

## **An Exposition of the Performance Repertoire of the Mysore School of Bharathanatya- A Historical Perspective (1700 To 1930 A.D.).**

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“In Karnataka, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the devadasi community, largely from Vokkaliga, Lingayat and Telugu speaking Naidu families referred to as ‘Nayakasani’ had some renowned members. Mysore, Moogur, Nelamangala, Kolar, Bangalore, Shimoga and Mulbagal were regions where dance was popular” (Venkataraman:2015:19)

In Karnataka, the Chalukyan Sculptures are a testimony for the showcase of Natyasastra elements by the sculptors between 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D to 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Later by the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D the *Marga* tradition gave way to the ‘*Desi Paddathis*’ or *desi* dance forms. Many new literary works on lines of Natyasastra came to the scene and the dance forms developed in different regions, sections of the society, based on ancient tradition and culture. This was adapted and established down the genesis in Karnataka during the medieval period under the able patronage of the Hoysala and Vijayanagar dynasties. After the fall of the Vijayanagar Empire in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, many artistes migrated towards down south of today’s Tamilnadu,(Thanjavur) Karnataka ( Keladi and a hundred years later Mysore) and Kerala (Travancore) regions.

*Sadir, DasiAttam* or Devadasi dance tradition which existed till the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was resurrected as Bharathanatyam at the turn of early 21<sup>st</sup> century and became the most well-known classical dance of South India. Especially in South India, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century itself, ‘Bharathanatyam’ saw the emergence of different regional Sampradayas namely Pandanallur, Vazhvoor, Tanjavoor in Tamil nadu and the Kolar, Mysore, Nanjanagudu and Muguru in Karnataka ( then it was called Mysore) based on the regional topography.

The popularly known Mysore school of bharathanatya or aptly termed as the Karnataka’s classical dance heritage in Karnataka had many local dance traditions with enriched Guru paramparas. Out of the many, the deep rooted, existing ones are Mysore, Mooguru, Kolar and Nanjanagudu schools. Karnataka dance tradition was preserved and brought forward by the Gurus and Nattuvanars. Through the intangible oral tradition, along with their able disciples they became the repositories of the dance tradition.

There were many predominant gurus and schools existent in Mysore. Natyasaraswathi Jetti Thayamma, Mugooru Amrithappa, Mysuru Dasappa ,Najanagudu Rajamma, Yajamann Kolar Kittanna and such stalwarts contributed immensely in preserving and propagating the heritage. Though the Tanjore tradition of Bharathanatyam, by the mid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Mysore, had mingled with the local conventional practices, the latter had a distinct flavour of its own.

Jetti Thayamma’s school excelled in Abhinaya, was replete with *shlokas, asthapadis, padas* and *javalis*. Kittanna’s school was well known to observe palace(*Asthana*), temple tradition(*aalaya*) and social performances(*sabha*) with unique repertoire, rich and unknown elsewhere. Mugoora School was famous for a strict adherence to *Nritta*. It gave immense importance to exercises specially meant for dance and practiced distinct adavus. The Nanjanagudu parampara concentrated upon the scriptures and their inclusion into dance, presenting rare compositions with vedic chants along with the usual traditional repertoire.

With a constant preoccupation with the Bharathanatyam of Tamil Nadu at present, these rare and beautiful dance compositions are being practiced only by a handful of committed dancers who have taken up the lifelong task to bring up these unknown compositions into the limelight on today’s proscenium.

### **Repertoire and Performances in the temple, court and Sabha**

In southern Karnataka, dance performances were held regularly for various occasions, celebrations. The recitals were classified under different nomenclature according to their place of performance. In the court of Wodeyar kings, the recitals were called *Bhogamela*. And the Court Dancers were called "*Bhogamela* Dancers". In the Temples of Mysore (around the palace vicinity), Bangalore’s Nagareshwara Temple. Ulsooru Someshwara Temple, Malleswaram Venugopalaswami Temple, Kadu Malleshwara temple and Dharmarayana

gudi dance performances were held as worship under the title 'Mela' and the temple dancers were called 'Devadasis' and 'Nayaksanis'. For festive occasions at assigned places in the city, varied traditional dances were performed under the title- *sabha katcheris* or *Thafe*. And these dancers were called 'Thafe Mela Dancers'.

The repertoire was a blend of Tanjavur and Mysore traditions, but the technique was of the native curvilinear aesthetic movements with lyrical beauty, lucid flow of gestures (replete with *rechakas*) with specific delineations. The court tradition encouraged the dancer's histrionics in *satvika abhinaya*. The court was adorned with Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannada scholars and connoisseurs who appreciated the lyrics of great composers. The Mysore 'bani' known for its flowery hand gestures and the 'tribhanghi' is known for its intense abhinaya, though there were different modes of *adavus* in Mugoor and Kolar *sampradayas* which made the *nritta* aspect look distinct.

The *Poorvaranga Vidhi* and Abhinaya pieces were irreplaceable and continued to hold sway over the elitist spectators in the court of Mysore. The lyrics from *Amarushataka*, *Geetha Govinda*, *Kshetrajna Padas*, *Javalis* in Kannada and Telugu, *Mukundamala*, poetic verses from *Rajashekara Vilasa*, *Padya*, *Gadhya*, *Choorrikes* were popularly performed.

Guru Yajmann Kolar Kittanna, who was in charge of 300 families of *Devadasis*, did yeoman service to certain temples in and around Bangalore. Rare compositions like *Taaya*, *Prabandha*, *Rakhi*, *Swara Pallavi*, *Swaraprabandha*, *Seesapadhya*, *chitra Natya*, *Saptalakswani Varna*, *Ashtadikpalaka Nritya*, *Puspanjali*, *Bharatha Choornika*, *Aaradhana Shloka*, *Suladis*, *Tirumalacharyas* and *Mysore Sadashivarayas Composition*, *Shalyan*, *Narasiah's* and *Veena Seshanna's*, *Kritis & Tillanas*.

Innumerable *Javalis*, *Padas*, *modinritya*, *Pathanga Nritya*, *jade Kolata* existed in this tradition. Chand Khans' *Tumris & Ghazals* were also danced by the Mysore and Kolar Dancers in 'Bharatanatyam' style. *Chitra natya* which included *ashtadala natya*, *brindavana natya* was another prominent composition performed in the temples.

*Nartana Nirnaya* of Pandarika Vittala of the 16th century describes dance compositions like *Mukha chali*, *Swaramantana Nritya*, *Pushpanjali*. The oral tradition reveals *Navasandhi Nritya*, *Kautukas* (*Kautvams of today*) and *Prabhandhas* were part of performance traditions. Treatises *Sangetha Darpana*, *Sangeeta Saramruta* and *Sangeeta Makaranda* mention and also describe a *Suladi Nritta /Nritya*, a prominent composition of Haridasas as an important composition of Dance repertoire in the 16th and 17th century.

The preceptors, Nattuvanars trained dancers in dance compositions like the *Vinayaka Kautuka Mayura* and *Sarpa dances*; *Shabdams on Manduka* and *Shambu Bhavani* in Telugu and Sanskrit; *Choornike*, *Melaprapti*, *Javalis* with *kanda padya* as prelude; *Padams* with *Amarushataka* verses (introducing the *nayika/nayaka*) were in practice. *Jayadeva Ashtapadis* were predominant in the Mysore School tradition – especially in the royal court performance repertoire. *Raaga Taana Pallavi* -an integral format of Carnatic classical music was adapted to classical dance in the *Nanjanagudu Guru Parampara* of the Karnataka dance traditions.

Chinnaih, one of the four Tanjore brothers introduced *Jatiswara*, *Varna*, *Shabdham*, *Alaripu* and *Thillana* to the Mysore tradition. 'Alari' was a composition similar to *Alaripu* which was performed in the Mysore region earlier to Chinnaih. Purandaradasa's prose and Sriparadaja's *dandike* were also taught in the oral tradition of Mysore School. The Mugur *parampara* Gurus practised dance compositions like *Swarajati*; *Ekambareshwara Shabdha*, *Arambha*-an invocatory dance composition and *Choornike*. Scholar and dance historian Dr.Tulasi Ramachandra shares an important information that *Varna* and *Alaripu* were not taught in the Karnataka *Nritya parampara* until the 18th century.A.D. She also added that a valuable source *Kanteerava Narasaraja Vijaya* by Govinda Vaidya describes and enumerates the dance compositions in a performance repertoire for 'Oddolaga'- festival processions.

Historical studies reveal and dance experts are of the opinion that Mysore *parampara* repertoire was based on texts, scriptures and the Vedic sources when compared to the prominent oral tradition repertoire and modern period compositions in the Thanjavur tradition. A relevant text of the 20th century - *Rasikajananamollasini* written by a prominent Devadasi Venkatasundarasani of Bangalore, records dance compositions like *choornike*, *pushpanjali* as practised in her time. Mysore school exponent Lalitha Srinivasan opines "Choice of *Kshetragna padams* by Tamilnadu dancers was different in comparison to Mysore school dancers, Telugu and Kannada *Javalis* were performed often in the Mysore court." Also according to the historic records, cultural exchange between Ganga Kings and Hoysala/Vijaynagar dynasties led to Gita Govindas' *ashtapadis* travelling to the south, especially into the Mysore school tradition much earlier.

The vast repertoire in the court of Mysore Wodeyars included dances for – *Krishna Karnamrutha shlokas*; *Bhartruhari's shatakas (neeti and sringara)*; Stanzas from *Rajashekara Vilasa*; *Shiva deeksha mahima*; *kanakadasa's devaranamas*; compositions of *Muthaih Bhagavathar* and *Veene Sheshana*; *kanda padyas* as prelude to *Javali* and *exclusive Padams*.

The *Nanjanagudu* tradition preceptor late Guru.V.S.Kaushik has recorded relevant performance compositions during his period in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. "In music, *Swara* is prominent and in dance *Jathi*. that

is the reason the music related *swarajathi* was converted to *jathiswara* in dance".(107:1981:Kaushik). He observes that "the 18<sup>th</sup> century compositions like *geeta*, *prabhandha*, *ashtapadi* gave way to the Thanjavur *Margam* as specifically prescribed by the illustrious Tanjore brothers. *Pada varna*, *taana varna* and *swarajati varna* were introduced along with *alaripu*, *jathiswara*, *shabdham padam*, *javali* and *thillana*. Some variations in the format included *ashtapadi*, *choornike shlokas* and *daru varna*. Sri Tyagaraja's *pancharatna krithis*, Sri Dikshitar's compositions, *tevarams* and *raagam-taanam-Pallavi* of music also got included in the dance repertoire". (108-109:1981: Kaushik).

The Sadir of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed compositions of the Thanjavur rajas, *Korvanji natakams* Marathi compositions, *thodaya Mangalam*, *pushpanjali*, *Salaam daru* and *Kautvams* included in the repertoire of *Sadir Katcheri*. Many of the listed compositions were part of the eighteen compositions structured 'nirupanas' which later was replaced by the Margam of the Tanjore quartet. "The *devadasis* of Tamilnadu performed *Navasandhi Kautvams*, *Panchamurthi kautvams*, *Bhujangha nrityam* and unique *pallakku natanam* (palanquin dance), *simha natanam* (chitra natya), *vaidika natanam* (special in tyagesha temple) including *ajaba*, *turanga*, *brunga*, *kamala*, *hamsa* and *unmatta natanams*."as part of temple rituals and festivals.(101:kalarani:2004).

The *Devadasis/Nayaksanis* of Karnataka performed *choornike*, *taaya*, *suladi*, *ashtadikpala shlokas*, *taaya*, *Shiva/nataraja prabhandhas*, *aradhana* and *mangala shlokas*, *chitra natya*, *devaranams*, *ugabhogas* in the temple premises.(*Alaya sampradaya*) The court-'*Bhogha mela*' repertoire included *Choorinikes*, *Jodiritya* (duets) for *varnams*, *padams*, *javalis*, *tumris*, *ghazals* and *sringara sholkas* of grammatical variations like *seesa padya*, *kandapadya amarushataka shlokas* and *champaka vritta*.(*aasthan Sampradaya*) The *sabha 'Thafe mela' katcheri* included *swara prabhandha*, *swara Pallavi*, *sapta tala varnams*, *javalis*, *padams* with respective preludes, *jade kolata* and *pathanga nritya*. (*Sabha sampradaya*).

Mysore school experts, research scholars and performing artistes' research based performances have unveiled rare compositions. Their investigation of literary, sculptural evidences have enriched the existing traditional performance format. The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century compositions like *mukhachali / pushpanjali* documented in *Naratana Nirnaya*; *suladi nritya/nritya* of *Sangeeta Darpana*; *gaundali/perani* in *Sangeetha Ratnakara* and *Nritya ratnavali* have been reconstructed and presented on today's proscenium.

The dance repertoire in 'bharathanatyam' of the late medieval period until post independent India has undergone changes with continuous and constant application of thought process, dynamic transitions and adaptations. The inherited heritage and tradition remains intact with contemporary modifications based on various sources and additions through human excellence.

It is understood that the Indian tangible and the intangible heritage have survived generations through two main parallel streams the Oral tradition and the Textual tradition. The Oral tradition has stood the test of time through the process of transmission of knowledge from *Guru* to *Shisya*. This dissemination of cognitive methodology has resulted in establishing a *parampara* and a *Sampradaya* per se.

Bharathanatyam -both Mysore and Thanjavur are the best examples of oral tradition with historic authentication that they gained momentum in the post medieval and early modern period. They have existed until today having survived the colonial period insensitivity and social adversities. The Oral tradition has remained a rich repository, passed over with dedication, conserving the artistic culture and customs. The transitioned conventional teaching methodology and the pedagogy intrigues researchers to delve profoundly into the subject time after time. "A recognition of framework of interrelatedness of regions, the interdependence of art forms, principles of timelessness is essential for a true understanding of the traditions of the performing arts of India"( Saskia.C.Kersenboom).

The Karnataka and Thanjavur *Nritya paramparas* have endured over three centuries strictly based on the oral tradition, ably supported by the textual tradition. Both the traditions have had an undoubtedly proud lineage of Gurus with expertise handed down successfully. The Mysore school of Bharathanatyam maintains its unique repertoire and continues to take it forward in the realm of dance.

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