

SURVIVAL OF INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE DOWN THE AGES

by

Vidhya Sridhar

TA 241
Dr. Karl Toepfer

Vidhya Sridhar
05/06/96

Survival of Indian Dance down the ages

India's prehistory and proto-history provide sufficient evidence to the fact that there was a rich and vital tradition of this art from the earliest times. For example, there is the dancing girl from Mohenjo-daro, and the broken torso of the Harappan period suggestive of a dance pose. There are beautiful metaphors and similes in the *Vedas* based on the art of dance. Epithets of dance have been used for the Gods. *Indra*, *Marut*, the *Asvins*, and the *Apsaras*, all have been spoken of as well initiated in the art. Dance as a profession, and as a social activity has been associated with all significant moments of the life cycle. In the Epics and *Puranas* the princes are taught the art of dancing; both *Rama* and *Arjuna* were adepts and, of course, *Krishna* is the Supreme Dancer. Only a flourishing tradition of performance could have enabled the writer of the *Natyasastra*, to codify the theatrical art in his monumental work.

Roughly speaking, one may divide the history of dance into two periods:

1. From the 2nd Century BC. to the 9th Century AD.
2. From the 10th or 11th Century to the 18th Century AD.

During the 1st period, Sanskrit exercised a firm hold on the intellectual life of the people and its rich literature endowed the development of all arts in the country with unity and continuity. In the second period, there was a marked development of regional styles. The latter half of this period coincides with the period of the growth of the various regional languages.

Examples of sculptures in temples as well as critical and creative writing (*Sangitaratnakara*, *Abhinaya Darpana*, *Sringaraprakasa*, *Nrttaratnavali* etc.) support the view that the art was widely practiced and adored. Even a superficial study of these manuals emphasizes two broad facts:

1. Despite regional variations, all schools subscribed to the basic principles

of the *Natyasastra* tradition. The dance continued to be divided into *Natya* and *Nrnta* on the one hand and into *Tandava* and *Lasya* on the other.

2. Although they continued to follow these broad principles, many distinctive regional styles evolved and each region ultimately developed a native vocabulary. This led to the formulation of different classical styles in India.

The beginning of the contemporary classical styles-be it *Bharatanatyam*, *Kathakali*, *Manipuri*, *Odissi* or *Kathak*-can be traced back to developments in the medieval period, roughly dating from 1300 AD. to 1800 AD. The different styles of classical Indian dance were practiced and perfected by creative artists in different regions even during periods of political upheaval and lack of social patronage. Family traditions grew within these styles; the masters called were the repositories of an invaluable oral tradition, and as such preserved and nurtured it. This group of masters never performed but were essentially teachers who passed down the art forms to future performers or masters. They frequently contributed to its growth in spite of the lack of basic education or academic knowledge and unfamiliarity with the Sanskrit language.

The *Devadasis* were a group of women highly trained in music and dance and then wedded to the residing deity of the temple after which they performed their duties at the temple including the rituals of worship and dance. The British system of education did not recognize the "arts" as a subject of educational curricula. The generation which went to the schools and colleges founded by the British in India in the 19th Century was thus isolated from the art traditions of the country. Temple dancing was forbidden, but the devotees of the art continued to practice it in the seclusion of their homes. Apparently, the art had died by the 20th Century and what could be seen of it was only a diluted, almost degenerated form of what was known as the nautch in the North, and the sadir in the South. It was like a shadow of a by-gone reality. Due to the pioneering work of several people who saw the beauty of Indian dance going to waste, its revival took place and it is now widely practiced and researched on.

The revival of interest in dance since the early to mid 20th Century, developed as a sign of national pride in the glories of indigenous art and culture helped the development and popularity of our various dance styles. The store-house was so rich and the layer of dust so weak that the sincere artist had only to dig a little to discover its essential luminosity. During the past five decades, many layers of past artistic glory have been uncovered. The digging continues and each time one delves deeper, a greater treasure is discovered.

All art in ancient India could perhaps be called temple art, not because it was necessarily a part of the temple, but because its aim was the perfection of spiritual identification. God is the supreme artist and guides every action of man whether it is daily ritual or through works of art. The temples of India stand as the most eloquent testimonials of a culture that has survived five thousand years. Within temple walls, art was zealously preserved. The building of the temple itself was a dedication and a discipline. The different styles of classical Indian dance were practiced and perfected by creative artists in different regions even during periods of political upheaval and lack of social patronage. Family traditions, called the *sampradayas*, grew within these styles; the masters were the repositories of an invaluable oral tradition, and as such preserved and nurtured it. They frequently contributed to its growth in spite of the lack of basic education or academic knowledge and unfamiliarity with the Sanskrit language.

How has Indian classical dance survived the historical powers? What is the relationship between bodily expressivity and historical pressure?

BODILY EXPRESSIVITY:

The elements of Indian classical dance are concerned with the basic instrument of expression which it uses, namely the human figure. The description of bodily

expressivity is important in understanding how it has helped Indian classical dance to survive through history and shaped it in the process.

Abhinaya or acting is divided into *angika*, *vachika*, *aharya* and *sattvika*.

- **Angika: body gestures**
 - a. *mukhaja* (of the face), *upanga*
 - b. *sarira* (of the body), *anga* (major limbs)
 - c. *cheshtakrita* (of the entire body)

Angika abhinaya is done through :

- anga** - major limbs (head, chest, sides, hips, thighs, hands & feet)
- upanga** - minor limbs of the face
- pratyanga** - minor limbs of the body

Indian dancing seeks to depict the perfect point or moment of balance along the vertical median (*brahmasutra*) so much so that all movements emerge from and return to the *sama* or point of perfect balance. Indian dance concerns itself with the movement of the human form in direct relation to the pull of gravity. Such a conception accounts for the absence of sudden leaps and gliding movements in the air, so characteristic of the Western ballet. Except for certain aspects of *Kathakali*, none of the Indian dance styles use large leaps; and little or no discussion of them appears in the treatises on Indian dance. From the division of the body, we see that every single portion of the body is used in the communication process. The face plays an extremely important part in Indian dance whereby every part of the face is used to convey meaning. In most traditional solo dance forms, one dancer is playing many roles instead of many dancers presenting a dramatic story. The face and gestures of the body are imperative to this *ekaharya lasyanga* where one actor is playing many roles. Gender and mood are conveyed through these gestures irrespective of the sex of the performer. The performer does not have to lose his/her identity by cross dressing in order to communicate. The stance, the gestures of the body and the hand can convey masculine or feminine character. This unique

nature is accountable for the diversity of roles that the dancer can assume, making it a challenge to do so without the help of costume or props. In *nrtta* (abstract dance), where the mood is one of joy and no meaning is conveyed, the face and body communicate this joy which the performer is feeling to the audience. That only joy is conveyed through *nrtta* makes one think that people came and still come to view these performances to forget the problems in their daily lives. As a dancer myself, I am aware that the sheer joy that a good performer can feel and communicate to the audience transports one to another level of enjoyment and has a purifying effect on both performer and spectator.

The *hastas* (hands) are the only parts of the human body which have both *nrtta-hasta* (gestures that do not convey any meaning) and *abhinaya-hasta* (gestures that convey meaning). In the *angas* and *upangas* mentioned earlier, the *nrtta* or *abhinaya* portion depends mostly on the gesture of the hands and face, especially the movements of the eyes, eyebrows, eyeballs, etc. Next in importance are movements of the head, chest and the thighs. The feet are important, but less significantly than in the *nrtta* portion. The use of feet is governed by the demands of the theme in *abhinaya*, and so is *hastabhinaya*. The hands have been grouped under the categories of the *asamyuta* (single-hand gestures) and *samyuta* (double-hand gestures). Each of the hands mentioned under these categories has endless possibilities of movement, and is the vehicle of an entire language of gesticulation. They are all codified and can be used in myriad ways according to the imagination of the performer. Here, it is necessary to point out that all the primary hand gestures of both varieties mentioned can be used purely imitatively or suggestively, i.e. they can be used to convey ideas and emotions, or as symbols. Through hand-gesticulation, the Universe can be comprehended; the seven spheres, the oceans, rivers, planets, human beings and animals can be represented. The symbiotic role played by hand gestures gives the performer immense scope to elaborate or choose not to and the variety that is offered to the spectator is immense. Indeed the gesticulation of the hands

is the focal point around which everything else revolves. Recognizing this importance, writers lay down the famous dictum:

'Yato hastahstatho dhrishti - Where the hand goes, the eyes follow,
Yato dhrishtistatho bavah - where the eye goes, the mind follows,
Yato bavahstatho manah - where the mind goes, the mood follows,
Yato manahstatho rasah' - & where there is mood, there is sentiment.

These hands, along with the movements of the eyes and eyeballs, are employed in the *samanyabhinaya* (basic representation) and *chitrabhinaya* (special representation). The movement of the different parts of the face and the head, specially the movements of the eyes, are almost as important as the *hasta* in the *abhinaya* technique of the dance. Each glance and the movement of the eye balls and eyebrows is related to its corresponding *vyabhicharibhava* (transitory state), the *sthayibhava* (dominant state) and the *rasa*. The technique of Indian dance is as complex in nature as the techniques of any art in India. It builds from its smallest part into a composite whole by a series of laws applied systematically. All this is done with a view to evoking a particular state of mind or *rasa*, whether it be through *nrtta* or *abhinaya*.

The Indian dancer's preoccupation is not so much with space (as in the case of the western dancer), as with time, with the dancer constantly trying to achieve the perfect pose to convey a sense of timelessness. The human form here achieves geometrical shapes in time rather than in space, for the intricacy of the *nrtta* (abstract dance) technique depends on the very fine and deliberate manipulation of *tala* (rhythm) to achieve a series of poses. The perfect pose is a moment of arrested time in limited space. The Indian dancer is not concerned with the musculature of the human form, but rather, like the sculptor, takes the joints and fundamental anatomical bone structure of the human form as its basis. From such a basis the dancer strives to achieve absolute form, since the muscles cannot suggest absolute form and create abstract geometrical patterns easily. the different parts of the body and their respective movements have been

analyzed from this point of view. It is from the key points of knee, hip and shoulder that movement emerges in both the lower and upper limbs; the neck joint is the pivot for movements of the head and face.

***Vachika:* verbal**

- a. recitation and music in dance
- b. *vakyabhinaya* (sentence narration) in drama

***Aharya:* costumes and make-up**

***Sattvika:* of the temperaments, and involuntary states**

Sattvika abhinaya is a physical manifestation of a deep mental state. When the mind attains perfect concentration, *sattva* is produced. This *sattva* is essential for a superb simulation of emotion. The *abhinaya* where *sattva* is present is called *sattvika abhinaya*. Bharata calls *abhinaya* in which *sattva* preponderates as the supreme acting. This perfect concentration is required of the spectator as well to comprehend the nuances of the *sattvika abhinaya* and for *rasa* to result. This unique relationship between the performer and the spectator results in the upkeep of the nature of both. The spectator and performer must possess a higher level of intelligence and training to participate in this communication process. Spectators who do not possess this prior knowledge may find the classical art forms leading to boredom. Although this limits the demographics of the spectator, it makes sure that the art never dwindles to just a means of entertainment. It has been and remains much more than that and this inherent strength has helped it survive inspite of various obstacles.

EVOLUTIONARY NATURE:

The extensive codification in the ancient treatises have been given to us by those wise writers along with the caution that if the performer does not interpret them according to their imagination and times, the art would become a dead art. This gives ample freedom to the artist who wishes to practice these traditional art forms. Rather than confining him to follow the codified material doggedly, they offer a structure within which the artist can explore their own creativity. The fact that this structure exists is a great boon to artists as it offers a cautionary hand in the creative process. Using the codified structure to his benefit, the artist can evolve his own style, thus not allowing the art to degenerate. Apart from this freedom which the treatises offer, the composers in Indian history have given us treasure house of compositions to be choreographed and the untiring performer can never tire the spectator.

Traditional Indian dance has not remained the same through the centuries. Rather, it has evolved into something entirely different from what it was at its origin. The format of the recital has changed significantly. But the evolution that takes place within each dancer's lifetime is important to our study here. This evolution is one of the primary causes for the survival of our classical dancer forms. As a dancer, within my lifetime various facets of my dancing have changed and continue to change gradually through exposure to several factors around me. Every dancer I have watched has undergone changes unique to them and as we teach others what we have evolved, they in turn will go through the same process. The performance code established by the culture acts as a boundary of a non-confining nature, and the performer code works within this limitless boundary to bring about an evolution of Indian dance forms that enables it to survive centuries of historical pressure.

SYNTHESIS OF THE ARTS:

The theory of Indian dance cannot be understood in isolation but as a complex synthesis of the arts of literature, sculpture, painting and music.

Literature & Dancing:

The integration of literature and dancing is the direct outcome of the same inspiration as moved the classical writers. Indeed, the classical Indian dance would be but a dead technique, with meaningless flourishes and elaborations, without the rich *sahitya* (libretto) that forms the basis of this dance. The *sahitya* lends it gravity and dignity of purpose and, when it is presented by a truly inspired and dedicated dancer, it is imbued with a new and profound significance. As the dancer performs, a distinct religious, literary tradition comes alive: he or she portrays through movement what the writer has sought to express through words and poetry. The difference between a good and a bad performance is that the spark of literature shines in one and the lack of it makes the other dead.

Just as the part played by literature in dancing cannot be overestimated, so also the part played by Indian dancing in Vedic and classical Sanskrit literature cannot be over-emphasized. Dance has not only provided these writers with a subject for pleasure, for beauty, and for poetic ornamentation in a nebulous way but has also influenced them in a way that they are sensitive to the minutest technical details and exhibit a knowledge of the art incomparable to any reference to it found in other literatures of the world.

When we trace the history of Indian literature, we find references to dancing from the very earliest times. From the vague inspiration that the dancer provides to the imaginative poet to the symbolism that dance provides to the mythology writer, there is an abundance of material on dancing in our religious, theological, sociological and literary works. Through them we can re-create a history of this art, when no written history exists, and in them we find descriptions of dancing as it must have been at varying periods of history. Through the channels of literature, aesthetic or religious, we can trace the development of this art along pre-historic times, a later and higher level of

culture and civilization and the highly sophisticated and abstract aspect of dancing which manifest themselves in these works.

The relationship between dance and literature can be traced in the (a)Vedic and post-Vedic literature, (b) Epic poetry and the *Puranas*, (c) *kavya*, lyrical and narrative poetry, and (d) the *natya* or drama proper, through the following categories:

1. Divine and human beings in the literary texts from the earliest times are found dancing at some stage or the other.
2. The poet seems to be fascinated by comparing things in nature and the world in terms of the dancing image. The form of the dancer, her technical accomplishments, her bells, her rhythm, the poses she attains, are all deeply explored. Sanskrit literature utilizes dance in its rich fund of metaphor and simile, the two principles which are complementary in nature.
3. Specific dance recitals and performances are described in these works. These references give us some idea of the essential features of the types of dancing, both social and classical, that must have been prevalent. Through these references we can determine the place of dancing in the society at large and can have an idea of the aesthetic principles underlying these dances.
4. The aspect of Sanskrit dramatic literature is the direct result of dancing and can be completely identified with it. *Natya* in Sanskrit literature was not only dialogue on stage but an integrated representation of the four types of *abhinaya*, namely, *angika*, *vacika*, *aharya* and *sattvika*. This evidence of *angikabhinaya* in literary drama is witnessed in the *abhinaya* portions of contemporary classical dance in India: indeed, it is the only survival of ancient Indian drama. Here the two arts become one and inseparable and, if drama becomes more pantomimic in character, dance becomes more literary.

From the different types of relationship that exist between the two arts of literature and drama, the directions of growth and development of these arts are self-evident. In the

direction of thought-development, the earliest dancing gods and goddesses of our mythology grow to assume the religious significance embodied in the symbolic concept of the dances of Siva or Visnu, the full-fledged gods of our trinity: in the direction of the secular and social development, the spontaneous dancing becomes the social and folk dancing of our country where every festival and important event of life is expressed through collective community dancing and where the dancer is an important limb of a good and happy society: and in the direction of technique development, the religious ritual assumes symbolic, codified and imitative significance to become an elaborate technique of gesticulation and *abhinaya*. The earlier dialogues also developed to assume the form of the literary drama proper. Thus the wheel has come full circle here, and the growth of Indian literature and dancing is a simultaneous development of content, thought and technique, and of subject-matter and form. Matter and style, the idea and the manifestation of it in form, go on merging into one another and the one cannot be separated from the other. Suffice it to say that the art of dancing emerges from all these references and at the very moment of its being a source of amusement and pleasure, used either for healthy purposes or exploited for base instincts in man, it is a source of spiritual uplift, moral elevation and intellectual *sadhana* of the highest type. When it deteriorates, it is the art of the sorcerer, the sole instrument of temptation; when it ascends and develops, it is the voice and movement of God. These tendencies take time to be formulated but, by the time Bharata writes his treatise on dramaturgy, these concepts take a definite shape. It is this process of the growth of matter, manner and purpose of dancing that he has in mind when he attributes to dancing a divine origin, a religious and literary background, and an aesthetic and secular purpose.

Sculpture & Dancing:

The figures of Indian painting and sculpture are the gods of Indian literature and dancing; they are cosmic beings, embodiments of an abstract idea, of an innermost psychological significance; and the human form is the vehicle of communication of this soul state. In both sculpture and dancing the human form is the instrument of expression and everything in the figure, the face, the hands, the posture of the limbs, the pose and turn of the body, each accessory has to be imbued with an inner meaning (see illustration on next page); it manifests, on the one hand, the basic idea and, on the other, suppresses anything which would mean an emphasis on the merely physical or sensuous. The technique of the arts is conditioned by this ultimate purpose: since the aim is not only physical or emotional beauty, it presents the human form as a symbol capable of evoking states of being; the canons prescribe the laws and rules by which each single part of the human form can be utilized through the plastic medium and through the language of movement to evoke these states. Thus every figure of Indian sculpture is, like every pose and gesture in Indian dancing, highly symbolic, and each figure has a particular evocative quality. The technique is the methodology by which the artist can present this spirit in form, the soul in body, and it lays down the rules by which the universal and cosmic can be presented through an individualized representation, which can in turn suggest the divine and the cosmic.

From the point of view of form, we find that both Indian dancing and sculpture consider the basic anatomical skeleton of the human form more important than the accessories or muscles and tendons that cover it. Since it was the bone structure and not the muscle structure which was important, it was also possible to analyze the human form in terms of a set of geometrical and mathematical laws of planes and surfaces. Indian dancing intentionally imposes upon itself the discipline of limited space and all its movements can be analyzed in terms of the relation of the different parts of the human body to the vertical median. Just as Indian sculpture conceives of the deflections and poses of the human body along the different planes of the body and areas of space, so

also Indian dancing conceives of the movement in space. The point of perfect balance can be maintained if there is the minimum possible deviation from the centre of gravity; both the Indian sculptor and dancer follow this rule. Violent movement is depicted only by one leg and the utmost poise and stability of a rare static quality is suggested by the other.

From the Mohen-jo-daro figurine and the Harappa torso to the reliefs of Chidambaram and bronze Nataraja figures of the 16th century is a long journey. This journey of movement bears testimony to the acute sensitivity of the Indian artist to movement. The Indian sculptor was conscious of the human body as a most powerful instrument for the communication of moods. Like the creative poet and dramatist, he was also knowledgeable and his imagination was harnessed to the canons of not only sculpture but also dance texts. Through examples of Indian sculpture one can reconstruct to some extent a history of movement of Indian dance. The over-powering richness and variety with an incredible continuity can be seen in dance sculptures of India for nearly 17 centuries (see illustration on next page). In fact, its richness has always been a source of inspiration to the dancer.

Music & Dancing:

The relationship between Indian music and dancing can be analyzed by examining the details of the technical structure, the content of both, and from a historical point of view. The superstructure of musical composition is built by *svaras* (notes in an octave) which are charged with emotive content and each *svara* has a distinctive character: the *raga* (melody) is built from the *svaras* by emphasizing specific notes in a particular sequence in the ascending and descending scales: the mood of a *raga* is built in a special manner by emphasizing some *svaras* and ignoring others, by lingering on some, by running through a group of others. In Indian dance the different parts of the human form are like the notes of music in a given *raga* and are used in an analogous way. The

minor limbs (*upangas*), and the eyebrows, eyelids, eyeballs, nose, lips, and mouth are emphasized in mime and the major limbs (*angas*) i.e. the head, chest, waist, hips, thigh and feet are emphasized in the abstract dance. There are then the *pratyangas* i.e. the neck, elbows, shanks and knees which can be used in either aspect.

The dancer like the musician uses movement to evoke particular emotive states through abstract dance sequences and through interpretation in a stylized pantomime of the single poem set to music. To the purely musical melodic patterns in a given metrical cycle the dancer weaves abstract geometrical patterns in space; to the words of the poem set to music in a specific melody the dancer interprets through stylized gestures the literary content of the piece. In either case the musical composition determines the dance compositions; the patterns of melody determine the pure dance sequences and the nature and composition of the literary piece determines the interpretation of the permanent mood and transitory states.

When Markandeya told King Vajra in the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* that he must learn the art of dance before he learnt the art of icon-making and the art of music before he learnt dance and that he must master *tala* (rhythm) before he attempted to learn music, he was not being merely fastidious; he was stating a fundamental principle of the Indian arts. In Indian aesthetic theory the interrelationship of the arts has been known and recognized not on the level of the aesthetic experience alone but also on the level of technique. The concept of *tala* has levels, in different contexts, and in relation to different artistic instruments has determined the structure of Indian music, dance, painting and sculpture. More than any other single element, it is this preoccupation with time which binds the two arts in a manner in which not even sculpture and dancing and literature and dancing are bound. To use a commonplace analogy, sculpture and dance seem like two sisters of the same family; literature and dance the background and foreground of the same picture, but music and dance are two limbs of the same human

form. The relationship of these two arts is so intimate that at certain moments it is difficult to distinguish one from the other in the final artistic product.

What is left of the magnificent dramatic technique of Bharata is indeed fragmentary. Nonetheless from these fragments we can have some idea of the totality of a tradition which conceived of all the arts as interlinked and utilized the technique of one art in the other. The aesthetic experience provided by traditional Indian music and dance is perhaps the only survivor of the Indian aesthetic theory in practice. The theory was conceived initially in relation to Indian drama (inclusive of literature, dance and music), was extended to sculpture, painting, architecture; after two thousand years, while the tradition has been lost in practice to the more permanent arts such as sculpture, painting and literature, this continuity of tradition can be witnessed in the arts of music and dance. The word set to music, danced through sculptural poses which seeks to evoke a particular state of being provides to the performer and the spectator a heightened experience appropriately called *Brahmanand Sahodara* (twin to sublime bliss). And yet all these forms of classical music and dance are but fragments of an integrated whole, comparable to detached pieces of beautiful sculpture from a magnificent temple. While the single pieces have an identity and a completeness, they belong to a mighty architectural edifice of the theatre arts, where each played a significant part in the total conception.

UNIVERSAL NATURE

Indian dance is universal, has a way of unifying the energies and has immense therapeutical and theatrical values. There are no limitations of theme or content of the dance since it depicts the exploits of the gods, demons and kings as well as of ordinary human beings. The link between the various classical dance forms of India is the focus on the eternal yearning of the human soul (*Jeevatma*) to unite with the divine soul (*Paramatma*). The Hindu mind views the creative process as a means of suggesting or

recreating a vision, however fleeting, of a divine truth; and regards art as a means of experiencing a state of bliss akin to the absolute state of *ananda* or *jivanmukti* (release in life). This is common to all the regional classical dance forms no matter how diverse they are. From the pictures of these dance styles (their names are given at the bottom of each page), we can see that they are different in technique and content. What links them together under the term 'Indian dance' is the experience of bliss through union with the supreme soul, which is the primary goal of all these dance forms. The spectator must also thus have an inner preparedness to receive this vision and be a potential artist; he is a *rasika*, a *sahridaya*, one who is capable of responding. The training and initiation of this person is almost as important as the training and discipline of the artist himself. All Indian arts, especially the arts of music and dancing, thus demand a trained and initiated spectator. An awareness of the salient features of the vast background of Indian dancing can help formulate some of the demands traditionally made on the spectator. For the traditional Indian artist, regardless of the field in which he worked artistic creation was the supreme means of realizing the Universal Being.

"Art was a discipline (*sadhana*), a *yoga*, and a sacrifice (*yajna*). Any form of *sadhana* is a means of achieving a state of complete harmony (*samarasya*) and thus of total release (*svatantrya*) from the 'so-much-ness' (*iyatta*) of life; it leads to a recognition of one's truer self." (Vatsyayan 5). These were also the ends which the Indian artist pursued. The spiritual, mental and physical discipline required in the search for complete harmony is *yoga*. *Yoga* is adeptness or efficiency in any activity undertaken by the individual. All activity, in as much as it is dedicated activity, is a sacrificial offering. The artist was also obliged to the offering of his best. Accepting this major concept of Hindu spiritual and philosophical thought, the Indian artist could not possibly regard the problem of art creation as one of giving universal significance to his own subjective experience. He was involved in a discipline for the attainment of the Infinite, the Universal Being, in his individual self. The problem for him was one of suggesting or revealing or recreating

this movement. Through this creation he sought to evoke a state of pure joy. The artist was indeed like the worshipper who saw again and again the Godhead and who attempted to re-create the ultimate state of his realization through the specific technique of his art. To a person so conditioned, an art creation was a spiritual discipline, in which he had intuitively to know the truth of what he experienced before he gave it a concrete manifestation in art. Physical perception, the imitation of nature, was irrelevant to this belief, and artistic creation could be a success only if it achieved the supreme artistic purpose of creating a state of bliss, second only to the seeker's ultimate goal of absolute bliss. The aesthetic experience was considered second only to the supreme experience. If the above concepts were the fundamental principles of an artistic consciousness, the realm of aesthetics or the artistic experience could obviously not be limited to ideas, conflict and thought. 'Ideas' and the problems of suffering, pain and conflict belonged properly to the realms of philosophy; aesthetics, like religion, was the realm of the spirit. The artist's pre-occupation was with the 'symbol' through which states of being could be suggested or re-created. Subjective personal experience played little or no part, and artistic creation began only when the artist had attained, in his own intuitive mind, the state of calm or equilibrium. Having conquered all personal suffering and pain and attained this state of complete detached emotion, he presented through age-old symbols the spectrum of life only to re-create a similar state of being in the reader or spectator, a state in which the latter could experience, however transitorily, the pure bliss of art.

The aesthetic which emerged as a result of these beliefs was the theory of *rasa*. Since the human being and his subjective emotion were not themes important enough to be portrayed in art, life was seen as a series of states of being which though diverse, led to one transcendental experience of bliss. The theory of *rasa*, as conceived by the Hindu aesthetician and as practiced by the artist, has two aspects. The first is the evoked state in which transcendental bliss is experienced; the second is the sentiments, the moods, the permanent and transitory states, which were the object of presentation. The second

provided the content of the art; the first was its ultimate objective. The technique of the arts was directly conditioned by these principles, and these techniques are the rules through which these *rasa* states can be evoked.

The technique pertinent to each art is most frequently elaborated in theoretical treatises, while the spiritual aims and philosophic attitudes are taken for granted. The continuity of tradition of the arts was maintained so long as these principles were accepted as a matter of faith; when the underlying beliefs came to be doubted, the tradition fell into decay or disintegrated altogether. *Rasa* as a theory of technique can profitably be applied to all the creative arts in India. The technique of all arts, as enunciated by the theorists and manifested in the creative works, makes it quite clear that it did not permit or condone negation of the established and verified laws of execution. Once intuitive idea had been grasped by the artist on the spiritual plane, he followed faithfully and rigorously the laws of arrangement of word, line, mass, color, posture, sound and movement as laid down in the canons. Through all their crowded multiplicity on the plane of execution, he never lost sight of the fact that all these rules were designed to perfect the instrument of expression of the ultimate spiritual fountain-head and the Infinite Spirit: each single detail of technique was significant only in so far as it was a hand-maid to the central intuitive idea and the Absolute State. Had the technique of the Indian arts been merely a collection of technical rules, it would have been difficult for the creative artist to adhere to them so faithfully and so completely over a period of fourteen centuries. Also had the technical laws not allowed freedom of expression, experimentation and innovation, there would have been artistic revolts. The principles governing the technique of Indian dance are the same as those which govern the technique of classical drama in India. The liberty given to a dancer within the boundaries set forth by the ancient texts and the unity between theory and practice enable the survival of these dance forms.

CONCLUSION:

But the dilution in the quality of the technique is the cause of some concern. Although the dances have gained popularity during recent years, some of them are in danger of losing quality. The aesthetic enjoyment of the classical Indian dance is considerably hampered today by the gap between the dancer and the spectator. Even the accomplished dancer, in spite of his mastery of technique, may sometimes only be partially initiated in the essential qualities of the dance form and its aesthetic significance. But, in the case of the audience, only the exceptional spectator is acquainted with the language of symbols through which the artist achieves the transformation into the realm of art. The majority are somewhat baffled by a presentation which is obviously contextual and allusive but which derives from traditions to which they have ready access. Although they are aware that the dance is an invitation through its musical rhythms, to the world in time and, through its sculpturesque poses, to the world in space, in which the character portrayed is living, they are unable to identify themselves with him. Far less are they able to attain such identity with the dancer in his portrayal of the particular role. Even this awareness is, however, a partial and imperfect comprehension of the essential inter-relationship of the arts, which is one of the basic assumptions of classical Indian aesthetics.

It would therefore be wise to question the future of Indian classical dance forms and analyze its survival in the years to come. I believe that if they have survived for the last three thousand years, although they may face new problems, they will be able to hold their own place because of the reasons discussed above.

Bibliography:

Bharata Muni. The Natya Sastra. Trans. A Board of Scholars. New Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

Dhananjayan, V.P. A Dancer on Dance. Second Edition. Madras: Bharata Kalanjali, 1991.

Vatsyayan, Kapila. Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts. Second Edition. New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1977.

---, Indian Classical Dance. New Delhi: Director Publications Division Ministry, 1974.