

Non Ritualistic Dance Compositions Related to Karnāṭaka Temples Ms Poornima K Gururaja

18

Introduction

“A temple is a public institution that combines sacred, secular, religious, social, devotional and the romantic. (S.K. Ramachandra Rao). This shift in perceiving a temple as a multifaceted socio-religious-cultural space, “Sarveṣām-sarva-sampat pradām”, as opposed to only a place of worship instigated the research that looked into Karnāṭaka temples, their Sthalapurānas and sculptural evidence. Non-ritualistic dance compositions were constructed from literature related to temples, their mythological and social histories, Nyāsas and sculptural evidences. This led the researcher to believe that dance compositions related to temples could also be based on social history, Āgamic practices, epigraphical evidences, festivities and Sthalapurāṇa of a particular temple. The researcher chose not to take into consideration the textual traditions of temple dances. The presentation dimension of the dance was based on tradition, knowledge, skill and creative experience of past practitioners of the art and the researcher.



Purpose

Incorporating non-ritualistic dance compositions that glorify and highlight temples in Karnāṭaka.

Scope and limitations of the Study

The research was conducted over a period of two years. The geographical area was focused on Karnāṭaka and Tamiḷnāḍu. Tamiḷnāḍu was chosen as area of study because it lent itself to the formatting tradition and observation required for the research. Long years of immersion in the Taiṅjāvūr Paramparā of Bharatanāṭyam easily allowed the author a deep study into the inter-relation of dance and temples.

Karnāṭaka area was the focus because of the purpose of this research. Important Karnāṭaka Temples, their mythological and socio-political histories were studied. The scope was later made more concise to temples' histories that lent themselves to the incorporation into a

traditional dance repertoire. In order to satisfy the objectives of the research, a qualitative methodology was adopted. The results unfolded as the research progressed. The qualitative approach offered a highly intense description and analysis of the subject, without limiting the scope of research. However, the results were also subjective and heavily based on the skill and the ability of the researcher. The scope of the research was based on an existing subject which were compositions related to temples in Karnāṭaka. The dance choreography of these existing compositions relied heavily on the strategy of the researcher in terms of incorporating essence of the Karnāṭaka style of body movements for dance and Nyāsās (āgamic hand gestures) for hastas involved.

Methodology

In order to satisfy the objective of the research a qualitative methodology was adapted for research. Samples of literature were selected on the basis of relevance to Karnāṭaka Temples. Noted poets who were a part of the Bhakti movement in Karnāṭaka were chosen. Example: Saint Vyāsārāyaru to Purandaradāsaru.

Purposive sampling was selected on the basis of knowledge, paramparā (successive, relevant and extensive experience), and expertise of dancers and teachers who had practised and performed this genre of music and dance over generations. The approach to data collection was inductive, allowing for exacting results with small data samples.

- Individual interpretation of events and cross referencing within the temples were conducted with tour guides and long-term local residents of the temple cities.
- In-depth interviews were semi- structured allowing for deviation from the subject but also allowing for new information to be gathered. Interviews were conducted with priests, religious heads of institutions attached to the temple, tour guides, professors of temple studies and art, dance instructors, theorists in both music and dance and musicologists.
- Observation to produce generalised and specific theories.

The practice of traditional pieces of a Bharatanāṭyam repertoire from

the Tañjāvūr tradition and their performance lead to reminiscing,

documenting and reiterating a temple culture that had sustained

hundreds of years. Observation of the Karnāṭaka style of dancing led to a homogenous blend of two styles while composing the research subject.

Non Ritualistic dance compositions related to Karnāṭaka temples | Poornima K Gururaja





The Tañjāvūr Paramparā dance pieces that were closely related to temples of *Tirvārūr*, *Tañjāvūr*, *Mannārguḍi*, *Cidambaram* were closely studied.

Observations were made on how the structure of the piece was overlapped with the Āgamic practises of the temple and its relation to the Deity or Patron of the period. For example, the ritual of “Aṣṭabhoga”, offered to the Deity and the King. Observations were made of similarities in temple processions and royal processions that were incorporated into the dance numbers. The observation also included the mythology and puranic stories particular to the temples. The search in Karnāṭaka which included literature survey, interviews, observations,

and temple visits yielded little results in terms of temple related dance pieces either in practise or documentation, Dance compositions were composed and performed, but the

Non Ritualistic dance compositions related to Karnāṭaka temples | Poornima K Gururaja
co-relation to temples in terms of their historicity, mythological or social significance was not satisfactory.

A paradigm shift was made in the research process which enabled the research to concentrate on devotional movements in Karnāṭaka and poetry written during these movements. This led to a surprising pairing of dance and music closely connected to the temples of Karnāṭaka. The Haridāsas of Karnāṭaka were avid travelling bards. This shifted the focus into looking deeply at the literature of the Haridasas. The research also narrowed its focus to “World Heritage sites” that would create easier visibility for the dance compositions. The familiarity with the temple would then create easier understanding for further studies on the subject or its audiences in performance settings.

Non Ritualistic dance compositions related to Karnāṭaka temples | Poornima K Gururaja

Analysis

The Tañjāvūr temple was the primary focus of initial observation. It was observed that although the Cōlas built it, there was no documentation of actual dance in the temple epigraphs. (Indra Viśvanāthan Peterson). It was the epigraphical study during the time of Serfoji the 2nd that gave evidence of the 300 odd women employed by the temple, not necessarily limited to dancing in the temples. It was during the period of Serfoji 2nd that many dance pieces were commissioned including the “Śarabendra Bhopāla Kuravañji”.

The sculptural evidence indicated more mythological figures than dance related sculptures as compared to other Tamiṇnāḍu temples. During the pre-Quartet era and the era of the Quartet, observations indicate there was an active movement to shift from the ritual practises and alter the heritage ritual pieces to suit proscenium stage performances, thus creating what is now called a “Mārgam”. The Kautvams, be it Navasandhi or Pañcamūrti Kautvams meant to be performed in the premises of the temple for peripheral deities were later documented and brought out for stage performances.

While these were examples of moving ritual dances out of temple precincts, the varṇam were modified to suit either the deity of the temple or the patron of the time. The ideas of the varṇam being the same. The longing for union, the accomplishments of the subject, the play of cupid, were all kept intact and the patron was brought out of the temple to the courts making the dance numbers more secular.

With European influence the musical notations became global and westernised, and company Jāvalīs even included English in its Telugu compositions. These observations had flexed the traditional framework of what was defined as temple dance to incorporate multiple

Non Ritualistic dance compositions related to Karnāṭaka temples | Poornima K Gururaja

patrons and languages. This led the researcher to infer that Kings instead of deities could be interchangeable as the main theme of a piece. Thereby changing the definition of “Temple Dance”. There could be more than one language in a composition. The compositions could be performed outside the



precincts of a temple. Academic interest in India and abroad also lent for compositions to be discussed in academic settings from perspectives other than its relation to temples only. The logical next step was to look into the compositions of the musical Guru of the Tañjāvūr Quartet Śrī Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar. Deep observation of Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar's compositions opened up the niche that would fit the research and reconstruction of a temple-based composition for Karnāṭaka Temples. Dīkṣitar had specifically composed songs for Pañcabhūta Kṣetras of Śiva. These compositions were non-ritualistic, but tied very firmly to the deities of the particular temples in Tamilnādu and included their Sthalapurāṇas and salient features of the flora-fauna and water bodies around the temples. This format of Dīkṣitar's kṛtis inspired a deeper quest to look into Kṣetra kṛtis of Karnāṭaka composers related to Karnāṭaka temples.

This brought the focus of the research to Haridāsa Sāhitya which predominantly featured during the glorious Vijayanagara period. The language was Kannaḍa in a simple, understandable format. The dance compositions related to the research pointed to Sulādi's.

Sulādi's are musical pieces very specific to the Karnāṭaka musical lineage. They are set to seven talas most of the times and have prescribed rāga or multiple rāgas. Their being specific to the Karnāṭaka region was extremely important for the focus of the research.

A widespread survey of literature of the Haridāsas starting with Smt. Meera Rajaram's book on Purandara Sulādi's, finally ended in DR. Vidya Rao's extensive research into Dāsa Sāhitya.

Non Ritualistic dance compositions related to Karnāṭaka temples | Poornima K Gururaja

A Kṣetra Sulādi on the Virūpāksha temple in Hampi, Karnāṭaka, authored by Vijayadāsarū, was sourced from the Samagra Dāsa Sāhitya. It included the story of the temple from Sat Yuga to Kaliyuga, in its full glory. It also threw light on the origin of river Tuṅgabhadra on whose banks the temple stands. The marriage of Virūpāksha to Pampā Devi and the Dvaita philosophy were all covered in a single piece.

The rāga prescribed was Ābheri. This raga as suggested by DR.Arati Rao had two versions. After much discussion on the aesthetics of the music it was decided by the researcher that the latter version of the rāga would be incorporated. This would encourage more contemporary musicians to attempt working on a Sulādi. All of the above observations and findings were related to working on this Sulādi and transforming what was now a piece of literature into an active performance based dance composition.

The dance journey began with research on whether a Sulādi had ever been performed

earlier. Tulaja who has based a dance chapter of his "Saṅgītasārāmṛita" has also described the Sulādi Nṛtya giving details on how it was performed.

Textual evidence made it clear that the Sulādi's have had a firm tradition and history in both Music and Dance in Karnāṭaka."

It is probable that the "Nartana Sevā" in temples was conducted to the accompaniment of Sulādi singing by Haridāsa's.

This observation was also made at Cippagiri, the birthplace of Vijayadāsarū on the occasion of his birth anniversary. It was found that Sulādi's were actively performed as early as the 17th Century. (DR. Ra. Sathyanarayana). Its format was studied closely. Practical studies of the performative aspects of the Sulādi's came first from Tañjāvūr Kīṭṭappa Pillai's choreography

Non Ritualistic dance compositions related to Karnāṭaka temples | Poornima K Gururaja

of a Stotra Sulādi of Purandaradāsa in Tri-Kāla and Tri-Tāla. However, no textual prescription was studied to suggest a continuous Trikāla in a Sulādi. This may have been an influence of the Trikāla Jathi format of the Tañjāvūr Paramparā. However, a deeper study of the performative aspect of the Sulādi suggested that three Kālās are employed in a Sulādi at different points. The Aṭṭa Tāla is usually performed in Vilamba Kāla. The Jhampe and Dhruva tālas in Madhyama Kāla and Ādi and Eka in Dhruva kālās. Performative Sulādi's were learnt from heritage Maisūru practitioners DR. Padmini Sreedhar and



DR. Lalitha Srinivasan to understand the use of Maisūru Shyli Bharatanāṭyam and laśyāṅgas. However, the prescription of a “Kalasa” at the end of a Sulādi was not clear. The only reference to a Kalāsa, because of a qualitative analysis and no textual evidence came from the Mohiniyāṭṭam style of Dance. Here Kalāsams were used as Arudi’s, (crisp jati endings). Smt Padma Sampath, dancer-scholar from New York sourced one of these Kalāsams for the research that were incorporated at the end of the piece.

The Vijayadāsa kṣetra Sulādi has been included as a performative composition in the place of a Varṇam in the Mārgam format of Bharatanāṭyam. It has been presented at a Raṅgārpaṇe. Very importantly The Sulādi has been performed in the presence of Svāmi Śrī Vidyāraṇya, the current Guru of the Royal lineage of Kṛṣṇadevarāya and the Royal presence of his Highness Śrī Kṛṣṇadevarāya of Hampi at the Nāṭya Maṅṭapa of the Virūpāksha temple in Hampi. This brought closure to the long period of stay and observation of the temple and its related topics.

The success of the composition of the Vijayadāsa Sulādi, led to the attempt of a second Sulādi by Vyāsarāyaru. This also referred to the Hampi area but mentioned a deity by the name of

Non Ritualistic dance compositions related to Karnāṭaka temples | Poornima K Gururaja Udayādri Śrī Kṛṣṇa. No mention had been made in literature related to Hampi on this particular deity. There was also not in evidence a standing temple to this deity any longer.

The choreography was stalled because the deity of the particular composition could not be embodied in dance as there was no reference image of the deity. The researcher had always felt that the embodiment of the deity of the temple had to be close to the physical representation within the existing temple. This led to another information survey. DR. Veturi Ānanda Murthy was kind enough to throw light on this. After the defeat of the Gajapati’s, Śrī Kṛṣṇadevarāya is said to have brought the statue of Navanīta Kṛṣṇa and built a temple for the same at Hampi. This image was embodied into dance of the Sulādi by Vyāsarāyaru. A photograph of Udayādri Kṛṣṇa was sourced for the researcher by Dr. Arathy Rao, with the help of DR. Veturi Ananda Murthy.

Inference Drawn

The Sulādi’s composed into dance incorporated the Hasta Nyāsās of the temple based on book provided by the priest to create hastas for the deities and even nṛtta bits. The sculptures of the temple inspired some of the laśyāṅgas used in the dance composition of the Sulādi. A deep study of a temple and its environs enhanced the depth and breadth of embodiment in a dance. A deeper study of the temple structure, sculpture, literature attached to it, its ritual practices, its situation geographically, its patrons, royalty enriched our dance compositions and created context and relevance. Musical compositions related to temples that can be composed as dances, are not limited to Sulādi’s, in Karnāṭaka. More research can be done to source such compositions to enrich our cultural ties and rootedness to our land. Taking this

Non Ritualistic dance compositions related to Karnāṭaka temples | Poornima K Gururaja thought into further study resulted in a theatre-dance production on Tirumakūdalū Narasipura kṣetra. A song on Guṅḡā Narasimha of Tirumakūḍlu, was sourced by musician Gauri Viśvanāth, and a half hour production based on the Sthalapurāṇa of the place including the Agastīśvara temple and the Saṅgama of Kāverī, Kapila and Spatika rivers was created. The production was also a non-ritualistic theatre-dance production deeply tied to a lesser known Tīrtha kṣetra in Karnāṭaka. The rich historical context of the dance can be easily overlooked in a routine teaching and learning environment thereby overly simplifying many cultural and historical issues surrounding it. The result maybe a dancer performing in a cultural void, isolated from the philosophical, historical, geographical, mythological and religious contexts that gave definition to dance as a cultural nexus. The implication however, is not to force every dance student to an in depth history lesson but a broader vehicle for ‘cultural education’ can be enabled with an approach to studying each piece of dance in the context of the social, historical, sculptural, ethnographic detailing of a temple.



Non Ritualistic dance compositions related to Karnāṭaka temples | Poornima K Gururaja



Bibliography:

Power in Temples: A modern Perspective, Srikanth, Integral Books. ISBN 81-86107-03-7 Art and Architecture of Indian Temples, Volume 1, S.K. Ramachandra Rao, ISBN 978-93-84069-16-2

The Hindu Temple, An introduction to its Meaning and Forms, George Michelle Classical Kannada Poetry and Prose: A Reader, C. N. Ramachandran and B.A. Vivek Rai Prasanga University Hampi.

Suladi's and Ugabhogas of Karnāṭaka Music. Sri Varalakshmi Academy of Fine Arts Publications, Mysore 1967.

Vijayanagara, Ed. Vasundhara Filliozat; National Book Trust 1999.

Vijayanagara Art, R. N. Salatore, Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi

Sile-kale, Choodamani Nandagopal, Ultra Publication, Bangalore, 2011 Sulaadi's , Meera Rajaram, with Article by Arati. N. Rao, Vanamala Centre for Arts. Hindu Gods and Goddesses, W. J. Wilkins, Dover Publications.

Agams in Indian Dramatics and Musicology, Gautham Chaterjee, First Impression, New Delhi.

Glossary of terms:

Sthala Purana: The mythological story of the establishment of the temple that includes interaction between Gods, superhumans and human beings

Parampara: uninterrupted succession of knowledge

Aṣṭabhoga: Eight types of offering either to deity or Patron

Margam: Set pieces of a Bharatanatyam Repertoire from Kautvam to Tillana

Kautvam: Small poetry for accessory deities of a temple

Navasandhi Kautvam: Staring with Brahma the eight directions worshipped with poetry.

Panchamurthi Kautvam: Poems on Shiva, Devi, Ganesha, Shanmukha and Chandikeshwara.

Panchabhūta kṣetra: Places of Pilgrimage dedicated to the five elements: earth, water, air, fire and ether.



PRNAV JOURNAL OF FINE ARTS

ISSN: 2582-9513

Temples studied for Research:

Somanatha Temple, Halasur
Agastheshwara, Guñjā Narashima, Trumakudalu Narasipur
Moole Shankareshwara, Turuvekere
Brihadeeshwara Temple, Tañjāvūr
Nataraja Temple, Chidambaram
Madhukeśwara temple, Banavasi.
Mallikarjuna temple, Nadakalasi.
Lakshmi Narasimha temple, Nugehalli.
Shanthnatha Basadi at Shravanabelagola.

Non Ritualistic dance compositions related to Karnāṭaka temples | Poornima K Gururaja
Shiva temple, Amruthapura.
Mallikārjunaeshwara, Bhadravathi.
Chennakeshava, Belur.
Hoysaleshwara in Halebid.
Virupaaksha and Vittala, Hampi

Resource Persons:

DR. Karuna Vijayendra : Ranga Bhogha and related literature
DR. Meera Rajaram: Purandara Suladi's
DR. Vidya Rao: Vijayadaasaru and Vyasaraaya Suladi's
Dr. Araty Rao : Thesis on music of Vijayaganagara. Suladi's of Vijayadaasaru (Pdf)
DR. Veturi Ananda Murthy: Information regarding Udyadri Krishna and its historical background.
DR. Choodamani Nandagopal: Sculptures, their interpretations and embodiment.

Music:

DR. Sukanya Prabhakar.
Smt. Gowri Vishwanath
DR. Araty Rao
DR. Ramya Suraj

Interviews:

DR. Veturi Anandamurthy
Tanjai K.P.K. Chandrasekaran
Non Ritualistic dance compositions related to Karnāṭaka temples | Poornima K Gururaja
Guru RadhaKrishna
Guru Lalitha Srinivasan
DR. Tulasi Ramachandra
Guru. Smt Usha Datar
Temple priests at Virupaksha temple in Hampi.
Swami Vidyaranya, Shankara mutt, Hampi
Smt. Padma Sampath, Scholar-dancer , New York

Practical Training:

Tanjai K.P.K. Chandrasekaran
DR. Padmini Sreedhar
DR. Lalitha Srinivasan