

KATHAKALI, AND OTHER FORMS OF BHARATA NATYA OUTSIDE KERALA

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I

It is sometime now since the Kathakali of Malabar began to attract the attention of 'art-lovers,' and the Kerala Kalamandalam of Vallathol is being sought by artists who are eager to become exponents of Indian Dance. We are interested at present in the English literature that has recently grown up on this subject. Four articles have appeared in this part of the country: two in the *Triveni*, one in the *Hindu Illustrated Weekly*, and one in the *Journal of the Annamalai University*. Besides these stray articles there is the small publication of the Archæological Department of the Travancore Government which gives a short treatment of the Kathakali by Mr. R. V. Poduval, Superintendent of the Department. The pamphlet describes Kathakali and adds two short supplementary sections on 'rasa' and 'tala' both of which are scrappy. The speciality of the booklet, however, consists in the three plates it contains, one giving us a group of Kathakali actors dressed in various *roles*, another giving some 'mudras' or gesture-symbols of the hand as employed in Kathakali, and the third and the most important plate giving us a comparative study of the 'mudras' as described by the Sanskrit texts of Bharata and Nandikeswara, by the Tamil text, the commentary on the *Silappadikaram*,¹ and as used in the Kathakali. A short article on the 'Kathakali of Malabar' by Mr. N.K. Venkateswaran giving us a few details about the art appeared in the 1931 Nov-Dec. issue of the *Triveni*. In the *Hindu Illustrated Weekly* for June 5, 1932, appeared an article

¹The booklet supposes wrongly that *Silappadikaram* itself gives these gestures. The fact is that they are given in one of the commentaries on it, viz., that of Adiyarkkunallar.

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entitled 'The Kathakali; or, Ancient Malabar Drama,' by Mr. G. Ramanatha Aiyar, B.A., with three pictures. The account was brief but clear and bereft of any rhetorical flourish. The main characteristics of the form of drama called Kathakali were given there, attention being drawn to the Kathakali literature, make-up, training in 'abhinaya,' 'dumb-show,' and stage effects. The three pictures giving three typical scenes show us the costume as well as the facial 'abhinaya' of the artists. Then appeared in the first part of the first volume of the *Annamalai University Journal* a rather long article on 'Kerala Theatre' by Mr. K. R. Pisharoti, M. A., Head of the Sanskrit Department of the University. This article devoted a section to this most noteworthy form of theatre-art in Kerala, namely, the Kathakali. The latest contribution is an article by 'Art-lover' in the 1933 May-June issue of the *Triveni* which has been responsible for provoking me to contribute this paper on the subject.

It appears to me that the greatest danger awaiting the future of art in India is provincial superiority complex. It seems that even in the realm of art there is little possibility of all provinces federating into one unity of Indian Art. It has become very common now for one province to abuse another, each trying to show up to the Western world that, in respect of cultural advancement, art, literature, etc., it alone stands supreme in the whole of India. Each province says, as the Upanishadic seer said of the *Brahman*: 'It alone existed at first; nought else winked': *Nanyat kinchanamishat*. This kind of feeling permeates the writings of those who write about the forms of art flourishing in their own provinces. For instance, Mr. Pisharoti says in his article on 'Kerala Theatre' that it is the unique feature of the Kerala stage, as distinguished from not only the vernacular stages of India but also the English stage, that it gives prominence to 'actual acting and dancing' and that such terms as 'nataka' and 'natya' lend weight and authoritative-ness to their stage (P. 3). He adds that their theatre in Kerala keeps 'truer and nearer to the ideals of the ancient Hindu stage tradition.' He concludes his paper

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with the statement that in the Kathakali 'may be seen almost the highest perfection of the arts of acting and dancing, the perfect realisation as yet known of the technique so scientifically elaborated and described by Bharata in his *Natya Sastra*.' Such vanity results from a vicious provincial patriotism. It is a pity that writers do not care to do sufficient research and compare the forms of art of their provinces with those available in their neighbourhood and all over India. If one is not writing about one's own province's art he is an 'Art-lover' who has just come suddenly upon one provincial variety of the vast Indian Theatre and, having adopted that new-found form as his pet-child, he begins to write of it as the only truly classic Indian art. Writers harp upon Ajanta till suddenly they discover Kanchi and Tanjore. Till newer things are discovered, they write upon the same thing without end, giving us all the time few facts but indulging in effusive rhetoric.

It now seems to have happened that a few art-lovers have come to know a little of Kathakali. At once they have begun to write that this is the most hoary, ancient, and only genuine art of India. Mr. N. K. Venkateswaran opines that Kathakali is 'hoary' and that its technique is 'original'. It is not so old as it is supposed to be, nor is its technique original. 'Art-lover' says that Kathakali is based on traditions more ancient than that of *Bharata Natya*! To this audacious statement is added the discovery of the fact that its real beginnings can be traced to a race and civilisation much anterior to the Aryan and that its antiquity must indeed be very remote. It is affirmed that it is Kathakali that walked over to Java.

All this is unsupported dogmatic assertion, and the whole article proceeds in a spirit of propagandic pamphleteering. Kerala scholars accept the date of Kathakali as the latter half of the seventeenth century.¹ There is being carried on a controversy in the pages of the *Kairali* on the date of the origin of the Kathakali by Mr. Ullur Parameswara Iyer and Mr. Krishnan, Nair of the Malayalam Section in the Madras University

¹ P. 16, Mr. Pisharoti on 'Kerala Theatre'.

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Oriental Research Department. The latter wants to push back the date and hold that the Kathakali is four hundred years old. Even Mr. Krishnan Nair's four hundred years does not make the art 'hoary' or much anterior to Bharata. The story of how it arose is also known to everybody, that Kathakali or Attakkatha or its first specimen in the form of the Ramanattam devised by a chief of Kottarakkara Swarupam arose out of Krishna Attam which was pure Sanskrit drama. Pure Sanskrit drama was being staged everywhere in India. We had it in the Tamil country as 'Ariyam'. An inscription in a temple at Tiruvavaduturai, Mayavaram taluq, Tanjore district, says that the managing assembly of the village of Sattanur decided to have enacted the seven parts (Acts) of Ariyakkoothu, Sanskrit drama, during the festival. Besides, such Sanskrit compositions as the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva were rendered in 'abhinaya' in the Tamil country and we have in the Tanjore library a commentary on the *Gita Govinda* which gives the 'abhinaya,' word by word. Similarly the Chakyars staged Sanskrit dramas by parts in Kerala (Prabandham, Krishnattam, Koodiyattam), and all this acting was based upon Bharata's system as found in his treatise on *Natya Sastra*. Says R. V. Poduval: 'But the greatest influence on the Kathakali was from the Chakyar Koottu and Koodiyattam, two older dramatic representations' (Page 16). But lapses and provincial deviations there were and must have been, and I have with me a manuscript from the Madras Government Oriental Manuscripts Library called *Natankusa* in which an author, very well-versed in the Sanskrit Natya Sastra, criticises 'the haughty and erring' Chakyars of Malabar and their enacting of the Sanskrit dramas like *Ascharyachoodamani*, *Nagananda*, etc. This apart, it is sufficiently clear that the technique of *Bharata Natya* was widespread, and like the banyan tree, its pan-Hindu branchings sent provincial shoots which developed into the provincial varieties of Bharata's art. The Sanskrit, the classic language, produced the Prakrits, and one 'marga' produced many 'desis'. It is as foolish to assert that the Malayalam language.

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as it is now is an original language with nothing to do with Sanskrit as to claim for the Kathakali an origin independent of the classic Sanskrit theatre of Bharata. Surely primitive folk-dances there were all over the country, and forms of these might have been remoulded with the aid of the Sanskrit Bharata Natya, thus evolving new forms. But to call Kathakali as more ancient than Bharata and as based on pre-Aryan traditions smacks of what in the Tamil districts one is acquainted with as the 'veerattamil' and 'self-respect' spirit which holds everything as non-Aryan or pre-Aryan, non-Sanskrit or at least pre-Sanskrit.

'Art-lover' asserts that the Kathakali is 'the only genuine hundred-per-cent classical dance-art of ancient India!' One can as well identify the strip of land called Kerala with the whole of India. Mr. Pisharoti seems to think that it is only the Kerala theatre which uses the words 'nataka' and 'natya' and that there alone Bharata's system lives. He says that Kathakali is the highest perfection of Bharata, as yet known. Possibly it is the only form as yet known to the writer. Just as Sanskrit is the classical language of India, the language of its culture; just as Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, and Sudraka are the classical poets of ancient India, so also the system of Bharata Muni as laid down in his *Natya Sastra* in 36 chapters and on the basis of which Sanskrit dramas were enacted and dances were performed in ancient India, is the classical dance-art of ancient India. With the dethronement of Sanskrit and the development of provincial vernaculars, provincial forms of drama and dance retained the science of Sanskrit *Natya Sastra*, but the literature of the stage, the dramas and the songs that were danced, became vernacular. Anyway genuine classic Indian dance is that whose technique is what Bharata and a host of other Sanskrit writers have laid down in numerous Sanskrit treatises. What is the characteristic that forms the differentia of this Bharata Natya, the genuine classic Indian dance? Bharata Natya is the imitation of men in moods—*Avasthanukritih natyam*, through a medium which is a marvel of achievement at once in 'bhava,' 'raga,' and 'tala,'

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emotion, melody, and rhythm. Natya is of two kinds, 'rupaka' and 'uparupaka,' 'vakyarthabhinaya' or 'rasabhinaya,' and 'padarthabhinaya' or 'bhavabhinaya'. That is, it is either drama or dance. The former presents a 'rasa': it resembles an epic poem; the latter presents only a 'bhava': it resembles a minor poem. There is thematic unity of one 'rasa' all through a drama; the dance is a mere bit. The former has all the four kinds of 'abhinaya' or means of representation, namely, 'vachika' (speech), 'sattvika' (action of sattvika bhavas, tear, horipilation etc.), 'angika' (physical action), and 'aharya' (make-up). In the minor dramatic varieties and dance one or more of these four cannot be seen.¹ As for instance, the Kathakali is an 'uparupaka' which is bhavabhinaya in which vachika or speech is absent, it being a dumb show. All these form Bharata's Natya and that which characterises them as such is the one element called 'abhinaya,' the language of gesture. In drama most action is natural ('lokadharmi'), whereas in varieties of dance and incomplete drama there is a super-abundance of idealised action, ('natyadharmi') which necessitates the presence of maximum 'abhinaya'.² Thus the absence of speech in Kathakali secures in it a larger amount of 'abhinaya'. In Kathakali we have various persons to take the part of various characters ('anekaharya') which quality classes it as a drama, but in the Prabandham Koottu and Nautch done by one individual ('ekaharya') there is a maximum of 'natyadharmi' and consequently maximum of 'abhinaya'. Besides this 'abhinaya' or conveying the emotion by gesture, there is the pure dance called 'nritta' and this is 'tandava' with all its 'angaharas,' 'sthanas,' and 'karanas' elaborated in the fourth chapter of Bharata and carved in the tower of the Chidambaram temple. 'Nritta' is pure rhythmic dance and does not interpret any emotion through gesture. It depicts pure joy and is sheer

¹ Vide *Journal of Oriental Research*, Madras, Vol. VII. Part 3, my article on 'Dasarupa'.

² In Vol. VII. Part 4 and in Vol. VIII. Part 1 of the *J. O. R.*, Madras, will appear two papers of mine on this subject of Natyadharmi and Lokadharmi.

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rhythm, beauty of motion, the manifestation of 'laya'.¹ It is not so useful in drama as such, but in minor dramatic varieties and dances its place is definite. In 'abhinaya,' we have above all the 'hastabhinaya' which deserves the greatest attention of one who wants to train himself. By 'hastabhinaya' called popularly as 'mudra,'² 'artha,' (things, objects, and ideas) are suggested or shown. By the eye and other parts of the face as the brows, lip, nose, the cheeks, etc., 'bhava' or emotion is shown. The eye is the soul as it were. Says Bharata (*Natya Sastra*, XIV. 34.): "It is in the eye that feelings and emotions are: the feeling first indicated by the eye is then known by its physical action." The eye shows the thirty-three minor moods called 'vyabhichari bhavas' and the nine major sentiments called 'sthayi bhavas' which develop into the relishable state in the tasteful spectator's heart as the 'rasa'. Besides these, there are the movements, 'rechaka' (of neck, bust etc.). Says Bharata: "Angikabhinaya is threefold, action of the body, action of the face, and such natural action in the dramas as going, sitting, etc., ('cheshta'). In dance done by one, only the first two count. The first has six parts, there being the actions of six parts of the body,—head, hand, hip or waist, bust, flanks, and feet. These are the six 'angas', and six are the 'upangas' which constitute the realm of facial 'abhinaya',—eye, brow, nose, lip, cheek, and chin." It is in that part of the first department of physical action ('sarirabhinaya') called 'hastabhinaya' that the 'mudras' come up. When an emotional theme is set to a tune and sung as in Kathakali or as in any old Nataka of the Tamil country or as in Nautch, the scheme works thus: the artist keeps the rhythm or 'tala' by the feet, and along with this we have the 'nritta'; the song is sustained by the throat of the artist or by a set of musicians at the back; 'artha,' objects, and

¹ Bharata's *Natya Sastra*, IV. 260.

² The word 'mudra' does not occur anywhere in *Natya Sastra*. It is of iconographic and sculptural origin and its use by modern writers on Indian dance is due to the fact that very much earlier than classic Indian dance, Indian sculpture and Iconography became subjects of modern research. The word used in the Sanskrit *Natya* texts is simply 'hasta.'

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ideas are shown by gesture-symbols of the hand, and bhava or emotion by the eye, the chief of the six upangas.

Kanthena alambayet geetam
Padabhyam talam acharet;
Chakshurbhyam darsayet bhavam
Hastena artham pradarsayet.||

II

A rather long analysis of Bharata has been given above to enable critics to realise what constitutes the evidence to identify a form of art they come upon as faithful to Bharata. And when an 'Art-lover' tries to travel into nooks and corners and visit each province with a view to impartially gather the forms of dance and drama available all over India, he will find a number of forms which are as faithful, if not more, to the technique of Bharata as the Malabar Kathakali, forms which are provincial varieties, vernacular species of the one classical Sanskrit Natya of Bharata. The Kathakali is not 'the only genuine hundred-per-cent classical dance-art of ancient India,' nor is it the only form in which the tradition of Bharata lives or has reached perfection. The Nautch or the Bharata Natya or the Sadir done by the courtesan-danseuse in the Tamil country, which is the most widespread religious as well as secular form of dance as far as the Tamil Kannada and Telugu provinces are concerned, is as much, if not more, genuine cent-per-cent classical Bharata dance. In it can be seen the whole world of 'hastabhinaya' or 'mudras,' the 'abhinaya' of the rest of the 'angas' and 'upangas,' etc., 'nritya' as well as 'Nritta'. Its history goes back far into ancient India, and who can fail to see the courtesan-danseuse in every page of Sanskrit literature from the Rig Vedic hymns and from Valmiki and Vyasa? This dance was spread all over India as the evidence of all Sanskrit literature shows. In the Tamil dramatic literature it is referred to by the name Avinayakkoottu which means Abhinaya Dance. (Refer Adiyar-kkunallar on the *Silappadikaram*). In old times it was known as Mohiniyattam in Kerala and this is almost a dead variety

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there now. (Page 13, Mr. Pisharoti's 'Kerala Theatre'; Page 105, *Madras Christian College Magazine* 1921, 'The Malabar Drama' by Mr. R. V. Poduval). This is the dance which Parvati originated as 'lasya'; this is the classic dance which Malavika presented for the rapture of Agnimitra's heart in the *Malavikagnimitra* of Kalidasa; this is the dance which the courtezans offered to Lord Siva every evening in the temple of Maha Kala at Ujjain in the *Meghaduta* of Kalidasa.

The Bharata Natya of courtezans is, however, pure dance. There are varieties of drama that flourished and continue to be enacted even now in the Tamil land which are faithful forms of Bharata's art. The Kathakali of Malabar is, to give the fact of history, the mute brother of the Terukkoottu of the Tamil land. It can disclaim its relationship, but it can do so only to the extent old Malayalam language can disclaim its Tamil origin. The Terukkoottu as it is now done in the streets of the Tamil villages may have fallen from Bharata's system, but till recently it was full of 'abhinaya.' There is no doubt that the Tamil Terukkoottu is the Veethinataka of Andhra, the Yakshagana of Karnataka, and the Kathakali of Malabar. All these are identical except for sundry unimportant local differences. There is a vast Tamil Terukkoottu literature and when one takes one drama and sees how it is constructed in the form of 'padas' (songs), 'padyas' (verses), both sung, and occasional brief prose, one can see the identity between the two forms as far as literature goes. One finds at the beginning an item called 'todayam' which is an invocation to God and announcement of the names of the author and the play. It is this same 'todayam' that figures in Kathakali. Let us notice how the Kathakali proceeds. There is first the announcement, long before the show, by beat of 'suddha maddala,' 'chendai,' etc., called 'kelikkottu' and this corresponds somewhat to what in Bharata's *Natya Sastra* we find as 'nirgitavadya' or 'asuravadya' or external instrumental music forming part of the 'purvaranga'—the preliminary. The Tamil Terukkoottu was announced in the morning by the village 'yettiyan' by beat of the 'tamukku'. Then comes 'todayam'.

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which can be seen in the Tamil drama also. The 'todayam' appears also in a number of songs called 'todaya mangala' in the traditional 'bhajana' of the Tamil country. It is part of the 'purva ranga' and as seen in the Tamil drama it is the 'nandi' (benediction) and 'prarochana' (inducement) of the Sanskrit 'prastavana' (prelude) rolled into one. In Kathakali this item comes at about 8-30 P.M. Some boys come and dance in 'sukumara' (graceful) style after which there is 'nandi' in the form of 'vandana slokas.' Then there is the 'purappadu,' procession, if one can call it so. In this the divine or semi-divine character who figures in the drama as the hero is brought out in divine paraphernalia. Kathakali scholars suggest various explanations of this. This appears occasionally in the middle of the performance also, as in *Kimmiravadha* and *Kalyanasougandhika* though it is not called so. The song sung in these extra and middle 'purappadus' is the same as sung in the first prelude—'purappadu'. The purpose of the 'purappadu' of the hero with all his paraphernalia is evidently for creating and preserving in the minds of the spectators the reverence and the epic atmosphere. Personally I think that it is a development of what in a later stage of Sanskrit drama, when the 'purva ranga' underwent a change, is called the entry of a Sthapana Sutradhara. This Sutradhara, the Sanskrit works on Drama say, appears in divine make-up if the hero is divine or human make-up if the hero be a man and begins the show. The 'purappadu,' as it is at present, may differ very much but it might have originally developed out of the Sthapana Sutradhara. After 'purappadu,' we have a musical item called 'melappada' when we have only 'vadya' and this is also an item of 'nirgitavadya' of Bharata. About this time is sung what is called 'Manjutara' which gets this name from the practice of singing at this juncture the song 'Manjutara', etc., the seventeenth composition in the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva. This shows the influence of Sanskrit 'abhinaya' forms on the Kerala variety. As pointed out above, the *Gita Govinda* was very popular and was rendered in 'abhinaya' all over India. Some later writers have substituted their

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own new songs for the old piece 'Manjutara' from Jayadeva. The portion up to this can be said to correspond to what the *Silappadikaram* calls as 'antarakkottu,'—'music within.' Then at about nine the play begins. Two musicians, one chief and another following him, called respectively as Ponnann and Sangudi, sing the theme and the mute actors render the whole drama in 'abhinaya'. In between the 'abhinaya' of each foot of the song there is a course of mere dance which is 'nritta' and is called as 'kalasam'.¹ It is the same process as can be seen in the Nautch. Every foot of the song sung and gestured is variegated by a course of 'nritta' in the shape of rhythmic dance called 'tirmanas' in a variety of 'gatis' of the same 'tala.' The Terukkoottu also, as a true representative of Indian dance, had both 'nritta' and 'nritya.' All the actors entered dancing and till recently 'abhinaya' was living. Maybe there are yet Terukkoottu actors who preserve 'nritta' and 'nritya.'

Since Kathakali is devoid of speech ('vachikabhinaya') it is a 'nritya' and not a 'natya,' a 'bhavabhinaya' or a 'padarthabhinaya', not a 'rasabhinaya.' Further a 'natya,' like any classic Sanskrit drama, requires unity of one 'rasa' reaching a climax at the end, but in Kathakali any part of any Purana is played beginning somewhere and ending somewhere else. The theme is always renowned ('prakhyata') being puranic but has slight innovations by the poet ('utpadya'). As pointed out before, the 'sahitya' of the Kathakali which resembles that of the Tamil Terukkoottu, is in the form of song, verse, and prose, or sometimes devoid of the last. The verses and the less frequent prose are what the poet says 'Kavivakya'; the expression relating to what the characters speak between themselves is always song. The song is in the same form, as anybody knowing Karnatic music and Karnatic music composition knows, in 'pallavi,' 'anupallavi,' and 'charana.' This will clearly indicate the date of Kathakali, for the definite names of 'pallavi,' 'anupallavi,' and 'charana' date only after

¹ 'Kalasa' occurs in Sarngadeva's *Sangeeta Ratnakara* (VII, 1802-3). It means 'end of a course of dance.'

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the time of the Kannada composer Purandara Das, though long before him we had corresponding parts being called 'dhruvapada,' etc., in Sanskrit. In Yakshagana of the Kannada country, the Veethinataka of the Telugu country, and in the Terukkoottu of the Tamil land we see that the music is called Yakshagana.¹ In Tamil Terkkoottu plays we find the songs called by the names 'Taru,' 'Oradikkirthana,' 'Kanni,' etc. I do not know if these names are current in Kathakali also. Thus all these forms of South Indian drama are of operatic nature.

III

Besides these there are some other aspects of the Kathakali to be noted. It had undergone some changes at the hands which fashioned it with the help of Bharata. As pointed out by Mr. Pisharoti in his article, the Kathakali does not discountenance actual death, lying, etc., on the stage though Bharata prohibited them. The MS work *Natankusa* referred to above criticises also this practice of the Kerala actors going against Bharata. Mr. Pisharoti however praises the Kerala stage for this improvement (?) upon Bharata. When one breaks into a rhyme of praise upon one's province's art one cannot break the rhyme by a discordant note. Even flaws must be praised. Says Nilakantha Dikshita, the great Sanskrit satirist, that a panegyrist came upon a *black* man whom he had to praise and at once he praised him as the black cloud that rains plenty. 'Sringara' or love is overdone in Kathakali and 'gramyatva' or vulgarity is not absent. Such signs of popular and low handling are evident. Even as regards literature, Mr. Pisharoti says that at least one specimen of Kathakali drama, namely, the earliest Ramanattam 'does not possess a high order of literary merit.' (Page 16). The Tamil Teruk-

¹ The type of song called 'Yakshagana' is referred to in the music work, *Sangita Sudha* of Govinda Dikshita (1614. A. D.), minister of the Tanjore Telugu Kings. He says that he took 'Yakshagana' also into account and studied it for writing his work. In the Kannada Yakshagana as done now, songs of the type of 'Kirtana,' also are added occasionally.

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koottu dramas also, except stray works like Arunachalakavi-
raya's *Ramanataka*, were of poor literary quality and were
full of low comedy. There is no comparison between
Kathakali or Terukkoottu and the masterpieces of Kalidasa,
Bhavabhuti, and Sudraka and the refined technique as seen
in Bharata's text.

Sometime ago I drew the attention of Bharata-art-lovers
to a certain form of old drama which still continues to be
staged each year in certain villages of the Tanjore district. I
gave the information in the second instalment of my article on
'Theatre-Architecture in Ancient India' in *Triveni*, Vol.
V, No. 4, 1933. In the month of *Vaisakha* both at Sula-
mangalam and Oottukkadu, two villages in the Tanjore
district, every year the Brahmins of the village enact about
eight traditional dramas as part of the annual festival of the
local temples. In these 'natakams' lives every bit of Bharata,—
the 'charis,' the 'karanas,' the 'nyayas,' the complete langu-
age of gesture ('hastabhinaya') and 'abhinaya' of other
'angas' and 'pratyangas'. Mask and other parts of tradi-
tional make-up ('aharya') can be seen here. Here also
speech is least, and song gives an operatic character to the
drama. Crowds gather at these shows from all neighbouring
villages. A Brahmin 'bhagavatar' taking part in it is a master
of 'abhinaya' and can give the gesture-symbol of any idea.
His feet can keep the rhythm of any 'gati' of any 'tala' and
if he is a boy he portrays women's *roles* exquisitely. This is
as much, if not more, cent-per-cent genuine classical Bharata
art of ancient India.

These dramas, however, are in Telugu, which continues
to be the language of Karnatic music in the Tamil land. This
fact links it up with a variety of the Andhradesa. I pointed out
above that it is a variety of the lower strata of society, called
Terukkoottu. This Terukkoottu is in Andhra the Veethi-
nataka, both words, Tamil and Sanskrit, meaning street-drama.
The Yakshagana of Karnataka is likewise called Bayalattam,
meaning open-air play. The songs of these varieties are
called Yakshagana. If one turns over the catalogue of the Mss

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in the Tanjore Saraswati Mahal Library or the Madras Govt. Oriental Mss Library, one will find that the Tamil drama is called by one of the three names 'natakam,' 'yakshaganam,' or 'vilasam'. The second name is very common. Similar is the case with Telugu dramatic compositions some of which are called 'yakshaganam'. This name of the song in the drama has been applied to the drama itself in Karnataka. We had recently in the city of Madras a series of performances by two Yakshagana Dramatic Companies of South Kanara, and art-lovers could have got an idea of it.¹ To these has the Kathakali to be linked as also to what I was describing as the Brahmins' 'natakams' of the villages of Oottukkadu and Sulamangalam in the Tanjore district. Corresponding to the Brahmin 'bhagavatars' who are masters of the Bharata-art in these Tamil villages, we have the 'Kuchipudi bhagavatars' of the Andhradesa. Besides these many other varieties of cent-per-cent genuine Bharata Natya existed and some do exist even now in the Tamil land. For instance, there was the class of Brahmin artists called 'arrayars' attached to some of the important Vaishnavite shrines in South India. These Vaishnava 'arrayars' were masters of 'abhinaya' who interpreted, through Bharata's 'abhinaya', the Vaishnavite lyrics which are all set to music. If an art-lover takes trouble to visit the temple at Srirangam in the month of *Margasirsha* he can still find this art living. So Kathakali is not the only form of genuine ancient Indian Bharata Natya. If one cares to know more, he can discover forms which every province is rich in. Menaka, writing in the *Young Theosophist* for July 1933, informs us of a form called 'kathaka' existing in the north. When an art-lover who harps upon one variety is told of these various forms, he gets into a most pitiable feeling of anger against the

¹ The Kannada Yakshagana is nothing but the Tamil Terukkootu. Originally the drama had 'nritta' and 'nritya' to a very large extent. Each actor entered dancing to a song which introduced him. The theme is written in songs and verses which are both sung by a supporting musician. When these are sung, the actor danced and did 'abhinaya,' word by word. It differs from Kathakali in having prose speech by the actors. Themes are 'tandava'. Though impoverished in 'nritya' it is yet rich in 'nritta.' For a full account of Yakshagana, *vide* my article on the same in *Sound & Shadow*, Madras, Vol. II, Nov., 1933.

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informer. A rabid provincialist flies at one who says that similar forms of dance exist in other parts of India. On the other hand, a true lover of Indian art and its rejuvenation as the national entertainment, ought to feel glad over the discovery of the fact that Bharata's system lives profusely. One must thank God when he knows that so many sources are now discovered. Let modern renaissance-dancers take to one form or another, try to learn its technique, and be sincere and loyal exponents of Bharata's classic Indian dance and not deal in spurious stuff.

'Art-lover' says on page 584: 'Much of the so-called Indian classical dances are preposterous impostures.' I entirely agree. Let dancers of modern India resort to some traditional master of 'abhinaya', learn the whole foundation and science of the thing, steep themselves in the tradition of Indian art, culture, legend, and literature, and then try to devise new forms. In this connection 'Art-lover' has a remark on Indian painting. He says that Ajanta dances are preposterous impostures, for there is nothing in the whole series of Ajanta paintings except a single dance-scene in Cave No. 2. This statement and the ideas that follow it disclose how fragmentary the writer's knowledge of the three allied arts of Indian dance, sculpture, and painting is. Let me digress a little. The art of sculpture is also called 'chitra' in the classic Sanskrit Silpa treatises. As a matter of fact, it is only sculpture that is called 'chitra'; for a half-visible relief on a wall is only 'ardhachitra' or half-sculpture, and painting, a species of the same in colour and line, is only a semblance of sculpture, 'chirita-abhasa'. These two arts of sculpture and painting, if one peruses the biggest and the most valuable Sanskrit text on painting and allied arts, the *Vishnu-dharmottara*, are based on the Natya of Bharata. The 'sthanas,' the 'karanas,' the 'hastas,' the eye etc., of *Bharata Sastra* are all utilised by the sculptor and the painter:

Yatha nritte tatha chitre trailokyanukritis smrita |
Drishtayascha tatha bhavah-angopangani sarvasah ||

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Karascha ye mahanritte purvokta nripasattama |

Ta eva chitre vijneya *nrittam chitram param matam* ||

‘As in Natya, so in painting (and in sculpture), it is the imitation of the universe, that is, representation of men and other beings in their states of emotion; as in Natya, so in painting and sculpture, those eyes, those ‘bhavas,’ those ‘abhinayas’ of ‘anga’ and ‘upanga’ and those hands which were described in a previous section on Natya are to be present; for Natya is supreme picture, *param chitram*.’ The statue or picture shows us a moment of dance, and dance is a succession of pictures. The sculptor and the painter choose one powerful moment in a vast movement of feeling and express it in such a manner that one vital moment can suggest to us the previous and the succeeding ones. It is thus that stones, walls, planks, and papers are said to have ‘jiva’ and seem to speak. The *Vishnudharmottara* says that a good picture is so sweet that it seems to smile; it has life :

Hasativa cha madhuryam (yat) sajiva iva drisyate.

One realises the perfection of such art when one stands in the presence of some of the beautiful bronze icons in the temples in South India; as for instance, before such a figure as the Rajagopala at Mannargudi, Tanjore district. This being the way in which sculpture and painting are not merely related to but are actually based upon Bharata’s dance, how can one be not profited by a study of Indian sculpture and painting? It does not matter if special dance pictures are rare. Every picture and every sculpture has a ‘hasta abhinaya’, a ‘bhava’ of the eye, a pose, and these can be studied with great profit for ‘abhinaya’ itself, and not merely for the very external part of dance, namely, dress and ornament. And, dance themes themselves are not rare in our sculpture and painting. If ‘Art-lover’ can find only a single instance in the Ajanta Cave he can find that again and again, the frescoes in the Brihadiswara temple at Tanjore, albeit the small extent of the whole series, show us pictures of Bharata Natya. Again we have such temples as at Chidambaram,

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Belur, and Halebedu, and sculptures at Mount Abu where infinite are the representations in stone directly giving us specific poses, hands, etc. Of course one who studies these must not think that 'statuesque' is dance, and 'still' is movement. He must not show us mere tableau but utilise the one moment found in a figure of stone or of colour and line in perfecting the grace of one 'abhinaya' on his face, hand, and feet. He must knit it in a continuous fabric of an emotional theme.

IV

The Kathakali is said to be 'tandava'. Now artists and art-lovers speak of Siva's dance, Parvati's dance, 'tandava', 'lasya', etc., with little or no knowledge of what exactly these names mean. The 'karanas' described in Chapter IV of Bharata constitute 'tandava', the 'nritta' which Siva passed on to Bharata and his sons through one of his 'ganas' named Tandu. Generally, all robust and masculine dance, all movements having vigour are said to be the 'tandava' mode. The 'vritti' called 'arabhati' and the 'guna' called 'ojas' characterise 'tandava'. It is an 'uddhata' or forceful type. As contrasted with this, Parvati is said to have inaugurated the 'lasya', the 'sukumara' type which is graceful in its movements and is marked by the 'kaisiki vritti' and the 'madhurya guna'. This does not mean that males cannot do the graceful 'lasya' also, or that women cannot do the vigorous 'tandava' also. There cannot be any dance which is purely of the nature of one of these two. One can predominate. Both 'tandava' and 'lasya' are present in the Nautch but Kathakali tackles the 'uddhata' or weird and vigorous themes of the killing of Rakshasas, as in the *Kimmiravadha*, *Bakavadha*, etc., and so is mainly 'tandava', even as the Kannada Yakshagana is. But even here there are places where 'sringara' is even overdone and we then have 'lasya'. The 'kamaladala' is a classic instance of the 'lasya' in Kathakali. In the same manner, though 'tandava' and 'lasya' are both present in the Nautch, the Nautch is mainly 'lasya' because of its

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exponents who are women, and because of the themes which are mostly 'sringara'. Menaka seems to suppose that at present 'lasya' can be found only in the 'kathaka' which she has come upon in the North!¹ The 'kathaka' of the North is our South Indian 'katha kalakshepa', with much dance ('nritta') and with a little of 'abhinaya'.

Mr. Venkateswaran gives a few emotions and a few ideas, and remarks that the Kathakali has gestures for all these! Trying to be more thorough and more informed, 'Art-lover' gives a paragraph of objects and ideas and says that all these have 'mudras'! What wonder is there in this? The whole dictionary of the Sanskrit language has its corresponding gesture-dictionary in Bharata. A hundred Sanskrit treatises there are, as far as I have been able to go through, which give us pages after pages of 'mudras', and these live as much in the Tanjore district and elsewhere in the Tamil, Kannada, and Telugu countries, in the 'bhagavatars', the 'nattuvans', and the 'devadasis' all over the Tamil country and elsewhere, as much as in the actors of Kathakali in Kerala. When I was thus speaking of 'abhinaya' as living elsewhere also, a Kerala Kathakali scholar got into a bad mood and put me a crushing question whether 'abhinaya' in either Nautch, elsewhere, or even in Bharata's system is as perfect as in Kathakali which has symbols even for cases ('vibhaktis')! Limitation of space prevents me from going into the matter in greater detail. Some criticism of 'abhinaya', even as given by the Sanskrit texts, has to be offered, for, there has been after the time of Bharata, an overdoing of it. 'Verbalism' has resulted in certain aspects of it becoming arbitrary convention, not having their meaning in Nature upon which Bharata, in a significant text (Chapter IX, Slokas 151-152) bases the whole system of his 'abhinaya'. This is, however, work one has to do when he re-creates the art of Bharata for the present age. There are other essential things in respect of these 'mudras'

¹ Mr. R. V. Poduval in his booklet on 'Kathakali' (p. 46) gives us 'original' information that 'tandava' is upward and downward movement and 'lasya', side-ways movement!

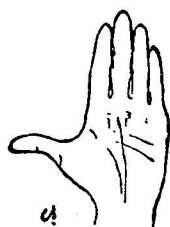
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which one has to know before he employs them, but these cannot be here dealt with. The Kathakali-advocate need not suppose that Kerala artists originated symbols for case-endings. Old Sanskrit texts have them. (See Nandikeswara's *Abhinayadarpana*—the list of objects denoted there by the 'pataka' hand.) It is in use and I have seen it employed in 'abhinaya' in Tamil land.

Further the Kathakali 'abhinaya' not only differs from Bharata's text and of those Sanskrit texts which follow him, but shows distinct deterioration. When one sees the chart of 'mudras' published in Mr. Poduval's booklet one sees clearly that Bharata, Nandin, and the Tamil text agree, whereas the Kathakali stands apart, with many differences. The list of ideas denoted by various hands follow the Sanskrit texts, but the corresponding hands differ. An examination of the Kathakali 'mudras' shows us the influence of incompetent or popular or rather lower artists' handling. Many hands are incorrect and do not denote the objects intended to be suggested by them on Bharata's principle of symbolic suggestion. (Page 20)

Firstly, the 'pataka' is wrongly called 'tripataka' and *vice versa*. One can see, on going through the list of objects given as denoted by 'pataka', how that hand, as given there, is incorrect. Taking the 'ardhachandra' hand, everyone knows it as one of the hands in the Nataraja icon. Any layman must know its correct shape, for the Sanskrit idiom means 'necking out' and the 'ardhachandra' hand is employed in that action. Sculpture, Icon, Bharata, Nandin, the Tamil text, and above all Nature give the correct 'ardhachandra' but the Kathakali counterpart has no resemblance to the shape of the sickle moon. The difference and deterioration can be seen with respect to the 'mushti' hand also. The Kathakali passes the thumb in between the four closed fingers. The 'fist' which every man shows in his anger, and in his action of fisting another, does not have the thumb like that. The 'mushti' is given as the symbol of old age, because it is the hand which holds the supporting staff which is a symbol of old age. One

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BHARATA'S
ARDHACHANDRA



KATHAKALI
ARDHA CHANDRA



KATHAKALI
MUSHTI



BHARATA'S
MUSHTI



BHARATA'S
SIKHARA



KATHAKALI
SIKHARA



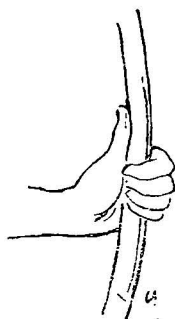
BHARATA'S
SUCHI MUKHA



BHARATA'S SIKHARA =
PITR TARPANA OR
OFFERING OF WATER
TO MANES



BHARATA'S SIKHARA = DRINKING



BHARATA'S SIKHARA
HOLDING THE BOW

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does not have the thumb as in Kathakali 'mushti' when he holds the staff. Similarly, in the double fist which is used to suggest loveliness, the two closed palms are pressed in a way at the two temples, which is what our old women-folk do on seeing a young lovely lass. Here also the thumb does not come in. Thus the Kathakali 'mushti' is not correct according to Bharata and hence according to Nature.

The 'sikhara' hand can likewise be examined. The symbol given by *Bharata*, *Nandin*, and *Silappadikaram* is correct. The hand indicates hero, leader or chief; holding of a bow; drinking, if the upraised thumb is taken towards the mouth; the manes ('pitris'), if we turn the hand horizontal, etc. All these are based upon Nature. We do that correct hand while speaking, whenever we have to refer to importance, leadership, and when we do 'pitri tarpana', etc. But these can never be shown by the 'sikhara' hand as Kathakali gives it with the thumb closed and the next 'pointing finger' raised. The 'sikhara' hand of Kathakali is the 'suchimukha' of the Sanskrit texts. The difference therefore between the 'sikhara' and the 'suchimukha' is shown by Kathakali, by a very insignificant change in the position of the thumb. The 'suchimukha' is a very common hand which any layman knows as the hand which we show while 'pointing out,' for showing 'one', etc. Instances can be multiplied and the deviation and the deterioration can be seen in 'sukatunda', 'arala', 'mukula', 'kataka', etc. Every 'hasta' should be firstly correct as based upon Nature and secondly, must have 'soushtava'—beauty and grace. What has been said above is about the very basis of 'abhinaya' and it does not get nullified by local peculiarities and provincial adaptations which are bound to be. Nor is it contended here that there are not parts of Nautch-abhinaya in the Tamil land which show deterioration. To the modern re-creator of Hindu classic dance, Kathakali, Nautch, the Bhagavatars, Kathaka, nay, every small surviving thing is of importance.

I have mentioned above other forms of Bharata art still living in other provinces and have examined the Kathakali

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itself rather critically and have attempted to place it. But if Kathakali alone is claimed to be the only genuine Bharata Natya or its peak, the spirit is one of pure advertisement. It is simply preposterous to say that Kathakali belongs to 'an age anterior to Bharata Natya or Ajanta Chitra or Sanchi Silpa,' ('Art-lover') or that 'it has improved upon and refined even Bharata.' (Mr. Poduval). If anyone insists on identifying the Kathakali as 'the only genuine hundred-per-cent classical dance-art of Ancient India' he can be likened only to one of those men who identified the elephant with the rope-like tail of that huge animal. When one thus goes somewhat deep, the facile writer on Indian art today accuses him of suffering from the pandit's mentality; it is only a confession that the facile writer is a 'pamara'.