

## 11. Dance Music of the South

In our ancient books *Sangita* (Music) has been defined as comprising song, instrumental music and dance. In other words *Sangita* was a combination or synthesis of music and dance. For a long time these two went together as component parts of the same art. Of these two it is obvious that dance should have been the earlier art. All art generally is only a generalised expression of our reaction to certain phenomena of life. Any emotional excitement in life is generally accompanied by movements in the outer form which ensouls that life. These outer expressions of an inner emotional experience are first seen in bodily movements. Expression through vocal articulation must have obviously come in later. A fawn, a kid, a child first expresses its joy or grief by movements in the body. In nature there is some kind of a relationship between an inner experience and the outer expression of that experience. From a study of such relationships certain general principles emerge and these have been set forth in the works of great writers like Bharata and Nandikeswara.

When later on music developed as an art by itself it served two functions. On the one hand it developed independently as pure art music and on the other it served the

needs of the Dance art which also was developing on its own lines independently. There was, however, this difference, that while music can find expression for itself independently of dance, the art of dance needed music as an integral part of its function.

As music developed as an independent art it developed along lines some of which had no bearing on dance at all. Of course it also continued to subserve the needs of dance.

Dance has two primary aspects, generally called *Tandava* and *Lasya*. In the former, movements and rhythmic patterns—some of them intricate and subtle—dominate. Laya or tala aspect of music is stressed here. In *Lasya*, however, emotional expression (*bhava*, as it is called) is the dominant note. It is, therefore, obvious that music used for the dance art should be chosen so as to serve the particular needs of the dance item for which it is used.

In the first place it is a mistake to think that any music can be used for dance or that any song or composition can be danced. Generally musical compositions now used in dance are pieces specially composed for purposes of dance. For the *Tandava* aspect of dance we have pieces like *jatiswara*, *tillana* and some special types of *varna*. For *Lasya* where *bhava* is important we have *padas*, *javalis*, some *varnas*, and verses specially suitable for *abhinaya*. Though there is no hard and fast rule as to the nature of the theme chosen for *abhinaya* it has been almost an unbroken tradition to choose *sringara* (erotic) pieces for this purpose. There are valid reasons for this. All art is Divine in Indian Culture; dance, music, painting, etc., are all sacred vocations. Art and religion have always gone hand in hand in this country. The ultimate object of all art is to lead the human soul to achieve union with the Divine. This seeking for the Divine by the human soul is *bhakti*, devotion which is only one aspect of Love. In describing the various forms of this devotion it has been said that the

most effective form is *nayaka-nayaki bhava*, the human soul surrendering itself as the beloved (*nayaki*) of the One Lover (*nayaka*) of the Universe. I need not stress this point further. Viewed from this stand-point even the apparently erotic songs will reveal a high purpose.

Also pieces composed for *abhinaya* are made with this particular purpose definitely in view. The song should contain mostly words or ideas which lend themselves to the gesture language of dance. It is found that in general "erotic" themes meet this need very well. I do not mean that other emotions cannot be roused or that pieces cannot be composed on other themes. But it happens that in our lyric literature the most suitable themes are in *sringara rasa* and they are available in plenty. I have seen a few other themes also danced and with effect. Pieces like 'Innamum Orutharam' of Gopalakrishna Bharati, though obviously not erotic, are eminently suitable for dancing. But such pieces are rare. It has also to be borne in mind that all erotic songs may not be "danceable"—if I may coin a word to express what I have in my mind. For a piece of music to be 'danceable', especially in *lasya* style, certain minimum requisites are essential. The raga, the tala and the tempo should be in keeping with the *rasa* intended to be conveyed by the song. Also the *sahitya* should consist of words whose meanings can be adequately expressed in gesture language with the help of the eyes, hands, bodily movements and mudras. Of late, it has become the fashion to dance compositions of Saint Tyagaraja like "Ra Ra Seeta ramanee manohara" and other compositions like "Varukalamo" in *Nandan Charitram*, and "Tiruvadi Saranam". Frankly these are found to be flat and wooden, for the simple reason that they are not and were not intended to be "danceable". The best pieces provided by our lyric literature for this purpose are the *padas*, some of the *javalis*, *padavarnas*,

songs and verses from Jayadeva's *Gita Govindam*, verses from *Krishna-karnamrutam* and so on.

The general programme for a Bharatnatyam recital consists of:

- (1) Alarippu
- (2) Jathiswaram
- (3) Sabda
- (4) Varna
- (5) Some padas and javalis
- (6) Tillana
- (7) Some verses in Sanskrit.

Item (1) is only some sort of dedication to the art of dance. Item (5) deals mostly with the *lasya* aspect where emotions and expressions are predominant; this is the most appealing part of the programme as also item (7). In *varna* both *abhinaya* and rhythm are combined. In the other items we may say that the *tandava* aspect is stressed and rhythm (*Laya*, *tala* and *kalapramana*) plays the important part.

It has not been sufficiently recognised that *tala* (rhythm) has much to do with evoking human emotions. *Laya* has its own world of bhava like Raga. It is a matter of common experience that some suitable change in the tempo in which a piece is rendered often changes the emotional response in us. This accounts for compositions being set in varying tempos. Generally *padas* and *padavarnas* are meant to be sung in slow tempo and *javalis* in slightly higher tempo. In rendering musical pieces for dance this aspect of *layabhava* has to be kept in view so as to produce maximum effect.

In general the types of music intended for a concert and for a dance recital are not the same and should *not* be the same. Pieces meant for dance should be carefully

chosen having in view their structure, their tempo, their sahitya and the suitability of the music in which they are set. It is an aesthetic blunder to think that any song can be danced. Only "danceable" songs should be chosen for dance recitals.