

Eco-Aesthetic Awareness and Bharatanatyam

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Abstract: *The global environmental crisis has led to thinking about protecting the earth. Man began to protect his environment in all areas, and thus an environmental awareness emerged in literature and other art forms. This research paper is a brief description of how nature and the environment are aesthetically reflected in Bharatanatyam performances and how Bharatanatyam can spread and present ecological awareness.*

Key Words: *Ecology, Eco-Aesthetics, Environmental-Awareness, Bharatanatyam, Natyasastra, Abhinayadarpana, Hasta Mudras etc.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

Ecology is the study of the relationship between living beings, including humans and their physical environment. It seeks to understand the important relationships between plants and animals and the world around them. Eco-aesthetics is a relatively new subfield of philosophical aesthetics. This area includes not only the aesthetics of the more common objects and environment, but also a range of daily activities. Environmental philosophy was created in the Western Countries as a warning to protect the environment and human existence.

2. Indian Concept of Nature and Creator of Universe :

In India nature is worshiped as the mother and the creator of the universe as the father (the concept of Prakruthi & Purusha). The Indian concept is that Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati are the parents of the universe.

“Sivah saktya yukto yadi bhavati saktah prabhavitum
na ched evam devo nakhalu kusalah spanditum api
atastvam aradhyam hari hara virincadhibhir api
pranantum stotum va katham akrtapunyah prabhavati” (Saundarya Lahari,1)

(Lord Shiva, only becomes able.

To do the creation in this world along with Shakthi

Without her, Even an inch he cannot move,

And so how can, one who does not do good deeds,

Or one who does not sing your praise,

Become adequate to worship you

Oh , goddess mine, Who is worshipped by the trinity.) This sthothram in Saundarya lahari points to the importance of Siva-Sakti unity as well as the harmonious existence of nature and the universe.

In ancient India, human-nature relations were an integral part of daily life. In India, the worship of nature, such as land, air, water, fire and trees, has existed since Vedic times, not only for the well-being and prosperity of man, but also for the balance of the environment and the protection of society from disease and disaster. It can also be found in the arts and rituals of India. Lord Shiva, also known as Nataraja Murti, is the god of Indian dance. His wife Devi Parvati is the dance goddess of India. The famous Ardhanaareeswara concept is that they have incarnated into two equal parts of the universe. Ardhanaareeswara-dance of Siva and Parvati is very famous and inspiring. Bharatamuni's Natyasastra describes in detail the dances performed by Siva, Aavidha (vigorous) style and Parvati, Sukumara (delicate) style. (Natyasastra, 4.183)

2.1 Bharathanatyam

Bharatanatyam is a dance form that originated in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. It is a combination of Aviddha style and Sukumara style dance form mentioned on Natyasastra. It is the oldest, greatest and most glorious classical dance form in India. The chapter Rasavikalpam in the Natyasastra summarizes the 13 topics required for Natya. These topics are known as Natyasangraham.

Rasaa bhaava hyabhinayaa dharmee vrtti pravrttaya:

Siddhi: svaraasthathaadyam gaanam prakrti revacha.

Upacharaastathaa vipraa mandapaaschetisarvasa:

Trayodasavidhohyesha hyaadishtonaatyasangraha: (Natyasastra, 6.9-10).

Only when all these are properly combined in Bharatanatyam can the audience understand the theme presented by the dancer. Only then will the audience be able to enjoy that Bharatanatyam presentation and have an aesthetic experience. The basic structure of Bharatanatyam is based on the four kinds of Abhinaya (acting), namely Angika-Vachika-Aharya-Satvika mentioned in this Natyasangraha of Natyashastra.

Angiko vaachikaschaiva aahaarya: saattvikastathaa

Chatvaarobhinayaa hyetae vijneyaa naatyasamsraya: (Natyasastra, 6. 23).

These four types of acting are the fundamentals of all Indian classical dances. In addition to Natyasastra, dance treatises popular in the area are also used for the development of dance forms in the area. Bharatarnava (of Nandikeswara), Abhinayadarpana (of Nandikeswara), Sangeetasaaraamrta (of King Tulaja) and Mahabharata Choodamani (anonymous author) were used to compose Bharatanatyam.

2.2 Eco-Aesthetic Elements in Angikabhinaya of Bharatanatyam

Nowadays Nandikeswara's Abhinayadarpana is mainly used for the Angika abhinaya of Bharatanatyam, which is based on the Natyasastra. Some Hasta mudras, Charis, Gatis, etc. in Bharatanatyam are directly reminiscent of rivers, mountains, birds, animals and plants in our nature and environment. To depict the above, some new 'hasta viniyoga-s' (usages of hand gestures) were introduced by the dancers. The dancers proved that they could depict visually anything in the Bharatanatyam idiom. (Courtesy Sruti [J] Issue 203, August 2001).

2.3 Reflection of Nature into the Handgestures

Hand gestures in abhinaya of dance have the same position as that of letters in language. Each Hasta Mudra is distinct and can convey different meanings depending on how it is used. 'Abhinayadarpana' mainly deals with 28 'asamyuta hastas (single hand gestures), 24 'samyuta hastas' (combined hand gestures), hand gestures of different deities, Dasavatara hastas (10 incarnations of lord Visnu], hastas of 4 castes, miscellaneous hastas, 'Nrta hastas' and Navagraha hastas (nine kinds of planets) (Abhinayadarpana, 87-258).

Names of some mudras from Abhinayadarpana of Nandikeswara directly indicate its relation to nature. For example Mayura (Peacock), Ardachandra (half-moon), Sukatunda (parrot's head), Sikhara (peak), Kapittha (elephant-apple), Chandrakala (digit of the moon), Padmakosa (lotus-bud), Sarpasiras (snake-hood), Mrigasirsha (deer-head), Simhamukha (lion-face), Alapadma (a full-blown lotus), Bhramara (bee), Hamsasya (swan-beak), Hamsapaksha (swan-wing), Mukula (blossom), Tamrachuda (cock), Vyaghra (tiger), Kapota (pigeon), Pushpapuda, Sivalinga, Sakatam, Sankh, Chakra, Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Garuda, Nagabandha and Bherunda.

2.3.1 Examples of Hasta Mudras for Trees

Vrksha(Tree) hasta: Tripataka in Both the hands facing each other raising upwards from the middle and stretching the hands on sides above the head showing the trunk and the branches.

- Amalaka-goose berry tree: Samputa followed by the vrksha hasta.
- Arjuka- teak tree : Simhamukha followed by the vrksha hasta.
- Asoka – tree: Pataka in swastika position followed by the vrksha hasta.
- Kadali - banana plant: Mukula in movement followed by the vrksha hasta.
- Nimba - neem (margosa) tree Sukatunda are crossed followed by the vrksha hasta.
- Rasala-mangotree: Tripataka followed by the vrksha hasta.
- Tintrint -tamarind tree: Kangula hasta followed by the vrksha hasta (Sinha, Biswajith 1997, P. 223-226).

2.3.2 Examples of Hasta Mudras for Mountains

- Mountain Chakravala: Sikhara with the left hand held high and revolved round and round the right hand showing Soochi.

- Mount Great Mountain: Chatura facing upwards are crossed at the wrists.
- Kailas: Sikhara by the left hand extended and Ardachandra with the right hand moved round below.
- Mount Mandara: The right hand high showing Pataka, Ardachandra or Tripataka and Sikhara with the left hand raised to the same height.
- Mount Meru: Karthareemukha with the left hand held and Ardachandra with the right hand moved round below.

2.3.3 Examples of Hasta Mudras for Rivers and Oceans

Pataka brought from above with the movement like small waves towards down to indicate river and powerful waves for ocean.

- Ganga: Tamrachuda followed by the Nadi hasta.
- Narmada: Ardhapataka followed by the nadi hasta.
- Papanasini: Sukatunda followed by the Nadi hasta.
- Saraswati: Pataka and Chatura followed by the Nadi hasta.
- Tungabhadra: Hamsasya followed by the Nadi hasta:
- Yamuna: Chandrakala followed by the Nadi hasta.
- Ocean of Ghee: Chatura hands upwards and downwards.
- Ocean of Pure water: downwards to indicate waves Pataka hand held upwards and waves.

2.3.4 Examples of Hasta Mudras for Animals and Birds

- Aja - goat : Sikhara hands facing each other.
- Chakravaka - nudy goose: The two hands in Alapadma are fluttered.
- Dhenu- cow: Middle finger is bent while the other fingers are stretched.
- Gaja- elephant: Arala is placed at the ear by the left and 'kari' by the right hand.
- Garuda - king of birds: Garuda hasta.
- Kapota – pigeon: Kapota hasta
- Kraunca – curlew: the little finger is bent towards the palm in Alapadma.
- Kukkuda – cock: Bhramara hasta.
- Mrgam – deer: Mrgasirsa hasta.
- Mayura – peacock: Mayura hasta.
- Matsya – fish: Matsya hasta.
- Puzhu – worm: Sandamsa hasta.
- Suka – parrot: Sukatunda fluttered.
- Simha lion: Simhamukha hasta.
- Vanara – monkey; Mukula near the face and knee shaking.
- Varaha - wild boar: Varaha hasta.
- Vrscika- scorpion: In Ardhapataka the forefinger and the middle are bent.
- Vyaghra-tiger: Vyaghra hasta. (Sinha, Biswajith. 1997, P. 211-213).

2.4 Reflection of nature in Charis

Charis has been defined and enumerated by Bharata in the 11th chapter of Natyasastra defines it as the simultaneous movements of the waist, thigh, shank and the feet. According to Natyasastra, nothing is possible without Charis in Nrta and Natya. 32 Caris (16 Earthly and 16 Aerial Caris) described in the chapter titled Carividhana in Natyasastra (Natyasastra, 11.1-13). The names of some of the Caris themselves show their relationship with nature, for example: Casha-gati (gait of wild crow), Edaka-kridita (leap of lamb), Mrgapluta (Deer's jump), Bhramari (rotation of beetle) etc. Jayasenapati begins the third chapter on Charis in his work Nrta Ratnavali depicting the relation between Charis and nature.

Lilollaschashagati prabandhamrgipluto,
dyatbhramari manonjam,
Sasyanditabjam janithorusobham,
vakshayami charim vanararajitulyam.(Nrta Ratnavali, 3.1)

2.5 Different kinds of Gatis (steppings) in Bharatanatyam

In Abhinayadrapana of Nandikeswara defines and describes 10 types of gatis (stepping), including humans, birds and animals. The following are: Goose-step, Peacock-step, Deer-step, Elephant-step, Horse-step, Lion-step, Snake-step, Frog-step, Heroic-step and Human-step. (Abhinayadarpana, 309-322)

On balance, Bharatanatyam has not remained frozen. Many of its practitioners, through their fresh and polished interpretations, have either given a new sheen to the traditional repertoire, that is, enhanced the value of the inherited treasures or have added to the treasury by exploring new dimensions, prompted not only by fresh artistic perceptions of their own, but also by such factors as changes in the audience mix, and changes in environment (i.e., social context). There are, of course, the outstanding few who have done both. But the criticism, howsoever misdirected, is getting louder and its impact is being felt widely, confusing the multitude's perception of what Bharatanatyam really is. There is an urgent need, therefore, to review the dance-form in depth and clarify the issues (Pattabhi Raman, N. Courtesy Sruti [J] Issue 203, August 2001).

2.6 Eco-Aesthetic Thoughts and Vachika Abhinaya

Bharatanatyam has been under attack from those who consider it archaic. Some of the criticisms are: (a) It has an outdated repertoire. (b) It is boring to watch again and again the nayika pining for the nayaka. (c) It is like attempting to drive forward looking into the rear-view mirror. Such notions got a battering in Vande Mataram, a dance festival organised under the auspices of Natyarangam, a project of Narda Gana Sabha, 1-8 September, (1997) in Chennai. The festival threw up a host of interesting topics for classical Bharatanatyam: male chauvinism, eve teasing, dowry, evils of the current education system, the caste and reservation systems, threat of nuclear weapons, AIDS, the population explosion, corruption in politics, bribery, religious fanaticism, secularism, fraudulent god-men, the greed for riches, the Chinese aggression, the Dandi March, literacy, agriculture, mechanisation, industrialisation, environmental degradation universal brotherhood, abstract lines and forms, etc. (Excerpts from a review of Vande Mataram-a Bharatanatyam festival- by Jan Vasan, published in Sruti [J]158, November, 1997).

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Dance is such a form of fine art that makes the body itself the medium of performance for which reason this art remains much closer to nature and hence the so-called art as an Ecological awareness by origin. The renowned dancers of Bharatanatyam namely Malavika Sarukai, Geetha Chandran have many times been the center of mention for having come out their compositions with rich ecological awareness. Malavika Sarukai states that the Dance - Drama (Natyam) called 'Srunkhala' is the artistic produce coming out of her Ecological Awareness. Malavika took the pain of combining the verses of Rg-veda, Mahabharata, Akam Kavitas (Tamil poems), above all the specially written Nrthagitas (dance songs) S V Seshadri, to bring Srunkhala, the dance performance on to the stage. Geetha Chandran says, "On my view, there are two significant problems today. The first one is the problem of the environmental disaster which the earth faces with, and the next is of equality based on sex. Each artist is obliged to be an aid in the protection of nature. Art is the only means to have the finest creation of ecological awareness. Anyhow could be useful and might have its value only when people become aware of it. They make an attempt to combine these environmental problems symbolically. (Madhusoodhanan, G. 2006 P. 211-212).

2.7 Human-Nature Relationship in Traditional Dance Themes

The landscape descriptions are used in the rhetorical embellishment such as similes of Bharatanatyam compositions like 'pada', 'varna' etc. An example of the kind of literature normally sung for dance would suffice here. One of the great contributors of Bharatanatyam compositions Oothukkadu Venkata Subbayar picturises the mind of Radha in the 'padam'- "Alaipayuthe kannu"..... Kanada- Ragam, Adi-talam. Radha says.....

"Krishna, my mind is disturbed, rising like the waves towards you, listening to your joyous and [alluring] flute".

"Still, like a statue I stood, forgetting myself, listening to your amazing flute".

"The cool rays of the moon burn me like the noon-day [sun]".

"In total concentration my eyebrows are drawn to where you play your flute [searching for you]."

"The music of your sweet flute melts me, as it wafts on the wind to me".

And again in Palvadiyun Mukham, the poet says:

"When I think of your sweet childlike face, my mind is excited....." "Your [skin] colour is blue, like the ocean in which my mind is immersed from the very beginning".

"I recognize nothing that I see, because I can think only of you".

"If I look up, I can see only your beautiful face".

"In the waters of the ocean, everywhere I see your smiling face".

"In the song of the cuckoo bird, I hear your flute. It makes me dizzy [with joy].

"The peacock feather in your dark curls shines brightly blue in colour".

"When you play your flute in the woods, the peacocks dance and the cuckoos sing."

"My mind is steadfast on your lotus feet, and I dream that in all future lives I am born in this state - that is the boon I ask of you". (Sahai, Krishna. 2003, P. 143). In a Bharatanatyam performance landscape sceneries are imitated through repeated improvisations of imagining power with the hand gestures, rhythmic movements, bhavas, rasas etc.

2.8 Ecological Awareness in Traditional Themes

The traditional themes of Bharatanatyam can be observed through ecological aspects. The alleviation of human hunger, poverty and urgent need of ecological integrity. This because a better quality of environment would only help in ensuring the well-being and prosperity of future generations. This, therefore, raises the pertinency of traditional items of the performing arts repertoire. Let us take an example from the traditional repertoires and see their validity in the instant context. If every human and living creature has the right to safe and clean drinking water, then this message is subtly exhorted in the oft-seen 'Kaliya mardana' episode where in lord Krishna subdues the poisonous serpent 'Kaliya' who was polluting the waters of river 'Yamuna', making it possible for habitation. If 'Kaliya' is taken as synonymous to the poisonous wastes being emptied into the rivers then what is note-worthy in this mythological episode, is the 'subjugation, of 'Kaliya', emphasizing the need to allow microorganisms to live but disallow a cancerous growth of the same which makes the river waters 'dead'. What is being witnessed today is the unfortunate reality of poisonous industrial and sewage wastes indiscriminately polluting the river waters making them totally uninhabitable for all living creatures (Narayan, Shovana, 2003, P. 92). In another episode 'Govardhan Leela' (to lift 'Govardhan Mountain by lord Krishna) declares as to worship nature for our well-being.

3. CONCLUSION :

The practice of composing and performing Bharatanatyam based on epics and myths for entertainment purposes only needs to be completely changed. Dancers and choreographers should always remember and strive to apply the principle of Lokavritthanukaranam Natyam (Dance and Drama is an imitation of the world) as stated by Bharatamuni in Natyashastra. This article concludes with the hope that environmental awareness will continue to spread through Bharatanatyam.

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