

Music and the Dance

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(Presidential Address delivered at the Forty-Seventh Annual Conference of The Music Academy, Madras)

It is with mixed feelings of pride and humility that I have accepted the high honour bestowed upon me by the Music Academy, Madras in asking me to preside over their forty-seventh annual conference. My pride is in our South Indian traditions of music and dance and in my family's special heritage within these traditions; my humility stems from my awareness of my role as an individual artist within these great traditions, and from my debt of gratitude to all those who have helped me in my life-long dedication to the twin arts of music and dance—my family, my gurus, my friends and critics, and the public that has come to pay homage to these arts, to appreciate and understand them, not only throughout India, but, in recent years, also in other parts of the world. I have been asked to preside over a conference which has, in the past, been presided over largely by musicians,

and I feel that by doing so the paramount importance of music in South Indian dance has been rightly emphasised. Bharata Natyam, in the highest moments, may be considered the embodiment of sound in visual form, a ceremony, and an act of devotion. For more than two thousand years the *shastras* have confirmed that an individual dedicated to the dance must be equally dedicated to music, must receive thorough training in both the arts, as well as in all possible aspects of human life, traditionally classified as the sixty-four arts. Through this intensive education, the artist should be imbued with a deep understanding of the sources from which they stem. I am speaking of spirit and emotion, of *bhakti* and *rasa*.

To create the most perfect realization of *rasa* in a performance, all elements must be in balance. Although *tala* provides a wonderfully strong backbone, it is undoubtedly *raga-bhava* which evokes this *rasa* in all its varying shades and infinite variety. The rhythmic forms and its mould should be such as to augment the *raga-bhava*. The more the *raga-bhava*, the more does the *abhinaya* shine. We should never forget that in deriving *bhava-raga-tala* from the syllables of the word *Bha-ra-ta*, there is an underlying concept of the equality of these three elements. In the nuances in the *abhinaya*, the *raga-bhava* stands beautifully integrated, and includes the subtle expression of *gamakas*, the intonation of *shruti*, and the unfolding of improvisation in *niraval*. It is my teacher's instruction that the above-mentioned aspect should be brought out in the *abhinaya* and I hold it as my objective when doing *abhinaya*. The masters have created separately compositions especially suited for the dance. The hundreds of songs useful for music-concerts are of a different kind. Apart from these, the masters had separated the dance-music; we should inquire into their idea in doing so. Their main ideas are: (1) the *raga* and *tala* should stand inter-twined. (2) the *raga* and *bhava* should go hand in hand in *abhinaya*. (3) the *raga* and the words of the song should mingle together in the *abhinaya*. I do not have the boldness to take away the time-honoured creations of the great honoured masters of Bharatam from the dance performances. Songs suited to concert—singing afford no scope for the full creative unfolding of *abhinaya*. This is my experience. *Padas* and *pada-varnas* are indeed the jewels of dance-music. The *Bhairavi tana-varna* is the treasure of concert-music. The masters of dance have so set their creations that the sequences involving strenuous physical movements alternate with relaxed passages of *abhinaya*. Similarly between the *pada-varna* and the *tillana*, they placed *padas* for quiet *abhinaya*. *Natya-rasikas* may see this arrangement of fast and slow tempos alternating, affording a quickening and relaxation following each other. The students of dance who are to come up in the future should acquire an equal mastery of the twin arts of music and dance, understand the subtle aspects of both and abide by the underlying principles of the art as it had been developed by our ancestors over the centuries.

It was my good fortune to have been born in a family in which the traditions of music and dance have been the focus of life for generations. Although it is known to many that my grandmother's grandmother Kamakshi-ammal danced and sang in the Court of Tanjore, it is important to point out that my great-grandmother Sundarammal was a musician, as were my grand-

mother Dhanammal and my mother Jayammal. In fact, most of the artists of our family in recent generations have been musicians rather than dancers. Among those remembered are several violinists, and performers on the *veena*, flute, *ghatam*, and *mridangam*, as well as many singers. I feel proud to come from a family that has produced musicians of the greatness of a Vina Dhanam or a Jayammal, the quality of whose music is still remembered by many here. I may recall that my mother Jayammal was teaching vocal music at the Academy's College till her last days.

Within the family, it was Vina Dhanam, who outlined to me the repertoire of *padas* and presented their scope. She was trained in the school of both Dikshitar and Shyama Sastri and was responsible for the family's interest in these particular branches of music. My interpretation of the *padas*, then, depends on Dhanammal's interpretation of all of her music, and not just the *padas*. She set an ideal of richness and subtlety of emotional expression that shines like a lamp before those who have heard and appreciated her music.

It was my mother Jayammal who had me trained as a dancer, in spite of strong family opposition. Not only were those the days when Dance was being opposed but there was also a strong family stress on the importance of music. It was, in fact, a great musician from outside the family, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Ayyangar, who firmly supported Jayammal in her decision. Although Jayammal decided not to send me to school, she saw to it that I received all necessary training for the dance. It was she who selected Kandappa as guru, and after a severe and rigorous session of dance training from him from the early hours of the morning, she would make me sit next to her in the evening and train me in music. Kandappa was also a fine musician, and every *adavu* of his dance compositions was fitted perfectly to the *svaras*. Jayammal taught us the close relationship of *abhinaya* to *raga*—contour; she would say, "Your head, your whole body, must move with the *sangati*, with the *gamaka*, and not just with the *tala*".

Kandappa was my guru. He conveyed to me the legacy of the Tanjore quartette and he brought his own exquisite sense of balance in standardizing the Bharata Natyam repertoire and programme as I do it to-day. The initial inspiration within me to take up dancing came, however, from seeing a performance of Gauri Ammal when I was very young. If she had not brought the dance to such a stage of development, the combination of music and dance that I have attempted to realize would not have been possible. She is gone, she is missed, and I feel that a share of the honour in my being elected President of the Music Academy should rightfully go to her.

I have tried to keep myself open to learning from any one of artistic integrity and to add to and embellish the thorough training I received from my family and my guru. From traditionally trained ladies in our own family circles, I learned many things and received special help in languages, including Telugu, Sanskrit, and Tamil. One of them taught me to do an entire song with just my face: first, with the music, and then in silence. I had to go through the entire emotional range of the *sahitya*, using only facial expression, without the aid of hands or arms.

Up to a certain stage in my early career, Chinnaya Naidu taught to me the ways to develop improvisation, in *padas* as well as in other forms. He used to test me by singing short phrases with very little in the way of cues and then ask me to state which *nayika* was appropriate.

When I was already in my thirties, Kuchipudi Vedanta Lakshminarayana Shastri opened great new vistas for me, especially in *varnam*—improvisation. He once said, "If I had had a singer like your mother, with her music, I could have taken my art throughout the world". This remarkable man generously shared his immense knowledge with me, without holding anything back. In a very real sense, he gave me the confidence to attempt those things that I am doing to-day.

During my lifetime I have seen the art of Bharata Natyam rescued from ignominy and restored to a position of respect and world-wide interest. Those who supported me in the past often had to justify and support the whole cause of dance. I may mention Rasikamani T.K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar, who arranged concerts, to which he brought people who had opposed Bharata Natyam, in order that they might see for themselves the greatness of our heritage. He attacked the prejudice against it in his speeches and writings, as did Kalki, writing in *Ananda Vikatan*. Tiru V. Ka had once arranged my recital at a wedding. Among the invited guests were T.K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar and Kalki, both of whom had been opposed to Bharata Natyam and were surprised to see that it was being presented at a wedding. They were converted by the performance; they realized the sophistication and integrity of the art-form, and saw that it could be performed tastefully at a high level, providing a legitimate artistic and even spiritual experience, if approached in the proper way. In the nineteen-thirties there were many difficulties and obstacles to overcome. Subramania Chettiar and his brother Jalatarangam Ramaniah Chettiar arranged concerts and provided moral support in every way, and Uday Shankar introduced my art to northern India. I am especially grateful to Dr. V. Raghavan and the Music Academy of Madras for supporting me for more than forty years, giving me the opportunity to present my performance to a large general public, and providing a place for a school to train young dancers in my discipline of the art. Let me also not forget Kuppuswami Mudaliar, who was my *mridangam* accompanist from the very beginning, and whose tasteful drumming has contributed so much to the performance. Among early foreign supporters was the Dutch writer Beryl de Zoete. There are many others who have contributed to the interest in Bharata Natyam in India, as well as in other parts of the world, and, as a dancer, who has lived during this time of re-affirmation of an art to which I have dedicated my life, I wish to thank them with all my heart.

Out of my desire to propagate the form and style of this art taught to me by my teacher Sri Kandappa Nattuvanar, I have the privilege to dedicate my Dance School to his memory; even so do I dedicate to him the book on the art that Dr. Raghavan and I have written for the use of students, teachers and spectators. Only one thing I may stress on this occasion with your permission, as I am bound to, when I think of my teacher. To plan shortened courses and produce many musicians and dancers quickly is against the way of my teachers

and my grandmother Vina Dhanammal; it is harmful to art. The great objective is quality not quantity. The attention that is bestowed on dress and decor may be spent on actual training in the art.

It is after gaining the approbation of our country and especially of Tamilnadu, that I went abroad. In recent years it has been my good fortune to visit other parts of Asia, Europe and the United States, to perform and even to teach. I feel that only by adopting a broad outlook towards the many forms of music and dance which the human race has so far evolved, can we hope to understand the true position of Carnatic music and dance, and to see clearly in the face of many potentially disruptive forces in our cultural life its true genius, its unique artistic and spiritual achievement. I have had the opportunity to see the close relationship between music and dance all over the world, and to appreciate the myriad forms that have developed. I have come to realize that the arts of South India now have an international and world-wide importance. We must resist the temptation to mix them in inappropriate ways with other styles. We must study and experience them profoundly so that we are in contact with their deepest roots and meaning. I feel grateful to have lived in such a time as this, and to have been able to show to my compatriots, as well as to people throughout the world, the essential greatness of our South Indian traditions of music and dance.

I have indicated the great debt I owe to Jayammal and Kandappa Pillai, my family, my teachers, and to the Music Academy of Madras. My final *namaskaram* is reserved for all of you assembled here, my audience, my friends and supporters. Without your growing awareness of its greatness, the tradition of Bharata Natyam might already have died. Because of you I stand here to-day to preside over this great Conference. This honour really belongs to you the *rasikas*. The real temple of art is the heart of the *rasika*. I know that in your hearts and minds rests the future of our art. *Namaskaram*.

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to the lowest common factor, I can afford to be objective? A recent Indian film, *Garam Hawa*, focussing on the lives of a family belonging to a minority community, gave me pleasure at many levels, one of them being the reality or lack of Hindi-film "stereotype" in the depiction of character.

It is here that the author's meticulous use of facts and understated reportage achieves its hard objective. It is easy for us to carp at the intelligent blacks' hyper-sensitivity at the image projected of his people, for we remind ourselves, when has the American film industry ever been in the vanguard of changing mores and values? The average image of the white American is equally unreal. But from the nineteen-sixties onwards there has been a small but persistent attempt in films to analyse off-beat but vital human experience in America. The black experience as recorded in novels and plays by such writers as say, James Baldwin and Le Roi Jones, have yet to become the stuff of film. Black director/producers like Herbert Danska and Melvin van Peebles are few. Instead it is easier to produce *Shaft*—Gordon Parks, the reputed black photographer-now-director's answer to James Bond. It was released in Bombay a couple of years ago: a slick tough detective story with a smooth-talking, girl-loving, sharply-dressed but fearless black detective. This is not exactly a satisfying answer to thinking black people in the United States.

NITA PILLAI

VEENALAKSHANAVIMARSHE by Sangitashastrasarasvati Prof. R. Sathyanarayana, published by Sri Varalakshmi Academy of Fine Arts, Mysore, 1972, Rs. 30.00 (calico), Rs. 20.00 (ord.) (*In Kannada*).

Nearly fourteen years ago, a short, apparently insignificant work on Indian music was published by a significant institution. The work was *Veenalakshana* of Parameshvara; the name of the institution was the Oriental Research Institute of Baroda. Musicians and musicologists at that time probably thought to themselves, *parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus* (the mighty mountain labours but a ridiculous mouse is born!). For, *Veenalakshana* was edited by Sri Pade from a single, moth-eaten manuscript of about a hundred verses, written in poor style and grammar, It was full of lacunae and faults. Even its title was over-ambitious, since it had about five verses, containing the barest and the most elementary information about the *veena*. Its six, short *Ullasa* deal with musical notes, their rendering on the *veena*, a classification of the *raga, tala,* finger techniques on the *veena* keyboard, *melakarta* and their derivative (*janya*) *raga*. The work is in Sanskrit: Its author, who lived in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, adopts a very grandiose tone: he describes himself as a *kavishardula*, an expert in several *agama, mantra, tantra* (including the *dravida tantra*), sculpture, astrology and a great practical exponent of the *kundalini yoga*; and, of course, he says he is a great musicologist!

Veenalakshana was rightly ignored by musicians and musicologists alike. It was a typical work of its kind: loud and empty. It was, at best, a handbook for the tyro. It had, however, one remarkable feature. There was not a trace of enunciation, elucidation or explication of theory or technique. Practical application was its objective; brevity, even at the cost of intelligibility, was its main characteristic. The sum total of its descriptive content: *gamaka* techniques, *suladi tala*, fifteen *melakarta* (which are here, quaintly enough, neither *shuddha sampoorna* nor *raganga*, but *vakra* and/or *varjya*!) and some thirty-six *janya raga*. All this information

was taken for granted by both musician and musicologist alike and *Veenalakshana* was, therefore, regarded as yet another wayside anthill on the highway of Indian Music.

Or so we thought, till Prof. Sathyanarayana thought otherwise. The third of the renowned Musical Mysore Quarter—the Mysore Brothers—Sangitashastrasarasvati Prof. Sathyanarayana is one of our foremost musicologists and is the only Indian musicologist who is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (London). Member of the Societe Asiatique (Paris) and Member of the Society for Ethnomusicology (U.S.A.). He is an acknowledged authority on Indian musicology. His areas of special contribution to Indian musicology include inter-disciplinary extrapolation, text-critical studies, musical pedagogy, interpretative techniques in historical studies and the popularisation of the contribution of Karnataka to Indian music and dance. His writings are characterised by a creative and critical approach, by depth and dimension.

Prof. Sathyanarayana has been, like some of his colleagues, concerned about a lacuna in the history of Carnatic music. The problem is that modern Carnatic music evolved into its present state in terms of instrumentation, melody structure and rhythm structure from archetypes which crystallised in about the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; yet the written word is utterly silent and the lacuna in history was left unbridged. A deeper examination of *Veenalakshana* revealed to him that it was a veritable gold-mine of clues on the basis of which at least a part of the history of this all too crucial period could be reconstructed. So he put his re-edition and the (Kannada) translation of the work into an appendix and made his introduction the main thesis. In this way a unique work on Indian musicology, *Veenalakshanavimarshe*, was born. The product is a remarkable combination of scholarship and intuitive insight, detail and perspective, versatality and depth. He subjects the original work—line by line and word by word—to a critical exposure and arrives at extraordinary results. He stretches his hand far and near, into the printed or the written or the sung word and surveys nearly all the extant literature on the subject. He delves into the hoary past and draws upon the work of contemporary musicologists, musicians and composers. I have had the work read out to me, translated, explained, commented upon and elucidated with the oral footnotes and personal reactions of the author.

Veenalakshanavimarshe is written in three parts: in the introduction he discusses the author, work and date. There is a critique of the original work in which every word, every nuance of meaning and every intention of the original author is articulated into a substantial thesis. The Appendix contains elaborate and detailed reference material. As against the text and its translation of about thirty two pages, there is the main thesis of about four hundred pages. And every page bears testimony to the massive and monumental scholarship of the author.

Veenalakshanavimarshe has several significant features. It is the first and only work in Indian musicology which is entirely devoted to a critical penetration of a single, prior work. It is the only work in contemporary Indian musicology which subjects the original work to rigorous Higher Textual Criticism. The last sixty pages of the *Vimarshe* represent pioneering work in the enunciation and illustration of the principles of this aspect of Textual Criticism. This is a rare feat even in general Indian Literary Criticism. The *Vimarshe* engenders an adequate, interpretative technique entirely within the framework of the original. The most substantial part of the *Vimarshe* is the *Ragalakshana Kathanollasa*. In the context of evaluating the definition and description of the thirty-six *ragas* of the original work, the learned author has produced a historical survey of unparalleled scope and dimensions. This fascinating study traces every turn that a *raga* took every time. explaining how and why it did so. Some of the *ragas* have changed their names; some, their structure; some, both; some are about fifteen centuries old, while others are still in their infancy and only about two centuries old. All this is not excavation

of fossils: these are the *ragas* which are very much alive today. Nearly all available songs are gathered under each *raga*. Contemporary usage is very often evaluated. The rest of the *Vimarshe* places *shruti, svara, gamaka, tala* and *melakarta* in a detailed perspective in both concept and number.

Another interesting feature of the work deserves mention. Four pink pages at the end of the book compel the interest of the reader. These contain a unique song in notation, the only song ever composed, and set to music on the Indian musical instrument, the divine *Veena*. Prof. Sathyanarayana is himself a musician (he is descended from the great Pallavi Ramalingiah of *deshi-tala-pallavi* fame) and a composer. The words overflow with plural semantic projections and multiple symbolism from the *mantra, tantra* and *yoga shastras*.

The contents of *Veenalakshanavimarshe* deserve international notice and recognition. A translation into English and other European languages will be welcomed by students of Indian music and Indian culture.

S. BALACHANDER

CLASSICAL INDIAN DANCING by Mandakranta Bose, published by General Printers & Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, Rs. 25.00 (*In English*).

Painstakingly done, this glossary of technical terms of dance is the result of many years of serious research and hard labour. In a short but pertinent Foreword Prof. T. Burrow draws attention to the treatment of the subject by Bharata and his successors. The present work is mainly devoted to the classification and elucidation of the technical terminology found in about sixteen to nineteen works ranging from Bharata's *Natyashastra* to the *Sahityadarpana* and *Hastaratnavali*. According to the author, "the purpose of this glossary is to assist the student of Indian dancing to understand its technicalities". She rightly points out that, "no mere glossary can present the process, the essence of which is mobility, but it is hoped that the various parts of that process are explained in the following pages" In other words this is in no way a descriptive introduction to the art of dancing but an explanation of its technique. In order to make this explanation as full as possible the meaning of class names and basic concepts is given at the beginning. The method adopted is not one of a continuous alphabetical arrangement. The terms have been arranged under class headings, each class being arranged alphabetically.

After this lucidly stated objective, the author goes on to analyse, in the first place, the main terms used in the context of dancing, such as *Nrtta, Nrtya, Marga, Desi, Tandaya* and *Lasya* and then to analyse terms referring to movements related to specific parts of the body under the broad classification of *Angas, Upangas* and *Pratyangas*. This is followed by a consideration of the basic units of movements, such as the *charis, mandala, sthana, gati* and *recheka*. Finally a chapter each is devoted to *Karana* and *Angahara*.

According to the author, the tradition of Bharata was followed by the authors of all other treatises on dance except *Nartananirnaya* and *Sangitadarpana*. These two she treats separately.