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PAPER 8

**DANCES AND DANCE DRAMAS OF SOUTH EAST ASIA
MASK DANCES OF SOUTH EAST ASIA/ASIA-PACIFIC
COUNTRIES, RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES FOR
PERFORMING ARTS (DANCE) DANCE THERAPY**



ज्ञान - विज्ञानं विमुक्तये

PAPER 8

MODULE 34 TANTRA AND NATYA, CONCEPT AND CORRELATION

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Paper 8

Module 34

Tantra And Natya, Concept And Correlation



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MODULE 34 TANTRA AND NATYA - CONCEPT AND CO-RELATION

Introduction

The human body is certainly one piece of classic engineering designed to enable positive physical, emotional and above all spiritual enhancement. The art of Dance, when co-related with the science of Tantra is the union of Shiva Shakti, when the Ardhanareeshwara within one's subtle body is in action portraying the generative, operative and destructive forces. Tantra, one of the most misused terms in modern days has come to mean all sorts of negative practices unfortunately but is in fact the essence of weaving together, spiritual knowledge, Tantrayate/तंत्रयते, by actually participating in the cosmic reality of vibrating energy. A Tantra Sastra paradigm (Natyā can also be called as one such paradigm) exemplifies conception of the supreme personality of God, the dual aspect when the God himself becomes the Universe beyond Purusha [Consciousness] and Prakriti [Energy] - the complete, WHOLE, an undivided 'one'. With the force of dancing comes the discovery of THE 'I' and I re-unites with 'I'....Brahman.... I AM! What is that element, that essence or that principle that connects ONE to the

dance, connects dance to LIFE, connects with audiences, crossing all barriers? Is it the body owning a spirit, which wants to express or is it the spirit that has manifested in this form in order to express?

Natya Shastra in its references to Vedic texts and performance rites refers to dramaturgy as the Natyaveda or the fifth Veda, assimilating knowledge from all the four Vedas. Natya Veda, like the Tantras is open to all people with no barriers of age, caste or sex. Bharata begins with a salutation to Brahman and Shiva, Brahman's Sankalpa/संकल्प, concentration and determination to create a fifth Veda and then refers to Brahma who gave this to him. He states the elevated status of this shastra which emerged from Brahman's mouth- holy, pure and good. Bharata establishes Natya as a discipline encompassing in its totality the physical, the physical and the metaphysical and synthesizing all other art forms. The fundamental principle of Tantra Sastra is that man is a microcosm of whatever exists in the outer universe. The center of the body is at the base of spine which supports the whole body, called the Merudanda/मेरुदंड as it is akin to Mount Meru supporting the earth. This is the concept, elucidated by Sir John Woodroffe in Shakti and Shakta. Man is composed of nature meaning that his Prāna/प्राण, life force is activated by the five elements of fire, water, ether, earth, sky along with mind and consciousness. Life force is a phenomenon of energy. The body, with its solar and lunar energies, five elements, senses and the mind becomes the perfect temple for this inner worship.

Tantra Yoga attempts to unify Shiva and Shakti in the subtle body, Kundalini Yoga, opening up the chakrās/चक्र or energy centres. In Nātya, the power is similarly awakened, but through spontaneity. It is said in the legend of origin of Natya that Nahusha/नहुष, the King brought the sons of Bharata to introduce drama on earth after they had been cursed. This Nahusha was the grandson of Swarabhanu/स्वराभानु or the serpent planet Rahu, himself the son of the lioness power- Simhika/सिम्हिका or Adya Shakti/आद्य शक्ति.

Does this have any connection with Tantric concepts like the symbolic serpent arising from slumber to realize its oneness with the supreme self? When Rahu turns its purpose away from material gratification and unify its purpose with Ketu, then we have the raising of the Kundalini.

Bharata's chapter on the construction of the playhouse theatre and replicating the stage as a vedika, and then making offerings as in pūja, reveals the coexistence of Tāntric, Āgamic Pūja with Nātya. Theatre was a model of the cosmos; each deity had a specific place in the cardinal directions that were demarked and the center of brahma-mandala established on stage itself. Through the holding of a Pūja with *homa*/होम and *japa*/जप, offerings of water, food and flowers, this space would be enlivened, given breath and soul and acquire the same potency as an image through the ceremony of infusing life- prānapratishtha/प्राणप्रतिष्ठा. Based on the view considering the manifest and unmanifest as part of one unified reality, the treatise unravels multiple forms, accepts the formless and enters beyond the concept of form.

Tantra the Agama has Vedic origin too and includes mantra, yantra, meditational aspects of Tanmatras and Chakras, to which initiation is through Guru/Shishya parampara. This is equally important in Natya tradition as it is also a Para [transcendental] Vidya [knowledge] passed on orally and with arduous training. Natya has the human body as instrument; symbolism plays a large role in both. While Natya aspires to a state of bodylessness with dancer becoming the dance, the Mind, the contemplating instrument on a deity, is transformed into that which it is meditating on. Both in the ultimate progress, aspire to go beyond the yantra or instrument.

Philosophy of Abhinavabharati and Vignanabhairavatantra
/विज्ञानभैरवतंत्र

The epitomic personage Abhinavagupta calls Rasāyana/रसायण [the science of art, of the rasās, or of vegetables juices, etc.), more or less the Indian equivalent of alchemy, an esoteric science in the most reckoned masterpiece Abhinavabharati, the best commentary on Natya Shastra for all times. Abhinavabharati commences with a praise of Shiva as the Mooladhara/मूलाधार[Chakra] for the sprout of the seed of the world, and being of the form of earth, it has the power of sustenance.

Vignanabhairava, an ancient work on Yoga, also belonging to the Kashmir Shaivism schools of thought, describes 108 types of Yogāsanās/योगासन, and studiously avoids mechanical worship, external rites and ceremonies, and goes directly to the heart of the union of human consciousness with the Divine. *Bhavabhuti, the*

dramatist, is probably the first to mention Bharata Muni as the author and he calls him Tauryatrikasūtrakāra/तौर्यात्रिकसूत्रकार. Trika system / Kashmir Shaivism highlight the doctrine of recognition and vibration. Kshemaraja/क्षेमराज explains that it is so called due to the three divisions of Shakti as transcendent, identity in difference and immanent, known as Shiva, Shakti and Jiva. In the philosophy of recognition, it is proposed that the ultimate enlightenment consists of recognition that one's own true identity is Shiva. The philosophy of vibration speaks of the importance of experiencing Spanda/स्पंद, the vibration or pulse of consciousness. Every activity in the universe, as well as sensations, cognitions and emotions emerge, flow and dissolve as part of the universal rhythm of the one Reality, Shiva.

The symbiosis of consciousness, the essence of the matrix of Tantra with artistic bliss actually predates Abhinavagupta in texts as Vijñāna Bhairava, Siva Sūtra and others that variously interpret the broader philosophical rationalization of Tantra, along with its assimilation to aesthetics. Abhinava describes aesthetic relishing as an immersion in spanda. All forms of objective "this" are absorbed into the universal "I" in the realization "I am this". The Trika treatise, Vignana bhairava suggests that, while Yoga Sutras and Vedanta adopt the Viveka jamarga whereby Purusha is distinct from Prakriti, Tantra differs in following true Yogaja- union of individual with Universal and realization of supreme energy in everything. The Highest reality Bhairava means BHA, Bharana- maintenance, RA, Ravana- withdrawal and VA, Vamana- projection of the world. With the practice of this Bhavana of dissolution into Vijnana or Cit, one will attain Bhairava, known as Laya Bhavana as it is creative

contemplation. The dancer, experiencing oneness in difference by enacting several roles in a scientific way of using Bhavas, travels from third to second to first person and then NO PERSON; in fact learns to participate in Siva's Bliss of Śakti by contemplating upon her as the reality underlying all.

Chakrās

The Dissolution and Creation endlessly played as a dance by Shiva – Shakti is represented by the ascent of energy circles or lotuses, Chakras and their descent. The subtle body is composed of seven Chakrās or energy centres. Chakrā means “what revolves” and hence signifies a wheel. Each petal of a Chakrā relates to one of the prime letters of the Sanskrit alphabet.

1. *MulādhāraChakrā*

The Earth Chakrā has four petals consisting of the mantras vam, sam, sam, and sam. It is the seat of the earth element or solid state of matter, whose governing seed syllable (bija mantra) is Lam. It is interesting that we always propitiate Ganesha as the ruler of this Chakra.

2. *SvādhīsthānaChakrā/स्वाधीस्थानचक्र*

The Water Chakrā possesses six petals consisting of the mantras bam, bham, mam, yam, ram, and lam. It is the seat of the water element or liquid state of matter, whose governing seed syllable is vam.

3. Manipura Chakrā/मणिपुरचक्र

The Fire Chakrā possesses ten petals consisting of the mantras dam, dham, nam, tham, dam, dham, nam, pam, and pham. It is the seat of the fire element or radiant state of matter, the governing seed syllable is Ram.

4. Anāhata Chakrā/अनाहतचक्र

The Air Chakrā has twelve petals consisting of the mantras kam, kham, gam, gham, nam, cam, cham, jam, jham, nam, tam, and tham. It is the seat of the element of air or the gaseous state of matter, whose governing seed syllable is Yam.

5. Vishuddha Chakrā/विशुद्धचक्र

The Ether Chakrā has sixteen petals consisting of the vowels of the Sanskrit alphabet: am, am, im, im, um, um, rm, rm, lrm, lrm, em, aim, om, aum, am, and ah. It is the seat of space, the element of ether or the etheric state of matter, the governing seed syllable is Ham.

6. Ājna Chakrā/आज्ञाचक्र

The third eye has two petals (by some accounts forty-eight), consisting of the mantras ham and khsham. It is the seat of the mind-space or mental ether (which underlies the elemental ether). Its seed syllable is ksham, meaning patience, peace and fortitude.

7. Sahasra Padma Chakrā/सहस्रपद्मचक्र

The Crown Chakrā has thousand petals and is the seat of the spirit (Atman or Purusha). Its seed syllable is Om. It is the seat of consciousness or consciousness-space that is the origin of the mental and material ethers. These Chakrās have both gross and subtle counterparts.

An insight into the Chakrās indicates how the syllables in our pure dance movements would have originated. The beeja/seed Mantrās of each Chakrā according to Tāntric Yoga were very well known and practiced by the sages of yore and were absorbed into dances. Beejaakshara/बीजाक्षर recitation in Tantra Chakra worship work on sound energy (which includes the important aspect of silence) and the sollus in Natya are a manifestation of this intricate practice of syllables. E.g. –These in kavutvams, which now on the proscenium stage have taken on a more decorative dimension, are to be traced back to their authentic practice in temple rituals.

The Process

It can be analyzed that while the Sāttvika expressions emanate from Sattva on a higher level and corresponding Chakrās, the others may belong to Rajas and Tamas/तमस category, middle and lower Chakrās. Manipura is considered the center of dynamism, energy, will power and achievement which radiates throughout the entire human body. It is associated with the power of fire and digestion, as well as with the sense of sight and the action of movement. Each Chakrā has its vibratory field and corresponds to points on our spine that have

potent energy. The heart center is a medley of deep emotions like desire, love, joy, lust, and anger. Called Anāhata/अनाहत, “unstruck”, this chakra or psycho-energy center is the seat of extra-sensory perception, higher intuitive perception and intelligence, the most active in the creation and transmission of Rasa. Navarasas can be co-related to the ascent and descent of vibrating consciousness. Anahata expands and vibrates to accommodate so many emotions, particularly the feeling of compassion; it sublimates the sensuous by not restricting it in the Swadishthana/स्वदीशथान. The spontaneous intuition of the artist in presentation and the spectator in receiving is due to their interaction due to the forces of both Anahata and Ajna.

The entire graph of the nine sentiments suggests that we begin with love and go to other fleeting emotional states and transcend finally to dissolve into peace. Love and Peace is the eternal nature. Nāṭya portrays so many Bhāvās but the Śānta Rasānubhāva, the underlying sheath of myriad actions remains after all the dramatic experience. This ninth Rasa signifies Brahmavidyā/ब्रह्मविद्या, which is the ultimate joy after removing the veil of ignorance of names and forms, actions and reactions, after a tryst with the māya of Bhāvās. Yogic āsanās, integrated in the dance Prayogās are helpful in raising the Kundalini Śakti. The beautiful balance in the dance postures kindles it. Kumbha refers to an overflowing pot; it also refers to a body filled with knowledge. The traditional Gurus say that an ardhamandali posture in perfect Sausthavam [back erect posture] held over years can bring in the Maha Kumbha by opening up energy centers, triangular shapes in intersection and balancing them and the

brahmasutra- an imaginary line passing through the centre of the body. *The heat during executing a long session of Adavus in great speed in comparison with the coolness in relaxed tempo, geometric shapes formed with an array of triangles, the emphasis on gravity as well as levitation and dancing without constraints of time, space or any desire to exhibit are steps towards the journey within.*

Why did Bharata give the name RASA to aesthetic joy? One may be born deaf, dumb or blind, but tongue being instrument of taste are almost always present at birth- like the universal RASA. Bharatamuni speaks about the rasas which have their own space – Purushas or entities. This universal rasa is unveiled to artiste and spectator, free of differentiating thoughts and with a heart, open to receive, unto oneself, the *abhinaya*. These universals are identified through esoteric meditations in *Tantra* which has provided a ready canvas – the artiste is only painting or weaving. While depicting or witnessing the personalities, whom one has read about and cherish within your space, one detaches body consciousness and gets into that character. One introspects and develops a beautiful connection with that character within oneself. One is not limitedly relating to the rasa depicted by the scene, but becomes aware of that which is already in us, through an aesthetic experience.

Mudras in Tantra and Hastabhinaya in Natya

Mudrās are sacred ritual gestures or hand positions. When used in dance they become an elaborate hand language. Mudrās create an energy field with the ultimate goal of a higher state of consciousness. The science of healthcare by mudrās is a branch of “Hathayoga”.

The decoration of the danseuse symbolizes the five elements, sun, moon and planets with the designs and motifs of ornaments, painting of hands, fingers, feet, etc. The bells on the feet symbolize the bells in the temple sanctorum. Perhaps, the danseuse performs the role of a priest or Tantri, worshipping with Mudrās and offering the self before the Lord as a Yogi, the body harnessed as the Yantra here. Varied and with beauteous appeal, hand gestures in dance have evolved from Mudras.

There are such esoteric mudras in temples of Kerala and Bengal and Vajrayana Buddhists. The aesthetic hastas in dance have a definite link with tantric mudras, which are for more ritualistic and austere practices.

In natya, which is for public consumption they are more elaborate, with better shape and clarity, and simultaneously have a lot of expressive use. Eg- There is evident co-relation between Abhaya [protection] to Pataka [flag, blessing] which also gave rise to Sarpasirsha, Swastika, Dolaetc, Jnana or Vitarka and Hamsasya, Kapittha, etc, Pasa -Ankusha [weapons of Deities and energizing] to Pasa, Tamarachuda, etc. and Apana [breath posture] to Simhamukha, Mrigasirsha etc. The signs have a specific meaning. Vrishabha Mudra has the Kanta or throat of Lord Shankara, the origin of the uttered word or Vak and one can see the throat of Bull. Shaiva Siddhantahas largely influenced art forms like Bharatanatyam and Tirumandiram of Tirumoolar is a Tantric text which prescribes the ways to attain highest states of bliss and extolls the Nadanta posture of Chidamabaram Nataraja.

Hand gestures in the Natya Shastra have been given in a definite order as if they evolved during the deep meditative states of the Rishi. What probably began amongst men as imitation of the world with the use of hand- mime evolved into a communicable language in dance and for channelizing energy in rituals. The esotersicm is implicit and although secretly coded, they are given extensive use for the sake of external communication.

Yantra/यंत्र of Shri Vidya/श्रीविद्या

The main purpore of the minor Upanishad Bhavanopanishad is to establish a relation between structures of the human body and Sri Chakra. The Sri Chakra is regarded as a projection of the essential characters of the universe.

The meditation method adopted is the samhara-krama (absorption or dissolution method), which commences from the outermost avarana and proceeds inwards, systematically, till the central point- the Bindu. The diagram of the Sri Chakra is primarily a Matrix of nine interlocking triangles. Five of these triangles have their apex facing downward, Shakthi, the other four triangles with their apex facing upward are Shiva. The intersection of these nine triangles creates forty-three triangles. The Bindu, also as a triangle creates forty-four triangles. The Shri Chakra Nyasa identifies the different elements of the Shri Yantra with different parts of the human organism. Bindu is Shiva; Bija is Shakthi; and Nada is their union. Tantra associates them with a particular yogic technique (kriya), sacred sound (mantra),

mystic symbol (mudra) and they perform the Karanas being adept in dance. *Sri Yantra is thus a 'cosmogram' – a graphic representation of the universal processes of emanation and re-absorption.* The saint composer, Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar, gave initiation to the Tanjore Quartet and were all great worshippers of Devi in the Sri Yantra. *Tanjore Quartet gave the Margam in the format of entering a temple [again a Yantric diagram], the Alarippu forming the entrance as Gopuram, the sanctum being the Varnam, Tillana as circumambulation etc.*

'Tāla' is absorption and 'Laya' is dissolution –Shiva Vyaptiie- fusion with Shiva through the path shown by Shakti who is energized in the yantra of body-mind-spirit.

A Contemplative discipline and an art process are connected

We can understand after seeing the divine practice, that the science of. Hence the Purusharthas [Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha] are realized through the divine Natya, placed higher than all Vedas.

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