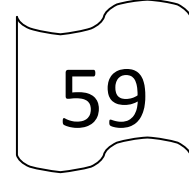


The syncretic and inflectional aspects of music in Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi

Dr. Smitha Madhav



Aim of this paper:

- To carry out a comparative study of the music of Bharatanatyam vis a vis that of Kuchipudi
- To examine the syncretic and inflectional aspects of the music in both these dance forms
- To examine the role played by music in shaping the visual aesthetics of these two dance forms

Abstract:

Both Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi are one of the more popular classical dance forms of South India. To a lay viewer, they may appear exceedingly similar too. However, there are unmistakable differences in these forms. These differences can be spotted in the content, intent, delivery, music, aesthetics, presentation etc. One factor that plays a vital role in giving form and structure to the art forms of Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi is their respective musical foundations. The music shapes how and what we see in the dance. This paper is an attempt to deconstruct a few components of the music of Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi and examine their effect on all aspects of the dance.

Keywords:

Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, BhamaKalapam, Margam, Tanjore quartet, Tanjore, Nayak, Nattuvangam, Instrumental music.

Introduction:

In the context of today's discourse, one could say that Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam hail from different geographical locations, ie: one is the dance of Tamil Nadu and one is the dance of the Telugu speaking states, mainly Andhra Pradesh. However, this cannot be a major cause for difference. A major "compare and contrast" study cannot be carried out based on geography alone. This is because the bifurcation of combined state of the erstwhile Madras state/ presidency occurred as recently as in 1953. It is another matter that the state that was thus created was later further divided and the new state of Telangana was created in the year 2014.

Both Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam belong to the large and prosperous southern part of India. However, in many ways, the common factors between these two forms end there. Since this study is dedicated to the musical aspects of dance, an attempt shall be made to compare and contrast the two forms, viz Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi from the point of view of their respective musical modes, mores and traditions.

Broadly speaking both Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi use the same form of music, ie: Carnatic Music. However, the visual and aural impact of the same Carnatic music is very different when used in Kuchipudi and when used in Bharatanatyam. Why is this so? The reasons for this are many. To understand this better, one must examine the basic features of Bharatanatyam dance



music as well as that of Kuchipudi and the contrast the two from various perspectives.

Sub Topics:

1. Antecedents of Bharatanatyam
2. Antecedents of Kuchipudi
3. Repertoire of Bharatanatyam
4. Repertoire of Kuchipudi
5. Meters employed in Kuchipudi
6. Musical instruments employed in the Bharatanatyam ensemble
7. Musical instruments employed in the Kuchipudi ensemble
8. Melodic aspects of Kuchipudi dance music
9. Talam, Gati and Kala Pramanam
10. Performative techniques of Bharatanatyam
11. Performative techniques of Kuchipudi
12. Conclusion

Antecedents of Bharatanatyam:

The backstory of Bharatanatyam as we know it is quite well documented. Though the actual practice of Bharatanatyam as a performative tradition has passed down through an oral and unwritten human chain of practitioners, the dance itself adheres to most dance and dramaturgical treatises, thus making it a rock solid tradition with a hoary past. In terms of the dance music, while one does not have a chance to listen to the exact kind of music was used in the pre Tanjore quartet era (barring later day recreations) , plenty of information is available regarding the repertoire of dance in the Nayak period.

Dance forms such as Perani, Jakkini, Pushpanjali, Mukhachali, Gondali, Drupada, Darusani, Padachali, Kautuvam etc. are known to have been presented in the Nayak courts. The Nayaks and the Marathas were both great patrons of art and thus spared no effort to ensure that the twin arts of music and dance not only thrived in their consolidated form, but also grew in leaps and bounds. The cosmopolitan nature of the Tanjore court thus made the dance of the courtesans and the handmaidens of God thrive in more ways than one.

Antecedents of Kuchipudi:

Kuchipudi, the dance of the Telugu country is also an internationally acclaimed art form and is the pride of the Telugu people. Said to have originated from the nondescript village of Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh, like many Yakshagana and dramatic traditions, it was originally performed by an all-male troupe. The entire dance party comprised men from the Brahmin community and their art flourished due to royal patronage. As an art form , one could argue that the Kuchipudi dance tradition as we know it today is relatively younger than Bharatanatyam.

The dancers in the all-male Kuchipudi troupe were known as Bhagavathulu. Today neither caste



nor gender is a bar. The world of Kuchipudi is open to men and women of all communities, castes and nationalities. The themes used in the practice of Kuchipudi are religious, worshipful, coquettish, romantic, erotic, playful and sometimes esoteric too. Pieces like Gollakalapam handle in a colloquial but refined manner, themes revolving around social reform also.

Kuchipudi as a discipline may be broadly brought under the umbrella of the performances of Yakshagana/ Bhagavatam/ VeedhiBhagavatham, all of which are collectively and simplistically known as the Yakshagana genre. They are in some ways a south Indian tradition of folk theatrical performances.

Kuchipudi endured a long and arduous debate as to whether it ought to be placed under the folk art nomenclature or that of a “classical” dance form. After continued struggle and consistent efforts, it has finally been securely and permanently accorded “classical status”. The adherence of Kuchipudi to the tenets of the Natyashastra and many other ancient texts contributed to its being placed in the “classical” space.

It is known that the Natyashastra is a work on the composite art forms of dance, music and drama and the fact that Kuchipudi has robust elements of all these three helped greatly in elevating it to the classical pedestal. For instance the Purvaranga which is described in great detail by Bharata is commonly seen in Kuchipudi.

Repertoire of Bharatanatyam:

The repertoire of Bharatanatyam is a constantly evolving one. It is what one would call a perennial “work in progress”. There has never been a single time in the past or the present of Bharatanatyam when one can say that there have been no modifications or alterations to the repertoire of Bharatanatyam. Bharatanatyam is a very porous dance form, in the sense that it easily assimilates pieces, ideas and concepts from other disciplines and thus now has many “imported” items in its kitty. These imports are not necessarily from other dance forms alone.

Some additions have been inspired by the Periyamelam, while some additions have come in from the Bhajanai Paddhati. Some aspects or pieces have been inspired by traditions from neighbouring lands too. Thus, there is no hard stop to where one can stop in terms of the ever expanding repertoire of Bharatanatyam. Be that as it may, one can briefly outline the repertoire of Bharatanatyam as we know it today in the following manner:

1. Pushpanjali
2. Alarippu
3. Jatiswaram
4. Shabdham
5. Kautuvam
6. Pada varnam
7. Padam
8. Javali
9. Tillana

While the above pieces typically make up the “maargam” of a Bharatanatyam recital, many other pieces such as swarajati, krti, keertanam, tiruppugazh, tevaram, shlokam, devarnama, tarangam, abhang, bhajan etc also have slowly wound their way onto the Bharatanatyam stage and are often seen in danced to today.



Repertoire of Kuchipudi:

Like all old dancing traditions, Kuchipudi is also characterised by a large and variegated repertoire. A combination of a plenty of factors come together to provide Kuchipudi with the huge number of pieces that make this artform as colourful as it is. When one thinks of Kuchipudi, one of the first elements that comes to one's mind is the BhamaKalapam, which is in many ways the piece de resistance of Kuchipudi. To many, the bhamakalapam is the identity of Kuchipudi. It is a long dramatic piece that was performed over seven nights in the days gone by. Needless to mention, what one sees today is a heavily truncated version of the original piece. Though there is no evidence to suggest that the BhamaKalapam was thought of as the first item in the repertoire, it certainly is the first among equals, in the sense that it certainly has captured the imagination of many. The lines "BhamaneSatyabhamane" are particularly popular.

Another key item in the Kuchipudi repertoire is the "Sabdham", a piece that is replete with both lyrical and rhythmic passages. The syllables are recited and are interspersed with lyrics that sing peans in praise of the deity or royal patron. The sabdam usually runs in a brisk to fast tempo. There is a consistent tempo to it. It is usually sans scope for much improvisation from the abhinaya perspective. Considering the formal atmosphere of the royal courts, it is obvious that the sahitya parts of the sabdams are filled with hyperbole, praise and adulation for the subject. The influence of the Mohammedan culture on south Indian poetry is seen through the generous usage of the word "salAm" every now and then.

An excerpt from the BhosalaSabdham, runs as follows:

*"Dha-ki-ta-ki-ta-jham
ta-dhi-dhi-ta-ka-jham
taka-dhiki-jhanu-tari
tari tarijham tari ki da*

Taka-tadhi-kida-taka

taka dhinadhim

tehi da ttathom

*Raja sribhosala kula candraratipatisundara raja Narendra raja tulaja Maharaja
tanujapratapasimhasutramasalAmdhisalAmdhidhisalAm.*

The lyrics of the above Sabdam may loosely be translated as:

Oh emperor!! Who is as resplendent as the moon that rises from the ocean (Here, the Bhonsle lines from which the king hails from is compared to the ocean and the moon is used as a metaphor for the ruler himself), Oh handsome king, who would put Cupid to shame ! Oh son of Tulaja... Oh Pratapasimha!! I repeatedly offer my salutations to thee!



Another unmissable piece in the repertoire of Kuchipudi is the Tarangam, said to be an innovation of Vedantam Lakshmi Narayana Sastry. These pieces owe their roots to the bhajana sampradaya tradition of south India. However, today the Tarangam is considered more a part of the Kuchipudi dance than of the bhajana paddhati. More often than not, the Tarangam includes a “plate dance” sequence. Sometimes lamps are held in the hands and pots are balanced on the head.

Yet another unique part of the Kuchipudi repertoire is the “Adhyatma Ramayana Keertanas”, songs that sing the praise of Sree Rama in a rather spiritual tone. The allegoric representation of the original text of Valmiki is presented as a conversation between Siva and Parvati. Adhyatma Ramayana is extremely popular in Telugu culture and it is not common to hear it chanted or sung in many Telugu households. Thus these are not exclusively “dance” songs.

There are varied opinions on the question of how the AdhyatmaSankeertanas made their way into the Kuchipudi repertoire. Prof Nataraja Ramakrishna was of the opinion that these songs were part of the Devadasi repertoire and were borrowed by the Kuchipudi dancers from them. With the passage of time, these songs seem to have gotten assimilated into the Kuchipudi repertoire.

The interaction between Kuchipudi Bhagavathas and Dasi artists was seconded and substantiated by Shri C R Acharya who was also of the opinion that there was a certain give and take between these two groups of artists, which led to some seamless transfers between the two. Another important, though not exclusive part of the Kuchipudi repertoire is the Ashtapadi. The abhinaya display in the Ashtapadis is no less than a study in psychology ; considering the various hues and shades of characters that shine through in the lyrics.

Another significant part of the Kuchipudi repertoire is the padam. Padam compositions of Kshetragna are, like the ashtapadis high on amorous content. The hero is usually Muvva Gopala, a manifestation of Sree Krishna, but the heroine is a mortal woman. Even though the padams of Kshetragna are considered to fall under the Madhura Bhakti category, one can clearly tell that the romance in the padams are highly “human”, with all the frailties of the human mind and the vagaries of human life finding frequent reference.

Early witnesses to the dance of the dasi women state that the padams were performed by the hereditary dancers in a seated position. The body movements were kept subtle. More emphasis was on the Sativka Abhinaya aspect. The face was extraordinarily mobile and nimble, thus heightening the display of the inner feelings and emotions. The kala pramanam was kept slow (viLambakAlam).

A pertinent aspect of the padams of Kshetragna is that many of these padams are in triputatALam / misrachAputAlam. The plausible reason for this is that the poet wished for the



dancers to focus on abhinaya in general and on sAtvika abhinaya in particular. Triputatalam usually offers the relaxed pace that is needed to be able to shine a spotlight on mukhaja abhinaya.

A study on the music of Kuchipudi is incomplete without a brief understanding of the meters and musical forms used therein. As a rich and bustling Yakshagana tradition, it employs plenty of different meters to keep the audience engaged and to be able to convey the appropriate feelings with accuracy. These musical forms have unique and peculiar constructions and serve specific purposes.

Some of the meters employed:

Dvipada: A unique style of composition that has a two-lined structure to it. It is a commonly used one. The meter is generally a five syllable one and many dvipada compositions tend to be wordy and long.

Sandhivachanam: As the name indicates, it is used to bridge or link together two episodes. It is cleverly used to depict some situations that are either difficult to portray or inappropriate to portray in a literal way. Sequences involving war, death etc are frequently glossed over with the help of Sandhivachana compositions.

Daruvu: Believed to have its origins in the Sanskrit term “Dhruvaganam”, the daruvus of Kuchipudi usually comprise a Pallavi, an Anupallavi and a couple of Charanams. There are many types including the PraveshaDaruvu (used to depict the entry of a character), SamvAdaDaruvu (which runs in the form of a discussion), VarnanAtmakaDaruvu (which is descriptive in nature), NishkramaNaDaruvu (used to portray the exit of a character) and nEpadyaDaruvu (that which is sung in the background)

Kandardham: A unique meter used in Kuchipudi dance dramas, this gives dancers a wide scope for performance. Its complex intertwining of rhythmic and free flowing sequence come together in an interesting manner, where in different rhythmic structures are used in the flow of this musical form.

Yalalu: This is a form of speech used for a prolonged dialogue, usually in poems that are structured like conversations. Other forms like Seesamalika, Kaivaram, Geeta padyam, Kaivaram, Parakuvachanam, Mattakokila etc are also used.

Musical instruments used in the Bharatanatyam ensemble:

Being a south Indian dance form, it is not surprising that Bharatanatyam dance uses south Indian music to accompany it. Simply put, Carnatic music is used to accompany Bharatanatyam dance. In its earlier form of sadir, the dance troupe was called “ChinnaMelam”, as against the Nagaswaram troupe which was called the PeriyaMelam. The ChinnaMelam set comprised of the



dancer and her musicians. The team was led by the nattuvanar, who himself played multiple roles and donned several hats. He was not just the preceptor of the dancing girl, but also the chief vocalist. He rendered the jatis and wielded the cymbals.

The ensemble also comprised of a mrdangam artist. The role of the mrdangam artist was next only to that of a nattuvanar. In a 2020 interview, Shri Kuttralam Selvam (son of nattuvanar Shri Muttusami Pillai) stated that it was customary for the nattuvanar to compose jatis in the company of the mrdangam vidwan. This ensured that the mrdangam artist was involved in the process from the very beginning. Hence there was no need to educate the mrdangists on the rhythm-scape separately.

A fiddle Vidwan and a vainika and other melodic support was often enlisted. Needless to mention, the sruthi was provided by the manual methods (Thanjavur tambura in the earlier days and the Sruthi petti in later times). Interestingly, the ensembles of some dancers of the hereditary community had a clarinet player in it. While it is unclear as to how, when and why this instrument found its way into the dance group, it is possible that its tone and unique sound made it gain favour.

The musical ensemble of sadir attam in the Nayak and Maratha period is believed to have the dholak and harmonium too. This was perhaps because of the cosmopolitan nature of the Tanjai court of that era and also due to the rich and versatile nature of the dance repertoire itself. When the dancer danced to Gujarati compositions and Parsee Javalis, it is not surprising that some of these “foreign” instruments were used too.

Musical instruments used in the Kuchipudi ensemble:

Being a south Indian dancing tradition, it is but obvious that the music of Kuchipudi is south Indian too. However, one must remember that unlike Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi was neither a solo form, nor a worshipful one. The venue of a Kuchipudi performance was neither a parlour, nor the inside of a temple either. Thus the musical ensemble of a Kuchipudi dance troupe was also designed with all these elements in mind. It is not only the choice of musical instruments that depends on the nature and intent of the concert, but all elements of the dance are influenced by these matters.

Traditionally, the Yakshagana performances are said to have used fewer instruments than the NrtyaRupakas. While the Maddalam is set to have provided percussive support in the early days, today the go to choice for percussion support seems to be the Mrdangam. In the past, instruments such as harmonium, Titti etc were used too. Sruti was maintained in the traditional manner with the help of the tambura. In the later years, the harmonium was used. The clarinet was also sometimes used as an accompanying melodic instruments.

Since performances of Kuchipudi usually happened in large and open spaces and were hardly “chamber performances”, the role that was played by the singer was special and challenging. The singer had to usually sing in a rather high pitch. This was to ensure audibility. Considering the



absence of amplifying technologies, this extra effort on the part of the singer was both inevitable and mandatory. To aid in this effort, on occasion the backup singers and the sutradhara artists lent their voice to the singer for better amplification.

Another challenge for the singer was that he had to manipulate his voice in a manner by which it was suitable to all characters, viz: male , female and child. In the absence of a female singer to sing for female characters, the onus fell on the main male singer to assume a shrill voice for female characters and thus create the requisite rasa or emotion in both the artists as well as the audience. For instance, in the Prahlada Natakam, all three pivotal characters , ie that of Hiranyakashapu, Leelavati and Prahlada appear together and converse with each other in many scenes. Such scenes are a test of the singer's mettle.

MELODIC ASPECTS OF KUCHIPUDI DANCE MUSIC:

On the question as to whether Kuchipudi has its own genre of music or not, all senior Gurus unanimously opine that this is not so. Instead they insist that it is nothing but the music of the Carnatic style that is adapted to suit the needs of the Kuchipudi grammar and vocabulary. A few commonly followed mores may be observed as follows.

The concept of "aadi Nata- antyasuratti" is frequently followed in Kuchipudi dance drama traditions. The usage of the "Saaki" is also used cleverly to build anticipation with respect to some characters. Especially demoniac rulers. One cannot but notice the bright start offered by the ever popular invocation "Amba Paraaku" . One notices the frequent use of major Ragas like kambhoji, Todi, Sankarabharanam, Mohana, Anandabhairavi etc. Other ragas such as Khamas, Mukhari, Harikambhoji, Hamsadhwani, Bilahari, Athana etc are used often too.

Being a primarily dramatic tradition, utmost care is taken to ensure that the ragas suit the characters that they are used on. For instance, PraveshaDaruvus of Rajasic characters like Bali, Banasura etc are set in ragas like Purvi Kalyani, Saveri etc. Heroines usually enter in auspicious ragas like Kambhoji and Bhairavi. The entry of Bhama in Bhairavi is all too well known to warrant another mention. Sombre ragas like Aahiri, Ghanta, punnagavarali, Mukhari etc are used in the Viraha sequences.

A peculiar aspect of the musical side of the Kuchipudi Yakshagana is that certain liberties are taken with phrases within a raga. For example the phrase "da nisa" is used in the Kamboji raga, whereas the Kambhoji raga is said to have only "pa da sa" in the arohana krama. Such liberties are taken with other ragas such as Aahiri also. This habit of taking melodic liberties with the sancharas of a raga is one shared by the Kuchipudi practitioners with the Bhagavatas of the Melattur Sampradaya.

TALAM, GATI & KALAPRAMANA ASPECTS OF KUCHIPUDI:



It is widely known that the commonly used talas such as Adi, rupaka, Khanda Chapu, Mishra Chapu etc are frequently used in Kuchipudi. However, one sees specific portions of the dance in many Kuchipudi Yakshagana performances presented in specific tempos or talams. For instance, the miming of the making of the muggu at the start of the performance is done in khanda gati. The raising of the flag is done in the time signature of Mishra gati. The ever so popular tandavanrtyakari in praise of ganesha is in Adi Talam. By and large the kala pramanam of the repertoire of Kuchipudi as we know it in general is somewhere between the madhyama and Durita . The Vilamba kalam in its purest form is seldom used for long.

Apart from these, one notices that some Daruvus are rendered in the dwi-gati format, ie: the gati changes back and forth from Chatusra to Tisra. Prof Nataraja Ramakrishna was of the opinion that this was done to attract the attention of the audiences and maintain the tempo of the piece. Other techniques such as the use of the ettujati and muktayimpujati at the start and finish of the entrance passage, using of the ardhi are used for enhanced aesthetic and musical experiences.

Kalapramanam in Bharatanatyam:

By and large, the Kalapramanam in Bharatanatyam is either Vilamba or Madhyama. The Vilambaklam and the ativilamba kalam are seldom used. However this trend is also changing gradually. In the newest productions of Bharatanatyam dance one does notice nrta sequences in break neck speeds and extraordinarily speedy jatis. This is however a recent trend and is not accepted by many old schoolers.

Performative Techniques of Bharatanatyam:

While it is impossible to compare and contrast the steps or the performative techniques of Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi literally step to step, one can attempt to broadly and roughly do so. A bird's eye view of the two reveals that the footwork of Bharatanatyam is precise and grounded. The steps are executed in the firmest possible manner and the arms are used in a linear fashion. The lines are sharp.

Performative Techniques of Kuchipudi:

Before entering the nitty gritty of the performative techniques of Kuchipudi, or any other style for that matter, one must spare a thought for the antecedents of the style. That would shine a light on the “whys” and “hows” of many aspects of the art form. In today's Kuchipudi, though we see many non-drama related solo pieces, the reminiscence of the dramatic past of Kuchipudi is clearly seen, felt and experienced. It is almost like an unmistakable stamp of the dance form. This is perhaps why dramatic aspects such as prose sequences are still retained in many pieces of the Kuchipudi repertoire.

In the early days, since Kuchipudi dance dramas were performed in front of rustic audiences in open spaces, the movements were also designed in a way that afforded the dancers sufficient scope to move around during the dance and grab and retain the attention of every member of the audience. Though this need may or may not stand today, the dance technique of Kuchipudi still emanates from the same ethos.

Conclusion:





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One can safely say that while the musicality of Bharatanatyam and that of Kuchipudi have some common kinship, it would be unwise to dub them as “similar”. One could instead say that the aesthetics of the two forms are born from the same ethos and have shared a common developmental trajectory for a while. In practice, however the kinetics and cadences of the music assumes enormously varying shades in the course of implementation. The native talents of the practitioners of these dances have contributed to the landscapes of these dances.

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