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### MADHURA MARGAM IN SHABDAM

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#### **ABSTRACT:**

The Shabdham is the first nritya item and the third/fourth performance item in the traditional Margam. We are now introduced for the first time to abhinaya or gestural expression, an important aspect of Bharatanatyam. Shabdham means a song in praise of the glory of a God or king in Sanskrit, sometimes also called a 'Yashogita'. The sahitya or literary content of a line of the song will be preceded or followed by short dance jati-s with a sollukattu. The sahitya may be devotional, erotic or tells a story related to a narrative episode from the Indian classical epics. Its performance is highlighted by gestural language, facial movements, graceful postures and enticing gaits. The shabdham is taught to the young dancer after the Allaripu and Jatiswaram, when the dancer is ready to learn how to co-ordinate hasta mudras, facial expressions and movements of the limbs to correspond to the words in the poem 261 being interpreted. Each word in the line of the sahitya has meaning or padartha bhava which has to be effectively expressed through the dance "This is said here to emphasise the important fact that after the introduction of the Tala and Raga in the first two items (Alarippu and Jatiswaram), here in the third, for the first time, the recital introduces words of a sahitya and rhythmic passages, intended respectively for abhinaya and dance, alternate here. Both parts of natya, the nritya as well as nritya, having thus been introduced.

#### **KEYWORDS:**

Shabdham, vaggeyakarrar, salamu, sahithiyas.

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

The traditional Bharatanatyam Margam begins with nritya items like Pushpanjali / Allaripu and or Kauthuvam, followed by Jatiswaram. By the time the dancer has finished the Jatiswaram, the dancer's physical body the anga, pratyanga and upangas have had a good warm-up, with the execution of the jatis and korvais in different speeds. The audience is also satiated with pure dance and is looking forward to some abhinaya moments as well. It is at this point, about 20-25 minutes



into the performance, that a simple composition introduces nritya into the Margam. As said in the last chapter on Nritya items in a Margam, Nritya is a combination of all four modes of Abhinaya with physical gestures, hastamudras and facial expression or mukhabinaya. This is the expressive dance that narrates a story with emotion – bhava to create rasa. In the present group of Margam items, the narrative is often interspersed with brief and brisk nritta interludes to break the monotone. In the Margam, there are several nritta-nritya items that the dancer performs. They begin with smaller, simpler ones with the sahitya being a small poem, a couplet, here the example is Shabdham and gradually build up the tempo to reach the Varnam. The Varnam is the longest and most challenging kriti, considered the piece de resistance of the performance. Thus a bridge is built as the dancer navigates her performance adroitly between nritta and nritya, just enough of both to whet the audience's interest and keep it engaged throughout the performance. The amount of thought based on practical expertise to create the Margam format is nothing less than a scientific invention. A large number of Shabdams were composed by gifted vaggeyakars of Melattur village in the Tanjore district. Most of the Shabdams are sung in Kamboji raga while a few are in Ragamalika. In earlier times, the Shabdham was also known as Kavita or Kavitava. Even though Kavutuvam is classified as a Shabdham in the temple tradition its words were not sung in a raga but recited in an effective prose order while the jati-s were danced. There are also long Shabdham compositions of a narrative type which are separately danced and interpreted in gestures. Shabdham is an old word in classical Sanskrit. It refers to the words of praise with which a deity, a hero, or a king are greeted as they come in procession or are seated in court. The oldest form of these was a pile of epithets laudatory of the hero.

Subsequently a poetic description of the qualities of head and heart came to be offered, and finally a love theme was introduced which ended with a salutation. Since these sabda-s ended with the word Salamuse or Salamure, they are also called Saltamus-s. The Shabdham often ends with a mujra style of Muslim salutation. That is one of the most unusual aspects of the Shabdham as it is perhaps the only Islamic influence on south Indian dance. The salutation involves the dancer bringing her two hands, palms inwards in front of the chest, then raises them to the forehead and then towards the audience. It accompanies the words that conclude the Shabdham, 'salutation to thee' or 'I bow before thee'. After the salutation is done, a jati is performed and the first line of the song is repeated.



### **The origins of Shabdham:**

Dr. V. Raghavan says in the article titled “Merattur Kasinatha, A composer of Sabdas of the 18th century AD”, published in 1943 Journal of the Music Academy, “The sahitya is always in praise of a deity or a patron, who is a zamindar or King. It goes on elaborating in epithets the qualities, acts and glories of the deity or patron and ends by exclaiming “Salute unto thee”. Padmanabha Salamure, ends a Sabda of Tanjore Vadivelu Pillai on Sri Padmanabhaswami at Thiruvananthapuram. Many others exclaim at the end “Paraku”, which means “Attention”, giving the picture of the deity or patron eulogized as arriving or sitting in court or going in procession, being announced by the bard.

In her book “Bharatanatyam” published in 1958, Balasaraswati adds: “The third urupadi (item) is Shabdham. Shabdham means word”. That is meaningful words that make a story are shown for the first time. Another meaning exists. In praise of a god, in the temple or in a procession, or a king/ruler, pointing to them and praising their qualities is called Yasogeethi. Such words filled with praises is called Shabdham. In this context, Shabdams exist that end with Salamure. For example: ‘Prathapa Simma Bhopala Salamure’ and ‘Padhmanadha salamure’ are present in Shabdham in praise of Tanjavur king and Trivandrum Padmanabha swamy, respectively. This is the reason, why Shabdams were also known as Salamure. As the first item of abhinaya in the Margam presentation, the Shabdham needs to be danced with special care. The padartha has to be effectively performed for the meaning of the sahitya to be conveyed to the audience and for the audience to appreciate the various ways in which the dancer is able to nuance the emotion. Often, the dancer begins with simple sancharis to elucidate the padartha.

It is in the Shabdham that for the first time, the words of a line of sahitya and the abhinaya that goes with it, are introduced as alternating lines of lyric (mime) and rhythmic passages (pure dance). The line of sahitya is either preceded or followed by short jatis with sollakattu like 'tataiya taiyyum tata tam'. The Pallavi is sung with rhythm syllables or sabda-s, and danced as the prelude and finale as well as the several refrains in-between. The abhinaya is executed with hastamudras and facial movements, interpreting the sahitya in multiple ways. The choreography designs physical movements to flow into one another to form intricate and attractive patterns. Therefore the Shabdham offers a very good scope for the dancer to give a glimpse of her command over abhinaya



in this very first item itself. Amongst the accompanying musicians, it gives a good opportunity for the singer to reveal his/her prowess. As the first nritya item, the Shabdham is executed in a slow tempo, allowing the dancer to unravel her talents, especially for abhinaya, a little by little. In the process, the dancer gets absorbed in sanchari bhava, thus infusing a sense of aesthetic pleasure in the audience. In general, Shabdams describe the hero's qualities, and for the scope of abhinaya other bhavas are introduced. Dasavataram, Ramayana, Gajendra Moksham are some of the themes explored in Shabdham.

### **THE STRUCTURE OF SHABDAM:**

After showing the abhinaya, at the end of each line in the sahityam, the dancer strikes the foot to "Takita Takadhimi" followed by Tat tai ta ha once, and the jati "tari taki nanaka tadhi mi dhi mi ki ta" is used. After this, the second line of the sahityam is done in abhinaya. The adavu can be changed to another. In the end, the dhit dhit tai adavus are used to finish the shabdham. Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale at times performed other items in place of Shabdams. In an article published in Kalakshetra Quarterly, 1980, she wrote, "I may also add that I used kirtanas like 'Anandanatanaprakasam' of Dikshitar and 'Ojagadamba' for an invocatory dance taking often the place of the Shabdham, which contains very much the same kind of sringara bhava as is found in Padams and Javalis...I found the Shabdham, which is a well known dance item, musically uninteresting, as it depended much on the Manodharma and the quality of the singer to make it good. Good singers were also difficult to find. It is generally believed that Shabdams composed before the time of the Tanjore Quartet, were in various talas and ragas. But when the Tanjore Quartet got into the act, the Kambodi and mishrachapu tala became the most popularly used for the Shabdham. Perhaps Kambodi was chosen because it is a rakti raga with numerous possibilities for improvisation. Another reason could be that as Kambodi was what is known as a desi raga with roots in folk music, it found an instant connect with the audience. Even when a Shabdham was composed in ragamalike, the first raga was kambodi. This is one of the reasons why so many Shabdams sound very similar as they start out, though their form and content has certainly undergone quite a lot of change.

There are no complications, however, either in the nritta or nritya components because following the time line of the Margam, the choreographer/dancer has to conserve energy, both physical and



emotional, for the challenging Varnam that would follow. The shabdams dedicated to Lord Krishna are in Telugu, while those dedicated to Lord Muruga or Nataraja are usually in Tamil. The Gurus of Rajarajeswari Bharata Natya Kala Mandir have composed a ShabdhamDayaradan in praise of Lord Rama in Tamil. Most of the old and traditional Shabdams are those handed down from the guru to shishya, composed by the Tanjore Quartet or old Gurus. The most popular ones are composed by the Tanjore Quartet. New Shabdams have been written by present-day composers but these adhere to the guidelines provided by the earlier composers. Shabdams thus form a simple and beautiful link between the Jatiswaram and the Varnam in the Bharatanatyam Margam. In his opening paper titled “Bharatanatya” presented in the Dance Seminar held by the Sangeet Natak Academi, 1958, Dr. V. Raghavan says, “The third item called Sabda occurs in the older texts mentioned previously....it being called Sabda and Salamu forms a tell-tale links between the Kathak and Bharathanatyam...Sabda as an old word in classical Sanskrit means the words of praise with which a deity, a hero and a king are greeted as they come in procession or seated in court. The oldest form of these is a pile of laudatory epithets of the hero, then a poetic description of the qualities of the head and heart, and then a love-theme was introduced; but, in a tell-tale manner, even the love pieces ended with a salutation.<sup>6</sup>

### **Some of the Familiar Shabdams :**

Sararijakshulu, Thandai Muzhanga, Aayar Seriyar, Adum Mayil, Vayu Maidane, Aazhi Suzhnthida, Ramar, DevihayeShivan, Venu Gananai, Krishna Manjari, Myilai Pujitha.

### **An analysis of shabdham:**

This item is usually set to the Misra Chapu Thaalam and *Ragamalika* (different Ragams or Tunes for different stanzas). Misra Chapu Thaalam is a series of 7 beats (1-2-3 ; 1-2-3-4 or *tha-ki-ta ; tha-ka-dhi-mi*)



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### EXAMPLE:

### ADUM MAYILTHANAI

**Ragam:** Ragamalika

**Thalam:** Misra Chapu (1-2-3 ; 1-2-3-4 OR *Tha-ki-ta* ; *Tha-ka-dhi-mi*)

**Composer:** Vazhuvoor Ramaiah pillai.

### #Starting Beats

Thaa-aa | Aa | Thaiyyum | Thuhhh | Tha | Thaam

Tha-Thai | Yaa | Thaiyyum | Thuhhh | Tha | Thaam

Dhalaanguthom | Tha dhingina thom

In the above starting beat the dancer should be in the natiyaaramba nillai and sundari (gireva bhedam) eye movement as pralokita.

*Tha* *Dhana* *Dhan* *Dhana*

*Tha* *Jhonu* *Jhonu* *Dhimi*

*Tha* *Dhimi* *Dhimi* *Kita*

*Thaka* *Tha* *Jham* *Thari*

*Thaam - Thai Tha-Tha-Thaam*

Here uses kutthadavu korvais which will be very lite and dose according to the misra chappu thalam

Adum mayil tanai nAdum muruganai

nidu kalaviyil kuda en mana



jadai kandu ni modi seivadu nyayama....

Thai thathaa...

Sakhi ne evveylaiyil modi seivathu

Nyayama...

The above sahithyam the heroine asking her friend by seeing my position still your not hearing to me and not even listening to me why your behaving like this already am feeling sad by muruga's absence kindly take this letter and give to muruga and explain my situation.

Thanina thakakina thingunam thari

Here in vazhuvoor bani the above line is also use to sing in the ragam and to do a kuttadavu korvais .

Bhaktar kotigal anantam kudave

palum ten abhiseka priyane

pazhani malai vAzh murugane...

undan malaradikkendan sharanam...

The cores and cores of devotees are seeking for your blessings and your happy with their offerings like honey and milk my almighty you're the god of palanimalai am pleasing you waiting for your lotus feet dharisanam.

Thathinnam tharikittathaka thakakinnam tharikittathaka

Thathinnam thakumtharikittathaka thakakinnam thakundtharikittathaka

Thinthinnamnam thimikittathaka thakathathinkinnathom

Thakathathinkinnathom thakathathinkinnathom



Here comes the thermanam the end part its completed with the theermana adavus( thathinginathom )type

## Meaning:

Even after seeing/realizing (kaNDum) the inclination (jADai)

of my (en) mind/heart (mana) to unite (kUDa)

in a lengthy (nIDum) union/sexual union (kalaviyil)

with kArtikEya (muruganai) who desires/seek (nADum)

the dancing (ADum) peacock (mayil tanai)

,is it just/right (nyAyama)

for you (nI) to behave (seivadu) in this arrogant/deceitful (mODi) manner?

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza Oh friend (sakhi),

is it just/right (nyAyama) for you (nI)

to behave (seivadu) in this arrogant/deceitful (mODi) manner at this (iv) time (vELaiyil)?

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza Oh kArtikEya (muruganE)

who resides (vAzh) in pazhani!

One who loves (prianE) being annointed (abhishEka) with milk (pAlum) and honey (tEn)





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as countless (kODigal - crores) devotees (bhaktar)

gather (kUDavE) in an unending stream (anatam),

I offer my (endan) obeisance at (SaraNamE) at your (undan) flower-like (malaraDikku).

### **NAYAKI :**

In the above shabdam the nayaki is explaining that she is longing for murugas love and union/sexual union so this nayaki is named to be KALAHANDARIKA they nature of her physically away from the hero(nayaka)longing for his love.

### **NAYAKA:**

The nayaka in this shabdam is lord muruga he had all the best characters and good behavioural person and praising by everyone so the nayaka bhedam named as THEROTHATHAN loveable, kind hearted, very intelligent, handsome, polity, self confident personality, brave, voluble expressive.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The learning or teaching of the classical dance of Bharatnatyam begins with the foot movements known as tatta adavus, followed by the mudras, which together are then composed into Jattis. Pieces such as “Alaripu” and “Jatiswaram” are adavus performed to swara patterns. As the name suggests, **shabdam** is the first item in a bharatnatyam recital, which has words in it, also commonly called “sabda” also the word shabdam derived from the Marathi language. Therefore, it is also the item of a maargam where abhinaya or expressions are introduced. Also called Yashogati in Sanskrit, it is usually in praise of lord Krishna, Rama, Shiva, Murugan or the patron king. Almost all shabdams consist of four lines of literature, sung in Kamboji raag and misrachaapu talam. These are often sung in Ragammalika, starting with kamboji raag. They start with the syllables “tat tai yaa tai, tat ta taam”. **The songs of shabdams usually end with the words “salamure” or “namostute” as they are sung in praise of deities or kings.** The lines of



the song are usually followed or preceded by a short jati with use of syllables like “taa hata jam”. A large number of sabdams were composed by the “Vaggeyakaras” of the Tanjore district.

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