



# Techniques in Bharathanatyam



Volume II



# **Techniques in Bharathanatyam**

Volume II



## **TECHNIQUES IN BHARATHANATYAM II - DIB 02**

### **Diploma program**

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## **ALAGAPPA PERFORMING ARTS ACADEMY**

Alagappa Performing Arts Academy (APAA) is focused on developing structured learning programs to enhance comprehension of the quintessence in Indian classical performing arts. It is an integral part of the Alagappa group of institutions based in Karaikudi and Chennai, TamilNadu, India that caters to the need of primary, secondary, under-graduate and post graduate students with a comprehensive program of educational courses.

In its maiden venture, APAA has designed a comprehensive curriculum in Performing Arts with focus on Bharathanatyam, vocal and instrumental music to demonstrate the repertoire of culture that is imbedded in these classical arts. From an overview of the various art forms in India, to their rudiments, to clearly depicting the exquisite language of gestures, postures and rhythmical delivery, a student is guided through the various phases of this intricate art with textbooks that concisely explain its relevance. Interactive DVDs vividly describe the precise execution of these arts. These valuable learning aids enhance the comprehension and make this a constructive exercise for students to understand the depth and versatility of these arts.

In collaboration with Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, APAA had developed academic programs that are offered directly or through established centers and institutions worldwide to enable students to obtain an undergraduate degree.

## **FOREWORD**

Alagappa Performing Arts Academy, in collaboration with Alagappa University, Tamil Nadu, India and accomplished artistes in the field of Bharathanatyam, has developed a 'Structured Learning Program' in Performing Arts with focus on Bharathanatyam. This program offers:

Certificate in Performing Arts (1 to 3 year duration)

Associate Degree in Performing Arts (1 year after Certificate)

Diploma in Performing Arts (1 year after Associate Degree)

B.A. Degree in Performing Arts (1 to 2 year after Diploma)

The above programs have been designed with specific coursework and practicals that a student has to successfully complete to obtain the respective certification. Effective detailed aids like comprehensive textbooks have been designed to facilitate easy understanding of the various aspects of Bharathanatyam and appreciation of its rich heritage. Complementing the text books are interactive, user friendly DVDs that have been developed to enhance the learning process in practicing the art.

In this pioneering endeavor, I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Mr. Madurai R. Muralidaran, Bharathanatyam dancer, singer, choreographer, composer and Guru, who has acquired many laurels and credits for his dedication to the art and Dr. M.S. Sarala, an experienced dancer and Visiting Professor of Fine arts at the Alagappa University, Karaikudi for their

continuous support. Special recognition is hereby given to Dr. Lakshmi Sreeram who is the primary author of this book. Thanks to Mrs. K.R. Rekha, for formatting the book and enhancing its content. A special note of appreciation to Mrs. Lakshmy Ramaswamy and Mrs. Sujatha Mohan for review of the book.

Bharathanatyam, the traditional classical art form of Southern India, has a distinctive repertoire and is a vibrant mode of cultural communication that unites art lovers from different cultures and countries. Alagappa Performing Arts Academy is fortunate to be among the very first to design such a program to provide a new dimension in educating art conniseurs of this great performing art and help preserve its rich cultural heritage.

Generally, students of Bharathanatyam spend several years learning the art and perfecting the practice to perform the 'Arangetram'. Though this can take from 5 to 7 years, a formal or standardized platform for recognition of this effort is lacking. The primary focus of APAA's academic program is to reward students of this art with University accreditation. I am confident that students who enroll in this program will be able to demonstrate the value of their hard work and gain recognition for their proficiency in this art.

These Structured Learning Programs have now been enhanced to include other art forms such as Vocal and Instrumental Music and is now being offered by APAA globally.

Sincerely yours,

**Ramanath Vairavan**

Chairman & CEO,

Alagappa Performing Arts Academy

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

Alagappa Performing Arts Academy had designed a comprehensive curriculum in Bharathanatyam to preserve and propagate the repertoire of culture that is imbedded in this classical art. In collaboration with exponents in the field and Alagappa University, Tamil Nadu, India APAA had developed a structured learning program that will enable students to obtain a Bachelor's degree in performing arts. From an overview of the various dances in India, to the rudiments of dancing, to clearly depicting the exquisite language of gestures, postures and rhythm, a student is guided through the various aspects of this intricate art with textbooks that concisely explain its relevance and interactive DVDs that vividly describe the precise execution of the art. These valuable learning aids enhance comprehension of the depth and versatility of this art. The following programs are now being offered:

### **Certificate in Bharathanatyam**

This program provides an overview of the fundamental concepts of Bharathanatyam with a historical perspective. The rudimentary concepts of Nritha, Nrithya and Natya are explained. To portray an aesthetic profile the student will learn about the types of instruments used in Bharathanatyam and understand basic dancing "parlance". In addition they will be exposed to "adavu" (The basic footsteps). A student will be required to perform a dance recital such as Alarippu, (an invocation), Kavithuvam or Shabdham (tradition basic dance item with introduction of Bhava). Students enrolled in this course will take 1 to 3 years to complete this program.

## **Associate Degree in Bharathanatyam**

This program covers the basic and essential expression in Bharathanatyam. Abhinaya, its usage and importance are explained. On completion of this one year program after the Certificate, the students will realize the enduring and enthralling beauty of Bharathanatyam manifest in various types of Chari (walking pattern), different varieties of Alari ppu, Jathiswaram (combination of notes with Bharatha natyam steps) and Shabdam.

## **Diploma in Bharathanatyam**

This program reviews the eternal passion of Abhina-ya (facial expressions) and Angas (expressive communi-cations through the body). During this one year program, training will be imparted in the Varnam, the piece de resistance of Bharathanatyam that is known for its grace, vigour and expressive brilliance, the Padam and the Jawali which explore the various Rasas, Bhavas and Nayikas and in the Tillana, the fast moving dance score.

## **Undergraduate Degree in Bharathanatyam**

This program introduces the student to Nattuvangam. On completion of this one to two year program after Diploma the students will be prepared to execute choreographical combinations of footwork, hand gestures and expression. A thorough knowledge of Bharathanatyam acquired in other courses combined with this training in choreography enhances the students' ability to perform both traditional pieces and newer ones.

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# **Introduction**

## **Brief Introduction to Concepts Discussed in the Book**

Bharathanatyam has a strong abhinaya component which it draws directly from the ancient text on dramaturgy, the Natyashastra. The four broad types of abhinaya, namely, angika, vacika, aharya and satvika have been dealt with in the earlier books. The Natyashastra also talks of Samanya abhinaya and Chitra abhinaya which have been dealt with in the first two chapters.

Samanya abhinaya is the bringing together of the various aspects of angika, vacika and satvika abhinaya to convey an idea or situation or emotion. Chitra abhinaya includes the various means of conveying miscellaneous ideas such as the vast sky or ornaments or garlands etc. using only angika abhinaya.

The third chapter introduces the place and importance of these stories in Bharathanatyam.

The fourth chapter describes the mythological stories from which Bharathanatyam draws to tell its many stories. Myths and legends are told as part of the varnam especially, and these stories are drawn from Hindu mythology.

Bharathanatyam is organically linked to the musical tradition of South India called Carnatic music. It draws from this tradition for its repertoire and is performed to the accompaniment of this music. The fifth chapter sets out in detail the fundamental aspects of Carnatic music. The concepts of raga and tala are dealt with as also the various kinds of compositions in Carnatic music and the repertoire and method of rendering the compositions that are used in Bharathanatyam.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **SAMANYA ABHINAYA**

We have seen in our previous books that Bharathanatyam has a highly stylised idiom of conveying emotions and textual meaning which is broadly referred to as abhinaya. We have also seen that the roots of this language lie in the ancient Sanskrit text, Natyashastra. The Natyashastra is primarily a manual of theatre, attributed to the Sage Bharata and placed in time by different scholars between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. It has had a seminal influence on the development of music, dance and literature in India.

To recap, the Natyashastra lists four aspects of abhinaya – angika, vachika, aharya and satvika. Bharathanatyam too recognises these four aspects of abhinaya. Thus, emotions or ideas can be conveyed by the use of body - a mere widening of pupils or the raising of eyebrows can convey an idea or emotion. A sudden turning away or a gentle gait convey with fair precision an idea or emotion. While incorporating a

stylised version of these aspects of day to day behaviour, Bharathanatyam also has an extensive vocabulary of hand gestures (samyutha, asamyuta hastha-s) which convey specific ideas. All this comes under angika abhinaya. And then there is use of words in theatre which obviously communicate. In Bharathanatyam there are the songs whose lyrics are communicators. This falls under vachika abhinaya. In theatre costumes are also used to convey an idea. An actor dressed up in fine clothes and a crown, suggests that the character depicted is that of a King. This is aharya abhinaya. Finally satvika abhinaya is the subtlest type of abhinaya, where communication is achieved when the artist achieves a sympathetic merger with the character portrayed.

Now, we come to the concept of samanya abhinaya. This can be seen as referring to the script, as it were, of the performance. The artist, here a Bharathanatyam dancer, has all her equipment of angika, vachika, and satvika abhinaya. Now, how these are used, how they are put together, how the dancer weaves these elements to put together and present a piece in performance is samanya abhinaya. “Samanya abhinaya depends on words (and their tone), physical gestures and sattva (emotions). When words, the tone and the gestures are suited to the emotion conveyed, it is samanya abhinaya.” (1)

Commentators have tried to explain the exclusion of aharya from the above concept of samanya abhinaya. Abhinavagupta, the 10th century Kashmiri Shaivite commentator on the Natyashastra, explains this by saying that aharya is no doubt a part of the

dramatic effort; but it does not require constant exercise on part of the actor. Once the aharya or costume is donned, that is all aharya abhinaya involves while angika, satvika and vacika abhinaya are aspects that constantly demand effort from the actor.

Abhinavagupta explains samanya abhinaya with two interesting analogies. The first is that of the alatachakra or a rotating firebrand (alata). He says if a firebrand is rotated a circle appears. In reality there is no circle but it appears to exist because of the skill of rotation. Abhinavagupta explains by saying “Samanya abhinaya is the coming together of each major and minor part of action so that the result of their combination is a unified whole like the image of an alatachakra.”

(2)

In another analogy, performer is compared to the perfumer. The perfumer buys various sweet smelling substances and concocts them into a homogenous mixture that makes a wonderful perfume. In the same way, a performer combines her acquired skills, blending all the elements she is skilled at to give an excellent and balanced performance.

The analogy underlines the process in which an artist freely creates according to his life experiences of people, acquisition of the sastric tradition, and the inner choice i.e. adhyatma, out of the various norms laid down for communicating a particular emotion or situation. It also emphasises the freedom of the artist in innovating and experimenting and his judgement in selecting conventional techniques on the one hand and creating ever fresh methods on the other.

Bharata says that where the sattva element (felt emotion) predominates, i.e. where the emotional content is clearly communicated, samanya abhinaya is of the highest kind (uttama). Where the verbal element and the bodily gestures are on the same level as the emotional element, the samanya abhinaya is middling (or madhyama); where the emotional element is subordinate or very weak in the presentation, the samanya abhinaya is inferior (adhama). So, in a play, the character may deliver the dialogue loudly and clearly; he may move about and gesticulate in the appropriate manner; but unless his presentation is suffused with emotion (sattva), the presentation will fall flat and not touch the spectators. Correspondingly, in Bharathanatyam, the dancer may have excellent orchestral support with good singers and accompanists on the various instruments. She may also be very skilled in ankiga. But unless the dancer has the right amount of emotional involvement and is able to communicate that effectively, the dance performance cannot rise above the ordinary.

In the Natyashastra, samanya abhinaya is elaborated in great detail in the context of theatre. The treatment of samanya which includes specific ways of using the voice and limbs forms the very basis of the Sanskrit theatre tradition of which Natyashastra is a remarkable manual.

For example here is a passage from the Natyashastra describing how the enactment of a woman waiting for her lover is to be done:

*The nayika waits for her lover after adorning herself. She gets agitated and with a trembling body*



*and heart as if not beating, she goes to the doorway. With the left hand on the frame and the right on the doorpanel, she looks in the direction of the lover's arrival. She should express apprehension, anxiety and fear, all together; then not seeing the lover, for a moment she is sad, heaves a deep sigh, sheds tears and ....collapses*

*on her seat. She should try to understand the reasons for his delay, both auspicious and inauspicious.: "Could he be delayed by duties, or by friends or by the Ministers due to some state problem, or by any female favorite?" (3)*



Throbbing of the right eye

Bharata also mentions that the abhinaya could include omens for good and bad tidings. Good omens are the throbbing of the left eyes or lips or hand or thigh. The dancer could indicate this to show good omens to heighten the mood. Likewise bad omens are indicated by throbbing of the right eye etc.

It is interesting that this “formula”, so to speak, is still followed in a large measure by Bharathanatyam dancers two millenia after the Natyashastra delineated it!

Another detailed prescription that the Natyashastra offers is the treatment of the guilty lover which can also be studied for the interplay of angika, vacika and satvika

*“When the lover stands before her afraid and ashamed of his guilt, she should nag him with rebukes.... Very harsh words should not be spoken, nor should she nag too much. She should rather talk about herself in tearful words.... (Then), telling him to go*

*away, she should turn her back on him, walk away.... If the lover catches hold of her by hand or garment, the woman must appear pacified, and gradually coming near him she should release herself from his hold; she should act her enjoyment of his touch without letting him see it; standing on her toes in ashvakranta posture, she should loosen his grip on her; but in case she does not succeed, then perspiring and thrilled at his touch, she should say: "Let go of my hand". When she says angrily, "Go away", the man should walk away a few steps and then come back and start talking to her under some pretext. She should shake her head to and fro, all the time pretending anger and mumbling and censuring him.... She should harass him till he falls at her feet, and when he falls prostrate, she should look up at the female messenger. Then she should raise him up, embrace him and walk into the inner chambers. This should be done to the accompaniment of tender music." (4)*

As can be seen the above description is in the context of theatre. In dance, words cannot be spoken and the role of the vachika has to be achieved by the accompanying musicians. Typically, the singer will render the same line of the song in many ways and the dancer will perform sanchari using angika and satvika.

Samanya abhinaya, as elaborated by Bharata, includes many descriptions relevant in the context of drama. They are mostly concerned with the sringara rasa or the emotion of love and the erotic. Sanskrit plays have handled the state of love with great detail and sensitivity and so Natyashastra lays down elabo-

rate rules for depiction of men and women in different stages and conditions of love. These descriptions are also relevant to Bharathanatyam since the varnam-s and padam-s and javali-s (5) are almost always concerned with the lovelorn woman and sometimes man.

Signs of love in women: Here the external signs of a woman in love are described.

*"A woman's ....desire may be seen in her eyes which are tearfully smiling, eyelids drooping and eyes slightly closed. When a woman is looking with half closed eyes there is grace and invitation in her eyes. When the cheeks are slightly reddened, with drops of perspiration glistening, and the body thrilled, it is a sign of kama or desire.*

*"A courtesan, on the other hand, would show her desire by sidelong glances, by attractive gestures or postures of the body, by touching (handling) her ornaments, by drawing designs on the ground with her toe...by tying her hair.*

*A woman of good family also reveals her love.... She speaks with her face downcast, replies softly with a smile, conceals her perspiration, her lips are throbbing and there is a look of dismay about her." (6)*

Bharata delineates ten stages of love in a woman as follows (7)

**Abhilasha:** This is the first stage of longing.

**Cintana:** This is the stage of obsession with her lover. She tries to draw attention to herself by going

out, coming back, staying within his sight and various other means. She asks her friend "By what means can I get my beloved's attention?"

**Anusmriti:** She is constantly thinking of him and heaves great sighs of longing. She feels no comfort in sleep or in any activity.

**Gunakirtana:** This is a happy-unhappy remembrance. "There is no one like him, she keeps saying with sad smiles and graceful movements. Love is expressed by wiping off tears and drops of perspiration.

**Udvega:** Restlessness. She is not at ease and is not able to remain sitting or lying down but is restless awaiting the arrival of her lover. This is to be acted by sighs, lassitude and expression of anxiety.

**Vilapa:** Trying to recapture poignant moments she keeps walking to and fro lamenting "He was standing here, he was sitting here and here he left me".

**Unmada:** Hysteria, where she can only talk of the lover and detests mention of anyone else. This is to be enacted by standing still with a vacant look, by heaving deep sighs, by crying when she should be laughing and such other acts.

**Vyadhi:** This is delirious behaviour, expressed by fainting and feverish restlessness.

**Jadata:** Insensate state. She does not respond when spoken to and does not register any sound or vision. The only thing she utters is a wail. This is to be acted by fast breathing, by relaxing the body, and by responding on wrong occasions.

**Marana:** This is death following unrequited love.  
(This however should not be enacted on stage.)

**Rules for men:** A man pining for his beloved should express his love in different ways. When burning with love it should be expressed by having recourse to cooling things like sandal paste, flowers, parks and gardens. Suffering from the fire of love, he should send a female messenger to speak to his lover of his love and desire.

### **Abhyantara and Bahya:**



In all art forms with strong traditional moorings, we are well aware of the importance of sound training.

Bharata offers an interesting and important distinction between the well trained artist and the untrained but pretentious upstart who, without any sound training or practice, will pull off a performance by imitation.



*"The head, the face, the hands, the chest, the hips, the thighs and the feet all equally share the expression. But in a drama, to express rasas and bhavas, their movements will have to be graceful. When the movements and gestures are not stiff, not hurried, not clumsy and keep to tempo and tala, and when the words are distinct and not harsh and hurried, that abhinaya is called abhyantara (pronounced aabhyantara) i.e. correct abhinaya. The opposite of this, i.e. where everything is as one wills (not according to rules) is called bahya (pronounced baahya) i.e irregular or incorrect. Abhyanatara (literally, inside) is one that is within rules and bahya (literally outside) is one that is outside rules. Those without any training or access to sastra-s employ only bahya just imitating others." (8)*

### Representation of sensory stimuli and responses:

Bharata prescribes how one might act various sensory stimuli and responses. These are very much followed in current Bharathanatyam practice.

*Registering a sound is to be acted by a side glance, with head inclined towards the side and the index finger at the back of the ear. A touch is to be acted by touching one's shoulders and cheeks with drooping eyes and brows knit. Taste and smell are to be acted by narrowing the eyes and a sharp intake of breath by distending the nostrils. (9)*

Contemporary Bharathanatyam also uses the katakamukham hasta to indicate smell. In contemporary Bharathanatyam, the hearing of sound is indicated by the chatura or pataka hasta held near the ear. Pataka hastas over both ears is used to indicate a harsh sound. Hamsasya held near one or both ears is used to indicate pleasant or beautiful sound such as the sound of Krishna's flute.

## **QUESTIONS :**

- 1. What is Samanya abhinaya? How does the analogy of the alatachakra or firebrand apply to it?**
- 2. What is the relation of samanya abhinaya to the four types of abhinaya?**
- 3. How does the analogy of the perfumer apply to samanya abhinaya?**
- 4. What is the relation of sattva and samanya abhinaya?**
- 5. Describe in terms of samanya abhinaya how you would depict a scene where a woman is trying to quietly go out to meet her lover.**
- 6. How will the dancer depict love in a woman of noble birth and a courtesan? Describe and distinguish.**
- 7. Using an abhinaya piece you have learnt, describe how some stages of love in a woman are depicted in it.**
- 8. What is abhyantara and bahya according to Natyashastra?**

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **CHITRA ABHINAYA OR MISCELLANEOUS REPRESENTATION**

Bharathanatyam has a stylised system of gestures and bodily movement (samyutha and asamyutha hasta-s, eye movement, and other aspects of angika abhinaya) which individually, and also in combination, convey specific ideas. Thus we have gestures for depicting say a peacock with just the tripataka mudra and a bee with the bhramara hasta or an offering of flowers with the pushpaputra hasta. There are other things, abstract ideas, states of mind which too have a codified depiction in Bharathanatyam which can be traced back to the Natyashastra.

In the chapter called Chitra Abhinaya, Bharata, in the Natyashastra, lists some miscellaneous things and ideas and their representation in abhinaya, specifically by angika abhinaya or abhinaya through bodily

gestures. It is interesting that a couple of millenia after the Natyashastra, contemporary Bharathanatyam still conveys these ideas in much the same way. There are, however, some changes in some cases.

*Morning, evening, day and night, seasons and dark clouds, wide expanse of water, the different quarters, the big stars and many such things that are far and wide and fixed or permanent, may be indicated by the hands in swastika gesture on the one side and head in udvahita and eyes looking up (or in the distance). With the same gestures of hand and head but with eyes looking down, anything on the ground may be indicated.*

*To indicate moonlight, happiness, air, taste and smell, gestures used for touch and thrill may be employed. Hot ground and heat of the sun may be indicated by movements suggesting search for shade.*

*By covering one's face with a cloth, dust storm or smoke could be indicated.*

*Looking up with half shut eyes, the mid day sun in indicated. Similarly sunrise and sunset may also be indicated by suggesting the depth of the ocean (from where he has risen or set).*

*With widened eyes and appearance of shock and fear, one can convey lightning, thunder, shooting stars etc.*

*With hands in Udveshtita and Parivarita and the head bent low, a sense of repugnance or of avoiding contact may be conveyed.*

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*Lions, bears, monkeys, tigers and other beasts of prey may be indicated by holding the hand in padmakosha hasta downwards in swastika gesture.*

*Touching the feet of elders should be indicated by holding tripataka and swastika hastas. A goad or a whip in hand should be indicated by swastika and kataka hastas.*

*Anything pleasant is indicated by touching the limbs, by thrill of the body, anything harsh and unpleasant also by the similar gestures but by contracting the body as well. (10)*

In contemporary Bharathanatyam, the hamsasya hasta is employed, taken over the hands especially, with a pleasant or unpleasant expression depending on whether a pleasant feeling or unpleasant feeling is to be conveyed.

**Gestures for Garlands:**

*With hands in arala gesture on the left shoulder (at the place of the sacred thread), and then gradually separating them (one on each side) in the swastika gesture, necklaces and garlands could be indicated. (11)*

In contemporary Bharathanatyam, Hamsasya is also used to indicate necklaces as also Katakamukham and chatura to indicate garlands.

*Numbers one to ten are conveyed by fingers and multiples of ten by two hands in pataka. By mov-*

*ing round the index finger and pressing the alapallava hand the idea of entirety could be conveyed.*

*Umbrellas, banners are indicated by holding the staff in the hand. Weapons too are indicated by the gesture of the way in which they are wielded. (12)*



trishula and mushti hasta  
be conveyed.

For instance, in contemporary Bharathanatyam, the trishula is indicated with the tirshula hasta on one hand and the mushti in the other held as if piercing someone lying down.

Memory, trying to remember is indicated by look of attention, downcast eyes, slightly bent head and the hand in samdamsha. This suggests an attempt to remember and the act of remembering.

With the head in udvahita and hands on the right side above the head in hamsapaksha, heights may

With the arala hands raised to the side of the head, destruction, termination and fatigue are conveyed. (13)

#### **Gestures for seasons:**

The Indian tradition recognises six seasons:

these are grishma (summer), varsha (rainy), sharada (autumn), hemant (early, mild winter), shishira (late, severe winter) and vasanta (spring). Here is the Natyashastra on how these may be depicted.

*With all the limbs relaxed, suggesting that all quarters are clear and conveying that various flowers can be seen, autumn is conveyed; and winter by contracting the body and by chattering teeth, sneezing, shaking the head while crouching as if in cold; severe winter by gestures of touch suggestive of cold wind; spring by gestures of rejoicing, enjoyment, merry making, and blossoming of various flowers; summer by suggesting the heat of the ground, movements of fanning and wiping of sweat; rainy season by appropriate flowers, grass and the presence of peacocks. (14)*

Postures and anubhavas appropriate for men and women.

The Natyashastra makes a clear distinction between how the same emotion may be differently conveyed by a man and a woman; by a noble character, middling character and by a low character. A noble man will react to shocking news with dignity and restraint while a low character is bound to react with more display of grief, by lamenting and loud gestures. Again a man will exhibit differently his inner state than a woman. The following situations are described in the Natyashastra.

### **General postures for men and women:**

According to Natyashastra, the natural posture of a man is vaishnava and that of a woman either ayata

or avahittha and these may be changed if the occasion requires it. (15) In contemporary Bharathanatyam, swastika is often employed for depicting women while for men a simple samasthana with sama or trayasra pada is often used. The gesture of male characters to express various experiences must be bold and yet graceful; but in the case of females they should be delicately charming, their feet and hands graceful while those of a man are deliberate and firm.

### **Expression of anubhava-s**

*Depiction of a man feeling happiness is done by hugging oneself, and smiling eyes. That of a female by depiction of sudden thrill, closed eyes full of tears and a happy attitude.*

*In anger, a male reacts by upturning his eyes, biting his lips, breathing hard and his whole body shaking with agitation; while in the case of a woman her eyes are filled with tears, her chin trembles, lips quiver, eyebrows are knit, she cracks her fingers and discards her ornaments and assumes the ayata position.*

*In sorrow, a man breathes deeply, and silently, sighs, is moody with face downcast. A woman weeps, sighs, falls on the floor, beats her breasts.*

*Fear in man is depicted by looking bewildered, restless, by dropping weapons. A woman shows fear by shaking in her limbs, looking this side and that, clinging to anyone nearby. (16)*

**QUESTIONS :**

- 1. What is chitra abhinaya? What aspect of abhinaya is mainly used in chitra abhinaya?**
- 2. Describe how one may depict the following:**
  - a) Vast expanses in the sky**
  - b) Animals of prey**
  - c) Anything pleasant, anything unpleasant**
  - d) Some weapons such as the trishula, the gada**
  - e) Trying to recollect, memory**
- 3. How are the following depicted differently in man and woman?**
  - a) Fear**
  - b) Happiness**
  - c) Reacting to bad news, sorrow.**
  - d) Anger**

## CHAPTER 3

### SANCHARI-S

(Hindu Mythology-Glimpses)

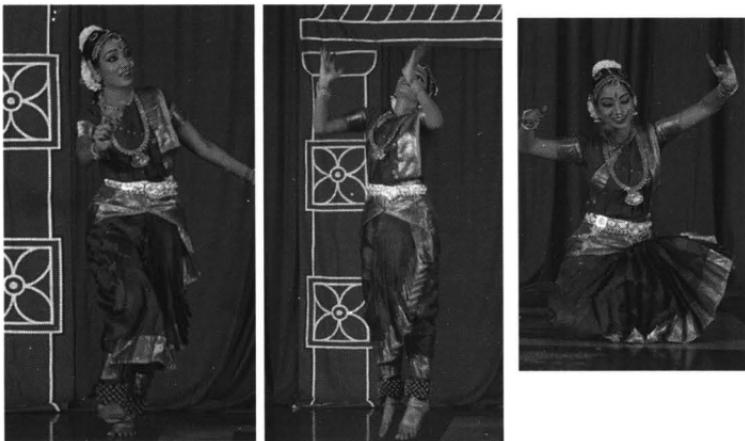
Abhinaya in contemporary Bharathanatyam has a strong component of sanchari-s. As detailed in our previous book, sanchari bhava refers to transitory emotions, or ancillary emotions that are associated with the eight major emotions or sthayi bhava-s. These are mentioned and listed in the Natyashastra as being 33 in number. Thus the sthayi bhava of sringara or love can have asuya (jealousy) or sanka (suspicion) as ancillary emotions. In contemporary Bharathanatyam the word “sanchari” has a different though associated connotation – it also refers to the way of expanding on a particular line by evoking mythological stories and presenting it in abhinaya.

Abhinaya is broadly of two kinds:

**Padartha abhinaya:** Here the abhinaya is performed word to word. Each major word in the song is depicted in abhinaya in the same order as the song

is sung. For example, take the line “Krishna nee beganne baro – which means (word to word) – Krishna, you quickly come. This is a famous song in the Raga Yamunakalyani. The padartha abhinaya will proceed like this – depiction of Krishna (say as the flute player), you (with a suchi hasta) quickly (snapping the fingers); come (mrigashirsa). There can be variations of the padartha abhinaya too.





**Vakyartha abhinaya:** In this, the general meaning of the line is depicted in many ways. For example, in the above line, the vakyartha abhinaya could depict mother Yashoda searching for Krishna, pleading with him, threatening him etc. – to come quickly. Depiction of Krishna's playfulness, his teasing his mother, hiding from her etc. too would be well in place in depicting this line in vakyartha abhinaya. To take another instance of say a varnam in which the Nayika is imploring her lord

to come – Mohamana enmeedil. The padartha (word to word literal meaning) of the line is: I am deeply and madly in love with you; the second line completes it asking is it right for you to tease me thus? The first line can be depicted in padartha abhinaya by depicting each word individually; and, when it is depicted in vakyartha, signs of love may be shown such as restlessness or lack of interest in food, or complaining to the cuckoo or the deer...

Besides the above two stages of abhinaya, there is another important aspect of abhinaya and that is **sanchari**. In sanchari, which follows the padartha and vakyartha abhinaya, some related story or idea is elaborated. In Krishna nee begane baaro, depiction of the leelas (miraculous episodes in Krishna's life) of Krishna could be performed. To take another example, suppose the line is one where the nayika asks her sakhi to take a message to her Lord Siva, then, in sanchari there could be elaboration of some mythological story of Lord Siva. Sanchari-s are typically interwoven into the abhinaya in varnam and sometimes sabdam, but rarely in padam. In padam, the intensity of bhava is of uppermost concern and any deviation into mythological stories is usually not incorporated in the abhinaya of a padam.

Thus, a Bharathanatyam dancer has to be familiar with the mythological stories that are presented in sanchari-s.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **GLIMPSES INTO HINDU MYTHOLOGY**

Bharathanatyam as a dance form is enmeshed in the Hindu culture. The cultural moorings of this dance form are in the Hindu religion and traditions. In keeping with Hindu customs, the dancer begins with a namaskara (salutation) to the Earth, the guru, the gods, the other artists on stage and finally, the audience. Traditional musical repertoire of Bharathanatyam is in praise of Hindu deities. Again, if we take the costume, the ornaments that are used are very much drawn from the Hindu cultural ethos. The central place of the tilaka (marking on the forehead) – whether it be a male dancer or a female dancer – also indicates its close links with the Hindu culture. But above all, the stories that the dancer tells through abhinaya are drawn from Hindu mythology and legend. This is not to say that stories of other religions/cultures cannot be told in Bharathanatyam. They can be, and in fact, they have been told. But the fact is that the traditional repertoire of Bharathanatyam and indeed, most contemporary Bharathanatyam, draws from Hindu sources for its content.

## Sources of Indian Mythology

Sources of Indian mythology are mainly the epics, (the Ramayana and the Mahabharata) and the Purana-s, especially the Bhagavata Purana.

**Epics:** India celebrates two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

**Ramayana** (authored by Sage Valmiki) relates the story of Rama, Prince of Ayodhya, who vanquishes the demon King Ravana at the end of an epic struggle to rescue his wife Sita, whom Ravana had abducted. The story is full of travails of the young Prince. The character of Rama is deeply entrenched in the Indian mind as embodying all that is noble and virtuous. He is called maryada purushottama – the highest among men who pursues what is moral and just even in the direst of circumstances.

**Mahabharata** (authorship attributed to Sage Vyasa) is an epic of vengeance and has more greys than white and black. In terms of the variety of emotions handled in it and the situations that the characters are thrown into, it is unmatched. The central event in the Mahabharata is the great war fought within a family, among cousins - between the sons of Pandu, the Pandavas and the sons of Pandu's brother, Drithrashtra, the Kauravas. Never the best of friends, the Pandava-s and the Kaurava-s share an uneasy relationship through their childhood. Through deceit in a game of dice, the Kaurava-s succeed in sending the Pandava-s into exile. On completing the exile period of 14 years, the Pandava-s demand their share of the Kingdom. Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava, refuses and Pandava-s have no choice but to go to war.

The Mahabharata is a poem of nearly a hundred thousand verses (in its longest form) with many subplots and side stories. It deals with the four goals of man recognised in the Hindu tradition (Dharma – moral law, artha – material prosperity, kama – sensual desire, and moksha – liberation); it portrays situations throwing light on the conflicts that man experiences because his own individual good is frequently pitted against that of the society; and indeed, his own moral preference might be opposed by the demands of his duty. The Mahabharata contains the Bhagavat Geeta, one of the most eloquent treatises discoursing on man's choices and destiny.

**The Purana-s** are a group of important Hindu religious texts, consisting of narratives of the history of the Universe from creation to destruction, genealogies of the kings, heroes, sages, and demigods, and descriptions of Hindu cosmology, philosophy, and geography. Purana-s usually give prominence to a particular deity and most use an abundance of religious and philosophical concepts. They are usually written in the form of stories related by one person to another. Some of the famous Purana-s are the Matsya Purana, the Vishnu purana, the Bhagavata purana.

**Bhagavata Purana:** Also called Srimad Bhagavatam, this purana contains the stories of all the ten avatara-s or incarnations of Lord Vishnu but particularly details Lord Krishna's life story, especially his childhood days in Gokul – Vrindavan; it is also the source for the madhura bhakti - worship of the Lord as a lover in the lives of the gopi-s or the cow girls. When Krishna leaves Gokul for Mathura, the grieving Gopi-s embody the yearning souls of man for divine union.

## Bharathanatyam and Hindu Mythology

Stories from Hindu mythology are especially found in the Varnam and sabdam pieces. If there is an invocatory verse in the Pushpanjali, this too typically is in praise of a Hindu deity. Therefore knowledge of these stories and legends is important for a Bharathanatyam dancer.



A Scene from Krishna Leela

Below are a few important stories that are frequently depicted in Bharathanatyam. (The stories recounted below are drawn from popular knowledge. They admit of minor variations).

Before embarking into the narration of the puranic stories, following is a brief introduction to the various deities that are often referred to and some of their attributes.

Hindu Gods have distinct personality traits; each deity is associated with a vahana (vehicle) and aayudha (weapon).

**Brahma:** This is the creator (srishti) of the universe. His spouse is Saraswati, the Goddess of learning. He is depicted as four headed and is the repository of the vedas. His vahana is the swan or hamsa.

**Vishnu:** He is the preserver (stithi) of the Universe. He reclines on the thousand headed serpent, Adishesha, on the milky ocean (ksheerasagara.) His four hands hold the shankha (conch), chakra (discus), gada (mace) and padma (lotus flower). Simply depicting the chakra, with the suci hasta held aloft is enough to indicate Vishnu or Krishna, the only incarnation in which He has also wielded the discus. Thus the weapons of Vishnu are the chakra (also called the sudarshana Chakra) and the gada. His vahana is Garuda, the eagle.

Vishnu is also depicted as the one reclining on the Adisesha. (pannagashayana, bhujagashayana).

Vishnu's spouse is Lakshmi who is depicted with two lotus flowers held at shoulder height in kapitta mudra.

**Siva (pronounced shiva):** He is the destroyer of the Universe (anta). However it is not some evil intent that leads Him to destroy the world. Siva merely completesthecycle of creation by annihilating it so that new creation can arise. Siva is also giver of boons. In fact, the very name Siva means auspicious. Siva is a yogi or a mendicant, lost in medi-



A Scene from Shiva's Ananda Thandavam

tation most of the time. He has a tiger skin (or elephant skin) for clothes, matted hair (Jatadhara), a serpent around his neck for a garland, the crescent moon on his matted locks (chandramouli). The river Ganges too is trapped in his matted locks and she comes out in a gentle trickle from his twisted locks. He holds the trident or trishula in his hand and also the drum (damaru). He is the divine dancer who dances the tandavam. He is Trinetra (three eyed) and rides the Bull, Nandi (nandivaahana).

Siva's spouse is Parvati and they have two sons – Ganesha and Muruga.

Ganesha is the elephant headed god who is the remover of obstacles. Any undertaking is begun with a prayer to Vighnaraja (vighna – obstacle, raja – King of) Ganapati. Ganesha has the humble mouse for his vahana (vehicle). He is also called ekadanta because He only has one tusk. Muruga is the younger and the warrior son of Siva and Parvati. Mythology has it that He was born to kill the Demon Soorasuran. Muruga is also Shambukha (one with six heads) and rides the peacock and has the Vel (a spear) for his weapon. Muruga has two consorts - Valli and Devasena.

### **Some stories commonly depicted in Bharathanatyam**

**Dasavatara:** According to Hindu mythology, Lord Vishnu, in pursuit of His divine mission to preserve the world, has taken nine avatars or incarnations in different forms. The tenth avatar is regarded as coming in the future. As He declares in the Bhagavat Geeta:

Yadaa yadaa hi dharmasya glaanirbhavati  
Bhaarata

Abhyutthanam adharmasya tadaatmaanam  
srujaamyaham.

Paritraanaya saadhunaam vinaashaaya ca  
dushkrutaam

Dharmasamsthaapanaarthaya sambhavaami  
yuge yuge.

*Whenever there is decline in righteousness and ascendency of evil and evil doers, I incarnate myself to save Dharma and the world. In every age I am born to save the good and destroy the evil.*

The ten avatars are

1. Fish (matsya avatara)
2. Kurma (Tortoise)
3. Varaha (Wild boar)
4. Narasimha (Man-Lion)
5. Vamana (Dwarf Brahmin)
6. Parasurama (A fierce warrior Brahmin)
7. Rama
8. Balarama
9. Krishna
10. Kalki

Each of the avatara-s has stories associated with it. In Bharathanatyam, the avatara-s frequently depicted in sanchari are Narasimha, Vamana and, of course, Rama and Krishna.

**Narasimha avatarā:** Hiranyakashipu is an asura (demon) who has a boon that he will not be killed by man or animal, by fire or weapons, during day or night, inside or outside the house, on the ground or in the air. This made him almost invincible. In a state of absolute power, he decrees that henceforth all worship shall be offered only to him. Anyone found worshipping Lord Vishnu would be killed. He unleashes a reign of terror but has to face resistance from his own son, Prahlada. Prahlada refuses to stop chanting Lord Vishnu's name and worshipping him. The infuriated Demon King tries all methods to kill his son, but in every case Prahlada is saved by the divine intervention of Lord Vishnu. Finally, Hiranyakashipu confronts Prahlada and asks him, "Where is your Vishnu?" Prahlada replies: "He is everywhere." The King asks "Is he there even in this pillar?" to which Prahlada says, "Yes, even in the pillar". The enraged Hiranyakashipu breaks the pillar and out emerges the man-lion, Narasimha. It is neither man, nor animal; it is dusk time and therefore neither day nor night, Narasimha puts Hiranyakashipu on his lap (neither on the ground nor in the sky) uses His claws (neither weapon nor fire) to pull out Hiranyakashipu's entrails. Thus, Hiranyakashipu is killed and the earth is relieved of her burden.

**Vamana Avatarā:** This is the first avatara where Vishnu assumes a full human form. In this, his mission is to bring an end to the asura (Demon) King Bali. Bali

performs many yagna-s (ritual sacrifices) in an attempt to gain supremacy over Indra, the King of the Gods. Since this would upset order in the universe, Lord Vishnu decides to put an end to the unacceptable ambitions of the demon King. When Bali is performing a Yagna (Sacrificial oblation), Vishnu arrives in the form of a dwarf brahmin. Receiving the guest Bali offers Him anything He desires (since charity or dana is essential in a sacrifice). Vamana asks for land that He can cover with just three steps. And Bali agrees to give it. Bali's guru, Sukracharya, sees through Vishnu's guise and warns Bali but Bali is committed and goes ahead. He gets ready to pour the water from the kamandala (a container with a spout) which would seal the act of dana. In a last bid attempt to stop the act, Sukracharya takes the form of a bee and lodges himself in the spout of the container so that water may not come out. Vamana takes a stick and pierces the spout blinding Sukracharya in one eye and Bali pours the water and brings on his own undoing. Vamana grows to Viswarupa – a form as huge as the universe and measures the entire earth with just one step and the entire heavens with the second step. Raising His foot, He demands his third step. Bali bows down and offers his head. Vamana places His foot on it and sends Bali to the patala or the netherworlds. The story goes that Bali is allowed to return once a year to see his people and that is celebrated as the festival of Onam.

### Rama Avatar

The story of Sri Rama is beloved and has been told in Valmiki's epic Ramayana. The story of Rama has been told in other languages too, notably by

Tulsidas in Hindi (Sri Ramcharitmanas) and Kamban in Tamil.

### A gist of the story of Rama:

Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna are Princes of Ayodhya ruled by the Surya vamsi (race of the Sun) King, Dasaratha. Dasaratha has three wives, Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. Rama marries Sita of Mithila after winning a competition and will be crowned King, but for his stepmother Kaikeyi's determination to see that her son Bharata should be crowned. Kaikeyi is actually instigated into this by her maid Manthara. Kaikeyi invokes two boons granted her by the King many years ago and asks that Bharata should be crowned King and that Rama should be sent to the forest for 14 years. Rama goes, but Sita and Lakshmana too accompany him. The grieving King cannot bear separation from his dear son and he dies. Bharata goes in search of Rama and begs Rama to come back and take the throne, but Rama refuses since that would amount to disrespect for their father's word. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita set up home in the Chitravati forest. The demon King Ravana abducts Sita and the brothers begin their search for her. They befriend Sugriva, the monkey King, and his minister, Hanuman. Rama invades Lanka with the help of the monkey troops and brings back Sita. All return to Ayodhya where Rama is crowned King.

There are many stories that are well known but the ones that are often depicted in sanchari during a Bharathanatyam performance are the following.

**Ahalyaa Shaapa Vimochana:** Rama and Lakshmana are travelling with their guru, the formidable sage Vishwamitra. At one spot, Rama notices that there is an abandoned ashram (hermitage) and enquires about it. Viswamitra tells the story of the sage Gautama and his lovely wife, Ahalya. Indra, the King of Gods, smitten by her beauty, disguises himself as Gautama and while the sage is gone for his early morning bath, seduces Ahalya. Ahalya is not unaware of the impersonation, but in a moment of pride (of her beauty) and lust, succumbs to temptation. Gautama returns and curses Ahalya to turn into stone. When she begs his forgiveness, Gautama tells her that she will have to wait for Rama's touch which will transform her back. He also curses Indra whose body has to bear the shame of his act with a thousand female organs which are later transformed into a thousand eyes. Thus Indra is also called sahasraaksha (the thousand eyed one).

On hearing the story of Ahalya, Rama enters the hermitage and touches the stone with his foot and Ahalya is redeemed from her curse.

**Sita Swayamvara:** Rama and Lakshmana, along with Sage Vishwamitra, reach the kingdom of Mithila, ruled by King Janaka who has invited Kings and Princes from all over to participate in a competition, the winner of which would win the hand of his lovely daughter, Sita. The competitors have to lift and string the bow of Lord Siva which is in King Janaka's possession. It seems a simple task but no King is able to move the bow even an inch. In some versions of the Ramayana, the demon King, Ravana too tries his hand but fails. Janaka is frustrated and taunts the assembly. At this point

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Rama is asked by Vishwamitra to try His hand. Rama approaches the bow, salutes it reverentially, invoking Lord Siva's blessings. He lifts the bow easily and in trying to string it, breaks the bow in half. Sita places the varamala (garland) around His neck and the marriage is celebrated.



Sita Swayamvara

### **Soorpanaka episode and Sita's abduction:**

This is when Rama, Lakshmana and Sita are living in exile in the forest. Soorpanaka, sister of the Demon King Ravana, tries to charm her way into the hearts of the handsome brothers, but is spurned and rejected. She first approaches Rama who tells her that He is already married and will not take another wife. He urges her to approach Lakshmana who rejects her. Realising that the brothers are teasing her and having fun at her expense, she tries to harm Sita, but Lakshmana quickly cuts off her nose. Bleeding and raging, Soorpanaka goes to her brother Ravana who rules over Lanka and demands revenge. Ravana plots to abduct Sita and takes the help of his Uncle Maricha. Maricha assumes the form of a golden deer and attracts the attention of

Sita who asks Rama to get it for her. Rama goes after the deer, asking Lakshmana to stay guard. Maricha draws Rama deep inside the forest and is killed but not before he screams out for Lakshmana in Rama's voice. Sita, fearing that Rama is in danger, insists that Lakshmana should go and help him. Lakshmana is reluctant to go but on Sita's insistence, he marks a line around their hut inside which Sita would be safe. Any-one other than Sita, Rama, and Lakshmana, attempting to cross the line would be singed in flames. While Lakshmana is also gone and Sita is alone, Ravana comes in the guise of a mendicant, asking for alms. Sita offers him some food staying within the line. The mendicant says it is not proper for him to accept offerings made across any line or boundary. The unsuspecting Sita steps outside and Ravana assumes his real form and abducts her in his Pushpaka Vimana, a flying vehicle.

**Jatayu Moksham:** Jatayu is a vulture who sees Ravana kidnapping Sita and tries to fight the demon, but Ravana chops off the bird's wings and Jatayu falls down helpless. Later as Rama and Lakshmana come that way searching for Sita, they see the dying Jatayu who tells them about Sita's abduction and dies. Rama performs the last rites for Jatayu thereby ensuring that the devoted bird gets moksha or ultimate liberation.

**Sanjeevani episode:** This is during the war in Lanka with Ravana. Rama, along with the vanara sena (monkey troops) is leading the battle against Ravana. During the war, Lakshmana gets critically wounded. A distraught Rama says he will not go on without his beloved brother. The physician advises that an herb

Sanjeevini, which is available in the Himalayas, can cure Lakshmana. So Hanuman makes a trip across the seas and the length of India and goes to the particular mountain (Dronagiri) in the Himalayas. But he is unable to identify the herb and so uproots the entire mountain and flies back



to the battle field. The sanjeevani is administered to Lakshmana and he recovers to fight Indrajit, the unassailable son of Ravana, and kills him.

### **Krishna Avatar**

Krishna is one of the most colourful deities in the Hindu pantheon. His story is celebrated in the Bhagavata Purana also called Srimad Bhagavatam. Born to Vasudeva and Devaki in a prison in Mathura, he grows up in Gokul, a pastoral hamlet on the banks of the river Yamuna where his childhood is spent under the loving care of his foster parents Yashoda and Nanda. Krishna would steal butter and break the milk pots of the gopi-s (cow girls) and steal the hearts of all damsels and break their hearts with his dallying sports with other women.

He kills Kamsa, his own uncle and the tormentor of Vasudeva and Devaki. He is crowned King of

Sanjeevanam mountain

Mathura. He befriends the Pandava-s, the five sons of Pandu of Hastinapura and plays a critical role in their victory in the Mahabharata war.

**Birth of Krishna:** When his cousin sister Devaki gets married to Vasudeva, none is happier than Kamsa, the tyrannical ruler of Mathura. He offers to drive the chariot himself and escort the couple to their house. But when a disembodied voice from the heavens warns Kamsa that the eighth son born to the couple is destined to kill him, he imprisons them and kills each baby within minutes of its birth. Balarama, the seventh son, is miraculously transferred into the womb of Rohini, another wife of Vasudeva and is thus saved. When Krishna is born, it is midnight and raining heavily. Vasudeva, following a divine command, takes Krishna out of the prison and across the river Yamuna to Gokul. Yamuna is in spate but the waters miraculously part to allow Vasudeva and the child a path to cross it to the other shore. Vasudeva leaves the infant with Yashoda in Gokul who has just delivered a baby girl, and in accordance with the divine command, he brings the girl baby back with him to the prison. Kamsa, hearing of the eighth child's birth, rushes to the prison to kill it and is amazed to see a girl baby. But he resolves to kill her anyway and as he throws her against a stone she slips from his hands and transforms into a resplendent goddess who laughs at Kamsa and tells him that his destiny still awaits him.

**Childhood pranks:** These are often depicted in Bharathanatyam. As a child, Krishna steals butter and milk from his own house and those of others too. Milk etc. are stored in pots and suspended by ropes from

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the ceiling. Krishna and his friends would form human pyramids to bring down the pots and drink the milk and curd.

Gopi-s (cow girls) carrying milk and butter in their pots are also Krishna's targets. Sometimes Krishna would tease girls by just throwing



Krishna with yashoda

stones at their pots in which they would be fetching water or carrying milk, curd etc. A famous episode is that of Krishna stealing the clothes of the gopi-s. The gopi-s are out bathing in the river with their clothes on the banks. Krishna lifts the clothes and climbs up a nearby tree and watches the fun. The gopi-s find to their horror that their clothes are missing and are wondering what to do when Krishna lets them know of His presence by playing on his flute. The gopi-s realise His mischief and demand that He returns them their clothes. Krishna insists that they should all bow to him (do a namasakara) and beg him. Then alone will he return the clothes. Helpless, the gopi-s do as they are bid and they get their clothes back.

When gopi-s complain to Yashoda about Krishna's pranks, she decides to teach him a lesson by tying him to a big stone mortar. She brings some rope and tries to tie Him up, but the rope turns out to be too short.

She brings a longer rope but that too falls short. This goes on until Krishna decides to let Yashoda tie Him up. She leaves Him tied up and goes indoors. Krishna is tired of waiting for Yashoda to come back and untie the rope and so, tugging and pulling at the mortar, He starts moving. He goes out into the woods where the mortar gets stuck between two tall trees. Krishna tugs at the mortar until the trees are uprooted and fall down. From them arise two deva-s or gods – sons of Kubera, the God of wealth who were cursed to be born as trees until Krishna redeems them. They salute Krishna and go back to the heavens.

One day, Krishna is playing with mud and puts some into His mouth. Yashoda rebukes Him and asks Him to open His mouth so she can remove any mud that may be in His mouth. When Krishna opens His mouth, what should she see but the entire universe! Stunned, she realises her baby is no less than the Lord of the three worlds.

**Kaliya nardanam** (dance on the serpent Kaliya): As a young lad, Krishna is playing with a ball on the banks of the Yamuna with his friends. Suddenly the ball falls into the river and Krishna prepares to go after it. His friends warn him that the serpent Kaliya is in the river and is bound to harm him. Now, Kaliya has been causing much suffering by poisoning the river, and killing any unsuspecting person entering the waters of the Yamuna. So Lord Krishna decides to take on the serpent. He fights with the seven hooded monstrous serpent and finally dances on its hood. Kaliya is sent away and he never returns. This spectacle is witnessed by the wonderstruck inhabitants of Gokul.

**Govardhanagiridhari:** This is the miraculous feat of Krishna where he lifts the mountain Govardhana with his little finger. Krishna convinces the people of Gokul to propitiate the mountain Govardhana, which to the inhabitants of Gokul is life giving, instead of Indra, the King of Gods, who is, after all, unseen. The sacrificial offerings are made to Govardhana but Indra is infuriated. Being the God of the rains, he unleashes a torrential downpour over Gokul, and the village is all but submerged. Lord Krishna lifts the mountain on his little finger and protects the inhabitants, cows and other living creatures of Gokul. Indra realises his folly and arrogance and learns his lesson.



Krishna lifts Govardhanam

**Draupadi-maana-samrakshanam** (protecting the modesty of Draupadi): Draupadi is the wife of the five Pandava brothers. With a conspiracy to cheat Yudhishtira (the eldest of the Pandava-s) of all his possessions, Duryodhana (the eldest of Kaurava-s) invites him to a game of dice. With loaded dice, Duryodhana manages to get Yudhishtira to stake everything, his kingdom, his palace, even his brothers and himself, and lose them all. Finally, Duryodhana

suggests that one other thing is left which could be staked and Yudhishtira stands a chance of winning back everything. That “thing” is the lovely Draupadi or Panchali, the Princess of Panchala. Against all better judgement, Yudhisthira succumbs to the addiction of gambling and in a desperate bid to win back everything he has lost, he agrees to the wager. Yudhisthira loses and the Kaurava-s rejoice and want to humiliate the Pandava-s and their beautiful wife. Draupadi is dragged into the court assembly full of men and Duryodhana orders his brother Dusshasana to disrobe her. Draupadi screams for help, but all are helpless since legally she is under the full control of the Kaurava-s. Finally she prays to Lord Krishna and wonder of wonders, she is given an unending stream of cloth which protects her honour. As Dusshasana pulls at her robe more of it wraps around her until there is a mound of cloth lying under an exhausted Dushashana’s feet and Draupadi is still covered in cloth. Krishna thus comes to her rescue.

**Geetopadesham:** This happens at the beginning of the Mahabharata war. This war, as has been mentioned before, is between the Pandava brothers on one side and the Kaurava brothers on the other. Pandava-s and Kaurava-s are cousins. The Kauravas have denied the Pandava-s their rightful share in the kingdom. Krishna acts as the charioteer of the third of the pandava brothers, Arjuna. Arjuna is a skilled archer, probably the best in the land and is also Krishna’s dear friend. Just as the battle is about to begin, Arjuna, who is to lead the Pandava-s, is in a moral dilemma at the thought of having to kill his own blood

relatives. He refuses to fight. Krishna then gives the message of the Gita in which he discourses about the real and the unreal, the duty of man and his choices to attain salvation. One of the most profound messages of the Gita is its karma yoga which urges man to do his duty without any interest in the result.

Karmanyevaadhikaraste        maa        phaleshu  
kadaachana

Maa karmaphalaheturbhoo maatesangostvakar-  
mani.”

“In duty alone you have right not in its fruits. Be not avaricious of the results of your actions, and be not indolent resorting to inaction.”

**Gajendra Moksham:** This is a story from the Bhagavata Purana, a very popular one among dancers while doing sanchari. Gajendra is an elephant who is devoted to Lord Vishnu. (The actual story goes that Gajendra is a King Indradyuman cursed by the Sage Agastya to turn into an elephant.) When Gajendra is bathing in a lake, a vicious crocodile grabs his leg and tries to drag him into the lake. Gajendra tries to shake himself free but is not successful. Finally, he calls out to Lord Vishnu who throws his discus (Chakra) at the crocodile, killing it. Gajendra is freed and attains salvation by the touch of Lord Vishnu and ascends to Vaikunta, Lord Vishnu’s abode.

## LORD SIVA

### Attributes of Lord Siva:

Lord Siva has a yogic or ascetic personality. He is often depicted as meditating. He cares not for fine clothes and jewellery but smears ashes on His body and dances in the cemetery.

He wears the skin of tiger for his attire, a serpent around his neck as a garland, smears ashes from the cemetery on his body, holds a damaru (a small, hour glass shaped drum) in one hand, a trident or trishula in another, rides the Nandi (bull), has the fierce third eye on his forehead which, when opened, will burn anything that it falls upon; he is also Neelakantha (blue throated – the story will be recounted later); he holds the river Ganga in his matted locks and also the thin crescent moon on his head.

Lord Siva is worshipped in the form of the linga – a phallic symbol. In dance too, he is depicted with the sivalinga mudra.

**Gangavatarana:** This is the story of how Lord Siva traps the powerful river Ganga in his locks. Ganga is one of the most sacred rivers in India and she herself is worshipped as a goddess.

King Bhagiratha of the solar dynasty and an ancestor of Lord Rama, wants to bring down the celestial river Ganga from the heavens to the earth to bring salvation to his ancestors. He performs immense austerities and wins a boon to that effect and Ganga will descend to earth from her heavenly abode.

But if Ganga were to descend from the heavens, the earth would not be able to bear her force and would be destroyed. And so, Bhagiratha prays to Lord Siva for receiving Ganga and breaking her fall as it were. Siva agrees and lets loose his matted locks. As Ganga descends, Lord Siva traps her in his matted locks and then from there He lets her out in a gentle trickle so that she can flow on earth. Thus, Lord Siva is known as Gangadhara (He who bears the Ganga) and is always depicted with a small trickle of water from his hair.

**Kamadahana:** This story is famously described in Kumarasambhavam, the Mahakavya of the great poet, Kalidasa.

Parvati, the daughter of the Mountain King Himavat, is in love with Lord Siva and wants to win Him over. But Siva is in deep meditation and will not even look at her. The gods want the union of Siva and Parvati since it is prophesied that the son born to them could alone vanquish the dreaded demon Taraka. So the gods conspire to rouse Siva and send Madana or Manmatha, the God of Love and his wife Rati. As Parvati places a garland around Siva's neck in devotion, Manmatha takes aim and shoots his arrow. The arrow finds its mark and Siva is momentarily shaken out of his yogic state. He spots Manmatha; infuriated, He opens His third eye to burn the God of Love to ashes. Later, when Siva and Parvati unite, Madana is resurrected.

**Mrutyunjaya or Kaalakaala:** This is one of ways of addressing Siva. Kaala refers to the God of death. Siva is kaala to kaala himself – He overcomes the Lord of Death. (Mrityu – Death, jaya – victory). This is the

story of Markandeya, a young boy devoted to Siva. Markandeya is fated to live only 16 years and as his time runs out, he puts his faith in Lord Siva and is worshipping the Linga when Yama, the Lord of Death comes to take him away. Markandeya puts his hands around the Linga and holds on to it. When Yama puts the noose around Markandeya to take him away to his realm, the noose falls around the Linga. Infuriated, Siva steps out of the Linga and all but vanquishes Yama. Yama is spared in return for Markandeya's eternal youth. Markandeya lives on forever as a boy of 16.

**Neelakantha:** The gods and the demons get together to churn the ocean to obtain nectar (amritha) which will give them everlasting youth. During this **amritamanthana** or the churning of the ocean to get the nectar, the gods and the demons use the mountain Mandara as the churning rod and the serpent Vasuki as the rope with which to churn. As the churning progresses, a vicious poison, the Halaahala, which threatens to destroy both the deva-s and the asura-s, is produced. Lord Siva comes to the rescue and collecting the poison in His palm, swallows it. Parvati, His consort, is terrified and clutches his throat and stops the poison from descending any further. Thus the poison remains in Siva's throat which turns blue. Thus, Siva is Nilakantha or blue throated.

**Ardhanarishwara:** This is an androgynous deity composed of Lord Siva and his consort, Shakti, representing the synthesis of masculine and feminine energies. The Ardhanarishwara form also illustrates how the female principle of God, Shakti, is inseparable

from the male principle of God, Siva. Ardhanarishwara, in iconography, is depicted as half-male and half-female, split down the middle. The best sculptural depictions of Shiva as Ardhanari are to be seen in the sensuous Chola bronzes and the sculptures at Ellora and Elephanta. Usually, the right side is male and the left is female. Besides male and female anatomies on the respective sides, the right side is depicted as wearing a tiger skin while the left side is depicted as draped elegantly with fine cloth. The right side hair is matted and flying while the left side hair is soft and beautiful. On the right side are the moon and the Ganges while the left side is adorned with jewels. A serpent is the bangle on the right arm while lovely bangles adorn the left arm. This is a form that invokes wonder, the adbhuta rasa.

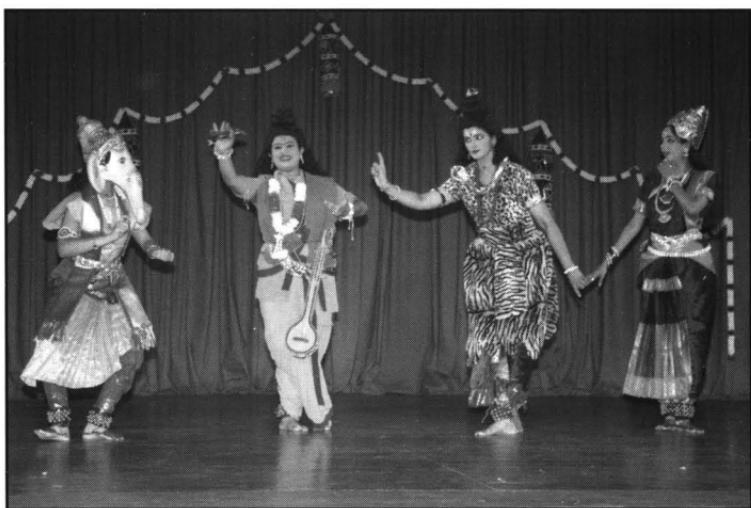
### **Bhikashatana / Darukavana episode.**

This is an important story associated with Lord Siva since it is this episode that explains Siva's appearance as an ascetic clad in tiger skin with serpents around his neck etc.

The sages of Darukavana decide to follow the way of karmic (ritualistic) austerities and stop worship of the Lord. To teach them a lesson, Siva descends in the form of a wandering mendicant, completely nude with a begging bowl in His hand. Vishnu descends too in the form of Mohini, the enchanting damsel. Seeing Mohini, the sages lose their control and start pursuing her in passion. The wives of the sages in the meantime are enamoured of the wandering mendicant and lose their chastity to Him. When the sages realise this,

they are enraged and perform an abhichara yagna (a sacrificial ritual to bring about bad effects on the person targeted) to punish Lord Siva. A ferocious tiger comes out of the sacrificial fire. The sages command the tiger to kill Lord Siva. But, Lord Siva kills the tiger and wears his skin around His waist. Then they create a trident, to kill the Lord. Lord Siva picks it in His hand as His weapon. Then they create a deer with sharp horns, to kill the Lord. Lord Siva lifts it in His left hand. Later on they create countless black cobras to kill the Lord. Lord Siva wears them as His ornaments. Then they create countless Bhuta Gana-s to kill the Lord. Lord Siva makes them His army. Then they create an Asura, Muyalaka, to kill the Lord. Muyalaka marches with the Yajna fire to destroy Lord Siva. Lord Siva holds the fire in His hand while overpowering the Asura and trampling him under His feet.

## Ganesha and Muruga



A Scene from Mango of wisdom

Two popular stories are often depicted in Bharathanatyam involving the sons of Siva and Parvati.

**Mango of wisdom:** The story goes that Narada, the celestial sage known for creating discord (though the end result is always for the betterment of the Universe), brings a single ripe mango to Siva. Ganesha and Muruga start quarrelling over who is to get it. A race is then set: whoever goes around the world thrice and returns first will get the mango. Murugan rushes off on his peacock and is confident of winning since his elder brother has only the little mouse for his vehicle. Ganesha simply goes around his parents (who, he argues, are His world) and claims the mango. Siva can do nothing but give it to Him. When Murugan returns after his whirlwind tour, he is shocked to find that Ganesha has won the mango and demands an

explanation. When He is told the reasoning, He alleges foul play and walks off in a tremendous huff. Story has it that it is after this episode that Murugan clad only in a loin cloth, descends to the earth to reside in Palani, a sacred town with a famous Murugan temple in Tamil Nadu. Palani is explained as Pazham (fruit) nee (you), meaning you are yourself the fruit of wisdom. It is with these words that Murugan is cajoled.

Valli Kalyanam (marriage with Valli): Valli is the beautiful daughter of Nambirajan, the King of the Kuravas or the hill tribes. Murugan wants to wed her and tries to court her in different guises.

But the courtship is disrupted by Valli's possessive brothers and other members of the tribe.

Finally, Murugan comes to her disguised as an old man who is on a pilgrimage. He stays as the guest of the hunter chieftain for some time. Valli is assigned the task of looking after him. During the course of a meal, the old man develops hiccoughs. Valli leads him to a nearby pond for a drink of water. He pretends to slip and fall into the water and is saved by Valli. The old man starts playing pranks with her and declares his love for her. She is disgusted and spurns him. Murugan prays to His elder brother,



A Scene from Valli Kalyaanam

## Scenes from Valli Kalyanam



Ganesha who appears in the form of an elephant. Valli is terrified and tries to run from the elephant but is unable to. The old man says he can save her if she would agree to marry him. In sheer despair she agrees.

The elephant lifts

her up and tosses her into the outstretched arms of Lord Murugan. Their marriage is then performed.

### **Stories associated with Devi or the goddess.**

Devi conventionally refers to Parvati or Shakti although Goddess Lakshmi and Saraswati are also referred to as Devi. Some stories that are popular are given below.

## **MEENAKSHI KALYANAM:**

The legend of Goddess Meenakshi of the town of Madurai begins with her father, Emperor Malayadhwaja Pandyan, the successor to Madurai's founder Kulasekhara Pandyan.

The childless Malayadhwaja and his wife Kanchanamala perform many Vedic sacrificial rituals in attempts to beget a child. Finally, in the middle of one such ritual, a three year old girl with three breasts emerges from the sacrificial flames and sits on Kanchanmala's lap. The girl in fact is Goddess Parvati, who has taken birth as Kanchanmala's daughter in response to a prayer of hers in her past life.

Following a divine command (heard as a disembodied voice), the girl is named Tataatakai and is raised as a boy would be raised. So she is taught warfare and trained in all aspects of fighting a war and running a kingdom. The voice also assures Malayadhwaja that Tataatakai's third breast would be absorbed back into her body when she first casts her eyes on the man who would become her husband—Lord Siva.

After Malayadhwaja's death, Tatātakai ascends to the throne. She is the beloved of the people and comes to be known as "Meenakshi"— the one with fish-like eyes. Meenakshi embarks on a dig-vijaya, a military campaign of victory across the length and breadth of India. After numerous victories on earth, Meenakshi attacks Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva. She defeats all the soldiers and generals of the Lord. Seeing this, Siva himself comes to fight the undaunted queen. As soon as Meenakshi sees the Lord,

the prophecy of her youth bears fruit: she instantly falls in love with him and her third breast goes back inside her body. Siva directs Meenakshi to return to her home city, promising her that He would join her in eight days as her bridegroom. And this is exactly what happened. They were married in Madurai with Lord Vishnu himself, as elder brother, giving away Meenakshi to Siva. Meenakshi Kalyanam, the marriage of Meenakshi with Siva, is celebrated annually to this day.

### **MAHISHASURA MARDHINI:**

Mahishasura Mardhini literally means she who is the slayer (mardhini) of the demon (asura) Mahisha (buffalo demon). Mahishasura is a powerful and ambitious asura who by his austerities gains a powerful boon from Lord Brahma. He wants immortality but is refused that and so he asks for what he thinks is equivalent to immortality or comes as close to that as possible. He asks that he may only be killed by a woman, for it is unthinkable that he could be killed by a mere woman.

Armed with this boon, he goes on a vanquishing spree and conquers all the earth and also heavens. It is time to end the demon's tyranny and so the gods come together and out of the powers of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, the great goddess, Mahadevi, is created. She is resplendent, with ten arms carrying all the weapons of the gods and rides a lion. She carries Vishnu's chakra and also Siva's trishula; Brahma gives his bow and arrow, and Indra his thunderbolt etc. She is also called Durga (invincible). When news of Vindhayasini,

the beautiful goddess who resides atop a mountain, reaches Mahisha, he seeks to marry her. But his messengers, Chanda and Munda are killed by Durga after which a fierce battle ensues. Durga uses every weapon at her disposal and the clever and powerful asura changes his form from human being to beast. Finally Durga kills him by plunging the trident (trishula) into the asura's heart. Heaven and earth rejoice at the victory and this is celebrated as Dusshera or Navaratri.

**QUESTIONS :****1. Fill in the blanks:**

- a) The form that Lord Vishnu took in the Vamana avatara is \_\_\_\_\_
- b) The two sons of Lord Siva are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- c) The weapon that Lord Muruga uses is \_\_\_\_\_.
- d) The name of the demon that Narasimha kills is \_\_\_\_\_.
- e) The name of the herb which Hanuman brings from the Himalayas to resuscitate Lakshmana is \_\_\_\_\_.
- f) The story of Lord Krishna is told in the \_\_\_\_\_ Purana.

**2. Write short notes on:**

- a) Sources of Indian Mythology
  - b) Siva and his attributes
  - c) Dasavatara
  - d) Bhikshatana episode
3. Research and write in detail any two puranic episodes associated with Lord Ganesha.
4. Why is knowledge of Hindu mythology important for the Bharathanatyam dancer?

## CHAPTER 5

### MUSIC OF BHARATHANATYAM

Bharathanatyam as a dance form is closely intertwined with the classical music tradition of South India called Carnatic music. The other style of Indian classical music, more prevalent in North India, is called Hindustani music. An initiation and training in Carnatic music is ideally an integral part of a Bharathanatyam student's training. If not this, a reasonable amount of exposure to the Carnatic music tradition is certainly desirable.

Carnatic music, at its core, consists of compositions that are set in raga-s (melodic entities) and tala-s (rhythmic entities). There is also an improvisational element called manodharma.

First, the two crucial concepts of raga and tala are discussed below.

#### Raga

Indian music is basically melodic in nature. Melody is music that is made by notes coming in succession. Harmony is the other way of music making and is the basic nature of most music of the Western world. Harmony is created when notes are sounded simultaneously within aesthetic parameters. A simple tune such as say, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, is a melody; but when it is sung to the accompaniment of chords on the piano, the whole exercise becomes a harmony.

Swara or note is the basic building block of any raga (pronounced raaga). Seven notes from which all music is created are shadja, rishabha, gandhara, madhyama, panchama, dhaivata, nishadha and are referred to as Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni. Of these Ri, Ga, Ma, Dha, and Ni each has a variant and this gives us 7+5, i.e.12 note places (swara sthana-s). A primary feature of raga is what swara-s figure in it and in which order, and what swara-s are omitted from it fully or partially.

A Raga is a melodic entity which prescribes a set of rules for creating melody. It specifies the rules for movements up (aarohana) and down (avarohana) the scale, which swara-s are used and which are not, which swara-s should figure more and which notes should be used sparingly, which notes may be sung with gamaka (a particular kind of embellishment), phrases to be used, phrases to be avoided, and so on. The result is a framework that can be used to compose or improvise melodies, allowing for endless variation within the set of notes.

Thus we have the well known raga Mohanam. This raga takes five notes in the ascent and five in the descent. They are Sa, Ri, Ga, Pa, Dha (all notes are from the major scale). In Western music notation, the scale is *C, D, E, G, A* which makes it a C Major Pentatonic scale since the individual notes in the C Major chord are embedded in the Mohanam scale. In

the Carnatic tradition many compositions can be found and indeed created afresh in the raga Mohanam. Each composition can be considered a different manifestation of Mohanam.

Some very commonly used major or important raga-s in the Carnatic tradition are Sankarabharanam, Kalyani, Thodi, Kambhoji, Bhairavi, Mohanam, Khamas etc.

## Tala

Tala (pronounced taala) or talam refers to the central rhythmic concept of Indian music. Tala is more than just the beats that make up the rhythmic aspect of most musical traditions. Tala or talam is a *cycle* of a fixed number of beats. Its cyclicity is of central importance. The concept of the beats returning again and again makes up the basic texture of the rhythm in Indian music. Thus, if we take Adi tala, a very widely used talam, it is a cycle of 8 beats or akshara-s and when the music is presented, the return of the beats (especially the first beat) is marked again and again.

**Avartana:** This is a crucial concept in the tala system of Indian music. An avartana is one cycle of the beats of any tala. Thus an avartana of the well known Adi tala is of 8 beats or akshara-s.

**Systems of Tala:** There is more than one system of tala in Carnatic music and today's music draws from these systems. Many performing arts forms including dance, theatre and music are broadly seen as having two traditions – Margi and Desi. Margi would be the central classical tradition (influenced and guided by Sanskrit textual traditions) while Desi would be regional

variants. In music too Margi and Desi traditions are recognised. The Margi tradition had a 108 tala system in place. It is now largely obsolete. In contemporary Carnatic music, we have a widely used suladi sapta tala scheme of 35 tala-s (elaborated below) and also the folk traditions of Chapu taal (elaborated below).

Quoting from Prof. Sambhamoorthy, a prolific writer of books on the theoretical aspects of Carnatic music, “The ancient books on music refer to the classification of tala-s into margi and desi and enumerate the classic 108 tala-s. Latterly a system of 35 tala-s developed and Purandaradasa (regarded as the originator of present day Carnatic music) gave prominence to this simpler system of composing alankara-s, gitas and suladi-s(17) in them. While the 108 tala-s make use of all the shadangas (18), the 35 tala-s use only the laghu, drutam and anudrutam (19). In addition to these, a system of tala-s known as navasandhi tala-s has been in use in temple rituals from ancient times. There is also the Chapu tala with its varieties and the Desadi and madhyadi tala-s...” (20)

### **Taladashaprana (ten vital elements of tala)**

Music texts refer to **Taladashaprana** or the ten vital elements or aspects of tala. A well known verse in this regard says:

Kaalo-maargah-kriya-angani graho-jaatih-kalaai-layah

Yatih-prastaarakam cheti taala dasha praana smruthah. (21)

Kaala, maarga, kriyaa, anga, graha, jaati, kalaa, laya, yati, prastaara are the ten vital elements of tala.

The more important of these are explained below:

### **1. Anga: Tala anga-s or parts of a tala**

These are the constituent parts or limbs of the tala. Six anga-s are recognised namely anudruta, druta, laghu, guru, pluta and kakapada. Of these only three anga-s are widely used namely anudruta, druta and laghu. These are used in the 35 tala system referred to above while the other anga-s also are used in the 108 tala system which is now largely obsolete. Anudruta, druta and laghu are explained below under talakriya.

### **2. Kriya: Tala kriya or action**

Kriya is the manner of counting time. It is through kriya that the anga-s namely anudruta, druta and laghu are indicated.

In Carnatic music the tala is kept by the singer by using the hand. The musician, who is usually sitting, slaps his or her hand gently on the thigh in definite prescribed ways to indicate the tala and its anga-s.

**Laghu:** In this action, there is first a beat of the hand with the palm down and then a certain number of fingers are counted beginning from the little finger. The number that is counted will depend on the jati of the tala. This will be explained a little later.

**Druta:** In this there is first a beat of the hand and then the hand is spread out with the palm facing upwards. This outward movement of the palm is called visarjita or veechu in Tamil.

**Anudruta:** This is just a single beat of the hand in a downward movement.

Kriya-s are divided into **sashabda** (those with sound) and **nisshabda** (without sound) kriya-s. Beating the hand on the thigh is a sashabda kriya while spreading out the palm in an outward movement as in drutam or counting the fingers in laghu is a nisshabda kriya.

### 3. Graha or point of commencement of the the tala

The place of commencement of the song in the avartana of the tala is called graha. It is called eduppu in Tamil. There are broadly two kinds of graha- sama and vishama. Sama graha is when the song begins on the first beat of the avartana. Vishama is when the song begins either before or after the first beat of the tala avartana. When the song commences after the first beat as is frequently found, it is anaagata graha. When the song commences before the first beat of the tala cycle, it is called atita eduppu or atita graha.

### 4. Jati

This is an important element in the 35 tala system which is widely used in music these days. It is elaborated later.

## 5. Laya

This is tempo or speed or what is also called kala pramana. Though upto six levels of speed are recognised, for most practical purposes, three are used.

Vilamba laya or vilamba kalam: slow speed

Madhyama kalam or madhyama laya: Medium speed

Druta or durita laya or durita kalam: Fast speed

## SULADI SAPTATALA

### The system of Seven Tala-s

According to the most widely used tala system called the Suladi tala system, there are seven tala-s in Carnatic music. These seven tala-s are actually tala schema-s since each of them can generate many actual tala-s - as will be explained.

later. Each of these seven tala schemes is described as a particular ordering of the laghu, drutam and anudrutam anga-s.

1. Dhruba
2. Matya
3. Rupaka
4. Tripura
5. Jhampa
6. Ata

## 7. Eka

Each of these is described in terms of the tala anga-s laghu, druta and anudruta as referred to above. The symbols for these anga-s are:

Laghu: is indicated by a single vertical line as – I

Drutam is indicated by a full moon symbol or circle as – O

Anudrutam is indicated by a half moon symbol as - U

Dhruva tala: Two laghu-s followed by one druta and then another laghu: II<sup>O</sup>I

Matyatala: One laghu, followed by one druta and then another laghu: IOI

Rupaka tala: One druta followed by one laghu: OI

Triputa tala: One laghu followed by two drutas: IOO

Jhampa tala: One laghu followed by one anudruta and then one druta: IUO

Ata tala: Two laghu-s followed by two druta-s: II<sup>O</sup>O

Eka tala: One laghu: I

**JATI:** Jati (Pronounced jaathi) refers to the number of counts that are in the laghu. Laghu, as explained above is executed by beating the hand once followed by counting a certain number of fingers. But how many fingers are to be counted? This is determined by the Jati. For example, the laghu could be a beat followed by counting 3 fingers starting from the little finger. This

will make a total of four counts: 1 beat + 3 finger counts. This would be the jati of chatusra or chatusra.

There are five jati-s in Carnatic music:

**Tishra:** (3 counts): This is when the laghu is for a count of 3 - a single beat of the hand followed by the counting of two fingers; i.e the little finger and the ring finger.

**Chatusra** (4 counts): This is when the laghu is for a count of 4 beats - a single beat of the hand followed by the counting of 3 fingers; i.e. the little finger, the ring finger and the middle finger.

**Khanda** (5 counts): This is when the laghu is for a count of 5 beats - a single beat of the hand followed by the counting of 4 fingers; i.e. the little finger, the ring finger, the middle finger and the index finger.

**Mishra** (7 counts): This is when the laghu is for a count of 7 beats - a single beat of the hand followed by the counting of 6 fingers; i.e. the little finger, the ring finger, the middle finger, the index finger, the thumb and then the little finger again.

**Sankeerna** (9 counts): This is when the laghu is for a count of 9 beats - a single beat of the hand followed by the counting of 8 fingers; i.e. the little finger, the ring finger, the middle finger, the index finger, the thumb and then again the little finger, ring finger and middle finger.

Thus a tala like say, triputa tala which is 1 laghu followed by 2 druta-s, could be:

1. Tishra jati triputa tala – this is a laghu of 3 counts (one beat followed by the counting of the little finger and the ring finger) followed by two druta-s of (two counts each): Together then the tala has seven counts or **akshara**-s (3+2+2). Each count of the tala is referred to as an akshara.

2. Chatushra jati triputa tala: This has a laghu of four counts followed by two druta-s – the tala has eight counts or akshara-s (4+2+2).

3. Khanda jati triputa tala: This has a laghu of five counts followed by two druta-s – the tala has nine counts or akshara-s (5+2+2).

4. Mishra jati triputa tala: This would have a laghu of seven counts followed by two druta-s – the tala has eleven counts or akshara-s (7+2+2).

5. Sankeerna jati triputa tala: This would have a laghu of nine counts followed by two druta-s – the tala has thirteen counts or akshara-s (9+2+2).

### **Gati-s or Nadai - s:**

This is another parameter to define a tala and refers to the “gait” of the tala. It refers to the number of units within each akshara or count. In other words, it indicates the number of units into which each akshara is musically divided. Technically or arithmetically, of course, an akshara can be divided into any number of units but musically, in the context of a song, the akshara

is divided into a certain number of units which imparts to the tala its gati or gait. Another word for gati is nadai which also means gait. Thus each akshara of the tala could be divided into three units which would be tishra gati or tishra nadai; it could be divided into four units which would make it chatusra gati or nadai; five units – khanda nadai / gati; seven units – mishra nadai/gati; and finally nine units – sankeerna nadai/gati. To give an example which would illustrate what nadai is, we could consider the waltz beat. It goes one two three, one two three. Now suppose each set of one two three is a single beat divided into three units and we have a tishra nadai.

An Illustration with Adi Tala or chatushra jati tripata tala.

Counts Ak- shara-s	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Tishra nadai	1,2,3 takita							
Chatu-shra nadai	1,2,3,4 takad- imi							

Thus, each count can be seen as having three subcounts (tishra nadai) or four subcounts (chatushra nadai). Though the number of the akshara-s or counts is the same (eight in this case), the feel or gait of the tala is very different depending on which nadai it is in. The same can be applied to the other nadai-s as well; i.e. khanda, mishra and sankeerna.

### Thirty five tala-s of the Suladi Sapta tala system:

The technical schema of Suladi Saptatala consists of seven tala-s each with five possible jati-s, making it

possible to generate thirty five tala-s ( $7 \times 5$ ). Each of these can be in five possible gati-s. That makes the total of  $35 \times 5 = 175$ .

As mentioned above, the 35 tala system is the most widely used system of tala in Carnatic music. There are other systems too from which Carnatic music draws in this respect.

**Chapu:** Chapu tala-s are a very ancient set of tala-s that were used in the Desi (regional) musical styles of India. There are many folk melodies in these tala-s. Prof. Sambamoorthy describes these as “syncopated (abbreviated) time measure and counted with two beats.” (22) Sometimes for convenience, it is shown with one beat and one visarjita (palm opened out to the side). Four varieties of chapu are recognised though only two are of importance in Carnatic music. They are Khanda Chapu and Mishra Chapu.

**Khanda Chapu (2+3=5):** This is for a count of five rendered in two beats. The first beat is for a measure of two counts and the second is for three counts. It can be seen as corresponding to the solkattu ta ka / ta ki ta.

**Mishra Chapu (3+4=7):** This is for a count of seven split as three and four. The first measure of three counts is often rendered in a visarjita while the second measure of four counts is rendered in two beats of 2 counts each. It can be seen as corresponding to the solkattu ta ki ta / ta ka dhi mi.

## Some tala-s that are widely used:

While there are many systems of tala, in actual practice, there are a few tala-s that are widely used.

**Adi tala:** This is a cycle of 8 beats as mentioned above. It has a laghu of 4 beats, followed by two druta-s. Thus it is  $4+2+2 = 8$ . This would be chatushra jati triputa tala.

**Rupaka tala:** This is a cycle of 6 beats. It has a druta followed by a laghu of four beats. Thus it has  $2+4=6$  beats. For the sake of convenience, the action is one anudruta followed by one druta all rendered at half the speed. So the hand is struck only thrice but the count for 6 is kept.

**Mishra Chapu:** This is a cycle of 7 beats broken up as  $3+2+2$ . The palm is spread out for a count of 3 and then the palm is struck twice at half the speed in anudruta which makes a count of 4. ( $3+2+2$ ). In common parlance it is described as **ta ki ta - ta ka dhi mi**.

**Khanda Chapu:** This is a cycle of five beats broken up as  $2+3$ . The action is performed as follows: first a beat for two counts and then a beat for three counts. Both are performed with the palm facing downwards. In common parlance it is described as **ta ka- ta ki ta**.

**Ata tala:** This tala is common in the musical form called varnam which is also a central piece in Bharathanatyam (the varnam-s that are used in Bharathanatyam however are rarely cast in this tala.) Usually this is in Khanda jati. Thus it would be a tala of

14 akshara-s: (laghu (5) +laghu (5) +druta (2) +druta (2) = 14 akshara-s.)

### **Repertoire of Carnatic Music**

Carnatic music repertoire can be divided into pedagogy oriented repertoire and performance oriented repertoire.

#### **Pedagogy oriented repertoire (Abhyasaganam)**

This is the repertoire that is used in imparting initial training in Carnatic music. This is referred to as Abhyasa Ganam (Abhyasa means learning) and consists of a meticulously structured scheme of exercises and repertoire in steps of increasing complexity.

**Saralivarisai, Jantavarisai, Alankaram etc:** These are patterns of the seven notes in the Raga Maya Malava Gowla. These patterns are in a well thought system that progresses from simple to very complex patterns. These patterns also introduce the various tala-s. Later these patterns are also taught in other scales.

**Gitam-s:** The next step in the training is learning simple songs called Gitam -s. Gitam literally means “song” and refers to a very simple type of composition. Gitam is actually just one musical “paragraph” that has no divisions. It is sung in a uniform tempo from the beginning to the end without variations. The melody is very simple and outlines the raga on which it is based and is set to a particular Tala

Well known gitam-s are Sri Gananatha (Raga Malahari), Vara Veena (Raga Mohanam), Aanalekara (Raga Shuddha Saveri) etc.

**Swarajati-s:** Swarajati-s are learned following Gitam-s. These are divided into three sections called Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanam. The Charanam-s often have different tunes. It was originally a dance form containing Jati-s (rhythmic syllables). Musically and lyric-wise, these are more complex compositions than gitam-s.

**Varnam:** This is an important form which belongs both to abhyasaganam and sabhaganam. It is described a little later.

### **Performance oriented Compositions (Sabha Gana-m):**

The above mentioned types of compositions are to lay the foundation for learning and performing the core repertoire of Carnatic music which includes Kriti, Padam, Javali, Tillana etc. These are described below. But first we describe the compositional form of Varnam which is a part of the abhyasa gana or pedagogical repertoire as well as the performance oriented repertoire.

**Varnam:** Varnam is an important compositional form which belongs both to the abhyasa gana or pedagogical repertoire as well as the performance oriented repertoire.

Varnam is of crucial importance in the musical pedagogy in Carnatic music. A varnam is supposed to incorporate all the main aspects of the raga in which it is composed. Thus the form and essence of a raga

is said to be captured in the varnam in the raga and learning the varnam and rendering it correctly with all the nuances is regarded an indispensable step in grasping the raga itself.

A varnam is set in a particular raga and tala and is usually in praise of one of the Hindu deities. The tala-s that are used in varnam are usually Adi tala or Kanda Jati Ata tala. Other tala-s are very rarely, if ever, used in varnam-s.

**Structure of varnam:** The varnam is structurally divided into two parts. The first part or the purvangam has three portions – the pallavi, the anupallavi and chittaswaram. The pallavi and anupallavi are usually of two lines each and are rendered as if they were one stanza of lyrics. The pallavi is not repeated after the anupallavi as happens in other musical forms such as kriti. After the anupallavi, there is a chittaswaram which is a pre-composed pattern of the swara-s of the raga.

The second part of the varnam or uttarangam comprises the charanam, usually a single line of lyrics which is followed by many sets of swara patterns, running into increasing number of avartana-s (1 to 4 usually). These are called charanam swara-s or etugada swara-s.

**Rendition of a varnam or gana krama:** A varnam is rendered beginning with the pallavi; unlike a kriti, it rarely, if ever, has sangati-s or variations. The anupallavi follows immediately since there is no gap between the two. Then the chittaswaram is rendered. This chittaswaram that comes after the anupallavi of

varnam-s, is called mukthayi swaram. Usually, the whole set of pallavi, anupallavi and mukthayi swaram is then rendered in twice the speed with the tala being maintained at the same speed. Rendered this way, the whole rendition will run through only half the number of avartana-s as the original rendition (since the song is rendered at twice the speed but the tala is maintained at the same speed.). After this, the pallavi is rendered again in the original speed.

After this the charanam is rendered - usually at a randomly increased speed. Then the charanam swaram-s are sung one after another and the charanam is repeated at the end of each of the chittaswaram-s.

**Types of varnam-s:** Varnam-s are of two types: **pada varnam** and **tana varnam**. Tana (pronounced thaana) varnam-s are structured and rendered as described above. Pada varnam-s have additionally lyrics that correspond to the mukthayi swaram-s and the chittaswaram-s after the charanam. Thus, the mukthayi swaram is rendered and the pallavi is repeated after that and then follow the lyrics that correspond to the mukthayi swaram. Again, after the charanam is sung twice, the first chittaswaram will be sung. The charanam line will be repeated after this and the lyrics corresponding to the first chittaswaram will be sung. The charanam line will be repeated again and the next chittaswaram will be taken up and so on. Varnam-s used in dance are usually pada varnam-s.

**Kriti-s or Keertana-s:** The core repertoire of Carnatic music consists of kriti-s (a type of composition),

sometimes also called keertana. The word kriti derives from the Sanskrit root kru which means to do. Thus a kriti in a broad sense means anything done, a finished product, in this case, a composed piece. Keertana means singing praises (of the Lord). Since the compositions are devotional in content, they are also called keertana-s.

These compositions are set in a specific raga and tala. They are devotional in content and are in praise of one of the Hindu gods, usually Siva, Vishnu, Ganesha, Muruga or Devi.

Although the terms kriti and keertana are used interchangeably, many scholars would argue that they denote different forms though some compositions may fall on the borderline between the two. To quote Prof. Sambamurthy, "the term kriti refers to the composition whose claim to permanence lies principally in its music and not in its sahitya (poetry). But in kirtana-s sahitya is of primary importance... Portrayal of raga bhava is the main thing in a kriti whereas in a keertana this is incidental." (23) Although both kriti-s and keertana-s are religious in content, the keertana's main intent is religious whereas the kriti's main intent is aesthetic and artistic. Singing keertana-s is a devotional act whereas singing kriti-s is very much an artistic activity.

Carnatic music reveres three composers of kriti-s referred to as the **trinity or trimurthy of Carnatic music**. These are Saint Tyagaraja, Mudduswamy Dikshitar and Syama Sastri who lived and composed in the Tanjavur area in Tamil Nadu in the 18th century. Their

compositions are an essential part of any Carnatic musician's repertoire.

### **Structure of a kriti:**

A kriti (as well as most keertana-s) usually has three parts or **anga-s**. These are the pallavi, anupallavi and charanam. Often there are more than one charanam. Keertana-s sometimes have multiple charanam-s after the pallavi refrain without any anupallavi: for example, the Divya Nama Sankeertana-s of Saint Tyagaraja.

Pallavi is the first part of the composition and usually runs to two lines. This is also the refrain since it has to be repeated after the anupallavi and the charanam (s).

Some kriti-s have only a charanam after the pallavi and this is called samashti charanam. Some well known kriti-s of this type are Mahaganapati manasa smarami (Nattai raga), and Sri Saraswati namostute (Raga Arabhi).

Some kriti-s have what is called chittaswaram – the swara-s from the raga are set to run to a few avartana-s which maybe sung after the charanam after which the pallavi is sung again.

### **Rendition of a kriti or gana krama**

A kriti is rendered by first singing the pallavi twice. Very often, the pallavi is rendered with minor and major variations called sangati-s. Each such **sangati** is also rendered twice each. Finally the pallavi is wound up

and the tala avartana is allowed to complete before the anupallavi is taken up.

The anupallavi also might have sangati-s and these are also rendered twice each. The pallavi then is sung again.

Finally the charanam is rendered and at the end of it, the pallavi is repeated.

Thus the pallavi is a kind of a refrain.

The tala-s used in kriti-s are many, such as adi tala, rupaka tala, mishra chapu, khanda chapu, eka tala, jhampa tala etc.

**Pada-s or padam:** Padam is a kind of composition which also is structured on the lines of the kriti with a pallavi, anupallavi and charanam. It differs from the kriti in being sringara oriented (theme of love) unlike the kriti which is devotional in nature. The lyrics deal with love and passion, not with bhakti as kriti-s do. The object of love is very often a deity, but the language is that of love and passion.

The word padam is widely used in Indian literature and music. There is a general use of the word which means any poem that can be sung. So we have the pada-s of Meerabai or Surdas. When we speak of Padam in Carnatic music and Bharathanatyam, we mean a particular kind of musical composition which is sringara oriented and rendered in a weighty manner in music concerts and rendered in Bharathanatyam as an abhinaya item exploring the nayaka-nayika bhava.

To quote Prof. Sambamurthy: “the term pada originally used to signify a devotional song. It is in this

sense that we talk of the Kannada pada-s of Purandara-dasa (dasara padagalu) and the Tamil pada-s of Muttu Tandavar. In the musical period of modern period, the term is restricted to the type of composition that belongs to the sphere of dance music and which treats of various aspects of nayaka-nayika reationships.”  
(24)

As mentioned above, the anga-s or parts of a pada is similar to that of a kriti. In other words, it too has a pallavi, anupallavi, and one or more charanam. Sometimes pada-s, especially in music concerts, are sung beginning with the anupallavi, if the meaning of the pada permits it. This makes for dramatic effect.

As for the raga-s that are used for pada-s, they are heavy, soulful raga-s which require a lot of emotional involvement in their delivery. The raga-s used are heavy, rakti raga-s which are delicately nuanced such as Suruti, Saveri, Kedaragowla, Kalyani, Sankarabharanam, Bhairavi etc. The laya or the pace of the pada is also much slower. In general, rendition of the pada, though on the lines of a kriti, is more challenging and requires greater musical maturity.

Tala-s used in pada-s are mainly adi, rupaka, and mishra chapu.

Pada-s are used widely in Bharathanatyam for abhinaya. Some of the well known pada-s that are used in dance are: ettanai sonnalum teriyada (Saveri raga), indendu vacchitira (Suruti raga), netrandi nerattile (Huseni raga) etc.

**Jawali:** This too is a sringara oriented composition. It differs from the padam in being a little lighter in terms of raga and taala. In one word, it is racier.

Slightly lighter raga-s are used and the pace or the laya of the composition is also a little quicker. Some of the well known javali-s are smara sundaranguni (paras raga), entadi kuluke (Kalyani raga) etc. Jawali-s are also used widely in Bharathanatyam for abhinaya.

**Tillana:** This is also a special kind of composition that forms part of the repertoire of Carnatic music. This also has the pallavi-anupallavi-charanam format. The distinct feature of tillana is that its lyrics (if they can be called lyrics) are made predominantly from meaningless syllables such as tirana, dhirana, takita, jham tarita etc. In other words it is meaningless syllables that make up the body of the song. Some of these syllables are derived from the world of percussion. They are the syllables used by mridangam players to represent what they play on their instrument.

The tillana usually has a couple or more lines of meaningful lyrics too. This usually occurs in the charanam part of the tillana. In a music concert, tillana is usually rendered at the tail end of the concert.

**Tukada:** These are tail end pieces that are usually light and easy on the ear. Many of these pieces are used in abhinaya in Bharathanatyam. Sometimes bhajan-s and abhang-s which are devotional songs in Hindi and Marathi respectively are also sung as tukada-s. Compositions of many saint poets such as Annamacharya, Narayna Tirtha, Sadasiva Brahmendra, Jayadeva, and others are often sung in this segment.

These songs belong to the bhakti tradition and though the lyrics have survived, the original music hasn't. Musicians therefore set these to tunes according to their taste and render them in concerts as tail end pieces.

### Improvisation or Manodharma

The above described elements of Carnatic music comprise its compositional repertoire. Carnatic music also has a strong improvisatory element. Besides rendering compositions, a Carnatic musician also engages in improvisatory music making. These two aspects of Carnatic music are referred to as **kalpita sangeeta** (that music which has been set or pre composed) and **kalpana sangeetha** (that music which is created imaginatively on the spot). There are four aspects of kalpana (improvisatory) music:

1. Raga Alapana: Here the raga is presented by using its notes and phrases to build an aesthetic and evocative presentation of the raga. There is no lyrical element in this. Alapana is rendered in akara (the “aa” sound) or ikara (the “ee” sound) and even ookara (the “oo” sound). Some syllables are often used such as ta da ri na num etc. Although there will be an underlying laya or pace of the alapana, there is no tala during the rendition of alapana.

2. Neraval: This is another important aspect of improvisation in Carnatic music. In this, any one line of the composition (usually the kriti) is taken up and is rendered in different ways incorporating various

aspects of the raga and the tala. The line taken up has to be a significant line, meaningful and poetically evocative.

3. Swara prastaram: This is improvisation by singing and actually pronouncing the swara-s of the raga. Swara patterns are improvised and sung with a particular line of the kriti as the refrain.

4. Taanam: This is rendering the raga using a pulsating rhythmic element that is introduced by the use of the syllables anam tam tom tanam etc.

In Bharathanatyam music, the first two elements of improvisation namely alapana and neraval are frequently used

### **Music of Bharathanatyam**

The music that is used in Bharathanatyam is very much within the Carnatic tradition. Thus the singer for a Bharathanatyam dance recital has to be trained in Carnatic music. If the dancer herself is trained in or has had some exposure to Carnatic music, the level and quality of her performance will gain much more depth and feeling.

A typical Bharathanatyam musical ensemble:

A Bharathanatyam recital is best accompanied **live** by a set of musicians. Compulsions of modern day conditions have made recorded msic to be part of the scene. Whether live or recorded, a typical Bharathanatyam musical ensemble consists of the following.

**Nattuvangam:** Nattuvangam is a crucial aspect of the Bharathanatyam musical ensemble and it bears the responsibility for the laya (rhythm) element.

The nattuvanar is the person (usually the guru) who performs the nattuvangam. The nattuvangam consists of two aspects – reciting the solkattu-s or jati-s and wielding a pair of cymbals in a manner to reproduce the dancers feet movements on the cymbals.

Cymbals are known as talam since they keep the talam and indeed recreates the complex rhythmic patterns the dancer details with her feet. The talam comprises two concave metallic instruments one larger than the other and the concave surfaces are struck together in various angles and positions to create sound patterns matching the solkattu-s.

Weilding the cymbals and playing them is one part of the art of nattuvangam. The other equally important aspect is reciting the solkattu-s with energy and accuracy and indeed musicality. It will not do to recite the solkattus in a flat and expressionless voice. Expression, energy, clarity and accuracy are highly desirable. Since the solkattu-s can be packed with syllables and in complicated rhythmic patterns, it calls for a great deal of practice to render them well.

Traditionally, the nattuvanar was the guru, trained in the art of nattuvangam. The guru would be the main conductor of the whole dance recital and would guide the dancer and the other musicians with his nattuvangam. These days we have the “freelancers”

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so to speak. Thus dancers or dance teachers trained in nattuvangam are hired by other dancers to provide nattuvangam accompaniment to their dance performances. In these cases, the nattuvangam artist learns the solkattu-s and conducts the dance recital.

**Mridangam:** The mridagam is a percussive instrument that is an ineliminable part of any Carnatic music concert. It is equally crucial in a Bharatha natyam recital. During the jati-s the mridangam artiste reproduces the patterns on the instrument, keenly following the dancer and the nattuvanar. During the song passages, the mridangam offers appropriate accompaniment to heighten the effect and also maintain the tala.

A mridangam accompanist to dance recitals is trained in the Carnatic tradition of mridangam playing but he has to use other techniques while accompanying a dance recital; mainly he needs to be alert to provide heightened effects during the sancharis.

**Vocalist / Singer:** The vocalist is another crucial and indispensable element in the Bharathanatyam ensemble. The vocalist renders all the songs that are used in the recital. The vocalist is also trained in the Carnatic tradition but has to acquire other skills to provide accompaniment to Bharathanatyam. The vocalist has to repeat certain lines in the song while the dancer performs sanchari abhinaya. The lines are repeated with minor variations (on the lines of the neraval) and the vocalist has to be alert to return to the main song when the sanchari is over.

**Violin/veena/Flute:** The violin, veena and/or the flute provide melodic accompaniment to the vocalist. Between items during the concert, the violinist or veena or flute player typically provide fillers in the form of raga alapana. They too are trained in the Carnatic tradition.

**Tambura or tanpura:** This is crucial to Indian classical music. It is the drone and provides the basic pitch which then fixes the scale. All other instruments (the violin, the flute, the mridangam and even the talam) have to match the pitch of the tanpura which in turn will be in a pitch that is comfortable to the singer. The singer then has to stick to the pitch that the tanpura is set in throughout the concert.

**Musical repertoire in Bharathanatyam:** While the musical repertoire of Bharathanatyam draws considerably from the general repertoire in Carnatic music, there are compositions and repertoire that belong uniquely to Bharathanatyam.

Following the typical margam in Bharathanatyam, we see that its musical repertoire is as follows:

1. Pushpanjali: Pushpanjali or the invocation with flowers (pushpa – anjali) is a nritta dominant item with a significant musical element. There is no meaningful lyrical content in the Pushpanjali and it is typically solkattu-s that are rendered. The solkattu-s are sometimes rendered without any melody; but frequently they are sung in a simple but powerful tune. The rendition is usually in the higher ranges of the octave for greater effect. The raga-s used are auspicious raga-s such as Nattai,

Gambhira Natai, Kedaram, etc. which are associated with auspicious beginnings. The lyrical element is introduced in the form of a sloka (benedictory verse) which usually is rendered in any evocative raga though usually without the rhythmic element. This method of rendering a verse – in a raga but without any tala – is called **viruttam**.

2. Alarippu: This is another nritta item which is often recited and sometimes sung in the raga Nattai. The sol kattu-s of the alarippu are themselves rendered in this raga-in a simple tune. This, again, is usually sung in the upper register for greater effect.

3. Kavittuvam or Kauttuvam: This too is a nritta dominant item which has a short verse in Tamil in praise of Lord Ganesha or Lord Muruga or Lord Shiva and other deities. The whole piece could be rendered in raga, again a simple tune in an auspicious raga. In this there is a combination of solkattus and meaningful lyrics in praise of the deity and is thus a combination of nritta and very brief abhinaya. The lyrics are usually in Tamil.

4. Sabdam: This is an abhinaya dominant piece and the raga that is traditionally used is Kambhoji. A typical solkattu (beginning tha dhimi dhin dhimi and ending with thai ta ta tam) is rendered in the raga and then the song in praise of a deity is sung in raga malika. The many stanzas of the song are separated by the refrain of the solkattu (tha dhimi dhin dhimi). While rendering the sabdam, the improvisatory technique of neraval is used if the dancer elaborates on a single line with sanchari. The stanzas of the song are

sometimes rendered in a different raga-smaking for better effectiveness, but the first raga used is traditionally Kambhoji. The preferred talam in Sabdam is Mishra Chapu, a cycle of 7 beats broken as 3+2+2. Sabdam is uniquely a part of the musical repertoire of Bharatha natyam. Well known sabdams are: *Sarasijakshulu jalagamate*, *Gokulambudhi chandra sundara*, *kandane unai enda nermum*, *aayarseriyar arindidamalum etc.* The language of the sabdam is often Telugu and Tamil.

5. Varnam – Varnam is often described as the piece-de-resistance of a Bharathanatyam recital. It is a crucial item which showcases the nritta (pure dance comprising jati-s and korvai-s) and abhinaya (mimetic) skills of the dancer. Properly performed, the varnam will take anything from half an hour to one hour in a dance recital.

Varnam usually portrays sringara or madhura bhakti (love for a deity) of a nayika whose state of mind is laid bare in it. Often there is a sakhi (friend), the confidant, to whom the nayika describes her love. Most varnams are in the languages Telugu, Tamil, Sanskrit and, rarely, Malayalam.

The varnam, as described above, has a pallavi, anupallavi which is followed by the mukthayi swaram. This is the first half of the varnam, also called the purvangam, (pronounced poorvaangam; poorva – earlier, anga – part). The second half, called the uttarangam (pronounced uttaraangam; uttara – latter, angam - part), has a charanam (usually a single line of

lyrics) followed by many sets of swara-s, the charanas-wara-s. Varnam-s used in Bharathanatyam are pada varnam-s as described above and so corresponding to each chittaswaram (both in purvangam and in uttarangam) there is a lyrical content too which is also sung as described above.

The varnam music begins with a short alapana usually rendered by the accompanying violinist or flute player and the pallavi is rendered a few times for the dancer to establish the mood with forward and backward movements across the stage with eye and neck movements. And then the first jati, which is usually trikala (in three speeds), is recited by the nattuvanar and then the pallavi line is again repeated. After this, the dancer launches into sanchari to elaborate elaborating the idea and emotion in the pallavi line in various ways so as to evoke the particular mood of the varnam. Sometimes stories from the purana-s (Hindu mythology) are also conveyed in expression and gesture.

In a similar fashion jati-s alternate with the lines of the songs which are elaborated with sanchari. The purvangam is completed with the rendition of the mukthayi swaram in nritta and its lyrical or sahitya counterpart in abhinaya. The pallavi line is then repeated and the purvangam is closed. Then the charanam line is rendered usually at a clearly brisker pace. The abhinaya for the line is done and this is followed by the charanam swara-s which are danced in nritta sequences. The swara-s have corresponding sahitya (lyrical) counterparts. These too are rendered in abhinaya.

*Some well known and widely performed varnam-s are:*

*1. Mohamana en meedil in Bhairavi raga, rupaka taala. In this the nayika says: “Is it fair that you should spurn me thus when I am so filled with love for you?” This is addressed to Tiruvarur yagaraja?*

*2. Sami nee ram manave in Sankarabharanam, Adi Taalam. In this the nayika begs her sakhi or friend to take a message to her Lord asking him to come quickly to her.*

*3. Manavi in Sankarabharanam, Adi Talam, composed by Ponnaya Pillai of the Tanjore quartet is amorous in content and expresses the longing of the nayika for union with Lord Brihadeeshwara of Tanjavur.*

*4. Saamiyai Azhaitodi vaa in Ragamalika by Sri Dandayudhapani Pillai is another popular Tamil varnam where the nayika asks her sakhi (friend) to go bring her lord to her.*

Difference between varnam in music concerts and dance concerts:

In Carnatic music as described above, varnam is an important composition type and has a critical role in musical pedagogy. Most concerts begin with a varnam – either an adi tala or an ata tala varnam. This is regarded as a warm up and is mostly rendered briskly. Varnam is only rendered in the beginning of concerts.

In dance concerts, the varnam is the central piece, both in terms of when it occurs during a concert and in terms of importance. The pace of the varnam is also more relaxed and leisurely to allow for abhinaya and sanchari. Besides this, varnam used in music concerts is mostly tana varnam (as described above) and rarely pada varnam while pada varnams are the rule in dance.

### **Padam:**

Padam is thus a compositional form that finds presence in both music concerts and dance. In Bharathanatyam it is entirely an abhinaya oriented piece. It gives enormous scope to the dancer for working on a basic dominant emotion (almost always love or sringara in its various moods) and presenting it skillfully in its myriad hues.

Padam-s are found in Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam. They invariably follow the pallavi, anupallavi, charanam format and frequently have more than one charanam. The theme of the padam-s is sringara or love, with any of the eight nayika-s (ashta nayika as described in our previous book) or woman in love at the centre. She sings of her love for her beloved, pines for him when he is away, asks her sakhi or friend to carry a message for her, chides her love for being less than attentive, is distraught when she discovers his infidelity and can be like the furies unleashed when she confronts him. Padam-s can be found in every mood that the great emotion of love can accommodate.

Often the padam-s are in the madhura bhakti bhava. This is where the devotee considers himself

a woman and the Lord the lover or husband. In expressing love for and yearning for the lover, the composer is expressing a devotee's longing for union with the Lord.

To quote Prof. Sambamurthy: "All pada-s of dignified nature are on the theme of Madhura bhakti. They admit of dual meaning: the outward sringara meaning and the inner philosophical meaning (bahir sringara and antar bhakti). The characters nayaka, nayik and sakhi stand respectively as the equivalents of the Lord (paramatma), the devotee (jivatma) and the guru who leads the devotee on the path of mukti (liberation)." (25)

As musical compositions, padams demand a high degree of proficiency in singing them since they are full of nuances. They are also rendered at a slow speed which too can be demanding.

As dance pieces too, they are very demanding since the abhinaya needs great maturity, practice and control.

In the traditional repertoire of Bharathanatyam, pada-s offer maximum scope for abhinaya since they express a wide gamut of emotions and situations for the dancer can present. Sringara rasa which is the realm of pada-s is regarded in Indian tradition as the Rasa Raja (King of rasa-s). One reason is it is of such wide scope that other rasa-s too find place in its depiction. Paraphrasing Prof. Sambamurthy (26), we see how sringara admits of other rasa-s. A Nayaka

performing a heroic act can result in Vira rasa. Separation from the nayaka can result in karuna rasa. Nayaka failing to turn up at the appointed time and place may provoke anger (raudra rasa) in the heroine. Continued unmindfulness and wayward behaviour of the nayaka may provoke disgust (jigupsa) while a sudden pleasant event like the unexpected appearance of the nayaka might evoke adbhuta or wonder. A nayika going out to keep her tryst in the dark and in stealth might express fear or bhaya.

In pada-s moods like anger, heightened expectation, jealousy, aggressiveness and self abrasion are pictured in a powerful manner. For example feelings of anger and frustration are portrayed in the pada Kasiki poyyene in Mukhari raga. The Nayika accuses the “other” woman of filling the hero with such disgust that he leaves for Kasi (a holy place associated with renunciation).

In the Saveri Pada, Telisenura the nayika expresses sarcasm and an underlying jealousy when she taunts the nayaka about how he behaves with lack of interest when he is with the nayika and how totally opposite his behaviour is when he is with “her”. “You are always cheerful in her company but you are always angry here...”

Indendu vacchitira in Suruti is another pada that depicts the nayika full of sarcasm: “Have you lost your way in coming here? You know “her” house is not on this street.” In Dari jachuchunnadi in Sankarabharana raga, the sakhi describes to the Nayaka how the nayika is awaiting him dressed beautifully. In Vadaraka pove,

another well known pada, the nayika tells her sakhi to carry the message of utter disappointment and hurt: "tell him not to come here any more."

Some other well known pada-s, the raga-s and their composers are:

Teruvil Varano – Khamas – Mutthutandavar

Ittanai tulaambaramo – Dhanyasi - Muttutandavar

Varattum – Saveri - Kavikunjara Bharati

Inimel avarukkum – Bhairavi - Kavikunjara Bharati

Padari varugudu - Kambhoji - Vaithiswaran Koil subbarama Ayyar

Ini enna pecchu – Sahana - Vaithiswaran Koil subbarama Ayyar

Nittiraiyil - Ghanam Krishna Iyer — Pantuvarali

## COMPOSERS OF PADAM

Jayadeva, the Sanskrit poet of the 12th century, wrote his classic work, Geeta Govinda, in the madhura bhakti tradition. The poems in this work, each called an ashtapadi, are descriptions of the amorous love of Radha and Krishna. The poems are noted for their explicit eroticism as well as their evocative power. These songs are also used as abhinaya pieces. The original music for these pieces haven't survived and today musicians set the songs in raga-s that they deem fit.

Kshetrayya is the most celebrated composer of padam-s that are used in Bharathanatyam. He lived in the 17th century and composed prolifically in Telugu, all his compositions bear the signature Muvvagopala. This is a reference to Lord Krishna for whose love the nayikas in his padam-s pine. He has used intimate idiomatic language to portray a variety of lovers' situations, feelings and moods.

Other important composers of Padams are Swati Tirunal, Muthu Thandavar, Marimutha Pillai, Ghanam Krishna Iyer, Gopalakrishna Bharati, to name a few. Even though a large number of Padams are in Telugu there are many in Malayalam, Tamil, and Kannada.

### **JAWALI:**

Padam and javali are generally spoken of together and this is because they are both sringara based. Jawali is generally lighter in musical content. The raga-s used are predominantly of the lighter variety like Behag, Kapi etc. though heavy ragas are also found in jawali-s. Here too the ashta nayikas can be found in all their moods. Some well known and popular jawalis are:

1. Parulanna mata: Kapi
2. Smara sundaranguni: Paras
3. Entadi Kuluke: Kalyani

Jawali is lively and provides good scope for the dancer to showcase her abhinaya skills.

## **TILLANA:**

Tillana, as elaborated above, is also an integral part of the Bharathanatyam repertoire and is rendered at the end of a Bharathanatyam recital. The pallavi or the first part of the tillana is sung many times for the dancers to perform complex jati-s. Typically, a pancha nadai segment is also included. This is a nritta segment where the five nadai-s (tisra, chatusra, khanda, mishra and sankeerna) are all woven together to create one complex jati pattern. There is, however, no recitation of solkattu-s. All the jati-s are performed to the refrain of the pallavi itself.

The sahitya element being very short, the scope for abhinaya is very limited in tillana.

## **MANGALAM**

Mangalam is the benedictory song that is rendered in both music and dance concerts. It offers a prayer for the well being of all creatures and sings the glory of the Lord. The most popular of these mangalam songs is a composition of Sri Tyagaraja, Nee naamaroopamunaku nitya jaya mangalam in the Raga Saurashtra and Adi Tala.

## Tanjore Quartet or Tanjai Nalvar

Among the most prominent composers of music for Bharathanatyam are four brothers collectively referred to as the Tanjore quartet. The margam of Bharathanatyam was systematised and codified in the 19th century by these four brothers who are referred to as the Tanjai nalvar in Tamil. They were talented composers and their compositions form the kernel of the Bharathanatyam repertoire. The kautuvam-s and the sabdam-s they composed are performed widely even today. The varnam-s they composed are eagerly learnt, performed and enjoyed even today.

The four brothers – Chinniah, Ponniah, Sivanandam, and Vadivelu were nattuvanar-s from families that traditionally danced, taught and conducted (what was then called) sadir attam (sadir was later rechristened Bharathanatyam in the 20th century). They were attached to the Tanjore royal court during the reign of Raja Serfoji II. Besides the oral tradition of music and dance they inherited, they also received training from the great Carnatic composer Muthuswami Dikshitar. They took their music and dance to other courts in South India too. All of them, but especially Vadivelu, received patronage of the great royal court of Trivandrum when Raja Swati Tirunal was ruler. Swati Tirunal himself is regarded a great composer of Carnatic music and many of his compositions (padam-s, varnam-s and tillana-s) are performed both in music and Bharathanatyam concerts. Vadivelu is also said to have introduced the violin (till then an instrument

used only in Western music) as accompaniment to Bharathanatyam. Later the quartet returned to the Tanjore court.

The contribution of the Tanjore quartet to Bharathanatyam both as dance teachers and as composers is unparalleled. They organised all the basic movements of feet and hands in coordination with the eyes and other parts of the body into the system of adavu-s. As elaborated in earlier books, adavu-s are the first lessons learnt by any Bharathanatyam dancer and it is the adavu-s which form the basic unit of all the pure dance sequences or jati-s that are performed in a dance recital. The Tanjore quartet are also credited with rationalising the items of Bharathanatyam and introducing the particular order in which they are performed today with its rare combination of pure dance, abhinaya, and music.

The Tanjore quartet also composed new music, specifically for Bharathanatyam such as jatiswaram, sabdam, kauttuvam and varnam. Their jatiswaram-s in raga-s Kalyani, Vasantha, Bhairavi and Saveri are very popular among dancers and dance teachers. The Kauttuvam-s (especially the navasandhi kauttuvam) are very fine pieces of dance compositions. The sabdam-s they composed in Ragamalika-s - Sarasijakshulu and Gokulambudhi - are also widely taught and perfomed.

When we come to varnam-s, again we find that many varnam-s popular in the contemporary scene

trace their authorship to the quartet, especially Ponniah Pillai. Mohamana en meedil in Bhairavi raga and rupaka tala, Manavi in Sankarabharanam Raga and Adi taala, and Saami nee ram manave in Khamas raga and Adi tala are well known varnam-s composed by the quartet. E Mayaladira in Raga Huseni is a popular swarajati. All of them describe a yearning for the love of and union with a deity. Mohamana describes love of the nayika for Tiruvarur Tyagaraja, while Manavi describes the love of the nayika for Lord Brihadeeshwara of Tanjavur.

## **QUESTIONS :**

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

- a) Music of Bharathanatyam is based on the \_\_\_\_\_ music tradition of South India.
- b) The central rhythmic concept in Indian music is \_\_\_\_\_
- c) There are \_\_\_\_\_ swara-s and \_\_\_\_\_ swara sthana-s in Carnatic music.
- d) One cycle of beats of a tala is called \_\_\_\_\_
- e) The Margi or classical tradition recognised \_\_\_\_\_ number of tala-s.
- f) The widely used system of tala since Purandaradasa is called \_\_\_\_\_
- g) Three speeds widely used in Carnatic music are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- h) The first part of varnam is called \_\_\_\_\_ and the second is called \_\_\_\_\_
- i) The trinity of Carnatic music are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

- j) Improvised music is called \_\_\_\_\_ , while precomposed music is called \_\_\_\_\_.
- k) The three parts of a kriti are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Write short notes on:
- Suladi Sapta tala system
  - Abhyasaganam
  - Tala anga-s
  - Varnam
  - Padam
3. Write essays on the following:
- Musical ensemble of Bharathanatyam
  - Tanjore quartet

## **GLOSSARY**

<i>Angika</i>	:	<i>Pertaining to the parts of the body</i>
<i>Aaharya</i>	:	<i>Pertaining to make up, costumes and stage settings</i>
<i>Asamyutha</i>	:	<i>Not combined, ie. Single hand gestures.</i>
<i>Abhyanthara</i>	:	<i>Performance according to the rules</i>
<i>Bahya</i>	:	<i>Performance out of the rules</i>
<i>Dasavathara</i>	:	<i>The 10 Avatars of Vishnu</i>
<i>Gamaka</i>	:	<i>Embellishment of the melody</i>
<i>Gathi</i>	:	<i>Also called nadai in tamil</i>
<i>Grishma Ritu</i>	:	<i>Summer season</i>
<i>Hemanta Ritu</i>	:	<i>Mild Cold season</i>
<i>Jaathi</i>	:	<i>Variations in counts are five</i>
<i>Kaurava</i>	:	<i>Sons of the king</i> <i>Dhritharashtra</i>
<i>Lakshmi</i>	:	<i>Consort of Vishnu</i>
<i>Laya</i>	:	<i>tempo or speed</i>
<i>Mahisha</i>	:	<i>Demon killed by Shakthi</i>
<i>Meenakshi</i>	:	<i>A form of Parvathi in Madurai</i>
<i>Malayadwajan</i>	:	<i>Father of Meenakshi</i>
<i>Maricha</i>	:	<i>Ravana's uncle who takes the form of golden deer</i>
<i>Nandi</i>	:	<i>Vahana of Shiva</i>
<i>Padartha abhinaya</i>	:	<i>Expression for meaning of a word</i>

<i>Pandava</i>	:	<i>Sons of the king Pandu</i>
<i>Puranas</i>	:	<i>Hindu religious texts</i>
<i>Raga</i>	:	<i>Melodic entity</i>
<i>Saraswathi</i>	:	<i>Consort of Brahma</i>
<i>Shishira Ritu</i>	:	<i>Severe Cold season</i>
<i>Sharadh Ritu</i>	:	<i>Autumn season</i>
<i>Sanchari</i>	:	<i>Expanding a particular line by bringing in relevant stories</i>
<i>Satvika</i>	:	<i>Involuntary expression of emotions</i>
<i>Samanya Abhinaya</i>	:	<i>Generic representation</i>
<i>Svara</i>	:	<i>Seven notes in music</i>
<i>Tala</i>	:	<i>Rhythmic concept of Indian music</i>
<i>Tala dashaprana</i>	:	<i>Ten vital elements of Tala</i>
<i>Varsha Ritu</i>	:	<i>Rainy season</i>
<i>Vasanta Ritu</i>	:	<i>Spring season</i>
<i>Vakyarthaabhinaya</i>	:	<i>Expression for the meaning of a sentence</i>

## **REFERENCES**

1. *Natyashastra, p185.*
2. *Dramatic Concepts Greek and Indian, p 122*
3. *Natyashastra p 198)*
4. *Natyashastra pp 199 – 200*
5. *These are primarily forms of musical composition that are also used in Bharathanatyam. They are elaborated in the fourth chapter.*
6. *Natyashastra pp 193-194*
7. *Natyashastra pp 194-195*
8. *Natyashastra p 189*
9. *Natyashastra pp 189 – 190*
10. *Natyashastra p 208 - 209*
11. *Natyashastra p 209*
12. *Natyashastra p 209*
13. *Natyashastra p 209*
14. *Natyashastra p 210*
15. *Natyashastra p 210*
16. *Natyashastra pp 210 -211*
17. *Forms of composition*
18. *These are the six anga-s or parts some or all of which form the body of a tala*
19. *Three of the above mentioned six anga-s, elaborated in the next section*
20. *History of South Indian Music, (p19, book II)*
21. *South Indian Music (Book III) , p 108*
22. *South Indian Music (Book III), p 105*
23. *South Indian Music (Book III), p 134*
24. *South Indian Music (Book III), p 200*
25. *South Indian Music (Book III) p 202*
26. *South Indian Music (Book III), p 206*

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3. *Siva Purana, by BK Chaturvedi.* Diamond Publications, 2003
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5. *South Indian Music, Book III.* 9th edition. Prof. P. Sambamurthy. The Indian Music Publishing House, 1990.
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"The importance of mind is more desirable. The attitude of the mind may be desired, undesired and indifferent.

The emotional states produced by the experience of happiness and misery are set in accordance with theatrical conventions"