

Sri Annamachaya Project of North America (SAPNA)



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Celebrating

Xth International Veena Festival

Veena Venu Mridanga Natya Ravali



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Sri Venkateswara Swami Balaji Temple , Aurora IL

Kūchipudi – Evolution and its relevance today

- Srivani Vokkarane

Kūchipudi is essentially a form of classical dance drama that developed at Kuchelapuram in the south-eastern part of Andhra Pradesh. The descendants of three hundred Telugu Brahmin families live at the village of Kuchelapuram to continue a tradition that dictates that only men may dance. Around the fourteenth century, the southern parts of India were ruled by a succession of dynasties committed to the propagation of art and literature.

A young orphan boy named Sidappa came to Sriakulam (Kṛṣṇa district in Andhra Pradesh). He was infatuated by dance dramas, an avid reader of Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra, a composer of music and dramas became the scholar of Vedas and śāstras. Sidappa soon well known as Siddhendra Yōgi began the training of the first group at the village of Kuchelapuram in Divi Sīma. The actual training of the actors was developed to make them into bhagavatulu, performers of the Bhāgavata Mela Nātakam. Siddhendra Yōgi first developed a unique and particular style based on the Nāṭyaśāstra and Nandikeśvara's Bharatārava.

The above figure highlights the overlap between gendered performance practices as well as genres such as yakṣagāna, kalāpam and veṣam - practices and genres that are treated as mutually exclusive in mythopoetic narratives about Kūchipudi. The earliest documented performance traditions practiced by the men of Kūchipudi village fall under the categories of kalāpam and veṣam.

Originally a literary tradition, the kalāpam did not emerge as an established performance genre until the late nineteenth century. Around this time, kalāpam texts became visible through performances by a variety of groups, both female and male. These texts fall into two categories: those that are based on narratives about a character known as Satyabhāmā are called Bhāmākalāpam,

and those that are based on a conversation between a Brahmin and a gollabhāmā (milkmaid) are called Gollakalāpam.

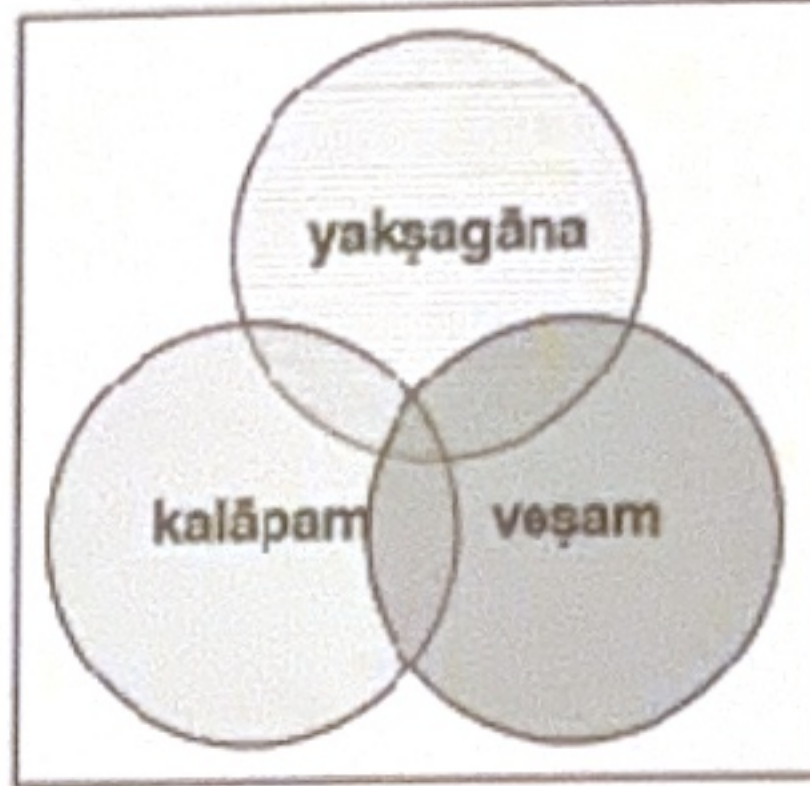
Over the last two centuries, veteran Bhāgavatas, intermingling with Gurus of ritual dance and the dēvadāsis, introduced nritya pieces into repertoire, integrating them as padams and shabdams into the dramas. These were rhythmic compositions woven around the lyrics, often including jathis. The development of Kūchipudi as a solo style is even more recent and is in large part due to the efforts of one great master, Vēdāntam Lakṣminārāyaṇaśāstri (mid eighteenth to nineteenth century) an epitome of Kūchipudi Kalāpams.

He was a man of vision and had foreseen the shape of things that would change the format of Kūchipudi art and introduced progressive changes. He reshaped the format from the ēkāṛatha style of performance consisting of independent, disconnected numbers.

He added tarangams of Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha, aṣṭapadhi of Jayadēva, pada's of Kṣhetrayya, lilas from Kṛṣṇa Karmāmrītam and Pushpabaṇa Vilāsam, Annamāchārya Kīrtanaś to the repertoire.

He is given credit as the first person to introduce acrobatic dancing on the sharp edges of a round brass plate borrowed from Karratakam and Mejuvaṇi Natyams of Strī Sampradāya. Lakṣminārāyaṇa śāstri's students Vempati Chinna Satyam, C. R. Achārya and The followers of Siddhendra Yōgi wrote several plays and the tradition of Kūchipudi dance-drama continues till today.

Traditionally the Kūchipudi dancer/actor was trained to sing and deliver dialogues. Vāchikābhinaya is an important feature of Kūchipudi dance. In contemporary practice,



vāchikābhinaya is limited to the song sung by the vocalist and it is left to the dancer to express it in mime. Ahāryābhinaya for solo exposition is thus not for a specific role as in a dance-drama.

The principles of aesthetics govern the design of the costume with a practical angle and the costume is less cumbersome, permitting the dancer to execute movements without any hindrance. Often a dancer uses a veil or 'thera'.

Among other props, the dancers use a curtain, held by two dancers before entering the stage.

Sāttvikābhinaya deals with the expression of psychic states and is associated almost physiologically with emotional conditions. A dancer emotes the appropriate expressions that are in keeping with tradition.

Dance is a sacred movement of the various limbs with deep divine feeling. The songs are purely devotional love songs with the dancer being the devotee and God being her beloved. The heroine longing for her lover is not a male chauvinistic theme as considered today but is the Jīvaṭma

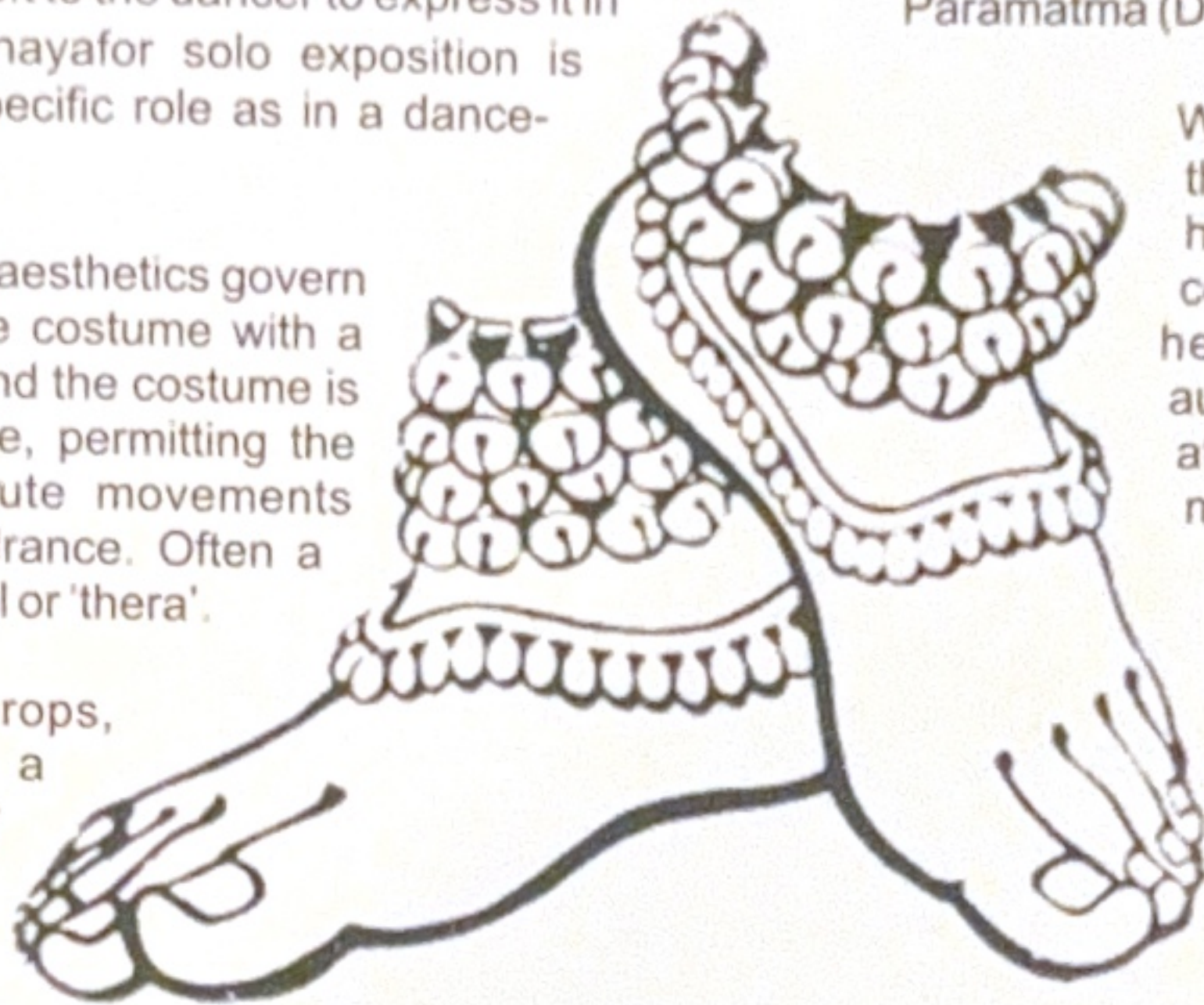
(Individual Self) longing for the union with the Paramāṭma (Divine Self).

When the dancer believes in this, she not only transports herself to a higher plane of consciousness but also takes her audience with her. Her audience transcend the feeling after the performance just as mentioned by sage Bharata.

These historical facts give us sufficient proof that a continued tradition of classical dance flourishes the land and adds to the richness. Inferences with time leads to acknowledgement that any organization or support groups

that prevail would help in the sustenance and preservation of the art form

During the current era, where moral values are declining and violence is increasing, it is the duty of the dancer to create an atmosphere of peace through her dance and the deep spiritual dedication that accompanies any performer of the classical dance style. Dance being a dynamic art cannot be stagnant, it is the dancer's responsibility to rise and bring awareness to the world.



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