

Annotations of Talk-Videos

Workshop on Foundations of Dance

Talks By Prof. Navjyoti Singh, Centre for Exact Humanities, IIT Hyderabad

(Held at Department of Indian Music, University of Madras, 15th and 16th September, 2017)

- Avinash Jha

DAY 1

<https://youtu.be/gqYl68P1lC8?si=JfUP54T1jwUwl1tw>

Origin of Dance

1.10

Lecture begins. Two stories about origin of art which reflect certain attitudes about art. How art has to be conceived? First story from Tibetan sources (originally from Sanskrit) is from 1st chapter of a work called Chitra Lakshan by Nagnajit and it takes place in Satyug. Second story is from Natya Sastra. This story deals with Treta Yug.

4.17

In the kingdom ruled by Bhayajit no body suffered untimely death. A boy dies without any apparent reason. Bhayajit inquires with Yamaraj as to what is the fault in his rule that resulted in this untimely death. Nor receiving an answer he goes to war with Yamaloka. Brahma has to intervene to restore peace and order and he says that the boy can't go back to Kritiloka with his original body, he has to get a new body. He also teaches Bhayajit how to make a new body by using canvas and paints etc. In this body the spirit of the boy could live. He also declares that from now on the king Bhayajit will be known as Nagnajit, conqueror of the realm of Paraloka where no one has body.

13.00

Art is to give a new body to some Nagnas.

13.15

Though the story is about painting, it could apply to dance and other forms as well.

In dance, one lends one's body to some other spirits. When acting you lend a body to some characters. In dance the body becomes transparent. You can see some interiors through the body (Bhāva etc.). Like in painting pigments of colour disappear and you see a person there. Pigments become invisible. In dance, your personal life becomes invisible and something else becomes visible.

16.40

All arts deal with material formations - pigments, living bodies etc which can stand for imagined spirits.

17.33

The second story is from Nāṭya Sastra (1st and last chapters). The story takes place at the end of Satyug. Satyug ended because people became too concerned with Sukkha and Dukkha - they began clamouring for happiness and avoiding suffering. Dharma was disturbed, people would not pursue higher ends and interfere in each other's quests. Rishis became worried. They went to Brahma.

The idea was now to introduce Krira (playfulness) in the universe. How will that help? There should be a sastra of krira and that is how Natya Sastra begins.

Two conditions for Sastra of Krira. It should be Sarva-vārnika (independent of all identities), unlike the four vedas. And that Krira should have the property of Sādhārikāra (Immersion). You forget worries, duties, responsibilities, everyone becomes like ordinary people. Minimal, simple people.

First chapter gives a drama about the theory of drama, a kind of meta-drama.

Brahma is able to conceive a Sastra of playfulness with these two conditions and teaches it to Bharata and his hundred sons.

28.04

Art is about surrogate beings, but not the being of the artist. It is about imaginary people. Devatās can't perform as they do not have bodies and motor organs (having motor organs is a condition for art).

When performance commences all kinds of obstacles (vighnās) are observed. Drama included fight between Devatās and Dānavās and Devatas were winning. Dānavas were unhappy and complained to Brahma why Sastra should be partial. They created obstacles. Brahma not worried about impartiality, about who is good or bad. This should be decided by the spectator. His worry was that Sādhārikāra was broken. Immersive state should not be broken. All art requires immersion including painting.

35.18

Treta Yuga is beginning. World is going its way according to causal laws.

Anukṛiti - Kṛiti Loka can be suspended for a while on a stage where a new world can be created away from Sukkha and Dukkha etc. People participate in this new world are ordinary people irrespective of their convictions.

Sāmājika is who rise and fall together. Audience rises and falls together in a performance. Sāmājika is born in Treta Yuga.

40.17

One has to construct an abstract stage to conceive a new world. This is constructed out of the material conditions in order to project a persona. Playfulness can be initiated on

this stage. All playfulness is a kind of removal from reality, like the playfulness of children. We give a material formation to our imagination.

Kalpa-Vikalpa-Sankalpa-Kalpa

Cognition-Memory-Imagination (private)-Sankalpa (public, motor activities, can be seen by others)

45.00

There is one more condition. What happens on stage should be Drsta and Sravya (seen and heard). Among the five sense organs two have objects are distant (vision and sound). The object is distant and it can be fictitious. These two senses do not have the condition that their object be present. Play is creating an artificial reality on the stage with visual and sonic objects and their togetherness. There can be tactile and smell imagination but it requires simulating the objects in the internal body.

52.20

When we imagine something how do we know whether it is good or bad (eg. some imagination you want to hide from others), whether it is worth expressing or not? Who is to judge what is to be given a new body? It is the audience (when put on the pedestal of Sādhāranikaran) who has been put on the stage of judgment. Sāmājik in sādharanikaran is an unbiased state.

In Treta Yug a structure of neutrality comes in through the agency of the Sāmājik. Natya Sastra is a body of theory of this Anukriti.

58.23

There is a curse in art, on artists. There is a reason why artists tend to loose sight of their duties and responsibilities easily because they are engaging so much in artificial, artistic reality.

1.00

Weeping as a sāmājik when watching a drama is different from the emotional weeping say when you are betrayed in life. Analysis of the hindi film audience weeping in the film 'Tare Jamin Pe'.

People who wrote plays, Kathas, etc. deal with the revision of habits of judgment that we have by putting us in a seat of judgment. Art is a reformative act in that it is a reform of the habits of judgment.

Art is a site of reflectiveness.

1.07

Treta Yug also has a fallacy. All art is about Maryāda (normative) in Treta Yug.

All yugas are there in us at this moment. They are layers within us.

DAY 2 (PART 1)

Begins with Questions and then Answers on the first lecture

4.30

Question on Sāmājik

Samāj - A term used in astronomy and dramaturgy. It is only recently it has been used for society. Shifting positions of planets, when they align in one line, is called samāj in astronomy.

Aryabhatta

7.00

Bharat Muni Samāj is when people are watching Natya or drama. First use of samāj in Indian tradition. Etymologically, rising together and falling together.

9.20

Kalpa Vikalpa Sankalpa

In the same kalpa all cognitions are different. Kalpana.

14.45

It is difficult to find any portion of reality without any human signature, without a stamp of human imagination.

16.40

Story of Indra and Vrttasur about Kalpa. Monument to Indra's victory.

20.30

There is a difference between what you can imagine and what you can do. Vishnu puts Indra in his place.

24.48

Discussion of question about the Objection by Dānavas about bias in drama.

27.00

Truth of perception is determined by the objects. What determines the truth when we imagine? It is the audience who determines. If the immersion of audience is broken, the work of art is not good. Sāmājik is at the centre of art.

Artist has a surrogate audience in mind when creating. Sakshi Pada - to be able to watch

yourself.

31.13

The question about Dharma and Art

Basic question: Everybody lives according to one's own dharma. How is it possible to put it aside and adopt someone else's dharma like an actor adopting the dharma of a queen.

Swang, Upadhi. Role switching by actors. Adopting roles in life - we don't have a dharma of our own.

37.48

Whether you can have a person who can adopt all kinds of roles?

A fundamental role-switching is between men and women, femininity and masculinity. Radha-Krishna. Chaitanya. Most difficult problem of dance of the medieval tradition.

40.50

Idea of a pure dance, dance which is not for audience but as a means of self-liberation. Natraj. Dervish dance. Idea of pure dance in Europe. Idea of passion dance - dance as expression of my being. Modern dance. Pure dance in the form of swāng of animals.

48.00

The problem of transcending of gender in dance in the Vaishnava tradition. A serious theoretical and dance issue. Kshemenra's mangalācharan - when Vishnu has put kājā.

51.50

Dance as an art form where everything is artificial. Bodies become transparent. Postures in dance are artificial. Forces used in dance are concocted. Forces used in lifting something with your hand and in acting of lifting something are different.

53.30

Traditionally three types of role playing that happens in dance. Pedagogy is not dance. We have to look at dance in a fundamental way and not in a pedagogic way. Dance traditions in some way have tried to solve some philosophical problems.

1.03.40

Long exposition on Gotipua begins and the origin story (shristi natya) of Gotipua is shown through a dance video.

Gotipua is a dance form from the village Raghurajpur in Orissa where only artists have lived for last 150-200 years. It is a boys only dance.

1.05.06 (Shristi Natya)

Children playing. Two boys in Navdweep. Playfulness leads to competition. Link between play and conflicts.

Two boys going for higher studies in Navya Nyāya to Mithila. One boy is naughty, the other is serious. Naughty boy is able to finish a treatise, the serious boy could not.

They are going back to Navdweep in a boat. Seeing the unhappy serious boy, naughty boy throws his book in the river telling his friend: Your reward will come later.

They are Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Raghunath Shiromani who later became a famous scholar.

Chaitanya goes to Kashi. He is a dancer and he finds Shiva Tattva in dance. He goes to Vrindavan and Krishna Tattva and Bhakti is introduced. He goes to Puri in search of being able to completely give up his ego. He wants Jagannath Darshan. He is disappointed because Jagannath is too constricted here. He wants to see the Virāt rupa of Jagannath.

He joins an Akhada for 14 years. He picks up certain movements which will become Gotipua. He has traversed three institutions - Pathshala, Tola, and Akhada.

Story of Kelucharan and Odissi and Gotipua.

1.46.55

Swāng or Pretense

Kshemendra (Kala Vilas) - Theory of pretence. All art as pretence.

1.50

Story of Dambha.

1.56.42

Who is more vyapak - Brahma or Dambha?

Long intervention by Jayachandran clarifying some issues presented before and comments on the Tamil Nadu context of the art of dance.

2.15.28

Question from the audience - How to proceed from where we are now?

Response from Prof. Navjyoti Singh.

One way is to think of Shristi Natya for any dance form. Other way is to have dialogues with new forms that are born like duet, break dance etc. in order to understand them. New forms are being born in India right now. Dancing mind is not sitting quietly.

Question about the difference between sports and dance. And about artificial nature of dance and Sātvik Abhinaya.

Response: Artificial is something good. Dance as the artificial motion of Manas. Satvik Abhinaya is Abhinaya of Manas.

Story of two birds from Upanisads. Sakshitva or the Witness. Having a feeling and knowing that we have that feeling.

Response to a question by Jaichandran.

DAY 2 (PART 2)

https://youtu.be/UdYqofPAqBk?si=LzIFjj_gLCMiEaKV

Begins with Jaichandran's presentation (and discussion) of a video clipping of a song from the film Navratri acted by Shivaji Ganesan and Savitri.

18.07

Prof. Navjyoti's presentation begins. This lecture deals more with the dramatic dance.

When body is transparent, what is visible? Many things are visible, but usually we can say that story is visible.

20.00

Meta-elements of a story - Theme, Characters, Relations, Things, Locations, Phenomena (Death etc.). Story unfolds through a dance drama.

22.40

Kachh Devyani Story from Mahabharata

32.00

Having heard this story you may tell this story to someone else. And then to someone else. There is a thinking that there must be a skeleton of a story, the minimal story. Rest of it is like embellishments and improvisations. These will be done in different ways in movies, drama, poetry etc.

36.50

Formal structure of a story. Seed-Fruition structure. Parts of the story could also have seed-fruition structure. Recursive.

The structure in Lilavati from Bija Ganit. Bija are seeds.

All stories have this structure. Dilemma, or conflict etc are seeds. Content always has something unresolved which has to be resolved in the story.

Dashrupak gives the details of the seed-fruition structure.

44.00

There are three levels on which dance is done. Nrit, Abhinaya, and Story.

Dance depends on what body can 'afford' to do. All three elements of dance exist in any dance form to a greater or lesser degree.

47.22

Grammar of dance. We generate language from a minimal set of rules. Similarly can we generate all dance from a given set of rules.

There is a suggestion that what Tandu (Nāṭya Sastra) did was similar to Shiv Sutra of Panini where 14 groupings of sound are given from which Panini's grammar begins. It is said 108 katanas were danced by Tandu. These could be the fundamental movements from which all movements can be constructed. It is an open question.

57.00

Panini's grammar is written in an artificial language with no verbs.

58.00

Myth and History

Mythic mode of knowledge - the belief that whatever is the oldest is the deepest.

Without stories, without myths, teaching becomes impossible.

Mythic politics is aversion to other people's stories rather than telling one's own story.

Ergodic Theorem.

1.07.00

Mythic is the beautiful portion of the world.

1.08.27

Like we did with Gotipua, we made a story of its origin which is fictitious but it may be truer than anything else. We made a myth out of Gotipua to appraise its depth.

1.13.20

Identities can be deconstructed only through myth. Mythic content makes world humbler.

1.14.55

Propaganda

1.16

Story-telling is one of the prime engagements of man.

We are continually reading each other's actions and wondering who fits into what story. A society which is not telling stories to each other is a poor society.

1.27.50

You can't be Nagnajit without being Bhayajit. To be mythic you have to be fearless.

1.30

There is an attitude which says that by engaging in art or imagination you go away from society, you are doing it only for your own benefit. Also an attitude that engagement with art takes you away from truth. And there is reaction to these attitudes. And there are wars too. What is the way to handle the violence?

1.35.40

Prof. Navjyoti refers to one of his articles. It is about repetitive actions. Through repetitive actions that we do all the time we achieve depth. One of the sources of warring attitude is that we should not do repetitive actions. We should only do new actions. The idea of Shisht Vyavahar and Adab is based on repetitive actions. People who are shisht are able to resolve conflicts. These people whichever religion they belong are the ones who are creating world order. People who cultivate depth in repetitive actions. Unity of people cannot be found by discussion among doctrines.

1.43.30

Poverty is only of imagination.