

DEVELOPMENT OF BAVA AND RASA IN BHARATANATYAM

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Alamkara Sastra - a work on Indian rhetoric, says "Artistic beauty cannot exist unless the heart of a man of good taste is moved to delight by the fascination of its expression".

All Indian arts have evolved certain concepts and laws which are common to all of them. Of all these, the concept of Bhava and of evoking Rasa in the mind of the spectator is unique in our arts.

On the subject of Bhava and Rasa, the Natya Sastra says "Bhavas (states) are so called because through words, gestures and representation of temperament, they (Bhavayanti) infuse the meaning of the play (into the spectators). Hence the root "Bhavaya" means to pervade. The Bhavas or states cause sentiment or Rasa to pervade the mind of the spectator.

There is a famous sloka in Abhinaya Darpana which says:

Eyes should follow the hand, mind should follow the eye, when the mind is applied, there is Bhava or Expression and where there is expression, there is Rasa or Sentiment.

Another sloka from Abhinaya Darpana says:

The Dancer should first sing, then should bring out the meaning of the song with appropriate gestures of the hand, should bring out the Bhava with her eyes and her feet must keep the tala or rhythm.

While the emotional states or Bhavas are of three types - Sthayee or Dominant, Vyabhichari or temporary or transitory and

Sattvika or temperamental, it is the Sthayi Bhava aided by Vibhavas, Anubhavas and Vyabhichari Bhavas that creates the Rasa or sentiment. For this a beautiful example is given in the Natya Sastra which says: "Just as only a king surrounded by numerous attendants and not any other man, be he ever so great, receives the epithet of a king, so also the dominant state or emotion followed by determinants, consequents and transitory states receives the name of Sentiment".

Vibhavas are the principal causes of an emotion. They centre around a hero or a heroine. Anubhavas are the physical factors like the beloved's glances, smile etc. Sattvika Bhavas are physical manifestations like sweating, horripilation, tears etc. All these combine to create Sthayi Bhavas-Rati, Hasa, Soka, Krodha, Utsaha, Bhava, Jugupsa and Vismaya. When these feelings are tasted and enjoyed, they become the eight Rasas - Sringara, Hasya, Karuna, Raudra, Vira, Bhayanaka, Bhibatsa and Adbhuta. Later on, Santi Rasa was added on - Nirveda (dispassion) being its Sthayi Bhava.

This kindling of emotion, which results in an impersonal delight whatever the nature of the emotion expressed, is Rasa. It is "Alaukika Ananda" aesthetically conveyed by the dancer's superb portrayal. Thus, it is through Bhava or Portrayal of emotion that a dancer is able to evoke Rasa in a cultured audience and Rasa is the soul of art. Bhava is expressed through Abhinaya which is the art of delineating an idea or theme through facial expressions, hand gestures and body movements. The secret of its appeal lies in its ability to kindle something deep in us.

Abhinaya has four modes of expression - Angika comprising of body movements, Vachika - the spoken word or song, Aharya consisting of facial make-up, costumes, jewellery and Satvika which is the outer expression of psychic states.

In solo Bharatanatyam, the emphasis is mainly on Angikabhinaya. Since the body becomes the medium of expression in Angikabhinaya, every movement of the Angas (major limbs), Upangas (minor limbs) and Pratyangas (parts of the body and features) and its relation to the emotions is explored in detail. Natya Sastra and Abhinaya Darpana deal exhaustively on these as well as the language of hand gestures and their various uses.

Angikabhinaya is of three kinds - those belonging to the body - Sarira, those of the face Mukhaja and those resulting from the movements of the entire body-cheshtakrita.

The example of the idea of seed, sprout and branches in the development of Bhava clearly gives us a clue as to how these are to be developed culminating in Rasa. When the first line of the song is sung, the dancer should get into the right mood of the song, which results in a certain stance or posture and the eye registering an expression on the face. This is termed as Suca and the next step is Ankura or sprouting where more ideas are expressed through the eyes. This Ankura in turn should develop into Sakha or branches where hastabhinaya is resorted to bringing out the meaning of the song in full.

Basically, there are two aspects, which are essential for a sensitive and stylised presentation of Abhinaya, which a connoisseur, the Sahridaya relishes. The first one is Symbolism or Dhavani, as it is called in Sanskrit poetics. It implies the suggested sense that underlies a portrayal. A particular

gesture of turn of hand or eye movement should be able to call up implied suggestions. Symbolism does not copy nature of the actual event but merely induces the mind to imagine what occurs in nature. For example, a lullaby making the child go to sleep - the gentle sway, the face full of unalloyed happiness holding the baby and singing him to sleep or the gentle push given to the cradle - all these multitude of suggestions enable one to experience Vatsalya Rasa evoked by such delicate or suggestive portrayals. This vast field of suggestion enriches the art. It will not be an exaggeration to say that it is symbolism that sweetens Rasa and not realism, which may be crude at times.

The second aspect is with regard to Auchitya - appropriateness, propriety and adaptation. Bharata says that if a thing does not agree or is not proper in a certain place with reference to Rasa, it is the greatest literary flaw. "Improper placing like placing of a necklace at the foot and an anklet round the neck can only produce laughter".

The proper placing of things to suit Rasa and the avoidance of things that are not suitable, form the essence of artistic expression. In nature, there are many things that are not beautiful and some of them totally repugnant although necessary. The dancer has to use a lot of imagination to a set of situations for an idealised or stylised presentation of a situation. For example, in the Ramayana episode, where Rama lifts the bow effortlessly as against others who also try in vain, emphasis should be on the aura of youth, beauty and strength of Rama, the massive weight and size of the bow, the ease with which Rama lifts the bow etc. Instead, sometimes one sees portrayals of the various comical acts of the other suitors including the Rakshasa to lift the bow, their demoniac gait and appearance, thereby detracting from

the main Rasa making it crude and inappropriate.

Thus irrelevant descriptions, or introduction of events, ideas or incidents that have nothing to do with the main development of a particular rasa have to be eschewed in a sensitive portrayal.

For Abhinaya, the selection of songs that give considerable scope for imaginative interpretation is important. While some give scope for working out stories connected with the Gods like in "Ettaikandu", the story of Kamadahana, the drinking of the deadly poison by Siva or the story of Markandeya can be portrayed in a charmingly descriptive way.

When a pada or varna is taken up for abhinaya, it is important to have an understanding of the main mood and import of the song: the type of Nayaki, Nayaka or Sakhi that the composer had possibly imagined while composing the song for an effective delineation.

Abhinaya has an unlimited range of interpretation by employing the technique of Sancharis. On the same words may be wrung numerous interpretations conveying countless varieties of meaning. The various emotions and cross-currents in thinking can be portrayed by bringing into play the various anubhavas and vyabhichari bhavas. While depicting the main emotion which may be Vipralambha Sringara, (love in separation) several transitory feelings like anxiety, impatience, longing, indignation can be brought in to suggest love in separation. These associated feelings and emotions enhance the main mood of the song. A dancer should cultivate the ability to register inner emotions in a subtle suggestive way. The technique of Sanchari bhava must reveal her creative faculties of expressing the various emotions in a beautiful poetic way thereby evoking Rasa in the mind of the audience.

Bharatanatyam is a highly evolved form of dance and handled with a lot of grace and depth of learning, it can be a most fascinating form of evoking Rasa or the "Alaukika Ananda".

Natyakalabhushanam Smt. Nirmala Ramachandran is one of the senior most exponents of the Pandanallur School of Bharathanatyam. She was trained directly by the great veteran Pandanallur Chokkalingham Pillai and Tiruppambaram T.K. Swamintha Pillai.

Smt. Nirmala had her arangetram as a eleven year old and in these 50 years, her performances in India and abroad have brought glory not only to herself but to the dance style she represents. Abhinaya has been her special forte. Her abhinaya delineates a whole gamut of feminine emotions-a remarkable feature indeed for in Nirmala alone can be found the rare and sofar unprecedented blend of the chiselled line and forceful rhythm of Pandanallur School of Bharathanatyam with the delicate and highly sensitive abhinaya of Balasaraswati school.

Smt. Nirmala has been a real cultural Ambassador for her contribution and efforts in promising Indian art and culture in the various countries during her stay abroad has been tremendous. Back home in Madras she has revived her dance Institution 'NIRMALA NIKETAN' where Bharathanatyam and Karnatic Music are taught.