

Towards the ninth rasa

Vidhya Subramanian

This is an exploration into the purported goal of Indian dance forms and their relevance to 21st century presentations. The topic of my thesis for M.A. in Theatre Arts with a focus on Bharatanatyam was 'Srīngara and Bhakti – Relationship and Reciprocity in Twenty First Century Bharata Natyam'. It explored the mutuality between these two terms integral to our dance forms and their role in the attainment of the Indian classical dancer's purported goal-

the union between jeevatma and paramatma. As I began the cathartic process of writing, it gradually became evident that the goal needed to be re-defined.

Jeevatma-paramatma union = spiritual release, we all know.

This sense of release is an ephemeral experience perceived in rarely expected and mostly unexpected, fleeting moments that spring up unannounced within the hours of

preparing for a performance or performing itself. I eagerly wait for those flashes of time that provide the evanescent out-of-body experience and catch me by ecstatic surprise. The rarity of such moments makes them all the more attractive, and striving for them a continuous process. The jeevatma – the dancer – is the real and present human being who seeks these instances of release. The reality of the release is a concrete physical, emotional and mental encounter.

Books, Games & Instructional Media By Jayalakshmi Eshwar

1. Educational Card Game Based On Dance Forms of India (Age Group 6 & above)

The card game provides the knowledge on Nine Indian Classical Dance Forms (Bharatanatyam, Chhau, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Mohiniyattam, Oddissi and Sattriya) through playing. Two types of games can be played Educational or Fun (Making sequences like regular card game Rummy).

2. Pushpanjali Learning Complete Item + Audio Music

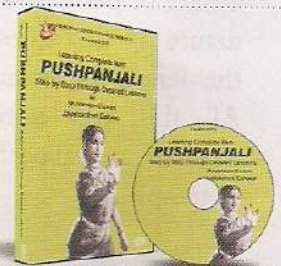
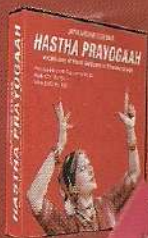
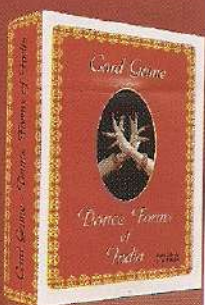
The two DVD set contains the teaching of Pushpanjali in a step by step approach by Jayalakshmi Eshwar. Each line has been repeated many times so that any one can learn the complete Pushpanjali and perform. The feet movements and the hand gestures are also explained separately for the easy understanding of the item. Pushpanali - Rag : Kedharam, Talam : Aadhi

3. Hastha Prayogaah: Usages of Hand Gestures

Detailed instructions about the usage of hand gestures in colour as a communication medium supported by audio CD and DVD for practice. (Book also available in Tamil in B/W)

4. Bharatanatyam: How To...

A book for step-wise learning of the dance along with audio CD and DVD for practice.



DELHI
Jayalakshmi Eshwar
Y-33, G.F., Hauz Khas, New Delhi-110016, India.
Ph: 91-9811490124 / 11-26515608 /
jayalakshmi.eshwar@yahoo.com / www.jayalakshmi.eshwar.com

CHENNAI
The Karnatic Music Book Centre
Ph: 91-44-28111716 / 28113253
kmbc@vsnl.net / www.karnaticbooks.com

CHENNAI
Shanti Dance Needs
Ph: 91-44-24951475
www.shanthidanceneeds.com

The paramatma, however, is a philosophical idea that is not tangible to the basic senses. The abstractness of this concept lies in the ambiguity of its location. Is the paramatma present in Godhead, in nature surrounding us, in the heart of the dancer or all of the above? According to Hindu philosophy, the supreme is present everywhere including within every living creature. The search for this supreme is the quest of Hinduism. The result of the search, the completion of a certain incompleteness within is also termed as moksha and is said to be concealed within each person by ignorance.

Within the context of Bharatanatyam, named as one of the paths to salvation, the paramatma takes the shape of a yearning that the dancer feels, as well as the fulfilment of that yearning. It is a continuous compulsion to transcend oneself to a state of perfection. The unrelenting nature of this quest is what makes the dancer set on an ongoing journey. All this was noticeably pertinent when dance was performed exclusively in temples.

In the 21st century, audiences are looking for relaxation, entertainment, peace, elevation and God knows what else depending on their prior conditioning and the space and time they have come from. The performances today also have to cater to global audiences of all backgrounds and knowledge levels unlike audiences before who had specific knowledge and cultural commonality. For the modern dancer, between physical conditioning,

marketing, academic pursuits, and juggling a myriad other endeavours called life, is there time to think of the paramatma? That time is when all else ceases to exist at the junction between movement and mood in a suspended state of perfection even as sweat pours from the body. Apart from such transient moments of rapturous delight, the sadhana itself is the passage and the goal. Notwithstanding audiences, the spiritual ideal is still very relevant though not always immediately conspicuous to the dancer's psyche. In fact, it is even more strongly rooted amidst the saturated and competitive world of Indian classical dance today. To sustain, one needs very high levels of will power which itself is a purgatory spiritual release before the dancer even steps on to the stage.

Can we look at it another way?

Liberation from earthly life is the last of the four stages of life as put forth in Hinduism. Bhakti or devotion is synonymous with liberation in this case, and one of the ways to attain this liberation is through the practice of the classical dances of India. Loosely translated as devotion, bhakti thus becomes the ultimate goal of the Bharatanatyam dancer. The paths used by the dancer to attain this release are bhakti and sringara.

- ❖ *Bhakti* as devotional pieces rendered
- ❖ *Bhakti* as the perseverance in the pursuit of the art
- ❖ *Bhakti* as the devotion that the dancer feels during the act of dancing

- ❖ *Bhakti* as the spiritual release itself: the jeevatma-paramatma union

- ❖ *Sringara* as erotic pieces rendered

- ❖ *Sringara* as beauty in the presentation and richness of emotion

- ❖ *Sringara* as love for the godhead/divine being beseeched

Bhakti then becomes the means to the goal as well as the end goal itself. Sringara is an accessible means to the transcendent end of bhakti. The allure lies in the common ground between the two and the potentially intertwined nature of their existence. Their interchangeability marks the flexibility of these two concepts in the attainment of the final goal. In a performance, for this jeevatma-paramatma union to be achieved, the dancer and the spectator must cross paths at a metaphysical level. The goal is common to both performer and audience. The dancer gives, the spectator receives. The spectator in turn gives, and the dancer receives. This exercise that requires a symbiotic relationship between both dancer and spectator has the potential to conclude at a point of release that could be described as peace, ecstasy, bliss, rasa.

Do we already have a name for it in our dictionary?

Among the navarasa or nine emotions, the last one is santa. Bharata does not include santa in the *Natya Sastra*, probably due to the existence of the eight colourful sentiments which offer myriad possibilities to emote, communicate and entertain. The *Natya Sastra* is after all a treatise on arts, not

POINT OF VIEW

philosophy. Santa rasa does not elicit a reaction in the spectator. When performed it would have to be presented as the dancer seated in a meditative pose, something that does not evoke feeling in the spectator. However, Bharata has said the eight rasa-s will lead to a peaceful mind – a state that was coined 'santa rasa' by later commentaries and added to the list to make them the navarasa.

Santa rasa is dormant in every other rasa. Santa is a sense of serenity and symmetry that lies waiting within every rasa to be awakened and realised. This state

of peace can be equated to the goal of the dancer – the attainment of the parmatma. Santa then becomes synonymous with the goal itself. Philosophers may attain it for longer periods of time through lifestyle changes while a dancer attains santa during temporary moments of performance. The everlasting nature of this goal ensures the enduring place of bhakti and sringara in the quest for santa.

The intertwined relationship between sringara and bhakti both of which serve as paths toward the jeevatma-paramatma goal, thus

negating a competition between the two, is as relevant in 21st century Bharatanatyam as the debate between them was in the early 20th century. Perhaps the goal of the Bharatanatyam dancer can be termed santa. Is it possible to substitute the phrase union of jeevatma and paramatma with the single word 'santa' and build a three-way relationship between sringara, bhakti and santa? A unified vision of the three – the goal of the dancer? Or just simply dance!

(Vidhya Subramanian is a Bharatanatyam dancer and teacher)

Radel®

digital inventions for Indian music since 1979

Winner of the
National Award of
Special Recognition
for R&D 2009

ISO 9001:2008
certification,
3 years Warranty
on all Products



www.radel.in

Bangalore ❖ Chennai ❖ Kolkata ❖ Pune
(91-80) 26647991 (91-80) 24337485 (91-80) 22264866 (+91) 9325633315

Also at Delhi, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. For information Call: (+91)9342420730