

Comparison of expression of devotional poems in Naradiya kirtan presentation with that of Kathak temple tradition

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ABSTRACT:

This study is about the comparison between the expression of Shloka, Pada, Bhajan, Stuti, Akhyan under the Maharashtra Naradiya Kirtan tradition and Kathak Mandir tradition. Music is an integral part of both the styles. Study of history of these two styles shows significant changes in their repertoire with changes in time. A study of the changes in the presentation of both styles gives an insight into the changes in use of music and social conditions of the time. Till date, no research work is done on the subject comparing the performance method of these two styles for katha akhyan and devotional poetry. The purpose of this research is to do a comparative study between the Naradiya Kirtan and presentation of katha akhyan in the temple tradition of Kathak, to examine the applicability of devotional poetic literature of saints used in both styles, and to clarify the place of sattvic abhinaya in both styles.

In this research paper, interviews with kirtan artist Charudatta Aphle, Sameer Limaye and also parts of 'Nachu Kirtanache Rangi' book written by Dr. Yashwant Pathak has been compiled and analysed. Devotional poetry received from Kirtankar Vishwas Kulkarni, literature and experiments received while participating in the workshop have been reviewed for this research. The use of sattvic abhinaya in the performance method of Kathak temple tradition found in the books by Vidyavachaspati Shankar Abhyankar, Dr. Puru Dadhich, Dr. Shovana Narayan and its extensive discussion explains the similarities in both the styles. The complete resem-

blance between kirtan by Kirtankar Muralidharbua Nijampurkar and the description of katha akhyan (story telling) in the temple tradition of Kathak by Omkarnath Thakur establishes a commonality in the expression of the two styles. Charudatta Aphle and Nizampurkar's demonstration of Kathak hand gestures on the hymns composed by Saint Tulsidas, kirtankar Milindbua Badve's presentation of Sattvic Abhinaya, Pandit Madan Maharaj's film footage of Draupadi disrobing incident performed in the Krishna mandir shows similarities. A joint study of Maharashtrian Kirtan and Kathak temple tradition is necessary to show the possibility of creation of the self-classical dance style of Maharashtra. This study will give more nuanced insight into Indian history. For this purpose, the topic of this research paper can play an important role in clarifying the literary and performance-based interrelationship of the two styles.

KEYWORDS:

Kathak, Kirtan, Bhakti movement, Naradiya kirtan, Varkari kirtan.

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1. Introduction

The word Bhakti is derived from the root 'Bhaj' which means 'to serve or to worship', that is devotion and loving attachment to the deity (Wikipedia contributors, Bhakti, 2023). Shrimad Bhagwat Puran verse 7.5.23-25

“Shravanam kirtanam Vishnu smaranam padasavanam Archana vandanam dasyam sakhyamatmanivedanam” (Wikipedia contributors, Navavidha Bhakti, 2019)

Delineates the nine ways in which we can connect with God 'Navavidha Bhakti', out of which 'kirtan bhakti' that is chanting his name and glory has been given the second place.

The word “Kirtan” can be translated into English as “devotional singing,” specifically praising and describing divine qualities, and narrating stories. The word “कथक” can be translated as “storyteller,” “describer,” “instructor,” or “main protagonist.” Both interpretations are closely related to each other. The storytelling of a Kathak dancer is a tradition that aims to entertain with a message. Its main

purpose is to guide people on the right path and provide education to the general public. These stories present exemplary characters such as Lord Shri Ram and Lord Krishna, who impart teachings through their actions. The Kathak tradition includes presenting such stories before society, emphasising the message being conveyed. The Kirtan tradition in Maharashtra serves as a similar example to provide a foundation for these stories and develop permanent emotions. Even today, both Kirtan and Kathak styles showcase this tradition.

Kathak and kirtan are related to Hari kirtan of Vaishnav sampraday. The development and transformation of two styles occurred during the 11th to 19th century. Kirtan style is the foundation of the bhakti movement which began in response to the invasions of the Mughal empire in North Central India. The Vaishnav tradition uses mythological and legendary stories to attract people to religion and maintain their connection to culture. This tradition was kept alive through the medium of music in various regional forms such as hari kirtan in Uttar pradesh, Harikatha in South India, Kirtan in Maharashtra. Through the medium of storytelling and poetry recitation, these compositions of Bhakti movement saints were presented in temples by the Kathak lok and participated in the Bhakti movement. Maharashtrian saints like sant Dnyaneshwar, sant Namdev, sant Tukaram also engaged in this movement for performing kirtans and composed thousands of poetries for the purpose of preaching.

Three basic elements of Maharashtra kirtan and Kathak tradition are story, acting, expressing through face and body language, and preaching. The kirtankar who narrates the story through music dialogue acting and preaching is a Hari kathakar and with addition of footwork, rhythm, bols or syllables, Kathak dancer has been doing the same method of storytelling in Indian temples. It has been the work of both the genres for centuries to promote devotion through singing, playing instruments, dancing , acting and oratory along with entertainment. In Maharashtra, Kirtan can be divided into two traditions - 'Naradiya' and 'Vaarkari'(Pathak,2003,p.7) The Naradiya tradition is primarily performed solo like Kathak artists, while the

Vaarkari tradition is performed collectively. In both forms, poems of specific saint tradition became an integral part of presentation along with connected philosophical, social subjects which are in oratory pattern. Naradiya kirtan tradition studies show resemblance with Kathak temple tradition presentation with respect to above explanation. In the Naradiya tradition, there are two parts of presentation - purva rang and uttar rang that is the initial phase and final phase. Initial phase consists of different prayers , poetry based on topics selected for preaching and explanation of the meaning of poetry. Final phase consists of story telling with abhinaya related to the topic selected for the initial phase . Kirtan ends with the same poetry of the initial phase with different raga and theka ending with Namasmaraan or gajar that is chanting god's name. Kirtan begins with the praise of Lord Ganesh and other deities. Even today, Kathak dancers in Jaipur start their presentation with Ganesh Paran and Ganesh Pad. In the Uttarang section of Naradiya, various stories are narrated. Similarly, in the expressive aspect of Kathak, when performing a pad or composition, the story is presented through vocal and physical expressions, which are instructive. An example of this can be seen in the narration of Pt. Omkar Prasad Mishra's presentation by Rohini Bhate(2006) in her book *Lehaja* (p.51). In Naradiya, some Kirtankars also incorporate elements of Kathak, such as showing Sam and use of ankle bells that are ghungroo on their feet, and even engage in jugalbandi (musical duet) to some extent with accompanists.

The meaning of 'Kathak' in English is a traditional storytelling form of dance that originated in northern India. Shovana Narayan, in her research book "Kathak Lok" states that Kathak is a narrative dance form that combines storytelling with movement. The traditional definition of Kathak is that it is a form of devotional storytelling, similar to the recitation of religious stories. The purpose of the Kathak temple tradition was to interpret poetry or literature and awaken the sentiment of devotion. The main focus in the temple was on poetry, which was embellished with music and dance(Narayan and Kalaha,2023,pp.53-64) Kathak temple tradition

was similar to the tradition of Naradiya Kirtan, where emotions and feelings played a prominent role. These observations are made by Shovana Narayan in her research and modifications.

There have been discussions about the effect of naradiya kirtan and Kathak storytelling methods on society's upliftment separately but the effect of combination of elements of both the styles on society for the same purpose has not been analysed yet.

2. Research statement

On the basis of this research gap my research statement is to establish the inter relationship between Naradiya tradition of Maharashtra and Kathak temple tradition to experiment with a combination of these two styles and analyse the effect of preaching through this experimental method on the society for its upliftment. This research will focus on the common or comparable factors of both the art forms with respect to devotional songs, poems etc in various ways.

3. Objectives

Research paper is focused on the study of the content and type of devotional poetry used in both the styles and comparison of satvika abhinaya in presentation of both the styles .

4. Purpose of study

Purpose of study is to make efforts to keep the original source of adhyatma alive by proper coordination of devotion and entertainment with the help of spiritual background of both styles. Ultimate goal of both genres is to preach through entertainment and narrative to upliftment of society and there is a need of experiment tell youth connecting instructions in this scientific Era for which this study will create a foundation by collaborating devotional literature along with excellence in Abhinaya of the performer interacting with emotions of the audience.

5. Research methodology

Research is done based on qualitative methodology. This methodology involves visiting areas associated with the traditions of kirtan and Kathak, practising the presentation of famous festivals in the region, film and documentary collections, conducting interviews with prominent artists from both styles, literature collection with the help of questionnaires and surveys, visiting temples to understand the traditions of both styles, visiting libraries.

6. Findings

Kirtan has been categorised into the following types:

1. Nam Sankirtan - Continuous remembrance of God's name.
2. Gun Sankirtan - Description of divine qualities.
3. Lila Sankirtan - Narration of various divine acts. (Pathak, 2003, p.7)

All these three types are performed in both styles with the help of devotional poems and storytelling which confirms the inter-relation between naradiya kirtan and Kathak temple tradition.

Under Nam sankirtan, heartfelt poetic expression of chanting god's name are shown during Kathak performance for example After Abhinaya on Dashavtar poetry, kathak performer, generally conclude it with speedy rhythm and tempo, dancing on Gajar 'Jay Jay Ram Krushna hari', or after performing. & Storytelling on life of Sant Tukaram, performance ends with continuous chanting of Vitthal Name with Taal & Laya. Similar format is depicted by nardia kirtankar in its initial and last stage of performance. Kathak performance in temple as well as present tradition, always starts with Shlok, Pad, Stotra of God, Goddess and Guru Like 'Ya kundendu tushar har Dhavala', 'Gurur Brahma' Shloka, 'Angikam Bhuvanam Yasya', depicting divine qualities. Naradiya kirtan tradition too follows the same format. Post shlok or Stotra devotional poetry like Bhajan, Abhang is used in both styles with Taal and Lay, where along with praising divine qualities, short stories are performed or explained in between. Kathakar uses Hasta Mudra, footwork along

with graceful & in depth abhinaya for it. Naradiya Kirtankar does the same with little more emphasis on Vachika Abhinaya, lesser Hasta Mudra, less use of footwork. In this scope for Abhinaya, Rasani-shpatti is generally restricted only to mesmerise the audience with Bhakti Bhav. Lila Sankirtan is the place where the real challenge comes for kathakar or Naradiya Kirtankar to express the meaning of devotional poetry through Abhinay. Here Satvic Abhinay plays the major role. In this presentation, Abhinaya & Natya (drama) are used to narrate stories such as Ram Lila, Krishna lila. Along with Kathak tradition, Rasleela is also considered as part of Lila Sankirtan. One can witness the Kathak temple tradition performances in Zula festival of Ayodhya. in which performance of the expressional part of it includes all 3 types Nam, Gun, Lila Sankirtan. This has been researched extensively by Kathak exponent Shovana Narayan. She explains the complete format of Kathak temple performance with examples of kathak performers Pandit Ayodhya Sharan Mishra, Satya Prakash pracheta Mishra, Premnath Mishra, Mukesh Mishra, Ravi Prakash Mishra, Avdhesh Mishra, Bhanu Prakash Mishra, Omkar Maharaj, Jagdish Prasad Mishra; she witnessed (Narayan and Kalaha, 2023, pp. 53-64). If we Study Naradiya Kirtan format, we can find Remarkable resemblances in both style's expression methods.

Swami Lakshmidharananda wrote in an article Bhakti in Indian culture that the most profound influence & contribution of the Bhakti movement to Indian Culture is in composing songs, poetry and in revitalising music and group singing. The intertwining of Bhajan and bhakti, song and devotion, is largely due to the fact that the path of Bhakti from its very beginning was preached through songs. The intense emotional attachment the bhakti had towards their divine, inspired copious volume of excellent religious poetry and played a major role in propagating religious aspirations and sentiments through these songs (Lakshmidharananda, p.114). In Kathak Mandir tradition, poetries of Sant Mirabai, Surdas, Tulsi-das, Ashtchhap Kavi were famous. In Naradiya kirtan poetries by Sant Ramdas, Moropant were mostly used, many of which includes

Nayak nayika bhav in the form of Adhyatm(philosophy). Following types of devotional poetries used in Kathak Mandir tradition- shlok, stotra, Abhang, bhajan, chhand paran, dashavatar; based on Hindi Braj, Avadh, Sanskrit language. Yashwant Pathak(2003) who did extensive research on Naradiya tradition narrates following types of poetries used since centuries in his book ‘Nachu Kirtanache Rangi’ - Aarya, Saki , Dindi, phatka, tipri, abhang, pad, bhajan, shlok, stotra etc(p.25).

Video posted by Mekhala Natwar (2016) on YouTube of Madan Maharaj, Kathak dancer, information collected through book Brahnavidyecha Shilpakar and interview of kirtankar Nizampurkarbua justifies the interrelation between both stylus and their method of Abhinaya.

In the video, Madan Maharaj started his performance by seeking blessings of Guru by performing Guruvandana in the form of singing and demonstrated the usage of hand gestures Hasta Mudra , footwork, and body movements to showcase the elements of Ang, PratyAng, and UpAng in Angika Abhinaya (expressive aspects of the body). During the performance of the Draupadi Vastraharan story, the tabla and harmonium were played together. In between, there was recitation of poetry, reading, and dialogue by the accompanists. Madan Maharaj himself also gave a dialogic presentation. During this presentation, he used impactful acting techniques such as eye movements, body postures, spins, jumps, and expressions of compassion to showcase different characters, using different body languages and acting styles(Natavar, 2021).

Kirtankar Nijampurkar Bua always incorporated elements of Kathak in his presentation of Naradiya kirtan. He received training in Kathak from Guru Shambho (Joshi,2005,pp.64-67) After this training, he started incorporating hand gestures and physical expressions of Kathak in his performance of Naradiya kirtan. He also presented the bols (rhythmic phrases) of the Pakhawaj, a percussion instrument used in Kathak, through dance. He chose the composition

“Shri Ramchandra Kripalu Bhajman” by Sant Tulsidas for his kirtan performance on Ram Navami. In his interview, eminent kirtankar Charudatta Aphale clarified that Nijampurkar Bua expressed the emotions and hand gestures of Kathak in every word of the composition (personal communication, 30 th June 2022) .

It is evident that the usefulness of Angika abhinaya (physical expressions) in both styles can be seen. In kirtan, the use of elements like padnyas (footwork), chakkar (spinning), and chhalang (jump) was relatively less in comparison to the Kathak tradition, but it was still necessary for entertainment at a subtle level. Modern kirtankars like Chandrashekhar Abhyankar and Aruna Salvi still use the padnyas of Kathak, as well as the metres of poetry (chhanda paran) to make their abhinaya (expressions) more effective (personal communication, 2022).

Natyashastra explains Bhav, Vibhav, Anubhav, Sanchari bhav in detail. To showcase the excellence in abhinaya, one needs to know the meaning of it.

‘Bhavanti iti Bhav’ meaning those that are present or arise and ‘Bhaavayanti iti Bhav’ meaning those that make one experience (Dadhich, 2017, p.202) . There are eight sthayi bhavas, 33 sanchari bhavs, in which satvik bhav are 8 in number. It is stated in ‘Nachu kirtanache Rangi’ book, Gyaneshwari and also in Dasbodh that The best Naradiya kirtan is the one in which the kirtankar displays the eight sattvic (pure) emotions - stambh (stiffness), swed (sweating), romanch (goosebumps), swarabhanga (change in voice), vepathu (trembling), vaivarnya (change in complexion), ashru (tears), and pralaya (dissolution). Ram Velapure states in his article ‘kirtan lakshan’ that the kirtankar who naturally manifests these eight sattvic emotions and awakens them in the hearts of the audience, their kirtan becomes blissful and gives joy. Research shows resemblance of these factors of presentation and importance of Satvik abhinaya in Kathak mandir tradition performed by Madan Maharaj and also in youtube video reference of Kirtankar Milindbua Badve presenting

story of Mentally ill lady carrying knife in her hand not knowing what to do , chaotic scenario at temple where she ran with knife. He very efficiently changed his voice ‘swarbhanga’ while narrating the chaos and fear in devotees of the temple , anger in the voice of the lady. To make the kirtan story more effective at some places he used only body language and facial expressions like being stunned ‘Stambh’ , instead of any dialogue.

According to Bharatmuni, drama is considered to be of superior quality if Satvik Abhinaya dominate. Research states that the Naradiya kirtan and Kathak temple tradition both are the best example of it. Rasa is actually the impression created on the mind of a sympathetic audience by the expression of bhava’s or emotions and is an experience the individual is subjected to on account of expression. Bhava is the emotion that creates a sense of enjoyment or experience which in itself is an entity and that enjoyment or experience is Rasa (Srinivas,2014, p.25).The ultimate goal of both styles is Rasa Nishpatti. In both these styles, there is a difference only in the use of technical terminology of Kathak and the use of vocal acting vachik abhinaya. If we compare the expression of devotion-based poems, there is a similarity in both, which confirms the research statement.

7. Conclusion

From 1900 to 2022, Kirtankars in Maharashtra have adopted the distinctive elements of Kathak Nritya. They have effortlessly integrated hand gestures, transitioning between storytelling and facial expressions, simultaneously presenting both styles. Establishing a connection between Kathak and Kirtan’s lyrical form complements Kathak’s graceful movements. The consistency in the practice of storytelling within the Mandir tradition, as well as the alignment of expression between the two styles, is evident. Maharashtra’s saints and Kirtan literature enhance Kathak’s expressive performances. The styles of devotional singing like Bhajan, Thumri, and Gauḷan are diverse in their linguistic nuances, yet they all hold a common thread of spirituality and guidance through entertainment. Through

these mediums, creators have propelled the realm of emotional expression and the portrayal of devotion in the direction of spiritual pursuit. Research establishes the interrelationship between Naradiya Kirtan tradition of Maharashtra and Kathak dance. New experiments with these two styles made by combining entertainment and preaching through story for upliftment of the society will be definitely successful.

The stream of devotional poetry has been flowing for centuries. Narrating these poems, explaining them and preaching, has been the tradition of both the styles. However, in the 12th century, during the 'Bhakti Movement' that began in northern India and spread throughout the country, the composition of such poetry reached its peak. Describing the union of the soul and the Supreme Being, considering oneself as a lover and God as the beloved, embellishing it as holy adornment or Madhurabhakti and explaining the poetry with music, drama, and dance has been the tradition of Kathak and continues in modern times as well. The tradition of performing Maharashtrian Naradiya Kirtan involves expressing this same aesthetic sentiment in poetry through the medium of music, acting as a text, narration, or story, and imparting teachings. In Kathak literature, devotional poetry may be accompanied by devotional adornment or in the poetry of Kirtan tradition with only subtle pointers and in both, the devotees' devotion towards God is depicted in words, the common thread in both is feeling of surrender that is Samarpan . From an aesthetical point of view, Kathak accepts the method of Kantasammat teaching. Kirtan uses a mixed method. This mixed use of Prabhu Sammit, Suhrad Sammat and Kanta Sammat preaching is the specialty of Naradiya Kirtan method.

Ka + Tha means establishing Almighty God in the hearts of the society, this is expected in both the styles. Teaching through entertainment is the ultimate goal of these traditions.

The use of the mixed form of these two styles will be successful in attracting the modern society and the task of establishing

awareness about the seriousness of modern problems, the work of creating a society of high ideological level, this mixed experiment will be the basis of the golden age of India. It would be appropriate to say that it will be made.

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