

Music and Dance Compositions in Kuchipudi Solo Repertoire

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at analysing various musical and dance compositions performed in Kuchipudi repertoire. Like other Indian classical dance forms, Kuchipudi also was influenced by the cultural changes that impacted the preferences of the Rasikas i.e., the audience of Indian performing arts. This dance-drama-centric dance style transformed as both solo and group performing dance form. Thus, this study considers various musical and dance compositions created and inculcated in Kuchipudi solo repertoire. Archived videos of solo dance numbers performed in Kuchipudi are played and analysed. The analysis of those solo dance numbers proves that the way in which the musical compositions are chosen and choreographed adds unique identity to the dance form.

Keywords: Kuchipudi, Dance composition, Music composition, Solo repertoire, cultural influence, Brahmanjali, Padam, Tarangam, Keerthanam, Thillana

INTRODUCTION

The word composition has its origin in Latin word 'Componere', which means 'put together'.

In the context of Indian classical dance, the term composition collectively represents dance and music. As Indian classical dance is always performed with music, the process of composition involves both. Kuchipudi dance, a dance drama centric art form and one of the eight main classical dance forms of India, relies on the musical compositions that are rich in lyrics, grammar, meaning and musical structure. The trinity of Telugu literature are Nannayya, Tikkanna and Yerrapragada, who have authored the book 'Andhra Mahabharatham' together (Ranganathacharyulu, 1981), have left evidences of the presence of Natyam in that period. Many reference to Natyam in Telugu literature of many authors like Tikkanna, Yerranna, Nachana and Srinadha(Sastry, 2006) indicate how Natyam in Telugu-speaking land enjoyed the richness of Telugu literature and music. Kuchipudi Natyam was strictly adhering to the guidance provided in Natya Sastra, thus evolving as a tradition performing dance dramas. The Bhagavathulus of Kuchipudi village would travel to many places and perform Kuchipudi Natyam in the form of Kalapas and Yakshaganas(Anand, 2018; Rao, 2011; Sarma, 2016). In order to align with the change in people's expectations and contribute towards societies' well-being, thematic presentations i.e., Kelikas were added to Kuchipudi repertoire. In order to be at par with other Indian classical dance forms and to gain the status of Indian classical dance, new presentational formats like solo presentations and dance dramas i.e., Nritya Natikas were added to the Kuchipudi repertoire (Sastry, 2006). These changes in the traditional structure of Kuchipudi Natyam necessitated the changes in the music used for this dance form too (Jonnalagadda, 1996,



2020). This study analyses in detail the various solo dance numbers and their music composition in Kuchipudi Natyam. These dance numbers were choreographed by veterans of Kuchipudi Natyam like Vedantam Lakshmi Narayana Sastry, Dr.VempatiChinna Satyam etc.

INVOCATORY DANCE ITEMS

Any Indian classical dance performance begins with an invocatory dance number. Many musical forms like Mallaris, Kauthuvams, Keerthanams etc took the place of invocatory number. In olden days, Kuchipudi began with a Poorvarangam. Dr.Vempati too has used Keerthanams and Kauthuvams but also added a completely new composition 'BrahmanjaliTandavanrutyasrashtaku' a song which was written by B.L.N.Chariand an exclusive music was composed by Kocharalakota Prakash Rao for the same. Sometimes even Kauthuvams took the place of an invocatory number. NateshaKauthuvam, penned by Ganga Muthu Nattuvanarand set to HamsadhwaniRagam is an example of how that dance item was adapted as an invocation. The dancer enters the stage performing an elaborate Jati using Karanas, Charis and Bhramaris. This invocatory dance item sets the pace of the entire performance. Sometimes, GaneshaKauthuvam and Keertanams on lord Ganesha were also used as invocatory items.

JATHISWARAM

Jathiswaram is a dance number in which Jathis and Swaras are intertwined to make students learn the rhythmic patterns of dance and musical patterns of song. VedantamLakshminarayana Sastry has taught quite a few Jaticattus to his students. These were part of the training syllabus set by him. This would enable the students to learn the rhythmic intricacies and further explore them through their choreographies. One such piece is the 'Atana' Jatiswaram that Dr.Vempati learnt from his Guru. But he completely revamped and rechoreographed the dance item and gave it a different perspective.

SWARAJATI

Swarajati is a combination of Jathi, Swaras and Sahithyams to make students not only understand the rhythm and music but also Bhava i.e., expression aspects in dance. Dr.Vempati choreographed a Swarajati in the Ragam 'Vasanta', but understanding the erotic sahyam of the Swarajati, he did not encourage the students to perform it on stage. With time he even removed the sahyam and taught only the swara pattern to the students. This aids the students to learn how to handle music and rhythm together in the initial stages of learning to dance to songs. A very special feature of Kuchipudi is that, even the Nritha is never devoid of Bhava. Therefore, the students learn to handle all three aspects viz. Bhava, Raga, and Tala through this item.

SABDAMS

Sabdams are the musical numbers which are generally written in praise of a particular deity. The phrases in the song are repetitive. These are positioned as initial items to be taught to



the students and presented in the first half of a performance. The bhava and abhinaya is simple. They are mostly set to 'Mohanam' Ragam and MisraChapuTalam. The interlude Jatis are also written by the composer only. DasavatharaSabdham, Krishna Sabdham, MandookaSabdhham and Ramayana Sabdhham are some of the examples.

PRAVESHADHARUVU

The word Daruvu is inspired by the Pancha Dhruva Ganams mentioned in the Natyasastra by sage Bharata. In Kuchipudi dramas, all the important characters enter the stage and they are either introduced with the song, portraying their characteristics, or the character introduces himself/herself and talks about their own characters. Some of the PraveshaDaruvus which portrayed the female lead characters are incorporated into the solo repertoire by Dr.Vempati. These characters are Bhama, Rukmini, Usha, Padmavati etc. Bhama and Rukmini Pravesam have similar choreographic features. Bhama is set to BhairaviRagam and Rukmini is set to Kalyani Ragam. Both are set to MisraChapuTalam. The character enters the stage walking to a Swara pattern and presents herself. The PravesaDaruvus in general demand a high skill of Abhinaya by the dancers.

TARANGAMS

Tarangams are the excerpts taken from the chapters of 'Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini' by saint 'Narayana Teertha.' Narayana Teertha has written the entire Bhagavatam and the 'Leelas' of Sri Krishna in this work of his. This work is divided into chapters and each chapter consists of songs and prose set in different meters. The chapters therefore give the feel of ocean waves or 'Tarangams.' The Gitams or the songs taken from each chapter of this work are taken by the Kuchipudi dancers (Bhikshu, 2020). They name and perform these songs as Tarangams to glorify the deeds of Sri Krishna. The Kuchipudi Scholars added a salient feature of dancing on the rims of a brass plate, at the end of Tarangams. VedantamPrahlaadSarma, a Kuchipudi Guru, is known to have introduced this feature into Tarangams. In olden days, the dancers also used to carry a pot of water on their head, but Dr.Vempati removed this feature from the performance as he found it a hindrance to move on the spacious modern day stages. While dancing on the rims of the brass plate, the dancers answer the phrases played on the Mridangam by the percussionist. In this item, all three elements of dance viz. Nritta, Nritya and Natya are ably executed. This is the prime piece of a Kuchipudi repertoire and is very challenging as it has every aspect of dance in it and is danced for a longer duration. The rich 'Sahitya' is explored and presented in the form of Sanchari (the side stories related to the main subject). The music for Tarangams is set in Ragamalika to suit every section of the song.

PADAMS

Padams are musical compositions where predominantly Sahithyams are used and are performed in Kuchipudi to show the expertise of the dancer in Bhava. Padams are generally based on 'Sringera Rasa' (O'Shea, 1998). Kshetravaya is a poet from Andhra Pradesh who wrote



many SrngaraPadams in Telugu language. Padams were predominantly in Telugu language. But later with time, many Bhakthi Rasa based Padams in different languages have come up on to the dais. Padams are the slow-paced songs, sometimes sung even in the Chauka kala.

JAVALIS

These are yet another genre of Srngara rasa-based songs. They too carry the same grammar as Padams. The only distinction is the pace of the songs. Javalis are more fast paced and entertaining. The abhinaya is not as deep as in Padams. They are only based on SrngaraRasam. No Javali is available on any other rasa.

ASHTAPADHIS

Saint Jayadeva hailing from the state of Orissa was a saint poet, who is known to have written many songs praising the love of Radha and Krishna. All the emotions that a hero and a heroine feel, while in love are made to be felt by Radha and Krishna. With this imagination of his, Jayadeva knit a love story(Kumar, 2019). Saint Jayadeva is a 15th century poet who spread the fragrance of Madhura Bhakthi (divine love).Ashtapadis are set to different Rags and Talas and performed in various forms depending on their grammar.

KEERTHANAMS

Keertanams are the commonly used genre of music in any classical music or dance presentation. The Keertanams can be simple, mature, and complex depending on the author who has written and composed them. There are Keertanams written by many authors like Tyagaraja, MuthuswamiDikshitar, Syama Sastry, Annamacharya, Oothukkadu Venkata Kavi, SadashivaBramhendra and many more. In Kuchipudi, Keertanams like ManasaSancharare of SadashivaBrahmendra, Kamakshi Sthuti of MuthuswamiDikshithar, BrundavanaNilaye of Oothukkadu Venkata Kavi, Annamacharya'sKeertanams like Muddugare Yashoda, PalukutenelaTalli and Paramapurushudu, Devulapalli Krishna Sastry's Koluvaitiva, Saint Thyagaraja's PancharatnaKeertanamJagadanandakaraka and, Ananda Tandavam, which was choreographed for a movie by Dr.Vempati was later used in Kuchipudi performances.

THILLANAS

Thillanas are a fast-paced musical and rhythmic pieces that build the crescendo to the finale of Kuchipudi. In Kuchipudi, Thillanas set to Ragas like Hindolam, Hamsanandi, Kunthalavarali etc are performed.

CONCLUSION



Many compositions in Indian classical music are performed in many Indian classical dance forms. The way those compositions are choreographed and performed in classical forms not only highlights the song but also becomes the unique identity of the dance form. Kuchipudi is one such Indian classical dance form in which the existing and customised musical compositions were chosen and brilliantly choreographed by veterans like Vedantam Lakshmi Narayana Sastry, Dr.VempatiChinna Satyam etc, thus creating an unique identity to this dance form and making it one of the prime and sought-after classical dance styles of India.

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