



PRESERVATION OF THE CULTURE OF INDIA THROUGH MUSIC AND DANCE

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Abstract:

The Ancient Bharat since ages has had a strong base in all the aspects of life through its strong vedic knowledge and served as a Centre of learning and training for the entire world. Its deep-rooted understanding in the Chatushasti Kalalu- (64 Arts) is unique and created by the ancient Rishis offers a unique base in particular for learning, practising and performing the Fine arts namely Music and Dance.

Handed over from generations to generations, nurtured, protected and preserved under the patronage of various royal dynasties, the Country stands robust and rich in this unique area of knowledge. Thus it becomes a sacred duty to continue to strive to protect, preserve and further develop this unique treasure.

The 15th to 19th centuries witnessed spectacular developments in the field of Music in particular, the Indian Classical music went through dynamic changes and is reckoned as the Golden period. The Musical Trinity and the existence of various musicians, Vaggeyakaras, the Lakshya and Lakshanakaras, have transformed and revolutionalised the field and elevated its form and stature to a different dimension. The field thrived during this period and saw several stalwarts emerging and contributing to its further development. Artists flourished, many Music sabhas came into existence and played their promotional role.

As the times advanced, royal dynasties vanished, life changed and priorities diversified, commercial interests started creeping in, yet because of its innate charisma and spiritual value, the field continues its presence but alas its quality suffers. Hence it is time that the situation is reviewed, and necessary corrective steps be taken to continue preserving its form and stature and continue its development.

The paper aims to:

- Review the CONTENT of the present education; weed out the not so relevant aspects to arrive at increased focus of learning.
- Improve the understanding of the SAMPRADAYAM and TRADITION through meaningful understanding of required elements such as DICTION, Meaningful rendering to create a uniform Bani of Carnatic music rather than personalized Banis leading to UNIFORMITY in the presentation as BHARATEEYA BANI befitting our BHARATEEYA SANGEETAM.
- Improved teaching methodologies taking advantage of the TECHNOLOGY and the INTERNET to stimulate THINKING PROCESS right from inception resulting in the
- MANODHARMA inculcation right from the beginning rather than dealing with it towards the end of the learning process.



- Increased Performance capability attainment while learning through working with various
- avenues like Temples, Chamber music and working the Music Sabhas and other avenues so that by the end of the learning course the candidates are already familiar to the avenues of sabhas as well as connoisseurs of music.

Importance of preserving the culture of India through music and dance

- India is a country with a rich cultural heritage that dates back thousands of years. Music and dance have always been an integral part of Indian culture and are deeply intertwined with the country's traditions, values, and spirituality.
- Music and dance not only reflect the beauty of Indian culture but also serve as a medium for people to express their emotions, thoughts, and ideas.
- It is important to preserve the culture of India through music and dance because it helps us to understand and appreciate the unique aspects of our heritage and promotes a sense of national identity and pride.

Carnatic Music has been an invaluable treasure in our lives. It is an integral part of our Culture and Heritage which plays an invisible role in our lives. Yester years saw it being pursued and taken up as a profession of pride and profusely patronised by the various rulers and some of them even exhibited their own proficiency and contributed to the rich art through their own creations in music. Yester year rulers like Sarabhoji, Swati Tirunal Maharaja are some prominent examples in the History of Carnatic music.

Recent times have witnessed rapid changes in the society which have started showing unnerving influences on the scenario of carnatic music leading to shift in the prominent place the profession of carnatic music has enjoyed. The present day life styles, the education system and priorities thereof and the craze of running for education and jobs abroad to improve life styles etc are various factors which are influencing the changing values. Added to these the interest and values for carnatic music in the states of telugu speaking states are taking a serious toll in the interest for carnatic music in these regions. However it is a matter of pride that the other three states are continuing to adore the values of Carnatic music as part of their lives despite the above mentioned factors. The upholding nature of their tradition and culture are still keeping the values for the art of music. But the influence of the changing patterns in life have some effect on the Music education system. It is this factor which this paper attempts to address and draw out an agenda for changes to be brought out for the benefit of continuance of interest & seriousness in pursuing the Art in future.

THE EXISTING SYSTEM OF TEACHING/LEARNING

No doubt the system and the methodology of teaching /learning has been well thought of which stood the test of time for so many centuries.

Let us recapitulate the system enunciated years ago.

- Sarali swaras
- Janata swaras
- Alankaras
- Datu / Hechchu / Taggu sthayi swaras
- Geetams
- Swarajatis & Jjatiswaras
- Varnams
- Keertanas
- Manodharma sangitam-ragalapana, swarkalpana, Neraval,



- javalis, Padams, Tillanas
- Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi

This pattern of teaching and learning has been in vogue right from the Old GURUKUL system to the present institutionalised systems in the Universities, Music colleges to the private teachers. The time frames involved range from 5 to 10 years in organised institutions to more than 10 years in the case of private professional performer-teachers. As against this the aspirants of today who may be engaged in normal education or professional courses are under pressure for devoting enough time for music which is an additional activity. Another dimension is their parents aspiring their children to become performing artists either on the stage or appear in the media, creating pressure on the teachers about the time to be devoted for music which they consider as an additional activity and may not be as a passion in the art.

Thus there is a need to consider the possibility of reducing the time of coaching or look at the possibility of remodelling the training schedule. Further we have come a long way from those olden times when the pattern of teaching was modelled to the environment of learning, and the facilities & techniques that are available today for teachers as well as students. In the olden days students have to travel distances to learn from teachers, even books were scarce and the students have spent time in copying the lessons during class time itself or even dictated by the teachers. As against this today printed material is available, in addition recording facilities are available to the advantage of both teachers as well as students. Further in the olden days the aspirants have to go long distances to listen to concerts or performances of professionals. As against this today the students have an opportunity for listening to recordings of professional artists at their doorsteps. Even opportunities are available today to watch various performances even virtually because of the technology today.

Due to all these advantages the entire scenario is different for both teachers as well as students. In one word, we have come a long way from the “swadhyaya” mode of learning to “Technology” strengthened teaching / demonstration / learning. Much of the teaching / learning is possible to happen through the recordings. Personalised teaching sessions are required to fine tune the execution and or fine tune the shaping of the students to the performing stage through imparting the finer aspects or the software. Thus the elementary or the the basic aspects of any aspects of learning can be introduced to the student are given in the preliminary sittings by the teachers, then technology is used to for routine learning and practice which later get finetuned in the final stage of teaching by the teachers in which the teachers give their experience and software to chisel them to final product. This part is always a “journey” depending on the level of the expert teacher.

COURSE CONTENT

The course content that was made in the olden times is still followed even though we have evolved to great extent as well as the facilities available are phenomenally different. In the older pattern, Pillari Geetams are taught after learning the Alankaras. This was the system created by Purandara Dasa who created simple and beautiful 8 or 12 line songs, easily understood and learnt by a young aspirant before one goes to learn more complicated compositions. But as we stand today, and if we take an objective look at this aspect, the student spends around a month or two of the time learning around a dozen geetams. This is the stage when the students are encountered with the practice of learning to sing the sahitya or the ‘Matu’. Till now they were learning to sing the Swaras or the ‘Dhatu’. It is here that they come across the aspect of singing with “Bhava”. Again there is one difficulty that these geetams are in Kannada language and many a time the students do not know what they are singing if they do not know the language. On many occasions even the teachers do not know the language and they are taught mechanically without knowing the meaning.



This is yet another dimension. After all this, these Geethams cannot be presented in a public Concert!?

On the contrary, instead of these Geetams, if we have a few simple Keertanas which may be possible to learn as easily as Geetams, it will be possible to sing these simple keertanas on the stage or in performance. This simple change can be easily adopted to save the time of learning geetams. We may not feel guilty of avoiding the great Purandra Dasar as we can make use of his other beautiful creations, his keertanas and to our repertoire of classical keertanas.

If you take a recourse to the life of the Saint Tyagaraja, you will find that whenever a new student approached him with interest to learn music, it is reported that he taught simplest form of keertanas such as “SreeJanaki Manohara” in the raga Isamanohari or “Lavanya Rama” in Poorna Shadjama raga etc as is reported in his life history.

Coming to Swarajatis & swara Pallavis also the same philosophy holds and one can save the time also. The only exception is the Bhairavi swrajati for which we have an attachment that it is a beautiful comprehensive composition giving a detailed exposition of the raga. One important aspect in music which is paid little attention is Singing with Bhava. This needs to be inculcated right from the early stage itself. Our traditional varnams are composed in a manner emphasizing on the “akaara” sadhana without paying attention to meaningful rendering with Bhava. Some of today’s composers have brought out new varnams which can be rendered with Bhava without sacrificing the technicality of a Varnam.

There is always a difficulty expressed by a number of students of music about developing Manodharma. Not uncommon among the students even completing Post graduate course their Manodharmam is not fluent. This can be easily circumvented to a great extent by inculcating Manodharma easily even from the stage they learn the simple keertanas in place of Geetams. Then they will have enough time to mature in manodharma right from the beginning of learning keertanas and mature through their entire learning process. Some teachers enable the students to write down the Kalpana Swarams or the raga development and practice and work out in their expositions. This practice should be discouraged or else that may become a habit and they may never be able to develop the thinking process required. As mentioned above the simpler keertanas stage is the right stage and method to develop the thought process required for manodharma.

Natya Kala:

Natya Kala, the art of dance, holds a unique place among the fine arts. It is not simply a sequence of movements but a profound medium of expression where rhythm, melody, and gesture merge into a single language. Through this art form, stories are narrated, emotions are revealed, and spiritual experiences are shared. Dance connects the tangible with the intangible—body, mind, and spirit—transforming performance into a sacred experience. Within the Indian cultural tradition, Dance is regarded as a divine offering that uplifts both the performer and the audience, creating an elevated space of aesthetic delight and inner awakening. Natya Kala, or the art of dance, occupies an exalted place in the realm of fine arts. Its foundations are traced to Bharata Muni’s Nāṭyaśāstra, revered as the fifth Veda, where dance and drama were envisioned as divine channels through which the truths of the scriptures could be experienced by all. This ancient text codifies every aspect of performance—from posture and movement to expression and rhythm—elevating dance from a mere aesthetic pursuit into a sacred discipline that unites artistry with spirituality.



At the heart of Natya Kala lies the theory of rasa, the aesthetic essence that stirs the heart of the audience. The dancer's task is not limited to physical grace; it is to evoke emotions that transcend ordinary experience. Through the careful cultivation of bhāvas, or emotional states, the dancer transports the audience into a shared world of joy, sorrow, valor, devotion, and peace. This emotional alchemy, described with great precision in the Nāṭyaśāstra and later elaborated by Abhinavagupta, transforms performance into an act of spiritual communion. Dance in Natya Kala is far more than movement—it is Abhinaya, a layered system of expression encompassing four dimensions:

- Angika (bodily movement),
- Vachika (verbal articulation),
- Aharya (visual adornment), and
- Sathvika (internal emotional states)

This holistic framework allows the dancer to “lead the audience into the emotion” (bhava), ultimately cultivating the intended rasa through nuanced gestures, expressions, and stage presence.

The Natyasastra also preserves a vast vocabulary of technique, including the 108 karanas or basic dance postures, a detailed system of hand gestures (mudras), as well as precise rules for movement, rhythm, and gaze. Each of these elements carries symbolic weight, allowing the performer to embody cosmic principles in visible form. Shiva's Tandava, for instance, represents the rhythm of creation and destruction, while the gentle Lasya evokes beauty and compassion. Through such movements, dance becomes a mirror of the universe itself.

Traditionally, Natya Kala was not confined to entertainment; it was a sacred act of offering performed in temples. The devadasi tradition, in which women dedicated their art to the deity, exemplifies this devotional spirit. Dance was seen as a medium through which divine energy flowed, blessing both the performer and the devotee. Over centuries, while social and cultural shifts transformed performance from temple courtyards to the modern stage, the essence of Natya as a spiritual and aesthetic practice has remained intact.

Another important aspect of Natya Kala is its distinction between margi and desi traditions. The former, classical and codified, seeks to elevate the human spirit through disciplined practice and symbolic expression, while the latter is rooted in folk culture, expressing the joys and concerns of daily life. Natya Kala belongs primarily to the margi stream, though it draws vitality from regional expressions, making it both universal and deeply rooted in local culture.

In essence, Natya Kala is not merely a performing art but a sacred language where body, mind, and spirit converge. It tells stories, preserves cultural memory, educates through allegory, and uplifts through beauty. Most importantly, it opens a pathway to the divine, transforming stage and temple alike into spaces of communion. Through the interplay of movement, music, and expression, it continues to inspire, reminding us that dance is not only seen with the eyes but felt in the soul.

Conclusion:

The above are only a few thoughts that could bring in some significant change in the teaching/learning process, saving some time without affecting the quality of learning. To this the technology edge can be taken advantage of to achieve the final product - the quality performer - without loss of traditional values. These are some initial thoughts that could make a change in the Music learning process to an advantage at the same time preserving the culture and heritage of our valuable arts.



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