

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF BHARATHANATYA

Traditional History:

As is common to all the Indian Classical doctrines, the origin of the subject of Bharatanatyam is traced to Brahma. This fact need not be considered lightly, as many modern scholars opined that the purpose or the intention of the past scholars was to tag an element of divinity to the subject.

There have been many Brahma-s, and this is an indication of non- eternity of Brahma. Brahma is eternal only in comparison with the short life span of the mortals. 14 *manvantara*-s make up one day of Brahma, one *manvantara* is equal to 4,320,000 human years.

Brahma (rightly interpreted as the *karyabrahma* evolved from the Absolute) is a treasure house of vast knowledge and can be the greatest source of it.

At the end of the *krithayuga* (period when moral standards prevailed), and at the beginning of *trethayuga* (*yuga* is a measure of time to span the age of creation), which is approximately 25lakh years from now, when the moral standards started deteriorating, the *devata*-s under the leadership of Indra, pleaded with Brahma to save the world from dissipation and decadence.

Brahma entered into a yogic trance, recollected Bharatanatyam, and devolved the knowledge to Bharathamuni entrusting him with the task of disseminating the scholarly art form to the mortals for the benefit of humankind. In furtherance of this, Bharathamuni spread this knowledge through his one hundred children conceived just by virtue of his sheer mental faculties (*manasapurta*-s)

To appreciate the nature of this entire yogic phenomenon which is instrumental in such mental devolutions of knowledge, one may go through Pathanjali Yogasutra-s, which speak of different levels of yogi-s, who exist in this creation for thousands of years, in proportion with the level of their *vairagya*. (Ref commentaries on the *sutra*-1/19 - विदेह पकृतिलयानाम् - *videha prakrithilayaanaam*).

A thorough study on scholarly interpretations on Pathanjali's work - *Vyasabhashya*, *Maniprabha*, *Raajamarthandavritthih*, *Nagojibhattavritthih* and so on, provide sufficient grounds for favorable unbiased inferences, and prompt us to take a fresh look at the traditional history with more understanding and wisdom. Further this has its own practical implications on a performance in fully realizing the essence of classical dance, even in the present day context.

Shiva is the originator of *thandava* (masculine or vigorous elements of dancing) which is an amalgamation of dancing elements like *angahara-s*, *rechaka-s* and *pindibandha-s*. Gods, goddesses, *deva-s*, saints, *gana-s*, *bhuta-s*, *yaksha-s*, *siddhara-s*, *amara-s*, *vidyadhara-s*, *uraga-s* and *pataga-s* witnessed Shiva's cosmic dance in Kailasa, and that dance comprised 108 *karana-s*, which thrived on meticulously integrated *angahara-s* (set of series of bewitching fluent movements) and *rechaka-s* (systematic movements of the limbs like neck, hand, waist and feet). In the context of drama, *thandava* or the masculine dance in an increasing intensity is performed on the stage in the *purvanga* part of a play and is called *vardhamana*.

Next, in order, to receive this knowledge from Shiva, were Hari, Brahma, Indra, Nandi, Tandu and other *deva-s*.

On the application of *thandava* and *laasya*, opinion of Raghavan.V. ('Bharatanatya' a paper presented at Sangeet Natak Academy dance seminar, 1958) is worth considering. Both were used in drama (*natya*), but only *laasya* appears to have been performed independently of the drama, danced by a *nati* or *nartaki*. Further, style that is more lyrical is of great interest to contemporary dancers and scholars, for 'it is in the wake of the classical *laasya* that the form known as Bharatanatya has developed. Even the individual items (*laasyanga-s*) of this type of solo performance are described in character and mood, and

unmistakably resemble present-day poetic themes in *shabdam-s*, *padavarnam-s* and *padam-s*.

Bharatanatya in different epochs:

Whereas the above findings are based on the mythological aspects, which have to be interpreted through spiritual perspective than setting them aside as mere beliefs, modern findings also need substantial representation, for a better idea about the antiquity of Bharatanatya.

One of the few artifacts to have survived the pre-Aryan civilization of Mahejo-daro is the famous copper statue of a young dancing girl. And, an abundance of early literary references to the dance of humans and gods may be found in Vedic and post-Vedic literature, epic poetry and the *purana-s*.

4th Century BC: References to dancing may be found in Panini's work on grammar, where he has mentioned about Shilali and Krishashva, two Buddhists, supposed to have written Natasutra-s (guidelines on dancing). Pathanjali's Mahabhashya (commentary on Panini's Ashtadhyayi) also mentions dance / theatrical troupes led by artistes named Granthika and Shobhanika.

Renowned teachers such as Thumburu, Kashyapa, Dattila, Ashmakuta lived during this period and were responsible for many works on Natya.

2nd Century BC: It is opined that Natyashastra took its birth during this period. It is a suggestive coincidence that Pathanjali who framed yogadarshana also live around the same period. Still it cannot be hastily and lightly construed that Brahma's period starts from this period. The art of dancing which existed long before had come to be devolved from Brahma to Bharatha around this period (consider the yogic phenomenon of connecting one's mind with those beings existing in the *prakrithilaya*, an ethereal plane, in this context).

Natyashastra served as the foundation of many art forms, which evolved into their different kinds in tune with varied customs, historical vicissitudes, geographical traditions and practices still, retaining the nuances of the main root.

Bharatanaty of South India, Kuchipudi of Andhra, Kathak of North India, Kathakkali and Mohiniattam of Kerala, Yakshagana of Karnataka, Manipuri of Manipur, Odissi of Orissa and the like are the results of such an evolution in the later period.

4th Century AD: the art gained immense popularity and enjoyed patronage during this period. At the same time, Devadasi system also was prevalent, and the Puri Jagannath temple had supported hundreds of Devadasi-s who contributed to the evolution of the art form

5th-7th Century AD: Chalukya Dynasty was known for its patronage for Bharatanaty, Sculptures in Aihole, Badami, and Pattadakallu, wherein different *bhangi-s* and *karana-s*, have been represented belong to this period.

8th - 10th Century AD: Similarly, Chola Dynasty is the golden age of fine arts. Brihadishwara temple of Thanjore, Nataraja temple of Chidambaram, Sarangapani temple of Kumbhakonam are a few which are the relics of the encouragement the art form enjoyed.

12th Century AD: Monumental carvings in the Halebidu and Beluru temples reveal the story of the great Hoysala-s, and in this context Vishnuvardhana's queen Shantala's name is immortal in the history.

Fine Arts in Royal Courts of Mysore :

1578 : Raja Wodeyar (1578 - 1617 - Wodeyar Dynasty was originally founded by Yaduraya in 1399) took over independent governance of Mysore Samsthana after the fall of Vijayanagara Empire in Thalikota War- 1565. The culture and traditions hitherto followed were continued unaffected gradually gaining progressive prominence. An influx of artists, of various faculties, from the previous empire started enriching the new one.

1638: Existence of organized theatre -*nataka shale*- may be dated back to this era. Subject matters for the dramas were selected mostly from the epics, and some of them pertained to social themes as well. Sanskrit and few Kannada plays were in vogue - *mitra vinda govinda* was a Kannada play standing out as an example.

1673 -: Though no specific names of dancers are available, descriptions of the court by Honnamma, the court poetess during the reign of Chikkadeveraja Wodeyar (1673 - 1704),

speak of beautiful courtesans performing at the court. Available literary references vouch for the presence of sound classical framework supporting those performances, and hence their significance as precursors to the present Mysore Style of Bharathanatya.

Folk art receiving encouragement from the people, and literature in furtherance of concretizing them have amply left their trail in such works as in Soundareshvarana Yakshagana written by Shanthavira Deshika a Lingayat poet and later in Padmavathiya Koravanji.

Geetha Gopala penned by the King after the style of Geetha Govinda of Jayadeva enriched the literature of his time.

References to Bharathacharya and the technique of dancing as prescribed in the treatises on the subject like Bharatha Sastra and so on indicate that classical dance was in a very flourishing condition during the period.

Regular schools were run to train the young artistes in dance and music. Folk dances like Kolata, Peacock dance, Parrot dance, and Swan dances were popular (History of the Wodeyars of Mysore – A. Sathyanarayana).

Wodeyars- Chikka Raja Wodeyar (1673- 1704) and his son Kanteerava Narasaraja Wodeyar (1704 – 1714) were known to have composed ten to fifteen Yakshagana-s in Kannada and Telugu.

After the death of Devan Purnayya (1732- 1812) court intrigues (it is interesting that Veena Venkatasubbayya – 1819- acting as the king's personal adviser (musahib) was also an accomplice in the intrigues against the king) brought down the efficiency in the administration, and the Wodeyar lost control over the administration. The British promptly took over the State and administered through their direct representatives (1831-1868). Mummadi spent his free time in pursuit of his interests in literature and fine arts including plays.

18th Century: This period has brought about an important turn in the form of Bharathanatya, and the credit goes to the Tanjore Quartet- Chinnayya, Ponnayya, Shivanandam and Vadivelu whose thorough proficiency in both classical music and dance, had systematically blended both these inseparable, interdependent and interrelated

components into an integral whole. This unique structuring is still the foundation of the present day style of presentation of Bharathanatya.

The quartet were responsible for great reformation and refinement brought into the classical dance form.

Chinnayya joined the Royal Court paving way for the introduction of his style of Bharathanatya in Mysore (this style was in addition to the Mysore style which was already in vogue).

1868: Inclusion of another art form- the theatre- took the cultural history of Mysore to perceptible heights. Inspired by Dashavathara plays (Yakshagana) at Dharmashtala, Mummadi brought the players to Mysore and they were paid regular salary after the troupe was converted into a regular drama company – Aramane Company – during the next Wodeyar's rule. Nandalike Vishwanathayya was the manager of the Yakshagana troupe and with his entry into the cultural world of Mysore, entered another school of music through his second son Bidaram Krishnappa, whose tutelage is still alive and flourishing.

“He met all its needs. If the modern Kannada Theatre was able to build on sound foundation in Mysore State the credit must go to Chamaraja Wodeyar”- 1868-1894 - (Sindhuvalli Anantha Murthi – Theatre Movements in Karnataka – Gubbi Veeranna)”

The concept of theatre was not entirely new to Mysore (refer Kanteerava Narasaraja Wodeyar's period 1638-1659)

Aramane Company was constituted as of necessity to fill the lacuna in the field of Kannada theatre in Mysore, and it was when the people were longing to witness plays presented by Marathi and Parsy companies – around 1875. As a consequence, Shakuntala of Kalidasa got translated into Kannada by Basavappa Shastri and staged for the first time in 1881.

Subsequently Sri Chamarajendra Karnataka Nataka Sabha (1882-1917) took its birth. After the merger of another independent company, Rajadhani Nataka Mandali founded by Mandyam Rangacharya, the original company toured all over Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh with success. The plays were being staged at Hosa Chatra – the present Sanskrit Patashala.

Chamaraja Wodeyar's court treasured and encouraged musicians and dancers. Names of Thirumkudlu Sundaramma and Jetty Thayamma enriched the field of classical dance.

Music and artistry were inseparable ingredients in the lives of the Wodeyars, and Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar (1895-1940) was no exception.

Venkatalakshamma (1906-2003, a disciple of Jetty Thayamma), a dancer and also a musician (a disciple of Devendrappa), was appointed as court dancer in 1928. She later served as Assistant Professor in the College of Fine Arts, Mysore University, which recognizing her services, awarded a honorary Doctorate. She is a recipient of Padmabhushana in 1992.

Natyacharya Thiruchengod Subramanya Pillai was a well-known court dancer. Mugur Chinnamma (1900-1972) was another exponent of Mysore Style of Bharathanatya and was a disciple of both Venkatalakshamma and T. Subramanya Pillai.

Bharatanatya in the recent times (and scholars' findings) :

Udaya Shankar's great contribution to Indian dance with his international experience and perspective, couples with in vigorously independent style. He introduced into India ballets which, though basically Indian, were "nevertheless his own personal creation...influenced by European expressionist schools as well as the dances of the Far East. Shankar wanted to forge a dance, which would be relevant to modern conditions, in which contemporary problems could be expressed, and which would have meaning for his audience. To do this he employed all the resources at his disposal irrespective of their origins, and still created an art, which could not be mistaken for anything but Indian.

Another well-known Indian dance personality to come under the influence of internationalism was Rukmini Devi, founder of the Kalakshetra International Arts Center. Showing an early and stubborn sense of cultural independence she espoused Theosophy and married Dr. George Arundale, Her intellectually disciplined dedication to the art focused the public attention on the possibility that the dance might contain something of interest and value in the lives of respectable people (John Higgins)

Noted authority Harprasad Shastri has opined on the period of Bharathanatya that it was written in second century BC. Manmohan Ghosh, another research scholar has

concluded, based on the style of language, the meter adopted and the geographical findings that it was between first and second century BC. Ramakrishna Kavi, an authority on Natyashastra has fixed it to be 500 years before Christ.

During the above period, of all the *shaddharshana-s*, *sankhya* and *yoga* philosophies were the most accepted and followed doctrines. Pathanjali, the preceptor of *yogadharshana*, also lived in this period. Though it is difficult to pin point whether Bharatha was influenced by *sankhya* or *yoga* or any other Darshana, yet it is clear that *yoga* as a means or technique has commanded a great deal of significance in the text.

When one goes through Abhinavabharathi, *bhashya* on *natyashastra* by Abhinavaguptha, it is self evident that he had imbibed and inculcated, in his approach to dancing, the principles and understandings of *sankhya* and *yogadharshana* -s, and he has also established the spiritual goal of Natyashastra. Inclusion of *shantharasa* as the ninth one is very well justified by Abhinavaguptha, who even goes to the extent of considering it as the origin of all the other *rasa-s*.

Abhinavaguptha was a scholar in *tantrashastra*, *darshanashastra*, *kaavyashastra*, *natyashastra* and *sangeethashastra*. He has to his credit around forty-one texts. His period was 10 to 12th Century AD.

The present work is based on Abhinavaguptha's elaborate commentary on *natyashastra* and I have been influenced deeply by importance of the eight limbs of *yoga* in to process of understanding and practicing Bharathanatya.

CHAPTER 2

ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF YOGA DARSHANA

All the spiritual schools – be it Jaina, Bouddha, Vaisheshika, Naiyyayika, Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shaktha, Yoga - who agree with the concept of Liberation, have no difference of opinion as to the path of the *sadhaka* as comprising eight limbs.

They may have their different philosophies to establish the attainment of moksha, but all have unanimously accepted and followed the eight limbs -*Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana* and *Samadhi*. (Jivanmuktiviveka)

सर्वोऽपि तैर्थिको मोक्षमङ्गीकुर्वन् योगिचरितेऽपि विसंवदितुमर्हति, आर्हत बौद्ध वैशेषिक नैयायिक शैव वैष्णव शाक्त साङ्ख्य योगादि मोक्षशास्त्रेषु प्रतिपाद्य प्रमेयस्य नानाविधत्वेऽपि, मोक्षसाधनस्य यमनियमाद्यष्टाङ्गयोगस्यैकविधत्वात् । (जीवन्मुक्तिविवेक – स्वरूपसिद्धि प्रयोजनप्रकरणम्)

(*sarvah api thairthikaha moksham angikurvan yogicharithe api arhatha- bouddha- vaisheshika- naiyyayika-shaiva-vaishnava-shaktha-sankhya- yogadhi moksha shastreshu prathipadya prameyasya naanaa vidhatve api, moksha sadhanasya yamaniyamaadi ashtaanga yogasya ekavidhatvat-Jivanmuktiviveka*)

Though as a practical means to an end, yoga existed in Vedic times, yoga as a distinct philosophy, was established by the great sage Pathanjali around two thousand three hundred to two thousand five hundred years back.

Pathanjali was a sage (*rishi*), a grammarian, and a physician too. Even to this day, his works are considered as standard texts.

There are six main schools (*shaddharshana-s*- paths) on philosophy pertaining to spiritual matters.

1. *nyaya*
2. *vaisheshika*
3. *sankhya*
4. *yoga*
5. *purvamimamsa*
6. *uttaramimamsa* (Vedanta)

Among the above six, *nyaya* and *vaisheshika* have many principles in common. *sankhya* and *yoga* have many common approaches, and *purvamimamsa* and *uttaramimamsa* go together in many aspects.

In fact, it is opined that it is impossible to fix the number of these *darshana-s*. The reason is that the individual in pursuit of liberation is at liberty to pursue his own path provided, it is established on logic, observation, understanding and experience. It has always been a sincere effort to describe the experience of Truth, in different ways, in spite of their awareness that such Truth is only to be experienced, and is something ineffable. The general goal is *moksha* and the only means is *vairagya*. All practices are subservient to the main goal and are ancillary to the approach.

Yet, the scholars have considered and recognized around 363 as the most important ones, and of them nine - *charvaka darshana*, *jaina darshana*, *boudha darshana*, *nyaya darshana*, *vaisheshika darshana*, *purvamimamsa*, *uttaramimamsa*, *sankhya darshana* and *yoga darshana* - are highly placed. In this list, *charvaka darshana* is an exception in the sense that it embodies a materialistic or a hedonistic view, not recognizing liberation, and therefore neither rebirth nor *atma*. For them the material body is everything and this birth the ultimate.

Origin of Yoga as a means of Liberation:

The exact time or the period of the origin of Yoga as a path is difficult to arrive at. We have only to depend upon the material proofs to have a probable idea.