
Analysis of choreography by Guru Bharatakalamani Dr. C. Radhakrishna, of the Kolar tradition of Karnataka

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Abstract -

Introduction - Most of the dance Gurus in India, have been into choreography as they have been conducting performances since centuries, at temples, palaces, halls, auditoriums. Bharatakalamani Dr. C. Radhakrishna, the great Guru of the 20th century, who belonged to the family of Naṭṭuvanārs of the Kolar Parampara, was an excellent bharatanatyam dance composer but also well-known for his dance and drama choreography. The Kolar Sampradāya is a part of Mysore School of Bharatanatyam and this was pioneered by Yajaman Kolar Kiṭṭanna at the end of 19th century during the reign of King Sri Chamaraja Wodeyer X of Mysore.

Need – While several people have known Guru Dr. Radhakrishna, who even had an honorary Doctorate in Bharatanatyam from Gangubai Hangal University, he has been a hidden gem to many. He had been one of the torch-bearers of Karnataka Nartana Parampara. The researcher would like to increase awareness about him.

Being one of the chief disciples of Guru Bharatakalamani Dr. C. Radhakrishna and Guru Smt. Meenakshi Radhakrishna for more than four decades, following the Kolar parampara of Karnataka and having received valuable information from them, the researcher would definitely wish to throw light upon his creations, regarding their tradition, compositions and choreography.

Scope – The scope is endless. Kolar style repertoire is very vast, having a rich heritage. Even if explanation of three types- Nrutya, Nrutya and Nāṭya are considered, it would take much more time and space than

expected. Guruji had ably served the dance field for over seven decades, guiding hundreds of students, innumerable nrutyabandhas.

So, in this paper, the researcher limits herself to brief explanation of three topics giving one example for each type.

Objective - This paper focuses on the analysis of one example of Nrutta – Swarapallavi and one example of Nrutya - T̥hāya and of Nāṭya –one his famous dance-dramas, ‘Nāṭyarani Shantalé’ – the way he expressed these via dance and also the various techniques, technologies, way the artists were used to bring ultimately an effective presentation

Method – Methodology is descriptive. There are very few books written about him. Having studied under him from the age of 10 and until even 2 years back and gained extensive knowledge about it, the researcher would like to analyse the ideas in choreography based on self-experience. The news paper reviews as well as matter about him have been given occasionally by great critics and they portray his greatness.

Findings – After writing about the nrutyabandha or nāṭya, it is analysed under various headings like the movements, pattern of entry and exit, music, voice used, tāla, rāga, costumes and make up, stage décor and lighting and other aspects. This paper has been written to give all the background information about the Guru as well as his ideas.

Conclusion - It can be concluded that the results of the study can be used by people, in future. This makes the readers realize Guru Radhakrishna’s greatness and can get motivated to learn and continue our parampara.

Keywords -

choreography, Guru Radhakrishna, dance composition, Kolar Tradition, Karnataka, bharatanatyam, aasthaana aalaya nrutya

Introduction –

Bharatakalamani Dr. C. Radhakrishna, the great Guru of the 20th century, belonged to the family of Nattuvanars of the Kolar Parampara. After he established the dance school ‘Chittaranjani kalakshetra’ in 1952, he spent his life propagating the rich tradition to hundreds of disciples for more than 7 decades. He

was also holding classes in Madurai, Thanjavoor, Chennai, Chitradurga and in Bangalore at Rajajinagar, Bangalore Tamil Sangham and Bharrateeya Vidya Bhavan at various points of his life. He was Chairman of Karnataka Board K.S.E.E.B Bharatanatyam exams and member of Sangeetha Nrutya Academy, Govt. of Karnataka

He would also teach compositions based on Margam – Alarippu, Jathiswara, Shabda, Varna, Pada, Javali and Thillaana but also nrutyabandhas from the manuscripts of Kittanna – Choornika, Thaaya, Swarapallavi, etc. He would also teach various other compositions not from the manuscripts as well as his own compositions also e.g Swara-sahitya-abhinaya. There were the presentations of ‘Bharatamela’ done focusing on the rare nrutyabandhas from those manuscripts by his skilled and well-trained disciples. He has presented various dance-dramas like Shantala, Vishakanya, Padmavati Parinaya, Shakuntala and Vaidyarajah Namasthubhyam. He has also choreographed for dances in films like Hamsageethe, Puraana Ganga and Kaveri.

Life, education and training – He was born on Friday 23.1.1928 at Mysore. He was the eldest son of mother Chellamma and father B.R. Chennaiah. After his mother’s death, he was well-cared for by his step-mother at Bangalore. He belonged to the family of Nattuvanars and learnt classical dance from his distant relative Nattuvanar N.Gundappa and completed his first performance / arangetram in 1944. He also learnt karnatic music from Tavarekere Ramarayar and Chintalapalli ramachandra Rao. He had done his Diploma and worked as a teacher at a Foundry at an Engineering College as per his father’s wishes but then considering his interest in subjects like dance, drama and music, his father supported him to start an Association ‘CRK Sangha’ with great people like Puttanna Kanagal, Actor Uday kumar, Chi. Udayshankar and others, where he suffered losses. In 1960, he got married to Meenakshi, grand-daughter of Yajaman Kittanna as his Guru wished.

Experience - Learning dance from N.Gundappa, teaching other students, directing dramas as well as studying Diploma at his college was going on simultaneously. At the age of 17, he was appreciated for his music kacheris and would also sing for dance performances. He had enacted as Bauddha Sanyasi in Gubbi Veeranna’s drama, ‘Gautama Buddha’. After the CRK Sangha parted, he turned towards dance teaching – many devadasi children as well as people who valued dance were his disciples. He established ‘Chitta ranjini Kalakshetra’ in 1956 and concentrated as a teacher, nattuvanar, singer and director of traditional classical dance. He has also learnt Padas, javalis from his relatives Hindoopura Padmamma and Nagamma. He was selected to present his style of dance as the director of ‘Mysore State Cultural Troupe’ all over the country, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari.

He conducted his student Pushpa’s arangetram in Rasika ranjani sabha in Madras, won great laurel and earned the title ‘Bharatakalamani’ by great K.S. Ramasvamy Shastry. Training students regularly in Madurai,

Madras and Bangalore was his routine. He has guided thousands of students over his lifetime and had conducted performances all over the country. He was member of Sangeeta Nrutya Academy in 1972-76 and Chairman for K.S.E.E.B Bharatanatyam exams for many years. He was experienced in drama direction of 'Prema Bali' at the CRK Sangha. He was offered dance direction of movie 'Shivalinga Sakshi' and later directed some more classical dances in films. He has directed, presented nrutya natakas and gained lot of appreciation. Until he was 94 he did take classes. He passed away on 30.3.2024 at the age of 96.

Historical value – At the end of 19th century there were many predominant Gurus and schools co-existing at Mysore encouraged by the Wodeyer Kings. Among them, Yajaman Kolar Kittanna who conducted performances during the reign of Chamaraja Wodeyer X, can be considered as the pioneer in the Kolar School of Bharatanatyam which was then called Taphe and Mela based on the place of performance. The Kolar Sampradaya can be considered as the part of Mysore School of Bharatanatyam. His disciples, Nattuvanar Gundappa and Puttappa were also well-known. N. Gundappa's disciples, Guru Radhakrishna and his wife Meenakshi Radhakrishna have done great service to the community in preserving the compositions and thereby the tradition.

Characteristics–

- Very sincere and dedicated
- Mostly had success in whatever he took up
- Had knowledge and skill of dance direction, planning and evaluation, classical music composition, nattuvangam, poetry and prose script, singing, acting and more.
- Taught based on the ability of students
- He wished not to run after popularity and awards

Awards and titles

Natya vallanar, Natya shiromani, Shantala prashsti, Rajyotsava prashasti, Attendance award, Grateful for Guru award and many more

Contributions

- Guidance to thousands of students – the torch bearer of Kolar tradition spreading knowledge about the past traditi,
- Margam presentations
- Margam presentations using DVG antahpura geethe (Varna, Pada, Javali, Thillana, etc.)

- Presented after researching the manuscripts of YKK ‘Bharatamela’ – I,II,III,IV, V aalaya aasthaana nrutya in sessions, to his trained disciples.
- He had also choreographed 35 tala thillana, simhanandana tala tillana and various other compositions using suladi sapta talas, chapu talas
- Kalidasa Krutidarshana, Shantale, Vishakanya, Padmavati Pparinaya, Vaidyaraja Namastubhyam,
- Movies – 7-8 classical dance direction – hamsageete, kaveri, sangharsha,
- He was involved in music direction for dances were excellent with rich lyrical value and appeal.
- Guided a number of researchers regarding various topics in bharatanatyam
- Resource person for many authors like V.S Kaushik and others, who published books.
- He revived the rare Chitra Natya – composed Astadala and Brindavana natya to draw on sand and rangoli
- Guided as Pradhana acharya at Kaishiki Natyavahini
- Guided as President of Karnataka Bharatagama Pratishtana to revive Karnataka paramparas.

Contributions listed in the **Appendix** in page 15.

Choreography can be considered the art of planning and arrangement of movements based on the theme, music, artists, etc. This art was mastered by Guru Radhakrishna and his contributions portray his abilities.

Significance of the paper

- There are a few papers written about the composer and so writing on him would throw light on him as well as his choreography.
- Choice of one nrutta, nrutya and natya would show various ideas regarding the dance compositions
- As one of his principal disciples for many decades, the researcher wishes to share her memories to the future generation
- This would also show the current status of the Kolar Parampara

Objectives: This paper focuses on Guru **Bharatakalamani Dr. C. Radhakrishna** and the analysis of one example of Nrutya – **Taaya**, one example of Nrutta – **Swarapallavi** and of Naatya – one his famous dance-dramas, ‘Shantale’ – the way he expressed these via dance and also the various techniques, technologies, way the artists were used to bring ultimately an effective presentation.

Review of literature

The existing books are just few in number,

- Guru Bharatakalamani Naatyaachaarya Sri C. Radhakrishna Amruta mahotsava, Bengaluru, Karnataka, 1999

In this book there are articles about his life, Kolar parampara, classical dance heritage of Karnataka including articles by Dr. Mala Sashikanth and Dr. Lalita Srinivasan. This book showcases his greatness.

Karnataka dance tradition would have been extinct if it were not for Dr. Radhakrishna and his wife and many other legendary Gurus. (Srinivasan, 1999) Kittanna's school was recognized for its temple, palace traditions and social performances that included Bharata choornika, Prabandha, Astadikpalaka Aradhana, Svarajathi, svaraprabandha, swarapallavi, Saptataleshvari varna, padas, jaavalis, taaya, sulaadi and so on. The repertoire was rich and unknown elsewhere. (Srinivasan, 1999)

- Some research papers of Dr. Mala Sashikanth, Dr. Choodamani Nandagopal mention about him in the book Classical Dance Heritage of Karnataka by Karnataka Bharatagama Pratishtana, Bengaluru published in 2012.

Even today as many common people think Bharatanatyam has had its origin only in Tamilnadu. But the paper 'Dance heritage of Karnataka' by Dr. Choodamani Nandagopal, gives literary, sculptural and epigraphic evidences which depict that Karnataka also had a dance tradition which dates back to 400 A.D. This indirectly shows the value of the Karnataka dance tradition which was continued by Guru Sri Radhakrishna with lot of dedication. (Nandagopal, 2012)

- The paper by Padmini Sreedhar, 'Bharatakalamani C. Radhakrishna – the only surviving Natyaacharya of the Devadasi tradition', is a part of the same book, Classical Dance Heritage of Karnataka published by Karnataka Bharatagama Pratishtana, Bengaluru, 2012.

This paper highlights about Guru Radhakrishna's major contributions in the field of dance from the start of his career until he was 85 years old.

News paper cuttings also have added to the information.

Methodology

Methodology is descriptive. There are very few books written about him. Having studied under him from the age of 10 and until even 2 years back, have lot of knowledge about it, the researcher would like to analyse

the choreography based on own experience. The news paper reviews as well as matter about him have been given occasionally by great critics and they portray his greatness

The data or the nrutyabandhas have been learnt under his guidance and performed many times. Being a researcher, analysis has been done over many years and has been written in this paper.

The definition of choreography has been informed by various ways, but the researcher has considered the aangika, vaachika, aahaarya and saatvika aspects.

Need – Many people have known my Guru Dr. Radhakrishna, who has an honorary Doctorate in Bharatanatyam from Gangubai Hangal University, but he has been a hidden gem to many. He has been one of the torch-bearers of Karnataka Nartana Parampara. The researcher would like to increase awareness in others about him.

Being one of the chief disciples of Guru Bharatakalamani Dr. C. Radhakrishna and Guru Smt. Meenakshi Radhakrishna for more than four decades, following the Kolar parampara of Karnataka and having received lot of information from them, the researcher would definitely wish to throw light upon his creations, regarding their tradition, compositions and choreography.

.Scope – The scope is endless. Kolar style repertoire is very vast, having a rich heritage. Even if explanation of three types- Nrutta, Nrutya and Natya are considered, it would take much more time and space than expected. Guruji has been in the field, very capable and fit for over 70 years, guiding hundreds of students, innumerable nrutyabandhas.

So, in this paper, the researcher limits herself to brief explanation of 3 topics giving one example for each type.

Analysis, Result and Discussion,

After being a performer and teacher for many decades, being blessed to learn from Guru Smt. Meenakshi Radhakrishna and Guru Sri. Radhakrishna, in- depth analysis has been done about the composition and choreography by the researcher.

Nrutya – Taaya

Theme - This is a rare nrutyabandha taken from the manuscript of Yajaman Kolar Kittanna. This is in praise of Lord Vinayaka composed by Sadashivaraya.

Music - This is in Raga Malahari set to Chaturashra tripata tala. This consists of two aavartas of ‘taanam tanam’, that are auspicious syllables each ending with omkaara followed by two lines of sahitya in Sanskrit. This is very devotional and pleasant to hear.

Position and Movement - The dance was mainly composed for a single dancer but if required Guruji would position the artists in a staggered format, so that all are in view of the viewers. It may vary from 3 or maximum 6-7 dancers..

The artist had to walk front for one line of sahitya along with hand gestures and same actions would be done going backwards interchanging the right and left hands, for the same sahitya, that would be sung the second time. For all the ‘taanam ...’ only namaskaara was used using anjali mudra and sometimes postures of Ganesha, flower, shankha, were also used.

Nrutta – Swarapallavi

Theme – This is a rare nrutta taken from the manuscript of Yajaman Kittanna. This has only jatis done with muktaya – this includes combination of adavus, according to swaras, taala and different nades and also in 3 speeds. The challenging mukhtaayas were to be mastered by practice.

Here the mastery of footwork and hand movements is given importance – it is also the mastery of all the others including the singer, nattuvanar, percussion and instrumentalists.

Music - This is in Raga Shanmukha priya set to Khanda tripata tala.

Pallavi has the same or similar line of svaras sung in various ways.

Position and Movement - The dance was mainly composed for a single dancer but if required Guruji would position the artists in a staggered format, so that all are in view of the viewers. It may vary from 3 or maximum 6-7 dancers..

The whole stage had to be covered if a single dancer danced.

Findings for Nrutta and Nrutya

Aangika

- **The start and the finish** – it is always done using adavus in dance, mostly entering from the right back corner to stage centre and vice versa going back.

- **Presentation method** – generally considered for a solo performance. The body including hasta, paada, bhangi and drushti are utilised in sync with the nattuvangam, the musician's song, the instrumental music, the beats - to great accuracy so that it shows the greatness of the presentation.
- **Movement and patterns of performers with respect to stage** – Adavus like tattu, mettu, naatu, kattu, tai tai tham used in Bharatanatyam were used set according to svaras, jathi and taala. Interweaving of various adavus like tattu mettu, walk/ nade, ta-thai thai taa, rangakramana adavus for movement. Mostly ardha mandala, sometimes poorna- parshvasoochi and pratyaaaleeda while standing at the end of a song line. Sometimes sama and aaleeda are also used. Postures also added to the beauty of the dance. Charis – sankramanam, kuttanam, lolitam are considered. Gi na thom in feet is not only used for jathi but also for muktaaya. But the hand movements vary.

Vaacika

- **Singers and instruments** – Music composer and singer D.Chandrashekar, mrudangam, morching, violin, flute, clarinet, khanjira and conch were used in the main 'Bharatamela' presentation.. But generally mrudangam and violin were used. Nattuvanga talam by the Nattuvanar was a must.

Aaharya

- **Stage décor** The stage with a dark blue back-screen was always preferred. Some flower decorations were considered.
- **Lighting** – Though red, blue lights were used for the start or end, the main dance was always in bright light.
- **Dress and Make up** – Generally dance costume 4 piece or saree costume was used. For female-artists, bright make up with kumkum or tilaka was done with hairstyle being a long plait with flowers.

Saatvika

- In svara pallavi the whole song is done with smile and energy. In taaya it was bhakti and happiness.
- There should be continuous involvement of the emotion

Naatya – (a nrutya –naataka) 'Shantala' dance drama

Aangika

- **The start** – It is shown that Marasinghaiyya and his wife Maachikabbe were longing for a child and they pray to a Shivalinga and then a flower falls in front of the idol – this gives a positive sign that in future, by God's grace a child would be born.
- **Movement and patterns of performers with respect to stage** – Adavus used in Bharatanatyam were used set according to saahitya, jati and taala. Interweaving of various adavus like tatttu mettu, walk, ta-thai thai taa, rangakramana adavus for movement. Mostly ardha mandala, sometimes poorna- parshvasoochi and pratyaaaleeda while standing at the end of a song line. Sometimes sama and aaleeda are also used. Postures also added to the beauty of the dance.
- He preferred to bring fewer artists on the stage so that each has the importance and arranged so that all were seen.
- **Presentation method** – The whole story was distributed into separate scenes so that there is continuity and overall story can be understood by the audience. Each scene indicated some specific bhavas and rasa.
- Incidents like the birth of Shantala, - sorrow -> astonishment -> happiness
- her study of religion under Prabhachandra Muni for Jain rituals happiness
- Study of classical dance under the. Natyaacharya, happiness
- Vishnuvardhana meeting Prabhachandra Muni, happiness
- her introduction to King Vishnuvardhana and shrungara, happiness
- their marriage shrungara, happiness
- she and the King decide to have statues of shilabalikas to adorn the temple of Belur - dancing maidens in stone. shrungara, happiness
- She poses for the sculptor and there is the sculpture. Many more ... she dances with ecstasy and falls faint – she visualizes that these sculptures come to life. The sculptures were dancers who dance DVG's antahpura geetes. She gets up to see that they were mere sculptures. shrungara, happiness

This was very impressive to the people and many other directors took his idea.

- Inability to bear a heir to the throne disheartened the king and he decides to have her sister lakshmi as the Queen. Sorrow, Frustration
- **Last scene** - She takes up Sallekhana vrata to renounce worldly desires, decides to meet her parents and dies on the way, while going to Shivagange. Sorrow-> Happiness
- **Story** -.Script was by H.P. Ramachandra Rao. Songs and as well as his own sahitya, jathis etc. were added where required.
- ‘Kaleyu sheelavanu kolabahudu’ is negated by Prabhachandra muni in the story. There was a time when people were hesitant to send their children to the art of dance. This statement was relevant during those times. During that time people hesitated to join dance. So he wished to communicate the concept to people via the drama.

Vachika

- The sahitya in kannada was very well scripted to convey the emotions as well as the story.
- **Singers and instruments**- The music composition was by the great Vid. B.R.Sreenivasan along with Master's ideas.. Famous singers like M.S.Sheela, Kasturi Shankar and others were directed accordingly. Violin, clarinet, mridangam, bell and other instruments were used very effectively convey the emotions. The dance and dialogues was synchronised to the music. Ragas were chosen to effectively communicate the dance.

Aaharya

- **Stage décor** – It was plain curtain on which various coloured lighting was shown.
- **Lighting** - Lot of light effect was considered – the lights like early morning red, purple sky, blue sky, stars and clouds... many more. The artists were lit in different colours to indicate shilabalikas and red, when Shantala dances with anger, sorrow and frustration Even shadow effect was used to effectively communicate some ideas. Red light was used to depict a stone panel, existing at a temple, of the marriage scene of Shantala and King Vishnuvardhana.

- **Dress and Make up** – Bharatanatyam costumes were used for women, especially white for Shantala. Male characters like Prabhachandramuni was in white dhoti and shalyam, natyaacharya, Marasinghayya had a top dress on kacche costume. Vishnuvardhana had to be with a crown and a King's costume.

Saatvika

- Each scene had its own set of emotions involved, as mentioned in page 10.
- Each actor had to show their bhaavas either as speaker or responder on the stage
- Overall the idea would be conveyed to the viewer.

‘You have taken us to a different world’. People appreciated.

Significance compared to previous research

There was not much research on Guruji or his works. This adds more information.

This research paper gives information on one nrutta, one nrutya and a dance drama.

Conclusion

We can summarize that Guruji valued and aimed in his choreography the following ideas –

- Each part of the dance or drama presentation had to be perfect.
- The sahitya, the singer, the instruments and the song or dialogue had to be correct
- Each actor / dancer had to be well-trained and well-practiced in what movements and emotions, they had to present
- Each part of the setting, screen and lighting had to be arranged
- The dressing and makeup had to be well-done.

People were extremely impressed with his presentations. The artists were very happy with his guidance. For the researcher it was a great experience – she considers herself fortunate to have learnt and performed under his direction.

Abhinava Guptacharya had told 'Natya is rasa'. The aim is to obtain Rasa. So, each scene may give one different emotion. But overall the viewer feels happy.

It can be concluded that the results of the study can be used by many in future. This makes the readers realize Guru Radhakrishna's greatness and can get motivated to learn and continue our parampara in future.

Future scope

Kolar style repertoire is very vast. Each of the nrutya, nrutta or natya which he has composed and choreographed can be studied and analysed more in detail.

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Appendix

Contributions of Guru Radhakrishna

	Margam	Presentations			
Invocatory	Alarippu	Jatisvara	Shabda	Varna	Pada
Choornika (3)	Thishra	Kannada	Nirathamuga	Pada Varna – Danike	Natanam
Sabhavandana m	Chaturashshra	Kalyani	Sarasijakshulu	Saptatala varna Tharuni	Nadarmudi
Vinayaka Kavuthvam	Khanda	Aarabhi	Raama Shabda	Saptatala varna Taralayatakshi mani	Nene Jaana

Nataraja Kavuthvam	Mishra	Chakravaka	and more	Svarajati varna Yemayaladira	Magavaariki
Narayana te namo	Sankeerna	and more		Daru varna	Bottu gattina
and more	Panchajaathi			Munidane sakhi pele	and more
				and more	
Ashtapadi	Devaranama	Jaavali	Thillaana	Mangalam	
Pralaya payodhi jale	Sharanu siddhi vinayaka	Madhuranagaril o	Thodi	Pavamaana	
Haririha	Krishna Baaro	Cheli nenetlu	Hindola	Mangalam Sri Raamunaku	
Radhika Krishna	Krishna nee begane baaro	Jaana ninnaya	Pharas	Jayamangalam	
and more	Kande na Kanasinali	Ballenelo	Shankarabharan a	Muktaajaala	
	Yaarige Vadhuvauguve	Bande yatako	Khandachapu		
	Ranga Baro and more	and more	ragamalika		
			Gaula and more		
Other rare Nrutyabandha	Thaaya (2)	Svarapallavi	Svaraprabandha	Champaka vrutta	Seesa padya
	Geetham	Navasandhi Nrutya	Navarasa	Svarasahitya abhinaya	Shambu natanam
Devi shlokas	Sulaadi	35 tala tillaana	Simhanandana tala tillaana	Bhujanga prayatashtakam	antahpura geete (thillana)
Other	Peacock dance	Snake dance	Koochupudi	Koochupudi	Manipuri

nrutyas that received praise			Bhamakalapam and tharangam	Ra ra Saami	
	Koravanji	Antahpura Geete (many)	Kannada Bhava geetes	Chitra natya- Astadala natya	Chitra natya- Brindavana natya
Nrutya Naatakas	Kalidasa Krutidarshana	Shantale	Vishakanya	Padmavati Parinaya	Vaidyaraja Namastubhyam
Movie classical dance direction	Shivalinga sakshi	Hamsa geethe	Sangharsha	Kaveri	Puraana ganga

These are list of what I have noticed about 50 years. There would have been more

Photos





Nrutta



Nrutya





Natya

Links – 3 videos