



CHAPTER 11

THE NRITTA - NRITYAKRITIS IN MARGAM



The traditional Bharatanatyam *Margam* begins with *nritta* items like *Pushpanjali* / *Allaripu* and or *Kauthuvam*, followed by *Jatiswaram*. By the time the dancer has finished the *Jatiswaram*, the dancer's physical body the *anga*, *pratyanga* and *upangas* have had a good warm-up, with the execution of the *jatis* and *korvais* in different speeds. The audience is also satiated with pure dance and is looking forward to some *abhinaya* moments as well. It is at this point, about 20-25 minutes into the performance, that a simple composition introduces *nritya* into the *Margam*. As said in the last chapter on *Nritya* items in a *Margam*, *Nritya* is a combination of all four modes of *Abhinaya* with physical gestures, *hastamudras* and facial expression or *mukhabhinaya*. This is the expressive dance that narrates a story with emotion – *bhava* to create *rasa*. In the present group of *Margam* items, the narrative is often interspersed with brief and brisk *nritta* interludes to break the monotone. In the *Margam*, there are several *nritta-nritya* items that the dancer performs. They begin with smaller, simpler ones with the *sahitya* being a small poem, a couplet, here the example is *Shabdham* and gradually build up the tempo to reach the *Varnam*. The *Varnam* is the longest and most challenging *kriti*, considered the piece de resistance of the performance. Thus a bridge is built as the dancer navigates her performance adroitly between *nritta* and *nritya*, just enough of both to whet the audience's interest and keep it engaged throughout the performance. The amount of thought based on practical expertise to create the *Margam* format is nothing less than a scientific invention I believe!

SHABDAM

The *Shabdham* is the first *nritya* item and the third/fourth performance item in the traditional *Margam*. We are now introduced for the first time to *abhinaya* or gestural expression, an important aspect of Bharatanatyam. *Shabdham* means a song in praise of the glory of a God or king in Sanskrit, sometimes also called a 'Yashogita'. The *sahitya* or literary content of a line of the song will be preceded or followed by short dance *jati-s* with a *sollukattu*. The *sahitya* may be devotional, erotic or tells a story related to a narrative episode from the Indian classical epics. Its performance is highlighted by gestural language, facial movements, graceful postures and enticing gaits. The *shabdham* is taught to the young dancer after the *Allaripu* and *Jatiswaram*, when the dancer is ready to learn how to co-ordinate *hasta mudras*, facial expressions and movements of the limbs to correspond to the words in the poem

being interpreted. Each word in the line of the *sahitya* has meaning or *padartha bhava* which has to be effectively expressed through the dance."This is said here to emphasise the important fact that after the introduction of the *Tala* and *Raga* in the first two items (*Alarippu* and *Jatiswaram*), here in the third, for the first time, the recital introduces words of a *sahitya* and rhythmic passages, intended respectively for *abhinaya* and dance, alternate here. Both parts of *natya*, the *nritta* as well as *nriya*, having thus been introduced."²

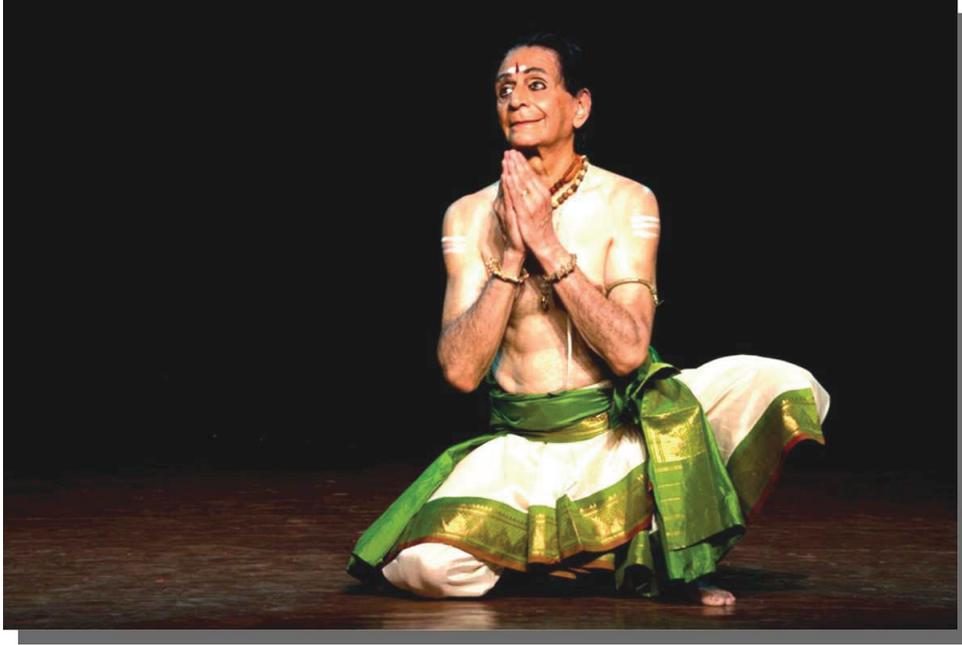


Fig.1 : Prof. C.V. Chandrashekar

A large number of *Shabdams* were composed by gifted vaggeyakars of *Melattur* village in the Tanjore district. Most of the *Shabdams* are sung in *Kamboji raga* while a few are in *Ragamalika*. In earlier times, the *Shabdham* was also known as *Kavita* or *Kavitava*.¹ Even though *Kavutuvam* is classified as a *Shabdham* in the temple tradition its words were not sung in a *raga* but recited in an effective prose order while the *jati-s* were danced. There are also long *Shabdham* compositions of a narrative type which are separately danced and interpreted in gestures.

Shabdham is an old word in classical Sanskrit. It refers to the words of praise with which a deity, a hero, or a king are greeted as they come in procession or are seated in court. The oldest form of these was a pile of epithets laudatory of the hero.

Subsequently a poetic description of the qualities of head and heart came to be offered, and finally a love theme was introduced which ended with a salutation. Since these *sabda-s* ended with the word *Salamuse* or *Salamure*, they are also called *Saltamus-s*. The *Shabdham* often ends with a *mujra* style of muslim salutation. That is one of the most unusual aspects of the *Shabdham* as it is perhaps the only Islamic influence on south Indian dance. The salutation involves the dancer bringing her two hands, palms inwards in front of the chest, then raises them to the forehead and then towards the audience. It accompanies the words that conclude the *Shabdham*, ‘salutation to thee’ or ‘I bow before thee’. After the salutation is done, a *jati* is performed and the first line of the song is repeated.



Fig.2 : Ms. Ragini Chandrashekhhar

On the origins of *Shabdham*, Dr. V. Raghavan says in the article titled “*Merattur Kasinatha*, A composer of *Sabdas* of the 18th century AD”, published in 1943 *Journal of the Music Academy*, “The *sahitya* is always in praise of a deity or a patron, who is a *zamindar* or King. It goes on elaborating in epithets the qualities, acts and glories of the deity or patron and ends by exclaiming “Salute unto thee”. *Padmanabha Salamu re*, ends a *Sabda* of Tanjore Vadivelu Pillai on Sri Padmanabhaswami at Thiruvananthapuram. Many others exclaim at the end “*Paraku*”, which means “Attention”, giving the picture of the deity or patron

eulogized as arriving or sitting in court or going in procession, being announced by the bard." ³



Fig.3 : Dr. Sneha Chakradhar

In her book “Bharatanatyam” published in 1958, Balasaraswati adds: “The third *urupadi* (item) is *Shabdham*. *Shabdham* means word”. That is meaningful words that make a story are shown for the first time. Another meaning exists. In praise of a god, in the temple or in a procession, or a king/ruler, pointing to them and praising their qualities is called *Yasogeethi*. Such words filled with praises is called *Shabdham*. In this context, *Shabdams* exist that end with *Salamure*. For example: ‘*Prathapa Simma Bhopala Salamure*’ and ‘*Padhmanadha salamure*’ are present in *Shabdham* in praise of Tanjavur king and Trivandrum Padmanabha swamy, respectively. This is the reason, why *Shabdams* were also known as *Salamu*.”⁴As the first item of *abhinaya* in the *Margam* presentation, the *Shabdham* needs to be danced with special care. The *padartha* has to be effectively performed for the meaning of the *sahitya* to be conveyed to the audience and for the audience to appreciate the various ways in which the dancer is able to nuance the emotion. Often, the dancer begins with simple *sancharis* to elucidate the *padartha*.

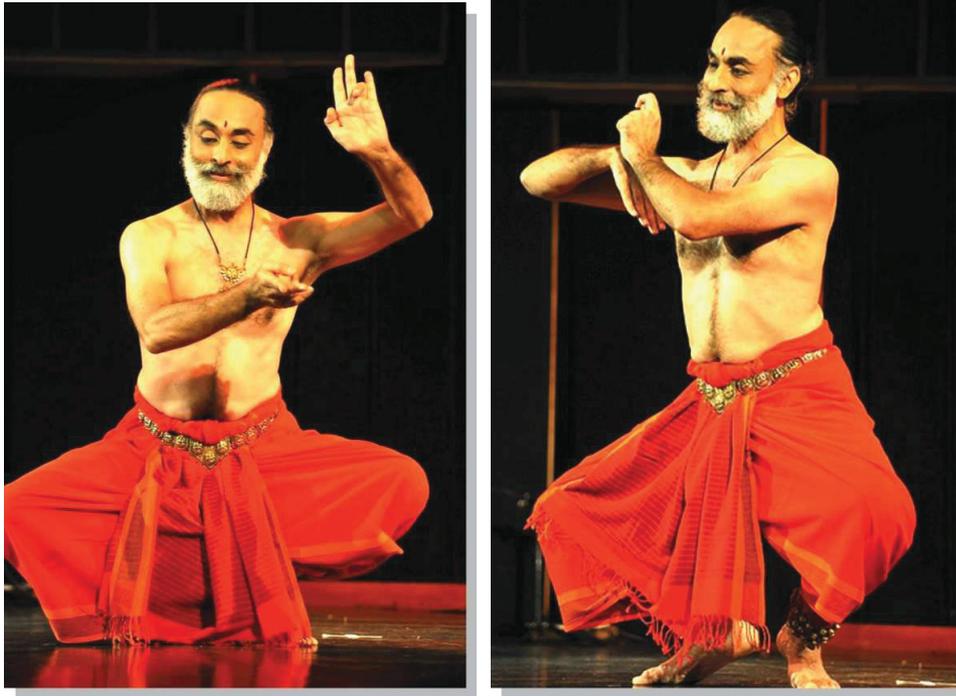


Fig. 4 : Shri Navtej Johar

It is in the *Shabdham* that for the first time, the words of a line of *sahitya* and the abhinaya that goes with it, are introduced as alternating lines of lyric (mime) and rhythmic passages (pure dance). The line of *sahitya* is either preceded or followed by short *jatis* with *sollakattu* like '*tataiya taiyyum tat ta tam*'. The *Pallavi* is sung with rhythm syllables or *sabda-s*, and danced as the prelude and finale as well as the several refrains in-between. The *abhinaya* is executed with *hastamudras* and facial movements, interpreting the *sahitya* in multiple ways. The choreography designs physical movements to flow into one another to form intricate and attractive patterns. Therefore the *Shabdham* offers a very good scope for the dancer to give a glimpse of her command over abhinaya in this very first item itself. Amongst the accompanying musicians, it gives a good opportunity for the singer to reveal his/her prowess. As the first *nritya* item, the *Shabdham* is executed in a slow tempo, allowing the dancer to unravel her talents, especially for *abhinaya*, a little by little. In the process, the dancer gets absorbed in *sanchari bhava*, thus infusing a sense of aesthetic pleasure in the audience.

In general, *Shabdams* describe the hero's qualities, and for the scope of *abhinaya* other *bhavas* are introduced. *Dasavataram*, *Ramayana*, *Gajendra Moksham* are some

of the themes explored in *Shabdham*. After showing the *abhinaya*, at the end of each line in the *sahityam*, the dancer strikes the foot to “*Takita Takadhimi*” followed by *Tat tai ta ha* once, and the *jati* “*tari taki nanaka tadhi mi dhi mi ki ta*” is used. After this, the second line of the *sahityam* is done in *abhinaya*. The *adavu* can be changed to another. In the end, the *dhit dhit tai* *adavus* are used to finish the *shabdham*.

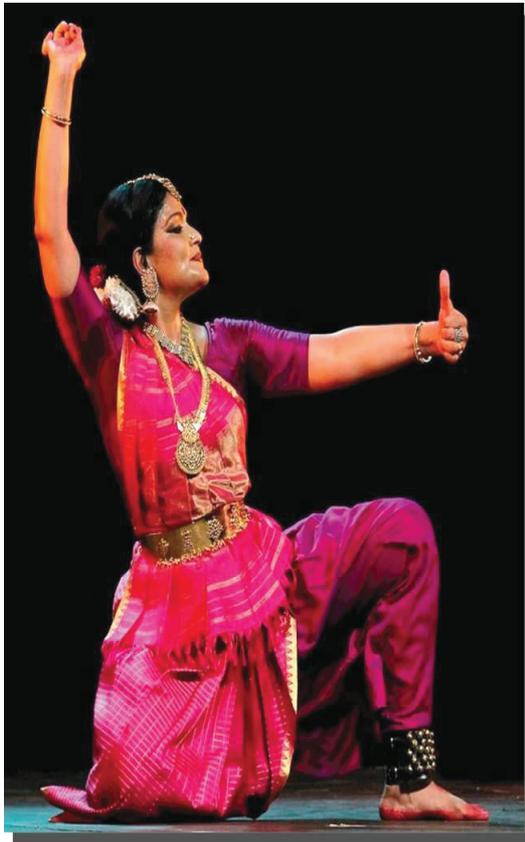


Fig.5 : Smt. Mallika Sarabhai

Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale at times performed other items in place of *Shabdams*. In an article published in *Kalakshetra Quarterly*, 1980, she wrote, “I may also add that I used *kirtanas* like ‘*Anandanatanaprakasam*’ of Dikshitar and ‘*Ojagadamba*’ for an invocatory dance taking often the place of the *Shabdham*, which contains very much the same kind of *sringara bhava* as is found in *Padams* and *Javalis*...I found the *Shabdham*, which is a well known dance item, musically uninteresting, as it depended much on the *Manodharma* and the quality of the *singer* to make it good. Good singers were also difficult to find ...⁵

It is generally believed that *Shabdams* composed before the time of the Tanjore Quartet, were in various *talas* and *ragas*. But when the Tanjore Quartet got into the

act, the *Kambodi* and *mishrachapu tala* became the most popularly used for the *Shabdham*. Perhaps *Kambodi* was chosen because it is a *rakti raga* with numerous possibilities for improvisation. Another reason could be that as *Kambodi* was what is known as a *desi raga* with roots in folk music, it found an instant connect with the audience. Even when a *Shabdham* was composed in *ragamalike*, the first *raga* was *kambodi*. This is one of the reasons why so many *Shabdams* sound very similar as they start out, though their form and content has certainly undergone quite a lot of change. There are no complications, however, either in the *nritta* or *nritya* components because following the time line of the *Margam*, the choreographer/dancer has to conserve energy, both physical and emotional, for the challenging *Varnam* that would follow.



The shabdams dedicated to Lord Krishna are in Telugu, while those dedicated to Lord Muruga or Nataraja are usually in Tamil. The Gurus of Rajarajeswari Bharata Natya Kala Mandir have composed a *ShabdhamDayaradan* in praise of Lord Rama in Tamil. Most of the old and traditional *Shabdams* are those handed down from the guru to shishya, composed by the Tanjore Quartet or old Gurus. The most popular ones are composed by the Tanjore Quartet. New *Shabdams* have been written by present-day composers but these adhere to the guidelines provided by the earlier composers. *Shabdams* thus

form a simple and beautiful link between the *Jatiswaram* and the *Varnam* in the Bharatanatyam *Margam*. (Fig.6 : Padmeshri Geeta Chandran)

In his opening paper titled “*Bharatanatyam*” presented in the Dance Seminar held by the Sangeet Natak Academi, 1958, Dr. V. Raghavan says, “The third item called

Sabda occurs in the older texts mentioned previously....it being called *Sabda* and *Salamu* forms a tell-tale links between the Kathak and BN...*Sabda* as an old word in classical Sanskrit means the words of praise with which a deity, a hero and a king are greeted as they come in procession or seated in court. The oldest form of these is a pile of laudatory epithets of the hero, then a poetic description of the qualities of the head and heart, and then a love-theme was introduced; but, in a tell-tale manner, even the love pieces ended with a salutation.⁶

Some of the well-known *Shabdams* are *Thandai Muzhanga*, *Aayar Seriyar*, *Adum Mayil*, *VayuMaidane*, *Aazhi Suzhnthida*, *Ramar*, *Devihaye Shivan*, *Venu Gananai*, *Krishna Manjari*, *Myilai Pujitha*, *Sararijakshulu*.

VARNAM

The *Varnam* is one of the most beautiful and highly elaborate dance compositions, incorporating technical brilliance, richness of melody and interpretation. It gives physical form and shape to the dance form in its most pristine and complex version. The term “*Varna*” figures in the very early treatises on drama and music (starting from about 1st century AD), and was used by ancient authors to describe melodic movements of the songs. The large class of compositions used in music and dance performances of ancient and early medieval period are referred to as “*Prabandha*.” Numerous compositions employed in the medieval period were developed based on *Prabandhas* including another wide class, “*Daru*”, which were employed in medieval *Natakas* (such as *BhagavataMela* and *Yakshagana*). These *Natakas* influenced the development of the court repertoire of Sadir-attam, later Bharatanatyam. During the medieval period, the format of music and dance performances underwent considerable transformation. New compositions such as *Padam*, *Swarajati* and *Javali*, *Tillana* were introduced into Sadir repertoire during the 17-18th centuries. Since the 18th century, *Varnam* took central place in dance in dance Margam as designed by the Tanjore Quartet.

In Sanskrit and Tamil, the term “*varna*” has many meanings. According to Lalitha Ramakrishna, the Amarakosha defines the term as follows “*Varna* indicates *Dvija* (Brahmin) and other castes, white and other colors, praise and the alphabet.”⁷In the *Natyashastra*, Bharatamuni used the term “*varna*” to denote “*ganakriya*” (melodic

movement) as follows: “*Varnas* (accents) are of four kinds: *Arohi*, *Avarohi*, *Sthayi* and *Sancari*. *Alankara-s* (embellishments) depend on *varna-s*. When all the *Swara-s* are rising, that is *Arohi* and then all are descending, that is *Avarohi*. When the *Swara-s* are steady (i.e. equal, or in one tana), that is *sthayi*; there the *Swara-s* move together (sam + cara = going together) that is *Sancari*. The *varna-s* with these characteristics, not only emerge from the body (throat, voice), they are defined by the three different *sthana-s* (*tana-s*). When a song gives rise in this way to two *varnas*, then out of the *varnas*, the *rasa* is born. Therefore *varnas* are also related to songs.

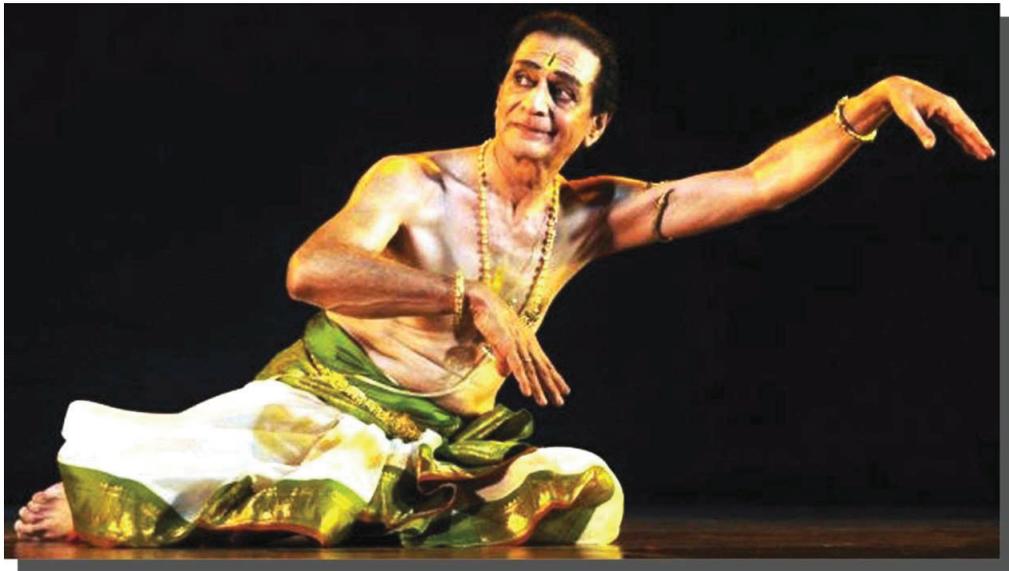


Fig.7 : Prof. C.V Chandrashekhhar

The concept of the four *varnas* is seen in all major musicological treatises from Bharata to Venkatamakhi. Matanga Muni in “*Brihaddesi*” defines the term *Varna* to denote *Ganam* or music as follows: Matanga Muni also mentions the close connection between *varna* and *raga* expression as follows: “A *raga* is that which is beautified by tonal excellence of *Swaras* and *varnas* and pleases the mind of people.”⁸ Sarangadeva in “*Samgitaratnakara*” defines the term *Varna* as *Ganakriya* and speaks of four *Varnas*⁹

In Tamil, the term “*varnanai*” means “description” and it is derived from the verb “*vrnoti*” in Sanskrit which means ‘to describe, to delineate, to illustrate.’ This is good metaphor of the *Varnam* which describes the subtleties of *raga* and *laya*, and which

is used to describe the inner feelings of the heroine, subtleties and shades of her relationship with the hero and the current situation of the two. *Varna* is also used in the sense of “*varga*” (caste), i.e. the certain group following the particular order, rules and traditions. This definition draws attention to Raga Lakshana aspect of the *Varnam*. The word “*varna*” also denotes color. This definition indicates multi-fold nature of the *Varnam*. *Varnam* is multidimensional and chromatic. *Varnam* portrays many shades of *raga*, brings out intricate rhythmic designs, and provides scope for innumerable variations of pure dance (*Nritta*) and expressive acting (*Abhinaya*.)



Fig. 8 : Guru Shri Adyar Lakshaman

The word “*varna*” means alphabet and many alphabet books for children are called “*Varnamala*”. Also the word “*varna*” means a syllable, as for example, “*PancavarneSvara*” which means ‘the Lord evoked by the five syllables *'Na mah Si va ya'*. The alphabet of a language constitutes the building blocks out of which a whole system of communication and expression is created. *Varnam* is known as grammar of *raga*, as it brings out “*Raga Svarupa*”. Thus, *Varnam* could be compared to the alphabet of *Ragas*.

The word “*varna*” in its meaning as “*stuti*” (praise) is also relevant because as far as *sahitya* of a *varna* is concerned, it is almost invariably in praise of deities, kings or patrons. This feature *Varnam* could inherit from *Shabdham* (which is also referred to as “*Yasogiti*” or composition in praise of king of deity). BM Sundaram explains this side of the term “*varna*” as follows:“ Description of *raga*, prescribing its *lakshana* was done in earlier times, only through a *geetam* and hence it came to be called as “*Lakshanageetam*”. Perhaps, due to its inadequate nature to portray all the possible

and admirable combinations and colors of a *raga*, the *Varna* took its birth. *Varna* took shape to project all ‘*sancharas*’ of a *raga*, with various shades, in a more elaborate manner. The constituents prescribed for a *Varna*, namely, *Arohi*, *Avarohi*, *Sthayi*, and *Sanchari* (movements of the note) are all found in musical portion of *Varna*.”¹⁰



Fig.9 : Ms. Divya Patel (Researcher)

The *Varnam* generally comprises two parts. The first part is called *Purvaranga* and includes *Pallavi*, *Anupallavi*, *Muktai Swara* and *Muktai Swara Sahityam*. The second part is called *Uttaranga* and comprises *Charanam* and *Charana swaras* (also called as *Chitta Swaras* or short notes). Some *Varnams* will have only *Sahitya*, whereas some will have both *Charanam* and *Charana Sahitya*. They are also known as *Ettugada Swaras* and *Ettugadasahitya*. A *Varnam* may have two, three or more of these.

The *Pallavi* is often in the nature of a prayer or request, while *Anupallavi* continues the statement of the *Pallavi* and addresses the deity or the patron. The *Ettugada* can be compared to the *Charana* of *kriti* or *keertana*, and therefore it is sometimes also mentioned as *Upapallavi* or *Chitta pallavi*. In Telugu and Kannada, *Ettugada* means "commencement", or "position of attack". King Shahaji substituted the word "*charana*" with "*ettugada*" in some of his compositions. This was later adopted by several composers of the *Varnam*. The *sahitya* used in the *ettugada* is comparatively short, mostly complementing the meaning in the *Pallavi* and *Anupallavi*.

In the *Varnam*, the *muktayiSwara* has a definite presence. It occurs in the concluding part of the *poorvaranga*, as *muktayi* means 'finish'. It is indicated as "*chittaSwara*" by some scholars. With or without *sahitya chitta Swara* are used in the *kriti* to add color, serve in a complementary not compulsory mode. They may have been a part of the original composition or may have been added later by other singers. In the *TanaVarnam*, *muktayiSwara* may or may not have *sahitya*.



Fig. 10 : Ms. Divya Patel (Researcher)

The set of *Swara* passages that follow the *ettugada* are called '*ettugada Swaras*'. They are thus different from the *muktayiSwara*. The *Varnam*'s content is reflected in the *sahitya* and its underlying theme. It could focus on godly devotion or love for the

beloved or in praise of a patron. Now, the aim of the choreographer and composer is to present the *sahitya* in all its varied hues and meanings. The Pada *Varnam* is always rendered in a slow tempo and hence is also called '*ChaukaVarnam*' (or the slow *Varnam*). In a sense it is very much like the *TanaVarnam* in form, but every *Swara* passage has its own *sahitya*. Sometimes the *PadaVarnam* may contain *jatis*, and that is known as '*Padajati Varnam*'. This is nothing but *Swarajati*. *PadaVarnams* are extremely simple and straightforward, without any excessive *gamakas*, nor are they embellished with *sangatis*.

"The vocalist starts *Varnam* with small introduction of the *raga*. After that vocalist commences the first line of *Pallavi*, during which the musicians, mridangist and nattuvanar join the vocalist. Dancer enters the stage and commences *Varnam* with "*Tattu*" (simple footwork when the strong beat of *tala* is emphasized.) This footwork is performed before execution of each *Nritta* portion. Similarly, Nattuvanar renders chain of *solkattus* (for example, "*dhalangu taka diku taka tadin ginatom*" in case of *chaturasra nadai*). This chain of *Solkattus* sets the *kalapramanam* and *nadai* (or *gati*) of coming *Nritta* portion (for each kind of *nadai*, the special chain of *Solkattus* is used, for instance, in case of *Tisranadai* it is "*dhalangu thom taka tadin ginathom*"). *Nritta* in *Varnam* commences with *TrikalaJathi*. The feature of this *tirmanam* is, that *Sollukattus* (garlands of *syllables*) and corresponding series of *adavus* are executed in three speeds (*kala-s*): *Vilambha*, *Madhyama* and *Druta*. The last portion of *Trikala Jathi* is called "*Kuraippu*." *Adavus* of *Kuraippu* are performed without repetition. "*Muktaippu*" is finishing sequence of *Kuraippu*. This final chain of *adavus* is also called "*makuta*" or "*teermana*" *adavus* executed in triple cycle. Further on, each line of *Pallavi-Anupallavi* is repeated several times and illustrated with *Abhinaya*. In *Pallavi* and *Anupallavi* "melody and *sahitya* are melted together in free-flowing style" ¹¹.

Structure of *Varnamas* followed by most of the dancers is as follows

- *Varnam* begins with a *Trikala Jathi*
- First line of *Pallavi* of *Purvanga* performed with a number of *Sanchari-s*
- *Jathi/ Trimanam* and *Kuraippu*
- 2nd line of *Pallavi*
- Several *jatis* are inserted after each line of *Pallavi* and *Anupallavi*.

- Muktai/Chittaswaras *Swara* is sung twice (sometimes in two speeds), set to different *korvais*.and Than *Muktai Sahitya* with *Tattu Mittu adavus*with Serpa nadai.
- Uttaranga (second part) comprises 3,4 or at times 5 Charanaswaras, Charana *sahityam*
- Charanam swaras are sung first followed by Charana *sahityam* set to pure abhinaya.
- Charana swaras are set to different mai adavu and then korvais. Charana *sahityam* is set to pure abhinaya.
- Chittaswaras are performed like in *Varnam*, swaras are sung twice, set to different korvais.



Fig. 11 : Ms. Janaki Rangarajan

In the pada *Varnam*, the melody admits variations such as *sangati* and *niraval*. The *abhinaya* performed to *pallavi* and *anupallavi* is elaborate and includes variations called "*kai*" and "*sancari*". "*Kai*" is the depiction of a particular line of *sahitya* using hand gestures ("*kai*" means hand, thus the term "*kai*" is applicable to pure *abhinaya* passages). The variations in *kai* follow the rules of *padarthabhinaya*, where the meaning is depicted according to the *sahitya*, using the language of hand gestures

and movement. Each *kai* gives a slightly different variation of the meaning and the intensity of *bhava* is slowly increased with each *kai*. The last variation is performed in the form of *sancari* which means ‘roaming around’. The *sancari* illustrates the meaning of the *sahitya*, exploring several layers of meaning embedded in the *sahitya*. The movements and gestures may not correspond in a literal manner to the words of the poetic or literary text but the way in which it is danced, elaborates the line/lines in a myriad of meanings. Thus the *sancari* brings together all the previous interpretations of the *sahitya*. The *jatis* interspersed between the lines of *Pallavi-Anupallavi* (there can be one *jati* or a pair of *jatis* inserted), brings out rhythmic aspect of *Varnam*. The first part of the *Varnam* concentrates on the contrast between the slow flowering of the *abhinaya* and the precise rhythmical setting of *jati-korvais*. Here pure *nritta* and *abhinaya* aspects are segregated clearly, and while the emotional intensity of *abhinaya* is increased by each line of *pallavi* and *anupallavi*, the gait and rhythmical complexity of pure *nritta* is increased from one *jati* to another one. Each *jati* in the *Varnam* is followed by *Aradi* or *Arudi* which serves as the juncture between the *jati* and the following line of *sahitya* set to melody. *Aradi* is also the point of synchronization, which allows the dancer, nattuvanar, mridangist, musicians and vocalists come together and proceed to the next *avartana*.

The *Muktayi Swara* is rendered twice, and two different *nritta korvais* are performed to these *Swaras*. The rhythmic structure of the *adavus* follow the gait of *Swaras* and introduce additional rhythmic patterns. The *sahitya* of the *muktayi Swara* runs in step with *Swara* phrases, with each line matching a melodic phrase. The *sahitya* of the *muktayi Swara* is always sung twice; the first time illustrated by pure *abhinaya*. The second set of *abhinaya* is used with "*Tattu mettu*" *adavu* (footwork set to different *jathis* or sequences of 4, 3, 7, 5 or 9 beats) or "*Sarpa nadai*" (when the dancer walks from left to right and back along the line resembling the shape of a snake). The rhythmic pulse of *muktayi Swara* has to be crisp and precise.

While there is not so much prolongation of vowels as in *pallavi-anupallavi* section, and not so much scope for elaboration for musicians, the *abhinaya* is performed to the *padartha* without much variation. The *tattu mettu adavus* like a peak where all the three aspects of *Varnam* - rhythm, melody and lyrics – come together and become a whole. Even the emotional intensity and the way it is expressed reaches its

summit here. This portion is like a cadence of the first section of the *Varnam*, where the *tattu mettu* performs the same function for *abhinaya* that the mridangam performs for a vocalist in a music kutcheri. The rhythmic patterns of *tattu mettu* are suggested by the *Swara* phrases.



Fig.12 : Shri V.P. Dhananjayan and Smt. Shanta Dhananjayan

The *uttararanga* section of the *Varnam* is made up of the *ettugadapallavi* followed by the *ettugadaSwaras*. The *kalapramanam* of this section can be increased upto 1.5 of the tempo of *purvaranga*. The *sahitya* of the *ettugada pallavi* is repeated several times in the beginning and end of this section. The *ettugadapallavi* is illustrated with *abhinaya* and since it is repeated several times, the *abhinaya* admits many *kaivariations*. Sometimes one *sancari* is performed to the last two repetitions of *ettugadapallavi*, which is also repeated after each *ettugada Swara*. This repetition is used either for *aradi* or the dancer goes backwards and prepares for the next *korvai*. Each *ettugada Swara* is repeated twice. The dancer performs two *korvais* set to different *kanakku* and *adavu* patterns. The tempo and rhythmical complexity of *nritta korvais* increase in harmony with melodic arrangement of *ettugadaSwaras* and the emotional intensity of the *abhinaya*. Both should become more intense and more impressive as they peak and the *Varnam* comes to a close. The *sahitya* set to the

ettugadaSwaras is also repeated twice. The first is used to perform pure *abhinaya*; the second is accompanied by *tattu mettu* or *sarpa nadai*. The *abhinaya* is compact with the syllables of the *sahitya* sharply following the gait and rhythmic patterns of the melody. The dancer uses different stories (mythical or real) to expound the layers of meanings of the *sahitya*. After the last *ettugadaSwarasahityam* is over, the *ettugada pallavi* is repeated again several times and dancer performs *abhinaya* (which usually is repetition of the *Kai* performed in the beginning of this section).

TYPES OF VARNAM:

TANA AND PADA (CHOWKA) VARNAM

"Structure of *Pada* and *Tana Varnams* is the same. Generally, it is accepted that *Tana varnam* has no *sahityam* for *Muktayi* and *Ettugada Swaras*, and *Padavarna* has. However, the presence of *sahityam* for *Muktayi Swara* and *Ettugada Swaras* is not very reliable criteria of classification of *varnas* in *Tana* and *Pada*. Earlier, both types of *varnas* included "full set" of *sahityam*, and even *Anubandham*, which could be regarded as being part of *Ettugada Pallavi* to be sung in conclusion of the second portion. For instance, there *Tana varnas* with *sahityam* for *Muktayi* and *Ettugada Swaras* and *Pada varnas* without ones."¹²

According to S.R. Jayasitalakshmi, there are four *Ata tala Tana varnas* of Subburama Dikshitar, including "*Sri Rajadhiraja*" in *Balahamsa*; "*Sri Rajivakshadi*" in *Edukula kamboji*; "*Sri Rajarajaramanna*" in *Atana/Purnachandrika*; and "*Sri Maharajadi*" in *Atana*, with *Sahityam* for all *Swaras*.¹³

Pada varnas without *sahityam* for *Muktayi* and *Ettugada Swaras* include "*Rammanave*" in *Hindolam*, *Rupakam* by *Ramaswani Dikshitar* and "*Roopamujuchi*" in *Todi*, *Adi* by *Muthuswani Dikshitar* (through, other *Chowka varnas* of *Ramaswami Dikshitar* do have *sahitya* for all the section, for instance "*Sami nine*" in *Sriranjani*" and "*Ela nannechevu*" in *Purnachandrika*).

The major difference between the two types of *varnas* is the tempo, as *Pada varnas* are set to *Vilamba kala* and *Tana Varnas* are majorly set in *Madhyama kala*. Thus, the term "*Chowka Varnam*" is used as synonym of "*Pada Varnam*." *Subbarama Dikshitar* mentions *Lakshanas* of *Chowka* and *Tana varnas* in his work "*Sangita*

Prachina Paddhati" as follows: "Chowkavarna resembles a pada, i.e. *Sahitya* composed with *Sringara Rasa* and is in slow tempo. *Muktayi Swara* should have double the number of *avartas* then that of *anupallavi* and it leads to *pallavi*. *Charana* consists of four *avartas*. After the first *avarta* of the *charanam*, the first *Swara* which is set in *vilamba kala* with *Dirgha Swaras*, consisting of one *avarta* is sung followed by second, third and other *Swaras* set in *madhyama kala* each of them concluded with the first *avarta* of *charanam*. After the *Swara* portion if finished, the other three *avartas* of *charanam* are to be sung followed by *muktayiSwara* and then concluded with the *pallavi*." ¹⁴



Fig.13 : Ms. Amritha Sruthi

RAGAMALIKA VARNAM

Ragamalika denotes a genre of musical compositions, set to a number of *ragas* ("garland of *ragas*.") "Earliest composers of *Ragamalikas* are king Shahaji of Tanjore and Melattur Veerabhadrayya, a pioneer composer of this musical form. After him all members of Dikshitar family composed *Ragamalikas*. One of the most popular *Ragamalika varnam* is "*Valachi vachi*" in nine *ragas* by Patnam Subramanya Iyer. Another example is *Navaragamalika Varnam* by Kalahasti Venkatasami Raja that is composed in the *ragas* Nattai, Gaulai, Varali, Arabhi, Shri, Narayanagaula,

Ritigaula, Bauli and Kedaram. Ramaswami Dikshitar composed Ragamalika *varnam* in format of *pada varnam* for dance. He used 61 *ragas* (for each line of *sahityam*) and 46 *Marga talas* (having *Guru* and *Plutakriyas*) and seven *Suladitalas*".¹⁵

DARU VARNAMS

The *DaruVarnam* has the overall structure of the conventional *Varnam* but there are additional *jatis* in the *muktayiSwara*. These *Varnams* are quite similar to *PadaVarnams* and adapt well for dance choreography. A number of them were popularized by composer Muthiah Bhagavathar (1877-1945) a versatile musician, vocalist, *Harikatha* actor, who also composed many *Swarajatis*, *Gitams*, *Lakshanagitams* using a wide range of *ragas*. He was an expert *vina* and *mridangam* player, and had learnt Sanskrit from his uncle, an orthodox Vedic scholar, before he started his music training under Guru Sambasiva Iyer of Tyagaraja Parampara. He was also proficient in dance knowledge and therefore, according to Mysore Vasudevacharya, he had the expertise to compose several *daruVarnams* as well as *Tillanas*. Amongst his very well-known *daruVarnams* were '*Mate malaya dhvaja pandya samjate matanga*' (Khamas, Adi), '*Balu mosamayyanura bagayara sami*' (Sahana, Khanda Chapu), '*Sanmutangi shri chamundeshvari shatodari*' (Vasanta, Adi), and '*Shri raja rajeshvari shritajana palini*' (Kapi, Misra Chapu). In the "*Mate malaya dhvaja pandya samjate*" *Varnam*, the *Muktai Swara* has a complete line of *sahitya* and complete line of *jatis* corresponding to *Swaras*. Muttiah Bhagavathar's *Darus* do not have *sahityam* for *muktayiSwara*.

There are many *Varnams* which are especially composed for dance. The popular ones amongst these are '*Nilamegha shyamalane niruma guna sundarane*' (Madhuvanti, Adi), '*Devi shri rajeshvari kadambari nive karunakari*' (Natakuranji, Adi), and '*Sarasa dala lochana mukunda unai lal tarakam*' (Khamas, Adi). Vinai Sessa Iyer's *Darus* have the *solkattus* as part of *muktayiSwara* and *sahityam* for the *muktayi* and *ettugadaSwaras*. *DaruVarnams*, which have *jatis* and *Swaras* in the *muktayiSwara* portion, are often referred to as "*Padajativarnams*". This type of *Varnams* is close to *Swarajati*, but also includes the *Varnams* composed later in the post-trinity period, when the *Varnam* became famous and regularly performed. In fact the *Varnam* as a composition evolved from the *Swarajati* but *Swarajati* itself became just one variety of *Varnam*.



Fig.14 : Smt. Rohini Thakre

As the *Varnam* evolved, new meanings also developed. In the 17-18th centuries, after the *Tana* and *PadaVarnams* were introduced as part of the music and dance repertoire, *Varnam* began to be strongly associated with either *ragalakshana* compositions in music (referred to as *tanaVarnam*) or the main item of dance repertoire (*padaVarnam* and all possible variations like *DaruVarnam*, *RagamalikaVarnam*, and so on).

Varnam, as a term, also came to denote characteristic melodic lines referred to as “*varna mettu.*” *Varna mettus* are important in opening up the *Raga Svarupa* and conveying the *bhava* through melody, i.e. *ragabhava*. Therefore the *Varnam* is a truly elaborate composition challenging the versatility of the dancer in pure dance and mime. According to Ragini Devi, “The most fascinating element of the *Varnam* is the exposition of the transient moods of love (*sanchari bhava*) in mimetic dance. The dancer thus creates a gesture poem of her own to enlarge the poetic theme of the song.”¹⁶

The *Varnam* is distinguished from a *Shabdham* or *Kirtanam* as the *Nayaka-Nayika bhavais* its main feature. Relationships between the hero and the heroine are interpreted in terms of *Madhura Bhakti* or supreme devotion to God through unalloyed love (*Sringara*). The plot of *Varnam* is set according to the spirit of *Madhura Bhakti*, where the most refined kind of love is that for the God. Thus, in *Varnam* the hero is symbolically represented by the Deity or king. Real patrons of those days were kings, chieftains or noblemen. All of them had “*Ishta Devata*” or the

deity whom they worshiped with particular devotion. Thus in *sahityam*, the image of this deity is used to denote the character. The *Nayika* (the heroine) addresses her Lord directly or indirectly. In *Varnam* the God is considered as *Nayaka* (the hero), i.e. abstract idea of God finds its manifestation in God-like human creature. Normally and usually, the *Varnam*, treats the theme of love and yearning for one's beloved. The story line of *Varnam* is woven around the anguish and longing expressed by the lovelorn maiden for an ultimate union with the *Nayaka* who is presented either as the Lord himself (embodied in form of local deity) or the king, in whose praise the *Varnam* was composed. Thus the hero can be a God or the king. Often it is description of a passionate woman temporarily ignored, pining or abandoned by her lover. She pleads with him to return to her and attempts to lure him with praise, scolding, images of frustration and sexual consummation, or whatever else might effectively draw him back. This is all suggestive of earthy pleasures and desires, often quite unabashedly so. On the other hand one may (as is expected to) interpret this appeal in a more spiritual and philosophical vein, as the yearning of *Jeevatma* for *Paramatma* (the individual soul for the supreme), the desire of man to be united with god, the passionate entreaty of devotee to deity. This dual approach to love, with its great hungers and profound consummations, is in fact no duality at all, but a recognition that the greatest of man's passions carries him beyond all distinctions of physical and spiritual into the realm of supreme undifferentiated bliss. It is the Hindu conception of love as both passion and freedom from passion.

According to BM Sundaram: "Since the *Pada Varnam* is a product of feudal times, its theme is based on *Bhakti* and *Sringara*, as found in *Padams*. The methods to approach God are many, *Madhurabhava* or *BhaktiSringara* is one of them. *VipralambhaSringara* (opposite to *Sambhoga Sringara*) arises pangs of separation and innumerable feelings and emotions, expressed in poetry. That is why this type of *Sringara* is more employed as theme of *PadaVarnams*." ¹⁷

Padartha can be subjected to improvisation and modification as we go deeper into its understanding. The word to word interpretation is not always followed. Often the word is modified by depicting its adjustival form. Like the word "royal" can be depicted as "one wearing the royal crown" or improvised as "one riding a golden chariot" or "one who is revered by his subordinates" Perhaps this is similar to the

Sangati part of music. In a way one can say that a line is improvised and interpreted without going a complete change. The *Sanchari bhava* is compared to the *Niraval* aspect where it is from a totally different point of view that the interpretation is done.



Fig.15 : Prof. Dr. Parul Shah

In his book, *Bharatanatyam--A Critical Study*, Dr. R Satyenarayana writes, “The *Varnam* combines in it *Abhinaya* and *Nritta*/pure dance in comparable proportions and thus marks the transition point of Bharatanatyam from pure dance to pure *abhinaya*, i.e. from pure from to pure representation This may be appropriately called Bharataprayoga because the acronymic definition of Bharata as comprising *bhava*,

raga and *tala*, is fully exemplified here". At the end the *Varnam* is one of the most beautiful and highly elaborate dance compositions incorporating technical brilliance, richness of melody and interpretation. Some dancers and dance writers have put it extremely well. "*Varnam* is the most complex, interesting, challenging item- the piece de resistance in a recital to prove the virtuosity and stamina of a Bharatanatyam dancer. [It comprises] the most complicated dance sequences." Kapila Vatsyayan has described *Varnam* thus: "The *Varnam* provides the fullest scope to the dancer to improvise on a given theme... In terms of technique, the dancer has freedom to improvise on the musical note as well as on the literary word. In the abhinaya portions, the dancer presents either a word-for-word interpretation or renders through gesture the meaning of a complete line. She can also present through gestures other images related to but not contained in the word. In this respect, the *Varnam* calls for all the imaginative faculties at the command of the dancer, who must possess a rich literary background. Without this, the dancer would be at a loss to present the words through the gestures in a variety of ways.... "

Ultimately one can say that the *Varnam* in the *Margam* format is like the soul of the body. It is commonly understood that the *Varnams* those are danced are *Pada varnam* and those sung are *Tana varnam*. In dance, both aspects *Nritta* and *Nritya* are fully expounded. The *jati*, *swara* and *pada* unfold each time going on higher level, and they need to be analysed and enjoyed. Both the aspects entwine and alternate with each other, with taking the same space in time and create visual, aural and spiritual beauty. It is a delight to watch a versatile dancer perform a *Varnam*!

SWARAJATI

This dance - musical form came into practice from the period of Maratha influence on the development of Bharatanatyam. *Swarajati*, as the name signifies, is a composition with alternative rhythmic syllables (i. e. *jatis* and *swaras*) in the song. Melattur Veerabhadraya (18th century) is the chief architect of *Swarajati* compositions. His *Huseni Swarajati* is the earliest example of this variety. *Swarajatis* are a very old musical form, many of which were composed by Tanjore Quartet, specially for dance. Shyama Sastri later composed *Swarajatis* that are concert-worthy. Many composers have composed *Swarajati* of which Melattur Venkataramasastri and Adiyappaya's compositions are well known.¹⁵ Some other

composers of *Swarajatis* are Shobanadri, Swati Tirunal, Chinni Krishna Dasa, Ponniah, Vadivel, Veena Seshanna and Mysore Sadashiva Rao.

There are three types of *Swarajatis*.¹⁹

- 1) Dance *Swarajatis* - having *sollukatus* in its musical structure. For example, *e mandayanara*, *e mayaladira*.
- 2) Those which have no *jatis* but comprises *swaras* and *sahityas*, for example, Shyamasastri's *Swarajatis* in *todi*, *bhairavi* and *yadukulkamboji ragas*.
- 3) Those that belong to the *abyasa gana*. These are simple without *jatis* meant for music students or beginners. For example, *ravemaguva* in *anandabhairavi raga* and *sambasivayanave* in *kamas raga*.



Fig.16: Shri V.P. Dhananjayan and Smt. Shanta Dhananjayan

The *angas* of *Swarajati* are made up of the *charana*, *charanaswaras*, *sahitya* and corresponding *jati* portion, followed by *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and again a short portion of *jatis*. The *charanaswaras* consist only of *sahitya*. The first few *charanaswaras* are developed in size and complexity while the last one is a blend of *jatis* and *sahitya*, building up the climax of the *Swarajati*. The *Swarajati* compositions for dance are

very close to *Varnams* by structure. The difference is that instead of Muktai swaras and Muktai swara *sahityam* (like in *Varnam*), Swarajathis are made up of Muktai swarajathi, i.e. swaras mingled with Sollukattus, without any *sahityam*. Another difference is that Charanam swaras are sung first followed by Charana *sahityam*. The *sahitya* of these *Swarajathis* is almost always in praise of deities, portraying *madhura bhakti*. The earlier counterpart of this form could be the *kaivara prabanda*. The present day *Swarajathis* have *teermanam jati* performed in the beginning of each line. This is also performed in the place of *PadaVarnam* in the *Bharatanatyam* recitals.

In Carnatic music training, swarajathis are sung as preparation for the performance of the longer *Varnams*. *Swarajathis* used in dance concerts are replete with nayakanayika bhava and are suitable for performing abhinaya. There are also simple *Swarajathis* that are taught to students after they acquire a sufficient number of *gitams*. A *Swarajathi* is neither as syllabic as *gitam*, nor does it have as many vowel extensions as in a *Varnam*. In a *Swarajathi*, the text and the tone play an equal role.

KIRTANAM

Kirtanas sing the glories of the Gods. In vocal music, the *Kirtanam* is a composition stressing the *sahitya* (lyrics), set to a melodious tune, which is comparatively simple. While the *sahityabhavam* is emphasized, and *ragabhava* (music) is given the second place. From 16th century A.D. the *Kirtanam* singing became known and came in vogue. This form most likely must have derived from *Prabandas*, the musical form. The *Kirtan* form became popular with the flowing melody, simple language in the *sahityas* and coupled with spiritual flavor. The earliest *Kirtana* compositions may be *Sringara sankeertanas* and *Adhyatma sankeertanas*. For the first time, during this period the *gadya padya sahitya* was probably introduced in here. There was a gradual transition from recitative music to lyrical music. The musical expression replaced the poetical expression.

The *kirtanas* of *Badrachala*, *Purandaradasa*, *Ramadas* and other composers are philosophical as well as filled with musical expressions. The *kirtanas* of *Muthuswami Dikshadar* have *samashti charana* where as the *Tyagaraja Divyanama Kirtanas* consists of *pallavi* and *charanas*. The *kirtanas* of *Uthukadu Venkatasubbi* have *jathi* and *svara* passages enhancing the *sahitya*. The *Kirtanams* are composed in

praise of lord Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, Hanuman, Ganesha, Nataraja, Devi, Guru, Krishna, Hanuman, Saraswati, Kartikeya, Ayyapan, Lakhmi, etc. The description of the Lord's valour, competence, compassion, beauty, are incorporated in an enhanced form.



Fig.17 : Dr. Ananda Shankar jayant

Kirtanams are set in simple talas, rhythmic with simple ragas and tunes. Many Kirtanams do not have anupallavi but consist of several charanams. It includes *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and *charana-s*. They are set to lighter *ragas* and usually sung in *Madhyamakalam* (medium tempo). The jathi and svara passages after anupallavi is repeated after the charanam. This is the highlight and beauty of the dance choreography and music.

Its *sahityam* narrates prayers and stories from the *Puranas*, and thus the basic *bhava* of *Kirtanam* is *Bhakti*. As a dance composition, the *Kirtanam* is an *abhinaya* item, where the lines of *sahityam* are intervened with *jatis* and *swaras* during which the

dancer executes different *korvais* (sets of *adavus*). *Abhinaya* in a *Kirtanam* it is mostly descriptive in nature, it may include elaborate *sancaribhavas* or not. There is the one difference here from *Padam*, *Javali* and *Ashtapadi*: the major *bhavam* of *Kirtanam* is *bhakti* (not *Sringara*), thus *abhinaya* of *Kirtanam* is not of *Nayaka-Nayaki Bhava* (in majority of cases).



Fig.18 : Smt. Leela Samson

Dance teacher, S Sharada, explains *Kirtanam* as, “*Keertanas* are taken from other works should be authentically presented. Kalanidhi Narayanan in her book "Aspects of Abhinaya" explains *Kirtanam* as follows: “The *Keertana* is a form of single-minded devotional music. The *RamanatakaKeertanas* or *NandanarKeertanas* and others of different authors are therefore steeped in *bhakti* and evoke devotional mood with little or no distraction or conflict. Hence the delineation of different moods as in *Sringararasa* is not possible. So the expansion of ideas in those songs is only by elaborating on the episodes and stories found in the *puranas* about the God in whose praise the *Keertanas* are composed.”²⁰

When *Kirtanam* is adapted for dance, the *sahitya* will be in *anpallavi-anupallavi-caranam* format (apart from *Padam*, *Javali* and *ashtapadi*). This could also include

compositions that are referred to as *Bhakti* in music. For example, the well-known *Kirtanam*, "*Anandanatamaduvār tillai*" in *Raga Purvikalyani* by Nilakantha Sivan or "*Varugalamo*" in *Raga Majji* by Gopalakrsna Bharati or "*Deviniyetunai*" in *Kiravani* by Papanasam Sivan or "*Anandanananaprakasam*" in *Kedaram* by Muddusvaami Dikshita are popularly performed as *Kirtanam* in dance.

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