hand, the king’s holy goal, ie. to own territory, enhance rain and rich crops, etc., which being sustained by the temple priests who served both the temples and the court. Classical music and dance had a natural affinity with the temple and religion not only were the themes almost always religious, the performances of dance and music were carried on in temples where they were free for the public. The implication is that those who came to the temple at least while they were within the temple were in an elevated form of mind and did not look for cheap entertainment. Almost all the rulers of south India gave a very great impetus to the fine arts. They built temples with the sole idea of promoting Bhakthi and the fine arts and also patronized artists. One should bear in mind that in those days, temples served the same purpose as the modern auditoriums and sabhās. All arts and sciences, astronomy, etc, prospered under the wings of the temples generously supported by the kings. Traditionally, an equal balance was struck between the kings who ruled like feudal lords and patrons with the power of religion. Temples in South India particularly have played an important part in the preservation for posterity the traditions of dance, drama and music (Enakshi Bhavan, 1976).

In Indian music and dance were never conceived of as mere items of entertainment. Music in its triple aspect of *gīta* (vocal), *vādyā* (instrumental music) and *nṛtya* (dance) were given a prominent place in temple rituals traditions. From *Kāmikāgama* one can see that the performance of music and dance was not something optional but an integral and compulsory part of rituals in worship. Temples have thus been the home of static dance and dynamic dance and music.

Ceremony

The *utsavas* (festivals) are considered highly pleasing to the Lord. Various arts and crafts depend on temples and festivals. The insistence on the recitation of the sacred texts, as part of the festival (rituals), apart from propagating them, help in preserving their form. The rituals instil in the devotee a sense of spiritual involvement either directly or indirectly. Great ritual care is taken to keep all the divine forces embedded in the temple area peaceful and contented. Like a royal lord; the Divine Lord holds court, receives visitors, listens to their requests is awoken with the auspicious sound of music and dance, is bathed, dressed and amused, and, what is more important he is emotionally involved with his devotees. One of the reasons for the many Hindu temple ritual may be the fact that this cultural religious syncretism has absorbed traditions of very divergent nature, divergent in all respects, time and social stratum (Geethe Rajagobal 2009, p.10).

Development of Music and Dance in Temples

Temples in South India particularly have played an important part in the preservation and development of music. In India, music and dance were never conceived of as items of entertainment. Even the greatest man and woman of the land treated music and dance as subjects worthy of serious study and practice. These two arts were elevated to the status of *vidyā*. They helped the thinking men and women to understand something of the Infinite. At a time when the habit of recording songs in notation was not cultivated, the only method by which the music composition was handed on to posterity was through oral tradition. (Annapoorna.L 2000, p.viii) Hymn singers among the *Śaiva* and *Vaiṣṇava* saints had sung wonderful compositions in their respective canons which are held sacred ever in the present day. Temple festivals have given rise to a large number of new poetic patterns and motifs.

Music and Dance are the holy fine arts in India. The spiritual side of music has taken deep roots in our land as the people have all along been more prone to spirituality. It is primarily because of the spiritual influence of the temples. South India is a land of temples and every village invariably has a temple. In fact, the temple is the centre around which a village developed. These temples have not only been functioning as places of worship but also as centers of all fine arts. These art forms grew adjuncts to religion and the temples with their vast endowments had a regular establishment with artists like singers' composers, musicians, dancers, instrumentalist etc for offering musical service in its sacred precincts. The abundant epigraphically and inscriptional evidence bear testimony to all these fine arts and

the hymns that have been preserved over the years (Pathmanathan.S 1977). Thus all forms of music and dance became indispensable items of worship (rituals) in the temples of South India.

South India – Hoary Tradition

The cultural history of South India has a hoary tradition. During the process of cultural attainment and development, the temple and their precincts have played a dominant role. Such temples were built in large numbers by the great royal kingdoms of Pallava, Ceras, Colas, Pāndyas and Nāyakas, etc. They speak of the cultural renaissance achieved through the centuries. When we speak of the temples of the four southern states- Tamil Nadu can boast of having the largest number of temples especially in and around the Cauveri delta.

Even though the earliest music compositions date from the days of Bharata, the author of Nāṭyaśāstra, such as the Dhruva gītis, Cārī gītis which were used as a common compositions for music, dance and drama, the earliest musical compositions was known to have been composed by Annamācārya of Andhra Pradesh, by the Nāyanmārs and Ālwars of Tamil Nadu and by the Dāsakūṭas of Karnataka. (Annapoorna.L 2000, p.xix) These savants also helped the development of music and dance activities in and around the temples. As time passed by, music and dance formed a part of the temple rituals.

Music, then, like all other traditional cultural components, is part of an integrated society in which philosophy science, politics, commerce, and all social phenomena are liable to be viewed in a spiritual perspective. Traditionally, music in South India has emerged out of religion, centered in and around the temple, and with worship. An efficacious means for achieving religious goals is through song (kīrtana), therefore, all music in south India is, or is derived from vocal music that springs from religion. Also the traditional stories about god and goddess told in the Hindu scriptures are carried mainly in song. Today, in villages and cities, children grow up hearing their parents, relatives and neighbors daily sing songs and relate marvelous tales that touch every nuance of Hindu life through the deeds of gods and demons, sages and saints. (Annapoorna.L 2000, p.x)

In addition to the song and stories heard in the homes, there are professional singings – storytellers who carry the tradition from village to village. Their performances consist of didactic and devotional songs and stories drawn from the scriptures, i.e. the great epics, Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata and the “Old” religious texts, the Purāṇas (Annapoorna.L 2000, p.9). Classical and folk dance and theatre, too carry the religion through themes drawn from the scriptures.

Dance in Hindu thought

Dance in India has a specific and sentimental background. Dance styles as practiced 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 rural set-up introduced folk dances, which were performed during harvests and ceremonies. The Fine Arts in the classical form are mainly the contribution of Hindu religion. The Fine Arts – dance, music, sculpture, painting and drama have a common objective although they follow different means and techniques in their exposition. The subject they deal is supported by Hindu thought, philosophy and mythology (Annapoorna.L 2000, p.10)

Music in Temple

The ancient history of our music witnessed the perception of the fundamental concepts of governing this art and the best music of the age found expression in the services of God. Music is holy art in India. From time immemorial to the Hindus, worship to God had to be only through music. Otherwise, they left that it was like a lifeless body without a soul or spirit. Hence music, dance drama etc. were formatted or prescribed to be sung, before the gods every day in the temples. These arts were not considered as mere symbols of entertainment in the temples but the temples also served as the promoters and institutions of all these arts that were considered sacred. Temples also served as educational institutions for those students who came to learn the Vedas, Śaivāgamas Purāṇas and other sciences like astronomy, medicine, etc. Likewise all fine arts like music, dance, drama, sculpture, architecture, etc., were not only taught but also preserved for thousands of years and the temples served as archives (Venkadasamy Raw.S.1984, p.97)

Instrumental Music

Instrumental music was very popular in the temples. Indigenous evidences show that many instruments were played to produce melodious music. Saints Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar gave a list of various instruments played during daily rituals and festivals in temples. The number of instruments depended on the prosperity and popularity of the temple concerned.

Beginning of the Nāgasvaram Tradition

The nāgasvaram party provided instrumental music in temple. Incidentally it, might be mentioned that the correct name of this instrument is only nāgasvaram and not nādasvaram. The name nāgasvaram was possibly give to the instrument because its tone colour resembled that of the bhujaṅgasvaram, the snake – charmer’s instrument.

The nāgasvaram is one of the oldest instrument in South India and is supposed to be the most sacred and important instrument played for the gods in the temples every day. It could be heard from a long distance and alerted the devotees about the prayer time in the temple rituals. Though it is considered the oldest, there is no reference to this instrument in ancient Tamil literature, probably because it had a different name. It is no exaggeration to say that the nāgasvaram has vastly contributed to the development of South Indian Culture (Venkadasamy Raw.S.1984, p.99). The term pere-vaṅgiyam in the ancient period is considered to refer to the nāgesvaram. Here,

vaṅgiyam means the ku!al (flute). The epithet Peru (big) does not refer to its size but refers to the largeness of its sound.

Mēlakāra is a composite class of dancing women and male musicians, distinguished by a marked social division from the higher orders of the musical profession. The dancing men and women of mēlakāra who together form a complete chorus constitute what is called a chinnamēla (or smaller music), in distinction to the Peryamēla (big music) which is a band of male musicians who play upon the nāgasvaram with drums and accompaniments differing from those of the dancers (Devasenapathy.V.A.1963).

There are many conventions and the traditions relating to the playing of nāgasvaram on various temple occasions. It should be remembered that it is only the traditions and conventions that have helped to preserve the culture through the centuries. Conventions have a lot of significance, values and meaning. And this meaning has helped us to enable life.

The mallāri music of the nāgasvaram usually sung in the tune of Naṭarāga has its unique structure and significance. Usually the mallāri will be played to mark the different stage of worship in temples as such. At the beginning of the procession call "purappādu" these tunes are played regularly by the nāgasvaram players. The music of mallāri, indicated the commencement of the particular worship in the temple (Venkadasamy Raw.S.1984, p.104)

The Role of Tavil (Percussion Instrument)

Tavil is a percussion instrument that is a must for the nāgasvaram. A nāgasvaram cannot be imagined or played without the tavil. Both the instruments complement each other.

Pañcamukha Vādyam

In some temples we hear special instruments being played during rituals. The Pañcamukha Vādyam is the pride of the shrines at Tiruvārūr and Tirutturaippūṇḍi, in Tanjore district. (Annapoorna.L 2000, p.122). It is played solo and also in conjunction with the śuddha maddalam. ParaSaivas are the privileged class of people entitled to play on this instrument. The present performer on this instrument in the Tiruvārūr temple is a descendant of Tambiyappa, one of the disciples of the composer, Muthuswāmī Dikṣitar.

The Pañcamukha vādyam is a five drum with plain drum heads. This complex instrument belonging to the group on membranophones is of interest both from the musical and scientific points of view.

Sarva Vādyam

Sarva vādyam, literally are instruments, is an interesting institution by itself and is performed only in a few temples.

In the temple at Cheyyur in Chingleput district, the sarva vādyam is performed during the annual Brahmōtsavam. Cheyyur is also familiar to Musicians as the place where lived the composer, Cheyyur Chengalvaraya Śāstrī in the last century. He has to his credit a number of kṛtis in Telugu and Sanskrit. He has composed some śabdas. He is also the author of the Telugu opera Sundarēsa vilāsamu (Geethe Rajagobal 2009, p.199)

Musical Instruments

Some of the music instruments are used in Temple rituals. They are stringed instruments, wind instruments, Drums and Dīkṣitar's Diophones.

Stringed Instruments

The tone of stringed instruments, being weak and thin, they are not used in temple rituals. The rituals take place mostly in open air or in large maṇḍapas. Stringed instruments are out of place in such surroundings. There is also the difficulty in turning the instruments within the available space of time and amidst noisy surroundings. Further, the strings of the instruments may get loose frequently and the task of retuning them correctly in the midst of noise becomes a difficult task.

Wind Instruments

The wind instruments used in temple rituals are : Cinnam (made of brass), Chinna Nāgaswaram (mukha vīṇā), Ekkāḷam (Ekkalai), Gowri kalam (Gowrikalai), Kombu Mukha vīṇā, Nabari (Udu Kombu), Nāgasvaram, Namari, Ottu, Pullanguzhal (Flute), Śaṅgu (Conch), silver Ekkalai (used in Śrīraṅgam temple), Tiruchinnam, Tuttari, and Tutti (Suti). Stone mukha vīṇā is used in the temple at Azhwarthirunagari. The Timiri nāgaswaram 11/2 in length was used in former times and now the Bari nāgaswaram about 21/2 in length is used.

Drums

Bali maddaiam, Bari tavil, Bērigai, Beriyal, Candrapirai, Chendci, Dakka, Dakki, Damaram (a pair of conical drums, kept on the back of a bullock and played upon by a boy riding on it), Dhanki, Dama vadyam, Danka, Davandai (big and small varieties), Idakkai, Jakki, Jayabheri, Kanaka tappatai, Kavana maddalam, Kinikittu, Lavandai, Maddalam Markupalagai, Moganai, Mridangam, Muttu, Nagar (big and small), Nagara chatti, Pañcamukha vādyam, Periya udal, Siriya udal, Sanna udal, Sannidhi udal, Śavandai, Suddha maddalam, Sūrya pirai, Sutthu maddalam Suthu tavil, Tappu palakai, Timilai Udal, Udal Vadya Tavil, Tappu palakai, Timilai Udal, Udal vadya chatti, Vīra kandi, Vīramaddalam, Vīramalahari, Vīra vandi, Viranam, Vangu and Takkai, a drum resembling the Idakka in shape and played in the temple (Prem Latha Sharma, 2000).

Music and Dance in Tantra Śāstra Tradition

The Pūjās and other rituals of the temples are based on the principles of Tantra and the use of the musical instruments during the rituals is also based on the Tantra

Sāstra. In the Tantra granthas which are followed in Kerala temples, the sounding of musical instruments is referred to as a necessity during almost all the rituals of the temples.

In the 'Isānasivagurudevapaddhati' in the Pañca catvārimśaha patalaha (45th chapter) the procedure of Pratiṣṭhā is described. (Isanasivagurudeva paddhati 1925) In the Ślokas 101, 102, 103 and 104, the procedure of bathing and ornamenting and offering Dhūpa (incense), Dīpa (light) etc., are dealt with. In this context, it is stated that after doing the abhiṣekas with honey, milk, ghee, sandal paste, water and so on, offering clothes, sandal paste, garlands, incense (Dhūpa), Dīpa (light from the lamp) and Karpūra āraṭi, the Utsava vigraha is mounted on the chariot amidst the sounding of Bhērī, Paṭaha, Dimdima, Jhallari, Timila, Śaṅkha, Tāla Mardala, Vēṅu and Vīṅā.

Not only this, the sounding of instruments itself is considered one among the services or Upacāras to God like Dhūpa (incense), Dīpa (lighted lamps), Naivēdya (offering of food) and so on. Music or Saṅgīta in its three fold aspects viz., Gīta, Vādyā and Nṛtya is also offered to God. In the Jñānamālā quoted by Rāghava Bhaṭṭa, the great Tāntrika and commentator on Sāradā-tilaka says that the different classes of Upacāras in worship are 38, 36, 12, 10 and 5.

The Upacāras figuring in the classes of 38 and 36 include Vādyā or sounding of musical instruments. In the list of 38 Upacāras, Gīta, Vādyā and Nṛtya come as the 32nd, 33rd and 34th Upacāras respectively. In the list of 36 Upacāras Nātya, Gīta and Vādyā occur as the 16th, 17th and 18th Upacāras respectively.

In the Iṣāna Śiva Gurudēva paddhati the eighth of the first half deals with naivēdya in the section called Naivedyādhikārah. Here, different classes of Upacāras beginning from 10 to 35, are mentioned. Of these, the class of Upacāras consisting of 25 and 36 include Vādyā Upacāra. In the class of 25 Upacāras, Vādyā Upacāra comes as the 22nd one and in the list of 36 Upacāras it comes as the 23rd one.

So, there are two aspects to this, one is music in its three fold aspects 'Gīta, Vādyā and Nṛtya' as an accompaniment to some rituals of the worship in the temples. Another is that music in its three fold aspect becomes an offering to God just as offerings of Dīpa, Dhūpa, Gandha, Puṣpa and so on.

Folk Music as a part of Temple Ritual

Folk music played a dominant role in villages as an offering for the local village deity. Similar to the Bhāgavatameḷa, a street play like Terukūthu was performed. The themes were taken from mythology and folklore of Tamil Nadu in Temples.

Folk Dances as a part of Temple Ritual

Folk dance forms are usually conducted outside the temple premises. The dancers are invited to perform during the annual festivals and usually move with the processional deity during the Ūvalam (taking the deity around the streets surrounding the temple). Some such dance forms are Poi-kāl kuthirai (dummy horse dance),

Mayilāṭ ṭ am (peacock dance), Oyilāṭ ṭ am, Karagamāṭ ṭ am (with the decorated pots on their heads) and Tappaṭ ṭ am (with small handheld drums), Kolāṭ ṭ am and Kummi performed as a part of temple festivals (Satyamoorthy. T, 1978

Conclusion

This present research paper establishing the importance that a music and dance compositions could evolve in projecting the underlined relation of music, dance and temples. The music and dance world are beholden to the great composers for their excellent Kṣētra Kṛtis – but for them the importance of music and dance in recreating the historical impulse would have been lost. Therefore, we understand that the vision of Indian aesthetic contexts in music and dance based on the Hindu temple rituals.

References

- Annapoorna.L. *Music and Temples*, New Delhi, Sundeeprakasham, 2000, p.viii
- Enakshi, Bhavan. *The Dance in India*, Madras, Madras University, 1976, p.204.
- Devasenapathy.V.A. *Human Bondage and Divine Grace in Indian Fine Arts*, Chitambaram, Annamalai University,1963, p.44
- Geethe, Rajagobal. *Music Rituals in Temple of South India*,D;K;Print world,New Delhi, 2009, Vol,I,p.2.
- Isanasivagurudeva Paddhati*, Ganapathy Sastri (Ed.), Trivandrum Sanskrit Series vol.iv, 1925, pp 101-105.
- Pathmanathan.S, *Temples of South India*, Kumaran Pathippagam, Madras, 1977, p.99.
- Prem Latha, Sharma. *Indian Aesthetics and Musicology*, Bharathiyan Publication, Varanasi, 2000, p. 142
- Sāmaveda*, Devi Chand (Ed.), Delhi, Munshiran Moñaharlal, 1980, p.125
- Satyamoorthy.T, *History of Indian Classical Music*, New Delhi, Bharatiya Bhavan Publication, 1978, p.81
- Venkadasamy Raw.S, *Manual of the Tanjore District*, Madras, 1984, p.97.