



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Reviving The Ancient Art Of Andhra Natyam: A Journey Through History, Tradition, And Rituals

1. Murthy Josyula SN

UP22P9310004/2022,
(Research scholar)

VELS Institute of science, technology,
and advanced studies (VISTAS),
Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

2. Dr. Sujatha Mohan

Associate Professor

(Research Supervisor)

ABSTRACT:

Andhra Natyam is a classical dance form from Andhra Pradesh with origins dating back over 3000 years, rooted in temple rituals and the Buddhist era. Initially performed by women known as "Kalavanthulu," this ancient art faced decline due to societal and economic challenges. It was revitalized in the 20th century by Padmasri Acharya Nataraja Ramakrishna, restoring its cultural prominence. Andhra Natyam includes various performances such as Kumbha Haarathi, Pushpanjali, and Sabda Pallavi, each rich in ritualistic and cultural meaning. The dance tradition is categorized into three main styles: Agama Nartana (temple rituals), Asthana Nartana (court performances), and Prabandha Nartana (folk expressions). The article delves into the history, evolution, and components of Andhra Natyam, highlighting its deep connection to the religious and cultural heritage of Andhra Pradesh, as well as its ties to the Devadasi tradition and mythological narratives.

Keywords:

Andhra Natyam, Temple dance, Kumbha Haarati, Pushpanjali, Lasya Nartana, Agama Nartana, Asthana Nartana, Prabandha Nartana, Kouthvams, Devadasis

I. INTRODUCTION:

Andhra Natyam is an ancient traditional art form. This art form of Andhra Natyam originated as a temple art form and dates to the Buddhist era. This 3000-year-old Andhra natya, performed by women was banned for several years after suffering the sequences of social pressures, customs, and financial problems.

This ancient form of dance re named and re-introduced as Andhra Natyam about 50 years ago by Padmasri Acharya Sri Nataraja Ramakrishna Garu. With the efforts and dedication and inspiration, he revived this ancient dance form.

Originally called Lasya Narthana and practiced only by temple dancers, this vibrant form of Telugu people is called Andhra natyam, which is the popular form today. The performers of Andhra Natyam are called "KALAVANTHULU". The Artists perform for public known as "kala poon" included under the category of Andhra natyam. In the year 1982 the art of Andhra Natyam was officially recognized by the experts.

This art form was referred as kucheri Kelika, Darbaru, mejuvani etc. The reason for calling it as Andhra Natyam is that these dance forms are originally performed in many temples, king's court's as well as in local Community gatherings.

Andhra Natyam features graceful body movements, beautiful gestures, and Kaiseki Vritti. This art form is traditionally performed by female artists and encompasses Agama, Asthana, and Prabandha styles.

Performed in the "Marga" tradition in temples, as outlined in the Agama Vedas, Andhra Natyam also includes the Prabandha style, which is renowned for its regional characteristics and Lokadarmi.

The classical form of Andhra Natyam combines the Agama, Asthana, and Prabandha traditions, all performed by female artists. When this art form is performed by a single female dancer, it is known as Eka Patra Kelika. This practice is rooted in ancient female-oriented dance traditions and continues to be relevant in the contemporary stage.

II. History:

Several dynasties ruled Andhra since the 2nd century A.D., including the Sathavahanas, Ikshvakus, Pallavas, Chalukyas, Kakateeyas, Vijayanagara rulers, Tanjore and Madurai Nayaka kings, Gajapatis, Reddy kings, and Velama lords. These dynasties followed various religious faiths such as Vaidika, Bouddha, Jaina, Saiva, Veera Saiva, and Vaishnava.

2.1 Dance Traditions:

During these periods, dance traditions developed and can be classified into three genres:

1. **The Aaraadhana Dances:** Performed in temples.
2. **The Court or Kucheri Dances:** Performed to please kings and courtiers.
3. **The Dance Forms for Common Masses:** Intended to entertain devotees, often in the form of narrative, dramatic, and conceptual performances as seen in the Yakshaganas and Bhagavatamelams.

2.2 The Devadasi Tradition:

Devadasis, or temple dancers, played a crucial role in these traditions. They served the Lord by performing Kumbha Haarati, participating in Nritya Pooja, waving the Chamara, and conducting the 16 varieties of service known as "Shodasopachara Seva" through dance (Nritya) and music (Sangeeta). They also performed Kelika. When the Lord gave darshan to the people, He was said to be in "Koluvu," during which the dancers performed Nava Sandhi Natya.

2.3 Mythological Story of How Devadasis Are Related to Dance:

There is a myth regarding the birth of the Devadasis and their connection to dance. It is said that when Nara Arjuna and Narayana Srikrishna were in deep meditation in Badrikashrama, Indra, annoyed by their intense tapas (penance), sent his court dancer Rambha to allure them towards worldly pleasures and disrupt their meditation. Upon learning of this plot, Lord Narayana, wanting to teach Indra a lesson and cure him of his

ego, created a beautiful apsara with all aesthetic and endearing qualities. Her every movement was delicate and artistic, and she had a divine glow around her. She danced before Nara and Narayana, and upon witnessing her performance, Rambha felt disheartened and woeful. This apsara was Urvashi, so named because she was born from the thighs of Narayana.

When the accompanying instrumentalists became dumbfounded and awe-struck by Urvashi's exquisitely delicate and artistic performance, Indra mistakenly believed that Rambha had succeeded in winning over the meditating sages. He went to Badrikashrama but was ashamed when he saw what had truly occurred. He begged Lord Narayana for forgiveness. Narayana pardoned him, gave Urvashi in marriage to Indra, and decreed that her progeny would henceforth worship the gods in the temples of the earth.

III. Andhra Natyam Repertoire:

The Andhra Natyam Repertoire is Divided into Three Traditions:

1. **Agama Nartana** - Way of Performance
2. **Asthana Nartana** - Way of Presentation
3. **Prabhanda Nartana** - Way of Performance

Agama Nartana:

Agama Nartana, also known as temple dance, is a ritual dance performed as an offering to the gods and goddesses in temples. The Andhra Natyam repertoire for Agama Nartana includes:

- **Kumbha Harathi**
- **Pushpandali**
- **Suddha Nrityam Items** such as:
 1. Swara Pallavi
 2. Sabda Pallavi
 3. Sahitya Pallavi
 4. Koutavams

Performed in Temples:

In addition to the above items, other important items performed in the Andhra Natyam repertoire include:

1. Koutvams
2. Kaivarams
3. Asta Dik Palaka Aradhana
4. Navasandhi
5. Adhyatma Ramayana Keertanas

Asthana Nartana:

Asthana Nartana, also called Kacheri and Kelika, is performed for highly celebrated VIPs such as kings, intellectuals, and noble people by Raja Nartakis, who hold a respectable status in society.

The Asthana Nartana repertoire includes:

- Jathiswarams
- Kaivarnams
- Sabdams
- Varnams
- Padams
- Javalis
- Slokams

Andhra Natyam's repertoire is adorned with Adhyatma Ramayana Keertanas. The performance of Kelika in a temple is different from performing Kelika in a king's court.

Prabhanda Nartana:

Prabhanda Nartana is also known as Parijatham. This form is performed for common people in the temple streets. The repertoire includes:

- Bhamakalapam
- Nava Durga Parijatham
- Gollakalapam
- Radhamadhavam

IV. Ritualistic Elements in Andhra Natyam:

Kumbha Haarathi:

In its reconstructed form, Andhra Natyam features a sequence of performances, beginning with "Kumbha Haarathi." This ritual includes the recitation of Choornika (hymns), followed by Pushpanjali, a pure dance (Nritta) item, and expressive Nritya.

Kumbha Haarathi is a pooja accessory symbolizing the offering of a divinity parade during a festival (Utsavam). The Aarthi is made with a small vessel called a Kumbha, which has a metal tip to hold the wick.

The performance of Kumbha Haarathi is a key element of the Andhra Natyam repertoire, dedicated to temple deities and performed exclusively within temple settings.

Pushpanjali:

The tradition of Pushpanjali dates back approximately 3,000 years, with both mythological and historical roots. The term Pushpanjali signifies the act of saluting and offering respect to the gods, gurus, and audience.

Sabda Pallavi:

Sabda Pallavi, as the name suggests, involves a Pallavi composed of Sabdams or Jathis. The Anupallavi may also include Jathis.

Kelika:

Kelika refers to the dance performed by Devadasis as an entertainment when the Lord was in His court. In this performance, Nrithya, Nritta, and Abhinaya are all showcased.

Nrithya Pooja:

Following Kumbha Haarathi, the Deva Narthaki (temple dancer) stands in Pushpa Puta Karana. The temple priest offers flowers into her hands, and the dancer performs Pushpanjali in Sama Sthanaka, while Choornikas are sung.

Ambara Vinyasa:

Ambara refers to the filling of the worship space with wind instruments, such as playing the flute or Mukhaveena. The instrumentalists then perform Ambara Vinyasa.

Aayita:

After Ambara comes Aayita, which celebrates the event with instrumental music accompanied by songs in various ragas and tales. The mridanga is played delicately in tune with different tales, creating what is known as Sabda Nriya.

Nandi:

The Nandi begins with mridanga Jathis and concludes with a dance performed to the tunes of geetas. The Nandi ends with a Teermanam.

Concluding Rituals in Temple Dance:

Specific dances corresponding to religious practices are presented before the Nandi. If performed in a Shiva temple, Bhujanga is danced, while in a Vishnu temple, the dance is Bhramana or Kamala Narthanam. After Nandi, Koutvams are performed, followed by selected Sapta Layas. The worship concludes with "Deepaaradhana," marking the end of the "Nrithyaaraadhana."

V. Ritual Dance Practices:

Kouthvams

Performed with heartfelt enthusiasm, Kouthvams are dedicated dance offerings by Devadasis, presented to the deity inside the sanctum. These include Kouthvams, Astadikpalaka Natyas, and Sapta Layas.

Kelika

Outside the sanctum, during the deity's Darbar or Koluvu sessions, Kelika is performed. This includes Nritta, Nrithya, and Abhinaya, showcasing a variety of dance forms and expressions.

Kouthvams

Kouthvams are worshipful musical compositions written in honor of the Gods. They extol the divine greatness and are presented with Mridanga Jathies.

Nava Sandhi Kouthvam

Nava Sandhi Natyam is a special narrative dance performed in praise of the Dik Palakas (guardians of the eight directions), especially during festive occasions. The aim is to invite and request protection from these deities.

The Astadikpalaka Koutvam is of two kinds:

1. Sthotra Nrithyas – performed during worship.
2. Pavalimpu Seva – performed after sending the deity to sleep, requesting the Astadikpalakas to protect the temple.

The Astadikpalakas include Indra, Varuna, Agni, Vaayu, Yama, Kubera, Niruthi, and Eeshana.

Sapta Lasyas

Following the Navasandhi Natya, temple dancers celebrate the divine worship through the Sapta Lasyas:

1. Suddha
2. Dandika
3. Desi
4. Kundali
5. Perini
6. Kalasa
7. Prekhana

These Lasyas originate from the graceful dances that follow the Sapta Tandavas performed by the Lord, reflecting the essence of divine grace and rhythm.

VI. Conclusion:

Andhra Natyam, with its ancient roots tracing back to the Buddhist era, represents a rich tapestry of dance traditions that have evolved through centuries of cultural and religious influences. Originally practiced as Lasya Narthana by temple dancers, this art form faced numerous challenges but was revitalized by Padmasri Acharya Sri Nataraja Ramakrishna Garu about 50 years ago, under the new name of Andhra Natyam.

Today, Andhra Natyam encompasses a variety of performances and rituals that honor deities in temple settings, including Kumbha Haarati, Pushpanjali, and various forms of Nritya and Abhinaya. The repertoire of Andhra Natyam is categorized into three distinct styles: Agama Nartana, Asthana Nartana, and Prabhandana Nartana, each serving different audiences from temple worshippers to royal patrons and common folk.

The intricate and graceful movements of Andhra Natyam, performed primarily by female artists, embody the essence of this traditional dance form. The integration of devotional elements with aesthetic expressions highlights the art form's dedication to both spiritual and artistic excellence. As Andhra Natyam continues to be celebrated and preserved, it remains a testament to the enduring legacy of temple dance traditions in Andhra Pradesh and beyond.

Reference:

From RDCFA research library

1. ISSN2455-7250, VOL.XVI No:2 Apr-june 2016 Madhavi puranam
2. VOL . VI NO:3 July-oct 2006 Kuchipudi kala kendra – Mumbai
3. ISSN 2455-7250 Vol. XVI No:4 Oct-Dec 2016 Dances of Telangana - Sahridaya trust Hyd 4. Andhra Natyam (Telugu), Dr. Nataraja Ramakrishna, 1987, Perani International, HYD
5. Kuchupidi Dance By Rama Devi, Pub: Pathingarayal, 2001.

