



Bhakti Cult: A Leverage to Temple Tradition and Dance

Maneesha Ratnakar Joshi

12

Introduction

The dance tradition in India has its origins in the temple tradition. Meanwhile, some dance styles are still influenced by temple traditions and among them, Kathak is a North Indian classical dance form. A popular quote on the origin of this classical dance is, "Kathan Kare So Kathak

Kahāve ", Kathak dance was born from the stories of storytellers. The art of presenting the story through poetical and musical rendition of the story along with graceful gestures is Kathak.

Temple tradition is also an important influence on Kathak dance and is related to the Bhakti tradition, which preserves the tradition of Kathā Kirtankārs (storytellers). The invasions in the pre-independent India, by the Muslim rulers after 1100 AD influenced the Kathak styles that evolved over time. As a result of which a distinct courtly tradition emerged. The dance, which had previously developed through a devotional cult, began to shift towards entertainment and

adornment during this period. The sanctity of the temple tradition, however, did not suffer at that time, but history records that the form of Kathak dance changed during the Mughal rule. Kathak dance originated from Kathā Kīrtan and is associated with the path of Bhakti. Today, in the presentation of Kathak dance, the praise and honoring of the Gods and Goddesses is important. However, during the Mughal period, this dance was performed in the court, and even today, the nature of court tradition and its ideology are clearly visible in Kathak performances. Since

ancient times, there has been a temple tradition, and spirituality depended on it, or, in general, all the arts, i.e., singing, playing instruments, and dancing have proceeded from the temple tradition. The work done in the presence of God in the temple is to attain salvation and the dance done with the same spirit are offerings at the feet of God, while the spirit connects the devotee to God.

Keywords: Kathak, Bhakti. Temple Tradition, Indian Classical Dance

Another observation is the transformation in this tradition, the court tradition, and then the dance performance initiated on the stage, and going forward, there were many changes. The important thing is that the dance done for yoga took to be done for enjoyment. The dance displayed on the stage was presented to the audience, who were people; considering the audience as God, the dance was being presented to them. Miracles started happening through dance, and emotion

started disappearing from it. It became the intention to garner appreciation by performing dance with Tantra. Śāstras, Tantra, and Vidya are all parts of this art, presented as dance, learned through Tantrā, and imbued as Vidya. Given the divine nature of art, it should be done with devotion and reverence. Devotion must be assimilated. The feelings that appear during the dance performance are the result of the artist's devotion to the art. This devotion takes one back to the temple tradition, and the basic purpose of this art is to enjoy oneself and share that joy with dedication. The way in which a dancer performs in the temple, where the deities or the spectators are considered to be deities, is an elated spiritual experience that transforms the auditorium into a temple.

With the changing times, Kathak began to be performed more on stages than in temples, the expressions of dance performance changed, and later it started getting commercialized. It is one of the reasons why in the present era, in order to retain and restore the feeling of devotion, taking the experience of devotion in the temple tradition and throwing light on its new dimension, an experiment was done by adopting a qualitative method. It is believed that if the tradition is



PRANAV JOURNAL OF FINE ARTS

ISSN: 2582-9513

experienced earlier, the devotion will work to restore the dance moving forward in the flow of time by bringing together 12 to 15 girl students of Kathak dance in the age group of 20–25. An experiment was done to get the experience of merging in that devotional experience.

Śrī Sant Jñāneśvar and Viṭṭhala Kulkarni are the two proto-gods of the Vārkarī sect in Mahārāshṭra, as well as their faith in Śrī Sant Jñāneśvar. Around 15 days before Āshāḍhī Ekādaśī (day dedicated to worshipping Lord Vishṇu), the palanquin of Śrī Sant Jñāneśvar leaves Ālandī village. It reaches Paṇḍharapura, a day before Āshāḍhī Ekādaśī. For 15 days,

Vārkarīs from several villages walk 250 km from Ālandī to Paṇḍharapura. Meanwhile, they continue to walk under the spell of Viṭṭhala's darśan, immersed in his devotion, despite the heat, rain, and wind. During the journey, they continuously chant God's name, sing abhaṅga (devotional poetry) and Kīrtan (religious performance arts), and dance, while expressing their faith in Śrī Sant Jñāneśvar. This is a devotional ceremony for people from a very young age to 80 years of age. Similarly, on the day when the palanquin comes out of Ālandī, on the same day, the dancers, understand various abhaṅga, its formulation, how it is established, structure, and on the day of Āshāḍhī Ekādaśī, dancers present those compositions in front of an audience in a closed auditorium (stage).

During this time, everybody is engrossed in devotion, reaching the pinnacle of absorption while performing the abhaṅga dance, which is a 2-hour dance programme. When the dancers are engrossed in their performance, everyone is believed to have a vision of Viṭṭhala. Everyone has a wonderful experience of being immersed in devotion.

Experiencing the dance as the temple tradition has 3 stages, i.e., Cautharā, Maṇḍapa, and Garbhagrha, the dancers first understood each abhaṅga pada, realized a dance composition on it, and then performed it before the audience. Here, in the temple, one can feel the dedication and oneness before God. The dance is a pleasure, in which the dancers expressed their devotion through their dance and enthralled the audience, and it was felt so much by the art lovers that the auditorium turned into a temple. However, this experiment is not done in temples.

Art lovers felt the divine transformation of the auditorium into a temple. While this type of use in temples can be limited to a few sādḥaks (sādḥaka or someone who follows a particular way of life) and devotees, this use in the auditorium ensures a far reach of devotion. Therefore, the temple can be a medium for transmitting tradition and dance.

It involved performing a soulful dance on stage while working on props, lighting, and music for the performance. During this experiment, which involved studying the literature of the saints, the devotion in it, the different forms of God, and His many pastimes, it became evident as to how big a challenge it is to reach the divine through dance. When one enters the temple, first we go to the cautharā (open or closed pavilion), then the antarāla, and finally the garbhagrha (the inner chamber where the idol of the God/Goddess resides). That is, going through these stages one by one means listening and understanding the abhaṅga, structuring the dance around it, then shaping it, and finally realising it. This journey leads to self-bliss. At this point, the power of the dance and the hard work of the dancer pays-off, and all are immersed in the blissful ocean of devotion.

Different forms of God are seen while studying a single line abhaṅga. All the abhaṅgas were in Marāṭhī. Dances were performed on the abhaṅga of Sant Jñāneśvar, Sant Tukārām, Sant Nāmdev, Sant Janābāi, and other saints. Of them 'Sundar Te Dhyān Ubhe Viṭevarī', abhaṅga is the description of the beautiful form of Viṭṭhala. In 'Viṭhu Mājḥā Lenkuravāḷā' abhaṅga, all the saintly devotees of Viṭṭhala, are presented as if they were his children. The characteristic of each sage being with Viṭṭhala is beautifully expressed in the abhaṅga, showing how they all sit comfortably



on his shoulders. 'Abīra Gulāla Udhaḷita Rang' and 'Nāthā Gharī Nāce Mājhā Sakhā Pāṇḍuraṅga' - in these abhaṅgas, the devotion of Saint Cokhobā has been described in many contexts. 'Kheḷa Māṇḍiyelā Vāḷvanṭī ghāī' is about the infinite devotion of Vārkarīs to their pure form and their engrossment in the chanting, rhythm, and sound of the mridanga (percussion instrument), above all, it also reaches the peak of Bhakti rasā. 'Avaghā Rang Ek Jhālā' is about the parable of Vithoba, which shares the experience of Saint Janābāī. In fact, everyone in the auditorium was seen sitting in the form of Vithoba. In the end, Sant Jñāneśvar ji prayed 'Pasāyadāna' in the form of blessings sought for this world – 'Ātān Viśvātmake Deve...'

While performing each abhaṅga, being united in its expressions, and playing different characters in that abhaṅga, all the dancers forgot themselves, and lived each abhaṅga. They had a supernatural feeling seeing the form of God materializing in front of his eyes and the dancers experienced sāttvikā feelings like tears of joy flowing from the eyes, hair rising on the body. All these colors of devotion were felt not only by the dancers, but the audience also experienced all these feelings and joined the dancers in this devotional experience. This devotional literature can be used not only in Marāṭhī but also in all the other languages of India by composing dances on it.

In the temple tradition, devotion to God can be adopted in different forms, in different dimensions. Devotion is not only for God; if one does it with everything in life, one's life will become godly. It is this reason as to why the culture of the temple tradition can be seen through the devotional path of dance and the devotional path towards God. A manchiyā performance is a dance performed in front of the deity in the temple tradition. Assuming this, a new perspective will be given to the different dimensions of Kathak dance. The journey of dance was like dancing

before God in the temple. A temple is a place of prayer to God, a place of satsaṅga (a gathering for devotional purpose) for the devotees. Today, the hall at this place is a place of satsaṅga for the dancers, and they express their devotion to the art through dance. This form of dance was shown through devotion to God. Devotion is an effective medium to reach God, Devotion is a sāttvic (virtuous) feeling. This devotion has survived only because of the tradition of the temple. Various Vārkarī sects, devotees, dedicate their devotion to the temple. In the art of dance, the Vārkarīs, i.e., the dancers, show their devotion not only in temples, but also in closed or open halls, auditoriums, expressing their devotion to God as they dance according to the tradition of the temple.

In this way, the dancers can study the entire Sage literature. Looking at new ideas, new dimensions, devotion in dance can be taken to the audience and God. Through the Bhakti cult, devotion was preserved in society, and if this Bhakti cult and literature have so much influence on dance, then the temple tradition will also be preserved and developed. Therefore, is not the devotional cult of the temple tradition the foundation of dance?

Theme : Influence of Bhakti cult on dance in the context of temple culture