

Indian Dances and Music for Dance

International Seminar

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THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN BHARATHA NATYAM

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Introduction: The traditional art form of South India is Bharatha Natyam. For Bharatha Natyam, music acts as a back bone. On the other hand, it may be said that there is no Bharatha Natyam without music. To perform a dance programme, the basic requirements are singing, percussion instruments and other instruments like flute, veena, violin and so on. It is clear that music includes singing and instruments like mrudangam, flute, veena, violin and other entities like tala and words (pada). According to Bharata, ganam or gandharvam (song) is comprised of svara, tala and pada –the wordings.

Yat tu trantriktam proktam nana todaya samasrayam

Gandharvam iti taj jneyam svara –ta?a –padatmakam ||

(Natyasastra -Chapter –XXVIII-8TH sloka –English translation by Unni. N.P.Vol.III.)

Ganam or music possesses svara, tala and pada. The sloka below emphasises the role of music in Bharatha Natyam.

'Kante na lambayet geetam

Hasthe nartham pradarshayet

Chakshubhyam Pradarshayet bhavam

Padabhyam tala macharit'

The sloka conveys that music must be sung with the voice, meaning must be conveyed by hand gestures, the emotions must be expressed by the eyes and tala or rhythm must be reckoned by feet. It is clear that how these three elements are applied in a Bharatha Natya concert.

To explain the role of music, it is necessary to point out the items utilized in Bharatha Natyam repertoire. They are Alarippu, Jatisvaram, Sabdam, Padavarnam, Padam, Javali, Tillana and Sloka.

Music and Bharatha Natyam: In the first item Alarippu, one of the music components tala i.e., rhythm is expressed through 'Sarira abhinaya'. Through the movements of neck and eyes, shoulder and hands, knee and foot work, the dancer performs the Natya in three speeds (Pratama, Dvitiya and Tritiya). In this item the pancha nadai namely Tisram, Chatusram, Khandam, Misram and Sankirnam are implemented by the performer.

The second item, Jatisvaram applies one of the musical components called svara. That means, it is sung with solfa syllables and has no sahitya. This item consists of svara i.e., melody, which is bounded by tala i.e., rhythmic patterns. The svara passages in the Jatisvaras are arranged in such a way to give importance to the rhythmic construction. Here, music helps to visualise the adavu patterns.

The third item is Sabdam where sahitya is introduced. It gives scope to express the Sanchari Bhava. The music (word) helps the dancer to show the abhinaya.

The centre point in the Bharatha Natyam concert is Pada Varna. The compositional sections are divided into two parts. The first one is Poorvanga, which consists of Pallavi, Anu Pallavi and Murchay. The next part is Charana and Ettukada. This piece has Sahitya for all sections and composed in slow tempo to bring out the essence of abhinaya. The tune (svara), words and rhythmic setting are met within this item. That means, the three musical elements mentioned in the introduction are implemented in a scholarly manner. The music is composed in such a way to show the mastery in variable aspects in Bharatha Natyam such as- adavus, nadai bheda, gati bheda, sirabheda, greeva bheda, samyuta hastas, and asamyuta hastas, the crowning aspect facial expression and so on by the dancer. The ability, talent and the proficiency will be expressed by this item to the audience.

Pada has Pallavi, AnuPallavi and Charana. Though it is meant for dance programme, because of the musical settings, it is sung in the music concert also. The themes of the Padas are in various types of nayaka-nayaki bhava. The music determines the dancer to express sanchari bhava in a tremendous way.

Javali conveys the love theme in a gentle manner. The musical setting helps the dancer to perform both the nrta and abhinaya in a soft manner.

Tillana is purely a nrta dance. In this, all the parts like neck, head, eyes, hands, foot and so on are involved to portray the rhythmic patterns. Tillana rarely contains sahitya in the charana. The crisp musical setting makes the dancer to perform vigorously. It is the only item, which is governed by the brisk adavus than any other items.

Finally, the sloka is performed as guru vandhanam and sabha vandanam.

Conclusion: Music is the main source to inspire the dancer to perform in a delightful manner. Both Music and Dance are interconnected and inspires not only the performer but also the audience.

