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'PARAMPARA' AND 'NAVNIRMITI'

Tradition and Creativity in Indian Classical Performing Arts

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Abstract: This paper delves into the dynamic interplay between tradition and transition within Bharatanatyam, highlighting its organic evolution over time. It explores how legacy, as a living concept, adapts to societal changes and the needs of practitioners and audiences. Central to this exploration is the evolution of Bharatanatyam's repertoire, reflecting historical shifts and contemporary demands. The Margam, a structured sequence of dance items, serves as the cornerstone of Bharatanatyam performances, allowing for innovation within a principled framework. Historical insights into patronage during the Pallava, Chola, Nayaka and Maratha periods shed light on the art form's progression. Language also plays a crucial role in transition, with shifts from Telugu to Tamil compositions reflecting changing audience demographics and preferences. The paper examines the challenges of linguistic diversity in Bharatanatyam's presentation and its solutions through creative adaptation. Transition is further evident in performance spaces, moving from temples and courts to modern stages, reflecting conventional changes and artistic innovation. The Bhakti movement's influence on Bharatanatyam repertoire is explored, highlighting the fusion of devotion and aesthetics. Thematic exploration within Bharatanatyam celebrates creativity while retaining traditional integrity. Innovations in stagecraft, including lighting and sound, enhance the theatrical experience without compromising classical authenticity. The paper concludes by emphasising the enduring relevance of conventional ethics amidst change. Perspectives from eminent artists and scholarly insights underscore the importance of preserving Margam's structured format while allowing for creative expression. Overall, Bharatanatyam's evolution reflects a delicate balance between tradition and transition, ensuring its continued resonance and relevance in contemporary times.

Index Terms: Margam, Linguistic diversity, Bhakti movement, thematic exploration.

Aim

- To explore Paramparik Navnirmiti (traditional creativity) and Navnirmitik Parampara (tradition within creativity)
- To study abstraction, hypothesis and metaphor, and their role in the way tradition holds its integrity while it fosters creativity
- To evaluate the independence and interdependence between Parampara and Navnirmiti, and their part in shaping artistic expression
- To trace the path of artistic evolution, and to note where innovation adds to or moves away from tradition
- To study steadiness as the fulcrum of art forms

Introduction

Dance carries meaning through the human body. Dance gives a clear view of motion and emotion together. Dance works as a medium that crosses language. Dance moves between two areas, abstraction and storytelling.

At its base, dance uses the body of the performer to carry emotion, narrative and idea through movement. This applies to classical dance, ballet and contemporary dance alike. Dancers use their bodies as instruments. Through this instrument, dancers express the depths of human experience.

Classical dance works on a range between abstraction and narrative. Abstraction in dance holds pure movement. This movement stays open, without a fixed meaning. Choreography built through shape, rhythm and spatial pattern invites the audience to read the dance through feeling and instinct.

Narrative driven dance carries movement as storytelling. Gesture, expression and symbol build sequences. These sequences bring characters to life. Audiences connect with these characters through feeling and thought together.

Abstraction and narrative meet in dance. This meeting builds depth, complexity and range within the art form. Narrative gives common ground for understanding. Abstraction gives freedom from a fixed reading. Together, they build room for creativity and many readings of the same work.

The familiar shape of the human body helps an audience read movement and emotion. This familiarity connects abstraction and narrative for the viewer.

Classical Indian Dance and Aesthetics

Classical Indian dance stands on a base of aesthetic principle built across centuries. The Indian dance tradition treats the human body as a canvas. Indian dance draws various art forms together into one whole. This whole holds harmony between form and content.

An artistic experience opens the layered pattern of dance as an art form. This pattern shows how dance moves between tradition and innovation. This movement engages both the performer (Kalaakaar) and the spectator (Rasika).

The performer carries the artistic expression through body, emotion and movement. The response of the spectator completes this artistic dialogue. A trained and open spectator adds depth to the artistic experience.

Parampara: Traditional Art Form

Parampara is a Sanskrit word for the line of transmission of knowledge. Parampara means an unbroken series, a continuation, a legacy, or a passage from guru to disciple.

In Indian classical dance, Parampara holds a sacred bond between the teacher (guru) and the student (shishya). This bond carries the diligence of the student in practice and the spiritual and artistic guidance of the teacher.

The purity of this Parampara stands beyond measure. The Guru mantra from the Bhagavad Gita states this reverence:

*Ajnana Timirandhasya Jnananjanashalakaya
Chakshurunmilitam Yena Tasmai Sri Gurave Namaha*

This verse means: he who opens the eyes of one blinded by the darkness of ignorance, through the ointment of knowledge, receives my salutation as Guru.

Guru-Shishya Parampara continues across generations and holds its place today.

Parampara, as an oral tradition, carries knowledge from the guru to the shishya. This tradition passes on technique, along with vision and perception. The goal of this tradition points towards a state of bliss akin to Ananda. Parampara moves with each generation while its core principles stay in place.

Oral tradition carries knowledge in a strong way, yet each transmission holds the mark of the individual who carries it. Interpretation and experience shape each passage of knowledge. Societal change, personal

insight and cultural shift bring gradual change to this knowledge over time. The line of Parampara adjusts through this process of transmission.

This process holds a balance of inclusion and exclusion. New elements enter the tradition to add depth. Outdated practices step aside. This process follows the pattern of a tree. Tradition works as the trunk, while innovation works as the creepers or flowers that grow around it.

Navnirmiti: Creative Art Form

Navnirmiti stands for new creation. Navnirmiti can grow from tradition or move in its own new direction. Navnirmiti holds new thought, and this thought can add to tradition or stand apart from it. Navnirmiti often leans towards open abstraction. This abstraction pushes the edge of form and invites new reading from the audience.

Abstract dance turns away from familiar movement and narrative. This turn opens the audience to new situations and perceptions. This process brings new ways to read human motion, in both body and feeling.

In dance, Navnirmiti often carries a mix of movement styles, new use of light and space, and work alongside visual designers, musicians and martial artists. This form grew in visibility from the 1980s onward. Globalisation, the internet and international travel shaped this growth.

Dancers also draw from modern dance technique. This technique holds abstract, non-narrative movement, floor work, theatrical device and multimedia. This scope of creativity moves within an open edge.

Parampara and Navnirmiti

Parampara and Navnirmiti may appear as separate, fixed frames. They exist together, in a state of symbiosis. Tradition can hold creativity within it. This form is Paramparik Navnirmiti. Creativity can draw from tradition. This form is Navnirmitik Parampara.

These two forms coexist and shape each other's path within classical dance. Their relationship shows the balance between abstraction and narrative, along with the balance between tradition and innovation.

Parampara gives a base. Navnirmiti adds new elements that carry life into the art form. This relationship keeps classical arts active and relevant through time.

Navnirmiti supports the growth of Parampara, since it brings fresh perspective and creative energy into tradition. Tradition, held apart from new input, moves towards a fixed and closed state. For this reason, Navnirmiti holds a central place in the continued life of Parampara.

For example, the path of Bharatanatyam moved from Sadir to Prabhandhas to Nirupanas. This path shows a steady Parampara alongside a gradual entry of Navnirmiti. This process works in cycles. This cyclic process keeps the art form active. Where a dance item held excess repetition, that item stepped aside, and fresh conception entered as Navnirmiti in its place.

Parampara and Navnirmiti need a careful balance, held on a scale. A shift too far in either direction can disturb the harmony of the art form. The synchronisation of tradition and innovation stays central for the art form to grow and hold its depth.

Narrative, Abhinaya, and the Gap Between Dancer and Spectator

Narrative and abhinaya (expressive gesture) in dance carry the boundary between vritti (approach) and pravritti (impulse). This process also holds sthaya bhava (the permanent emotional state) along with vibhava (cause) and anubhava (consequent reaction), together with sanchari bhava (transitory emotion).

Abhinaya carries symbolic gesture. This gesture forms a symbolic language. This language holds challenge for a person new to the form, yet stays rooted in established symbol for the trained eye.

Within its span, Indian classical dance has dissected and refined its narratives for use in presentation. Some areas of narrative stay unexplored, and open interpretation sometimes reshapes the story. This opens the path for 'abstraction' or 'fusion between classical dance forms' as available options.

Innovation, according to Dr. Nandini Ramani, a well known critic, writer, Bharatanatyam dancer and teacher of the Balasaraswati style, should hold within set limits. Some choreography moves far in the name

of innovation. Speed and momentum should build gradually across a performance. A piece that calls for a leisurely pace, presented in a fast tempo, moves away from its intended reading.

A deliberate attempt to build unique dance movement may stand as Navnirmitti. This attempt holds value when it stays rooted in the foundational principle of classical dance, and adds to the art form in a meaningful way.

A balance between tradition and innovation holds central importance in classical dance. Creativity, at its best, adds to the heritage and aesthetic principle of the art form.

A gap stands between the dancer and the spectator in the experience of classical Indian dance. Traditional forms of dance sit within cultural and historical context. This context stays distant for many present day audiences.

Parampara may add to this gap. Traditional dance carries deep cultural and historical context. This context stays outside easy access for many viewers today.

Navnirmitti may also add to this gap, in particular where it brings in sound and light effect. These additions add production value, yet they can place the essence of the dance in the background. This placement can create distance between the expression of the dancer and the perception of the audience.

For an audience new to the language of symbol and tradition within classical dance, the experience of the performance holds real challenge. The contextual and layered nature of the presentation may leave part of the audience at a distance from the artistic expression on view.

The exceptional spectator holds familiarity with the language of symbol through which the artist builds this transformation into the canvas of art. Most viewers hold partial access to this language. The dance carries an invitation, through its rhythm, into a world across time, and through its sculptural pose, into a form in space. Many viewers stand at a distance from full identification with this form.

This awareness, even where present, holds a partial view of the interrelationship that runs through classical Indian aesthetics. This interrelationship connects dance, music, sculpture and literature into one whole. The dialogue between King Vajra and Markandeya, within the Vishnudharmottara Purana, gives an early account of this interrelationship. This account may point towards Navnirmitti held within Parampara.

The stability of the core principle of an art form holds a central role. A shift away from this stability may point towards a change in artistic value or direction. For this reason, a balance between Parampara and Navnirmitti stands as a present need. This balance holds the cultural heritage of Indian classical dance in place for future generations.

Conclusion: Conscious Representation of Dance Movements

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, a scholar and art historian, describes the dancing Shiva, Nataraja, as the supreme sign of spiritual and artistic aspiration. This image, in her words, stands as a symbol that holds together every part of life and every part of creative activity.

Classical Indian dance holds these basic principles as its ground. Bharatanatyam builds new expression upon this ground, in its search for Navnirmitti.

A balance between Parampara and Navnirmitti holds a central place for the continued life of classical Indian dance. Practitioners who hold this balance carry forward the rich cultural heritage of this art form into the future.

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