

Importance of Pandit Lalanpiya's Thumris of Unconventional Themes in Kathak Repertoire

Varsha kolhatkar¹ & Manjiri Deo²

¹Research scholar, Sri Sri centre for Advanced research in Kathak, Sri Sri university Cuttak, Odisha.

²Senior kathak dancer, PhD in kathak from Khairagarh University.

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ABSTRACT:

Indian classical music has formed the basis of performances in classical dance forms. In Kathak dance style mainly for Abhinaya anga, the Hindustani classical music played an important role. The various musical forms such as bhajan, Khyal, Dadara Thumari etc. are used for the expressional part of Kathak. Since few centuries thumari has acquired immense importance for Kathak. In the period of Vajidali Shah, thumari came in fore front and the original musical form got associated with Kathak. Since then, the evolution of Thumari led to two main varieties viz Bol Banav thumari and Bol Bant thumari. Among the composers of Bol Bant Thumri, Pandit Lalanpiya's name is respected as the best Thumri composer and singer. During study of his compositions, it is noticed that he has composed many thumaris on unconventional subjects, but they are unknown to the Kathak world. In Kathak, thumris on the themes of Radha Krishna, Gop Gopika, Nayikabheda are more prevalent. Therefore, the question arises whether these Thumris on these unconventional subjects will enrich the Kathak world. The purpose of this research is to provide a variety of themes for performance by Kathak dancers. The hypothesis is that the thumaris written by Pandit Lalanpiya based on unconventional topics would enrich the Kathak performance. The methodology used is qualitative analysis of and during the process classification of his creations is done and Kathak dancers and experts are interviewed. The subjects like Bhakta Prahlad is consoling his mother to give him poison and not to blame his father, Rukmini's questions to her mother as to why she is forcing her for the marriage or Krishna complaining his mother

that in this winter season you are sending me early morning to feed the cattle but not even given new blanket etc. are the few examples of his thumaris. The research led to the conclusion that in present scenario also, Pandit Lalanpiya's 100 years old collection of unconventional themes will provide kathak dancers with a rich repertoire of expressions and Abhinay. Thumri has two types. The essence of thumri lies in its lyrics. Based on these lyrics, these two types were created.

KEYWORDS:

Lalanpiya, thumari, unconventional themes, kathak

1. Introduction

Kathak, a classical dance form, has assimilated the essence of diverse North Indian dialects and cultures, resulting in a rich tapestry of regional influences, languages, and expressions in its performances. This diversity extends beyond the dance itself, encompassing its foundational literature and musical styles.

Kathak draws upon various musical genres such as Dhruvad, Thumri, Dadra, Tarana, Hori, Bhajan, and Stuti to create its artistic foundation. While renowned Kathak dancers have contributed to its compositions, other composers have also made significant contributions, with Thumri occupying a prominent position.

During the reign of Wajid Ali Shah, Thumri-style singing gained prominence in Kathak. This style is characterized by its natural, emotive, and primarily romantic approach. Thumri comes in two varieties:

1. "Bol Banaav" Thumri, sung in light ragas and at a slow tempo.
2. "Bol Baant" or "Bandish" Thumri, a fusion of Dhruvad and Khayal singing styles, featuring a fixed composition performed at medium to fast tempos. It is also known as "Bandish ki Thumri" and gained popularity in the West as "Pachhawi Thumri. " This

variant emphasizes pure ragas and carefully selects words that can be sung at a fast pace without compromising pronunciation and musical impact” (Shukla,1991,155-156).

Regarding the composers of Thumri, Dr. Puru Dadheech (2013) writes, “Lalan Piya and others are names above all, who’s sweet Thumris are still popular in the music world.(109)”

Pandit LalanPiya (1856-1926), born in Farukhabad, was one of the best Bol-baant thumri composer, singer, musician and Kathakar.

He had written many books out of which ‘Lalan sagar’(1927) is his main and important book in which he had written 1345 thumris/other compositions.

Shri Omprakash Mishra’Kanchanji (2016) says, “his thumris are unparallel from Rhydam, and poetry point of view. All the compositions of Lalan Piya are rhythm-oriented and in medium tempo. Most of his compositions are in the Sitar-khani style”(63). Dr. Sonam Gupta (2009) has done research on his musical compositions. Sushri Puja Gupta (2006) mentions that in his compositions, apart from the primary emotion of romanticism, there is abundant use of the Shanta (peaceful), Karuna (compassion), Hasya (humor) ras. The language used is a mix of Braj, Avadhi, and Kannauji, with a profuse usage of colloquial words, according to her (22). Sushri Modak (2009) says, “His compositions showcase a wide range of tender emotions. His works include nourishment of emotions like romanticism, playful teasing, devotion, parental love, compassion, and more”(51,81). The senior most singer of Lalanpiya parampara Sushri Pushpalata Rastogi(2022) in her interview expressed, “His poetry, which beautifully describes various scenes and scenarios, serves as an unparalleled tool for emotional expression for dance performers”.

None of the writers, singers, or individuals have undertaken the task of categorizing, analyzing, or providing commentary on his thumris that explore unconventional themes. To address this gap in research, the present study has been initiated.

This research delves into the intriguing themes found in his work that may not typically be showcased in Kathak performances. These themes include portraying Rukmini as the central heroine, describing the wedding of Varsha Devi amidst dark rain clouds where the unconscious form takes on the role of the hero-heroine, depicting the motherly love between Yashoda and Krishna in Thumri, and showcasing the question-answer interactions between Krishna and the gopis. The research seeks to explore the possibility of conveying these diverse emotions through the medium of Kathak dance.

2.Objectives

Within the realm of Kathak, thumris traditionally revolve around themes like Radha Krishna, Gop Gopika, and Nayikabheda. However, Pandit Lalanpiya has crafted numerous thumris that delve into unconventional subjects yet remain unfamiliar to the Kathak community. Hence, the primary aim of this research paper is to reintroduce his overlooked creations to the younger generation.

3.Scope

This research paper would provide a variety of themes and stories for performance by Kathak dancers. This would encourage the younger generation to experiment on unconventional themes and provide insight towards the history of Indian mythology and expand their horizons of imaginations and choreography.

4.Methodology

The research employs a qualitative method encompassing the categorization of his unorthodox thumris, conducting interviews, and staging performances to ascertain the practical utility of incorporating these thumris into the Kathak repertoire.

5.Analysis

Pandit Lalanpiya's thumris explore a diverse array of themes, such as Parvati's playful complaints to her father regarding Lord Shiva's predicament, the Gopikas' grievances about Kubja, whom

they perceive as the one who has taken away their beloved Krishna, and Krishna's lament for not receiving a blanket from his mother during the winter, among others. Due to space constraints, only a select few are described in detail, with a special focus on their suitability for inclusion in Kathak performances.

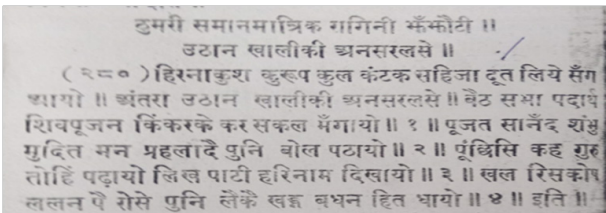
The evolution from "katha kahe so, kathak kahave" to "katha kare so kathak kahave" exemplifies the developmental journey of Kathak dancers. Pandit Lalanpiya's work, consisting of 2 to 3 compositions effectively unfolding a narrative or story, aligns with this storytelling tradition of Kathak.

5.1 Thumris on unconventional subjects

5.1.1 Story of Prahlada and Hiranyakashyapu

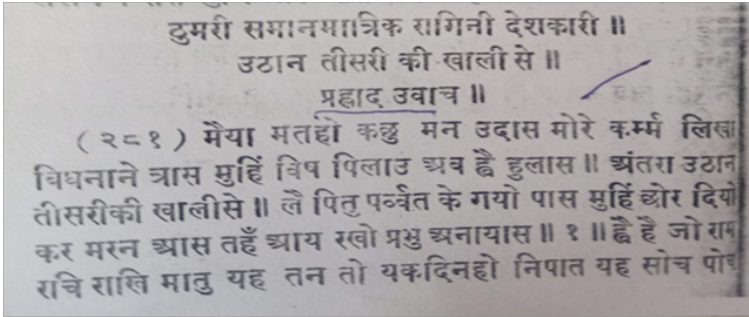
When discussing the Narasimha avatar, the typical portrayal often depicts the story with Pralhad being thrown from a mountain, cast into fire, or culminating in the moment when Narasimha emerges from a pillar. However, a wealth of untold details exists within this narrative, and here is where Lalanpiya's creative imagination shines. In all four of his thumris, he unfolds the story, beginning with the first thumri describing the grandeur of King Hiranyakashyapu's court. The second thumri delves into the moment when the king discovers his son chanting the name of Narayan. The third thumri focuses on the grief of Prahlad's mother, who is instructed to administer poison to her own child. Finally, the fourth thumri portrays Prahlad consoling his mother and beseeching her to administer the poison. Among these four thumris, I will narrate the second and fourth ones below.

i) Dhirodhatta nayak- Hiranyakashyapu



In this narrative, King Hiranyakashapu performs a devoted Shiva puja in his grand court and questions his son Pralhad about his studies. However, when Pralhad mentions “Narayan,” Hiranyakashyapu becomes enraged and attempts to harm his son. A Kathak dancer interpreting this thumri must convey devotion during the Shiva puja, parental affection when Hiranyakashapu questions his son, and then switch to a furious demeanour after hearing “Narayan,” portraying a Dhiroddhat nayak character and depicts Bhakti, Vatsalya and Raudra Ras.

ii) Dheer Prashant Nayak



Hiranyakashipu approaches his wife with a heart-wrenching request, urging her to administer poison to their son. The mother, overwhelmed with sorrow, breaks down in tears, questioning the purpose of her life. She calls her son Pralhad to reveal his father’s cruel demand(which is elaborately explained in other thumri). Pralhad, with composure, recounts his father’s actions and reassures his mother not to feel guilty or blame his father. He accepts his destiny. Pralhad embodies the qualities of Dhirprashant nayak, demonstrating a remarkable balance of mind, immense patience, and unwavering faith in Narayan’s protection—a truly unique character.

The thumri “Maiya Mat Karo mana Udas” encompasses a rich array of emotions, including tranquility, fear, wonder, maternal love, and compassion. It captures the mother’s complex emotions as she witnesses her son’s resilience despite the atrocities he has endured, filling her with immense pride and joy. For the dancer, this

presents a challenging yet rewarding opportunity to convey these multifaceted emotions with grace and authenticity.

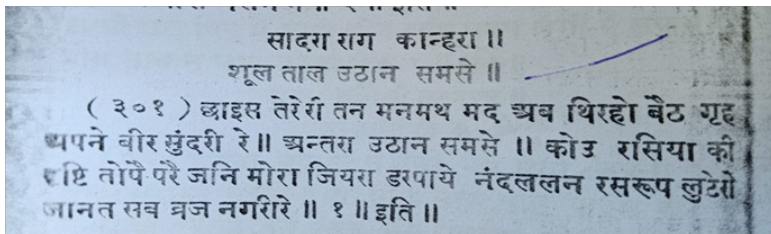
5.1.2 THUMRI- HORI

रंग डारो न श्याम सनेही| चुनर मोपै है एक ये ही|
मोरे बाबुल घर की ये नशिानी| सैती बरसन ते ही|
आज ननद ननदीया बुलाई| सो पहरिगियी धोखे ही|
चुनर मोपै है एक ये ही|

Normally in a hori performance, the lyrics are “Na daro rang” or “rang de chunariya.” However, Lalanpiya offers a unique perspective. The gopika treasures her chunni, a cherished heirloom from her father, and has safeguarded it for years. When her sister-in-law asks her to wear it on Holi, she does so unknowingly but later remember it’s Hori and fears ruining her prized possession.

LalanpiyaJi introduces a subtle, heartfelt emotion regarding a woman’s attachment to her belongings, particularly an heirloom received from her parents. The choreography can depict a wedding scene where her mother presents her with this chunni, and as she wears it on Holi, she handles it with love, caressing and kissing it gently. The performance should convey her emotions, including the fear of ruining it when she encounters her dear friend Krishna and pleads for his help in protecting her cherished chunni. The dancer can have a lot of imagination while choreographing it. And can be a good challenge for the dancers.

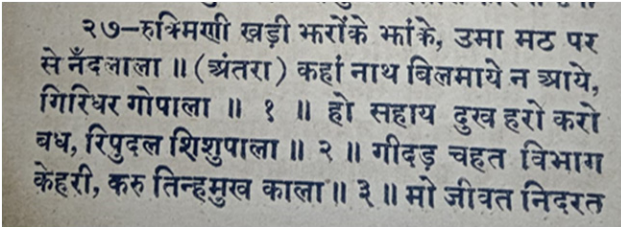
5.1.3 THUMRI- SADARA



In the challenging composition “Rupagarvita Naayika,” an unconventional approach is taken with the use of the 10-beat Shul Taal. While traditionally, Krishna praises Radha’s beauty in dance performances, in this instance, Radha’s friend implores her to stay indoors due to her extraordinary beauty and love-stricken thoughts. The friend expresses genuine concern that some admirers, particularly the mischievous Krishna, might captivate Radha’s heart if she ventures out.

The Rupagarvita Nayika’s character is conveyed through her elaborate adornments (shringar), her distinctive and confident gait (chal), and her somewhat dismissive attitude toward her friend’s advice. Additionally, the dancer can depict the narrative of Radha’s previous encounters with Krishna and her subsequent consideration of her friend’s request.

5.1.4 THUMRI- KAJARI



Rukmini’s apprehension of being wed to Shishupal is a central theme. She adamantly refuses to marry him, eagerly anticipating Krishna’s arrival. Despite enduring Shishupal’s harsh words and insults, she remains alive with the hope that Krishna will come to punish him for his actions. The performance will encompass various emotions, including her father’s role, Shishupal’s character, Rukmini’s daydreams of Krishna, and Krishna’s eventual appearance, evoking emotions of fear (bhayanak), anger (raudra), compassion (karun), and romance (shrungar raas).

5.2 Interviews

i) Shri Rudra Shankar Mishra (2023) in his interview men-

tioned that the compositions of Lalanpiya would give new perspective to the Kathak Abhinay paksha for young dancers.

ii) Dr. Vibha Dadheech (2023) in interview says- “The literary value of their compositions is highest, and their creative imagination is distinct from other literary artists, providing a novel opportunity for Kathak performers to express fresh narratives and emotions.”

5.3 Lalan Lalitya- Performance based on the compositions of Pandit Lalanpiya

On 22-10-2022 at Dwarakadhish Temple at Apata Phata, Raigad district, Maharashtra

This is FIRST ever known performance of this wide range on the compositions of Pandit Lalan piya which included thumris on unconventional subjects and taals. In this program the compositions like Tarana, Sargam, Vandana, paran, nayika bhed thumaris, the above referred all compositions which also depicted his Bol Bant style singing were performed. Very unique performance was on Mangalacharan which is exactly on the line of Natyashastra where before the start of the play or dance drama, the well-wishing of all including small creatures is done and blessings taken.

6. Conclusion

We started with the hypothesis that the thumaris written by Pandit Lalanpiya based on unconventional topics would enrich the kathak performance.

The analysis through examples, interviews and performance is done and research led to the conclusion that in present scenario also, Pandit Lalanpiya's 100 years old collection of unconventional themes will provide kathak dancers with a rich repertoire of expressions and Abhinay.

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The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

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