

Understanding the Theoretical Framework of Choreography in Bharatanatyam: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

Bharatanatyam is one of the oldest classical dance forms which are in practice today. It has three divisions within itself: *Nritham*, *Nrithyam*, and *Natyam*. *Nritham* is the pure dance or rhythmic movement of the body, *Nrithyam* is the part of the dance that conveys emotions, and *Natyam* is the dramatic representation of dance. For any piece of dance, choreography is important. Choreography, being the art of designing dance, includes inventing or arranging movement and choosing dramatic structures to organize and present it to the audience. Effective choreography comes from the understanding of different elements of movement and the aspects of designing movements. Effective choreography is crucial not just for pieces of a traditional Bharatanatyam repertoire, like a *Varnam*, *Patham*, or *Thillana*, but also for dance dramas. However, choreographing a dance drama slightly differs as it incorporates drama elements in addition to dance elements. This paper discusses the theories used in choreography and the elements and aspects that are important in the choreography of any item in a traditional Bharatanatyam repertoire. It then discusses how these theories are used in the choreography of dance dramas. Further, this paper postulates that understanding the theoretical framework of choreography can contribute to creating visually compelling and harmonious strings of movements, by bridging the gap between the science behind the body movements and the artistic quality of such movements.

Keywords- dance, choreography, bharatanatyam, laban movement analysis, dance drama, performing arts

I. INTRODUCTION

Bharatanatyam is definitely one of the oldest classical dance forms which are in practice today. Over 2000 years old, its ancientness is evident from the fact that its name 'Bharatanatyam' is connected to one of the oldest surviving texts of stagecraft, *Natya Sastra*, and its author *Bharata Muni* [1]. Some scholars say that the *Natya Sastra* was written by *Bharata Muni* between 200 BC and 200AD, but others believe that it is a collection of works written by many authors at different times [2]. Whatever the case, the fact that Bharatanatyam is a very old dance form is indisputable.

The prefix 'bharata' in Bharatanatyam denotes the three major aspects of this dance: *bhavam* (expressions), *raagam* (music), and *thaalam* (beat). According to *Bharata Choodamani*, a dance with these three aspects is *Bharatanatyam* [3]. The other classical dances of India also fulfil this criterion. In addition, their

origin is also linked with *Natya Sastra*. Despite this, only the Tamil Nadu-based classical dance form is called 'Bharatanatyam' because it is the one form which very closely follows the theories stated in *Natya Sastra* [4].

Bharatanatyam has three divisions within itself: *Nritham*, *Nrithyam* and *Natyam*. *Nritham* is the pure dance or rhythmic movement of the body [5] that reflects the mood of the musical composition but does not traditionally convey any emotions. *Nrithyam* is the part of the dance that conveys the emotions. It is the application of physical movements in conjunction with the mind [5]. *Natyam* is the dramatic representation in dance. The term 'natyam' has been used at times, not just to convey the meaning 'drama' but also as a term that denotes 'dance' [6]. From this, it is evident that a story-telling aspect has always been included in Bharatanatyam.

Like with any form of dance, the choreography is very important in Bharatanatyam as well. *Nritham*, *Nrithyam*, and *Natyam* are all made effective by the

strength of the choreography. However, choreographing a traditional Bharatanatya *urupadi* with *Nritham* and *Nrithyam* differs from choreographing *Natyam*. In dance dramas, the roots of which lie in *Natyam*, it requires a good grasp of not only the concepts related to dance but also the theoretical concepts related to choreography, in order to create many different pieces and yet connect all those as one, and hold the attention of the audience, often for more than two hours without any breaks.

Theoretical concepts in choreography can be considered as the sound, scientific framework that lifts up performing arts like dance and drama. The cornerstone of this theoretical framework is contributed by Rudolf Laban, who is historically known as the father of European modern dance [7]. He was a dancer, choreographer, and art-theorist who brought to light the basic principles behind movement structure and purpose. His theories were later developed by many others, notable among which is Irmgard Bartenieff. She was not only a dancer, but also a physical therapist and a pioneer of dance/movement therapy. Laban's theories on movement and Bartenieff's approach to it resulted in the creation of Laban Movement Studies. One of the most prominent type of Laban Movement Studies is the Laban Movement Analysis, a method for describing, visualizing, interpreting, and documenting all kinds of human movement, that has incorporated knowledge of kinesiology, anatomy, and psychology [7]. It has become a tool that is being used by dancers, physical therapists, athletes, and many others.

This paper discusses the theories used in choreography, and the elements and aspects that are important in the choreography of any item on a traditional Bharatanatya repertoire. It then discusses how these theories are applied in the choreography of dance dramas.

II. CHOREOGRAPHY: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND APPLICATION

Choreography is the art of designing dance. It includes inventing or arranging movement and choosing dramatic structures to organize it and present it to the audience [8]. Choreography is about specifying the movements in terms of four important elements: body and shape, space, effort, and time [9]. Of these, shape, space, and effort can be explained through the Laban Movement Analysis [10].

2.1. Body and Shape

Body is about the arrangement and coordination of movements of each part of the body. It includes not only the initiation of movement, but also the connection between each movement, sequencing, and the organization of patterns [7].

Shape is about how the body changes shape during each movement. According to the Laban Movement Analysis, *Shape* has four subcategories –

shape forms, methods of shape change, shape qualities, and shape flow support [10].

Shape forms describe the static shapes that the body takes during a movement. For example, when a dancer performs to a song about swans, the dancer's outstretched arms can bring out the shape form of a bird with its wings spread open; an arm raised above the head can depict the form of the bird's long, slender neck.

Methods of shape change describe how the body interacts with the environment, and the relationship the body has with its environment. These methods of shape change are motivated by the self or the environment. There are three methods of shape change, namely shape flow, directional shape change, and carving. Shape flow indicates the relationship the body has to itself. Essentially it is the stream of consciousness expressed through movement. It is self-motivated. On the other hand, directional shape change represents the relationship between the body and the environment: where the body is directed towards some part of the environment, thereby connecting with the environment. It is environment-motivated. This change is two-dimensional. These changes can either be Spoke-like, which includes pointing-like movements, or Arc-like, which includes gesturing in swinging motions [10]. Carving, meanwhile, represents the relationship where the body is actively and three-dimensionally interacting with the volume of the environment. It is also environment-motivated. It is about molding the environment. Therefore, both the mover and the environment are changed [10]. This change is three-dimensional and uses rotary motion. Miming the shape of an imaginary object or miming an action, like sweeping, kneading dough, can be stated as examples.

Shape quality is how the body changes towards some point in space. In other words, it describes towards which point in space the body is changing shape. The baseline for shape quality is opening (growing larger with more extensions) and closing (growing smaller with more flexion). It is process oriented. Other terms like rising and sinking (in the vertical dimension), spreading and enclosing (in the horizontal dimension), and advancing and retreating (in the sagittal dimension) can also be used to describe the shape quality of the body [10]. Here, the sagittal plane refers to the plane that divides the body into right and left halves.

Shape flow support describes how the torso changes its shape to support the other parts of the body during a movement. This includes the changes that support the inner architecture of the body within its space. Generally, it is described as growing and shrinking. In the vertical dimension, the changes are said to be lengthening or shortening; in the horizontal dimension, widening or narrowing; in the sagittal dimension, bulging or hollowing [10].

According to Irmgard Bartenieff "Movement goes out into space and creates shapes. But also, there is inner space, and breath is an inner shaping experience. The body shrinks and grows with each breath. Inner

breath changes can be supported by sound. Posture is not built by muscles but by the whole way you breathe.” [10].

In Bharatanatyam, the ‘body and shape’ element is pre-designed to a very large extent by the basic *adavu*. Except in contemporary composition, where this might be breached, during all Bharatanatyam performances, whether it is a solo, group dance, or dance drama, the changes in body and shape of individual dancers are the same. The need for still shape forms during the *nritham* section is rare. But in the *nrithyam* section, the shape forms differ according to the need of the situation, for example, the dancer might need to be like a tree, or a tower, or a temple.

The way a specific shape form is achieved differs between solo performance and group performance. In a solo performance, the soloist should portray the tree or temple alone. Therefore, the form is often simple. However, in a group, where more dancers are involved, they can create a more complex form: a tree with more branches swaying in the wind, or a temple with broad entrances and sculptures, etc.

Methods of shape change vary according to the type of performance. Since shape flow is self-motivated, the shape flow of a dancer enacting a particular situation is the same, regardless of whether the situation comes in a solo performance or group dance.

Directional shape change, however, differs. It depends on the number of dancers and the requirement of the dance. A solo artist cannot connect with the environment in the same way as a group of dancers. In a group, each dancer can move in a different direction, hence interacting with different elements at the same time. A soloist cannot do this. Hence, there is a difference in the directional shape flow between these two situations.

Similarly, carving also differs. In *nritham*, the shape quality is specified by the *adavus* that are used. So, the variation in shape quality during a certain movement/*adavu* is only due to the different styles (*Bani*) in Bharatanatyam and/or the personal style of the dancer. However, in *nrithyam*, the personal interpretation of the dancer plays a huge role, because it is the dancer’s interpretation of the gesture/emotion that makes the dance piece determinate [11]. Hence, in *nrithyam*, the shape quality depends not only on the basic qualities of the character being portrayed but also on the dancer’s interpretation of that character. As mentioned earlier, since most of the movements are pre-designed in the form of *adavu* and previous compositions, the shape flow support is also pre-designed.

2.2. Space

Space refers to the space around us; the space we interact with when we perform. In dance, space is a human construct that cannot be explored without reference to human subjects [12]. The dancer’s body is the means by which space is perceived, lived, and produced. Space can be divided into two: general space and Kinesphere.

General space is the total architectural space defined for the dance: the stage, studio, etc. Laban divided this space into nine main zones: the center, the four corners, and the four centered remaining zones (front, back, left, right) [9].

Kinesphere is the three-dimensional volume of space that is accessible when the dancer remains in a spot without shifting their weight or changing stances (Figure 1).

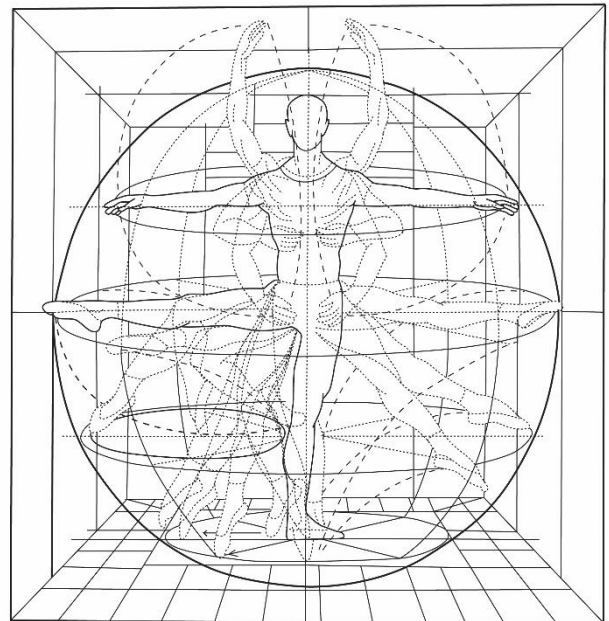


Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of Kinesphere

This space surrounds the dancer up to the limit that their extremities can reach. The Kinesphere can best be visualized as a bubble that travels with the dancer across the general space. It is the first area of movement exploration before the dancer explores the general space. The space range within the Kinesphere in which movements are performed can be divided into three: ‘reach space’ in which gestures explore the periphery, ‘near space’ in which gestures are close to the body, and ‘medium space’ that lies in between [13]. There are twenty-six directions in which the body can move in this Kinesphere (Figure 2). These twenty-six directions incorporate three levels and three dimensions. These twenty-six directions are upward, downward, to the left: low, middle and high levels, to the right: low, middle and high levels, forward: low, middle, and high levels, backward: low, middle, and high levels, to the left diagonal backward: low, middle, and high levels, to the right diagonal backward: low, middle, and high levels, to the left diagonal forward: low, middle, and high levels, and to the right diagonal forward: low, middle, and high levels [9].

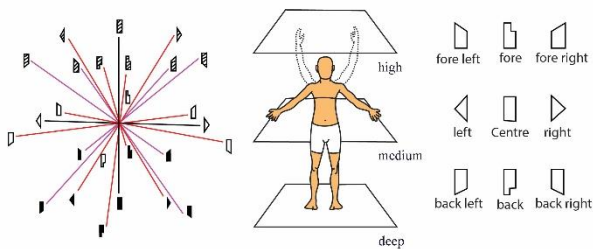


Figure 2: The 26 directions of movement in a Kinesphere

Rudolf Laban has stated that there are ways of organizing and moving in space that are perceived as specifically harmonious. Some combinations and organizations in dance are theoretically and aesthetically pleasing. The concept of the element ‘space’ that we use in dance is centered on the Space Harmonics theory of Rudolf Laban. This element includes interactions with the environment, spatial patterns, pathways, and lines of spatial tension [14].

Pathways refer to the path that is being followed when the body moves from one point in space to another. Within the Kinesphere three different pathways of movement are defined. The central pathway either passes through or is initiated from the center of the body. It organizes energy and reveals the Kinesphere by radiating from and coming back to the center. The peripheral pathway is along the outer limits of the Kinesphere. It organizes the energy and reveals the Kinesphere by revealing its edge. It maintains a distance between the center and the edge. The transverse pathway passes between the center of the body and the outer limit of the Kinesphere. It organizes energy and reveals the Kinesphere by cutting or sweeping through it, between the center and the edge [10].

Lines of spatial tension refer to moving in such a way that a line or curve is perceived by an observer to connect across space, making a link between two body parts (for example, a perceived line through the space from one hand to the other), or a perceived line or connect across space between two people, or a person and an object [14]. In dance, special tension is the organization of a movement, whether it is the movement of just the extremities or the movement of the body as a whole, across space, so that it intentionally creates a design or shape in the external space.

During a Bharatanatyam performance, the dancer, or group of dancers, and the movements they perform should be arranged in pleasing patterns in space. These arrangements, and even the perception of space itself differs from person to person, and between the different styles of Bharatanatyam that are in practice. However, one common concept underlying all arrangements is the concept of balance - balance of movements not only within the Kinesphere but also in general space. This balance creates harmony, making the string of movements more visually pleasing.

Kinesphere is the space that an individual can access without changing their stance. This Kinesphere is around every dancer. For each dancer, the theories regarding the Kinesphere can be applied as stated above. In a group dance, when two or more dancers interact, their Kinespheres merge and form a new enclosure with a new center (Figure 3) [14]. Using general space differs between solo performances and group performances. In solo performance, the dancer should cover the nine zones of the stage alone. Movements should not be limited to the center stage, or any one particular zone. The movements should be balanced between the different zones of the stage. Utilizing the full extent of the stage by one dancer is no easy feat. This requires careful choreography and practice. In a group performance, this is slightly easier, since there are many dancers, and different zones of the stage can be covered during different formations.

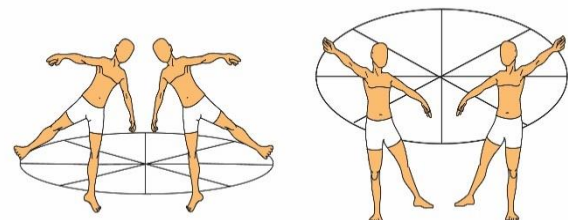


Figure 3: Two Kinespheres merging as one

2.3. Effort

Effort is the qualitative use of energy, texture, color, emotions, and inner attitude. It is both functional and expressive. We can express effort in terms of four motion factors: flow, weight, time, and space. Each motion factor has two polarities, one indulging and the other condescending [10].

Flow is about continuity, progression, emotion, and involvement. Its two polarities are free flow and bound flow. Free flow is outpouring, uncontrollable, open-hearted, and cannot be stopped immediately, while bound flow is restricted, controlled, rigid, and can be stopped at any moment [10]. Weight is oriented around the dancers’ sense of self. It is about intention, presence, and relation to gravity. Weight has two aspects – active weight and passive weight. Active weight is divided into light, which represents delicacy, fragility, and buoyancy, and strong, which represents power. Passive weight is further divided as limp (giving up weight) and heavy (complete collapse) [10]. Time is related to the moment. It is about intuitively knowing the right moment to act, and reinvesting in the moment. Its two polarities are sustained time and sudden/quick time. Sustained time is about lingering, prolonging, and drawing out the movement. On the contrary, sudden/quick time is instantaneous, urgent, and condenses the moment. The fourth motion factor, space, is about attentiveness, intellect, and perception. It is divided into indirect and direct. Indirect space is multi-focused, expansive, and

considers all the possibilities. Direct space is single-focused, channeled, and pinpointed [10].

An example can better illustrate the importance of effort. Reaching out to hit someone and reaching out to give a casual pat is the same in terms of shape and space. But they differ vastly in terms of effort. This difference should be borne in mind during the process of choreography. In Bharatanatyam, the appropriate effort for each movement is taught along with the movement itself. The point of concern is that rigid attention to correct posture (*anga suththam*) should not come in the way of exerting appropriate effort, nor should it be sacrificed to bring about the appropriate effort.

2.4. Time

Time is an element that affects both Body and Space. It gives rhythm and allows the dance to entwine with the music. There are several important concepts regarding this element, namely, beat, tempo, length, phrasing, and pause [9].

Beat is the basic reference for measuring time. Beats are counted to define the length of a movement or phrase. The speed of the beat is established according to the need of the dance. The speed of the beat, expressed in numbers, is called tempo. The higher the number, the faster is the beat. Length is the number of beats for which a movement lasts. When dancing to a rhythm, the length is counted by beats. When dancing without rhythm, the length can be counted in seconds. Pause is about stillness or quietness.

Phrasing refers to the organization of movements into choreographic fragments that have unity and a sense of a beginning and an end. Phrases can be organized rhythmically so that they coincide with the music. Pauses can be used to create a contrast or emphasize a point. Sometimes, this stillness is important to allow the previous expression or the tone of the previous moment to linger on before the next moment begins [13].

Bharatanatyam, like many other Indian classical dances, pays particular attention to these concepts in Time. It incorporates intricate and complex arrangements of movements in terms of Time. Variations brought about by juxtaposed speeds, *thaalas* in different *jaathis* and *gathis* are found throughout the repertoire. These variations are not just between different pieces in a repertoire, but even within the same *korvai* or *jati*. It is astounding how the same *adavus* can be handled differently in terms of these elements of Time to produce an intricate mesh of movements.

There are two ways of choreographing a dance. The first is improvisation. Here, only the generalized directions of the movements are given as guidelines. The dancer is given wide latitude for personal interpretation. The second way is planned choreography. Here, everything about a movement is given in detail. There is hardly any opportunity for the dancer to exercise personal interpretation [15].

Whether it is improvisation or planned choreography, several important aspects of Time need to be considered. They are unity, continuity, transition, variation, and repetition [15]. In addition, the rhythmic and non-rhythmic articulation and the theme should also be taken into account.

2.4.1. Unity

Separate movements should harmoniously flow together. Each movement should contribute to the whole performance. In a dance without unity, all movements will appear to have the same ambiance, but in between those, there will be phrases or movements that are entirely different in feel and do not fit in with the overall performance. It is difficult for the audience to get involved in and identify with such a performance. Only a dance with unity can hold the attention of the audience.

Unity is very important in all Bharatanatyam compositions. The phrases should be arranged so that the movements/*adavus* in each phrase show unity. When arranging individual movements into phrases, the tempo of the successive movements, as well as the harmony of transition from the ending position of one movement to the beginning of the next should be considered.

2.4.2. Continuity

This is about the development of the dance from the beginning to the end. Choreography with continuity will flow in a way that leads to a logical conclusion. The progression of phrases should be natural and organized so that each movement or phrase leads effortlessly into the next.

Continuity should be maintained in every piece of choreography. In *nritham*, the *korvai* or *jati* should be organized so that each movement flows effortlessly into the next. In arranging movements, the tempo of each movement should also be considered. Instead of ordering fast and slow movements in a pell-mell fashion, a gradual flow should be established in terms of tempo, and the *korvai/jati* should be led to an effective conclusion. The conclusion is in the form of *theermanam*. In the *abhinaya* section, continuity should be established in terms of the complexity/depth of the *abhinayam*. Starting from simple, direct *abhinayam* (*pathaartha abhinayam*), and moving on to progressively complex, indirect *abhinayam* (*vaakiyaartha abhinayam*), and then, sometimes, the *sanchari bhavam*.

2.4.3. Transition

When moving from one movement or phrase to another, Transition is important, so that each movement/phrase effectively flows into another, and each contributes to the unity of the dance. However, the transition should not be noticeable. If the transition is noticeable, it will interfere with the involvement of the audience and the dancer. In a dance with poor transitions, the audience will invariably focus on individual movements and phrases instead of the overall feel and form of the dance.

There are several different situations where transitions come into play - between two movements in a

nritham section, two successive *korvai/jati*, a *nritham* section and an *abhinayam* section, two characters portrayed by a single dancer when narrating a story, and the between two emotions in the *abhinayam*. These transitions should be done in a seemingly effortless manner so that the involvement of the dancer and the audience does not get affected.

2.4.4. Variety

Variety is important to capture and maintain the audience's interest. The same movement performed again and again becomes tedious. A simple way to include variety is to avoid repeating a movement in the same way. By changing the direction, timing, and use of energy, variety can be created [15]. Contrasts in movement forces and spatial designs also add variety.

When a piece of choreography is conceptualized in Bharathanatyam, variety can be added in a *nritha* section by incorporating different *adavus*, and by including several changes in the form of each *adavu*. For example, the hand gestures (*mudra prayokam*), *jaathi*, direction, and order can be changed. In the *nrithya* section, variety can be shown in the different *abhinayam* given for a particular phrase of the song (*patha vinnyaasam*).

2.4.5. Repetition

A certain amount of repetition is important in dance. This repetition of certain phrases allows the audience to see the movements again and identify with them. Sometimes, repetition is used to emphasize movements and sequences, which are important to, and characteristic of that dance. Sometimes, the familiarity with the movement is a comfort to the audience and gives a feeling of closure to the dance [16].

Effective choreography is about the delicate balance between variety/contrast and repetition. A dance consisting of contrasting movements throughout and one with continuously repeated phrases and movements are both ineffective. In the first situation, the audience can't identify with the unrelated sequence of movements. In the second situation, the movements become predictable. Variety should be used carefully as too much variety can affect unity.

Repetition is also important in Bharathanatyam. It is used to get the dancer and audience involved in the dance. It is also used for symmetry and rhythmic purposes. Often, certain *abhinayas* are repeated to identify with the emotion of the song.

These aspects contribute to forming integrated sections of phrases, and in arranging these sections in a sequence that leads to an appropriate conclusion. The development of the dance should lead the audience logically from the beginning, through the middle, to the conclusion. The conclusion of the dance can either be sudden, or gradual so that the dance fades from view [15].

While choreographing for a group performance, several components should be considered. The first component is space distribution. It is about creating geometrical patterns, symmetries, asymmetries, and irregular shapes with the dancers in the general space. The

second component is time variation. This includes Unison, Canon, Dialog, and Counterpoint [9]. Unison refers to all the dancers performing the same movement at the same time. In Canon, the starting moment is different for each dancer, but the movement and the counting are the same. Dialog is where one dancer or group moves while the other is in pause. Each dancer or group switches turns several times. Counterpoint refers to each dancer or group performing a different movement at the same time. The third important component is the ensemble type – whether the dancers dance as a duo, trio, quartet, etc [9]. In addition, if two or more groups of dancers are going to perform alternatively within one dance piece, then the transition between the exit of one group and the entrance of the other should be smooth. The coordination within and among the groups is important. Choreography should be done in a way so that continuity is maintained in the dance piece, even though the group of dancers is changing.

In addition to these, several other techniques can be used. These include Mirroring, Retrograde, Levels, and Shadowing. Mirroring is a technique where the dancers face each other and perform the same movement. Retrograde means performing a sequence in reverse order. Levels are about dancers dancing in different levels of space (high, center, or deep). In Shadowing, dancers stand behind one another and do the same movements.

In Bharatanatyam, group dances are not taught as part of the repertoire during routine teaching-learning sessions. They are more often taught for stage performances. Therefore, when it comes to the application of certain techniques in choreography, like space distribution, time variation, mirroring, etc., which require more than one dancer, the way these techniques are handled depends largely on the choreographer. Thus, it allows plenty of room for personal interpretation.

III. CHOREOGRAPHY IN DANCE DRAMA

Choreographing a dance drama is very different from choreographing a traditional Bharatanatyam *uruppadi*, whether for solo performance, or group performance. A dance drama is not just about choreographing for individual characters or groups. It is about bringing effective interactions between the individuals and the groups, and also handling the necessary drama elements efficiently.

Choreographing for individual characters and small groups in a dance drama is, to a large extent, similar to choreographing items in a traditional repertoire. Hence, the theories mentioned above can be applied. But some additional aspects should be considered. The choreography for each character should not clash with the personality of that particular character. The groups, if any, should be harmonious with the other elements of the dance drama. They should not disturb the overall scene or settings, with their appearance or space distribution.

Otherwise, the movements, timings, and techniques can be handled as mentioned earlier.

Dance drama is about telling a story through many characters. Therefore, in addition to the dance elements, some drama elements are also expected. The most important drama elements that should be taken into account are characters, space, and symbolism. The casting of the characters is really important. The dancer's physique, talent, precision, and style should be suitable for his/her character. The other aspects of that character can be molded into the dancer during the course of the production. For the dance drama to become a success, effective casting is a must.

Another important drama element is space - the way space is manipulated, in other words, how the stage (general space) is utilized. It also focuses on the meaning of the size and shape of the distances between two actors, an actor and an object (props or set) and an actor and the audience [17]. The positioning of each character in relation to the others is important. Characters should be carefully positioned so that their movements give maximum impact. At times, the positioning of a character can also convey the mood and personality of a character.

The positioning of the groups should be done in such a way to ensure that they don't interfere with the overall mood of the scene and setting. The way that the dancers/characters move on stage is important. Their paths should be free of tangles and unnecessary movements. When groups are used to support a character, the choreography should be done carefully, so that the group/groups support, instead of overshadow, that dancer, and do not divert the attention of the audience from the main dancer.

When technology supports it, the choreography can be done at different levels of the stage. That is to say, the stage can have platforms at different levels where dancers can perform. This will add a sense of magnificence to the production. Sometimes, this can also serve a symbolic purpose. The stage has not two, but three dimensions. This third dimension should be considered and made use of whenever possible. If there are platforms at different levels, this third dimension will be used. Sometimes, the props or the elements in the stage arrangements will achieve this.

Symbolism is another drama element that is important in the choreography of a dance drama. Symbols are often used in all art forms. Dance drama is no exception. Symbols can be used through props and colors, but the most sophisticated use of symbols is through gestures and movements [17]. Often, simple actions are used to convey subtle, indirect meaning. The choreographer should use such symbolism to bring out a quality of a character or even the theme/message of the dance drama. Similarly, the choreographer should be able to interpret the different levels of meanings behind the words of the songs used in the dance drama and choreograph the movements and space distributions accordingly.

In addition to these drama elements, some other important aspects should also be taken into consideration. The choreographer must be able to handle abstract concepts effectively wherever suitable. When choreographing a dance drama, emphasis should be given to appropriate places, to stress certain events or messages in the story. When a movement is being choreographed, in addition to the body movements, the visual effect should also be considered and decided. This includes the positioning of the dancers, stage setup, use of different lights, props, etc.

When props are being used, the movements of the props also have to be choreographed. Such movements can be choreographed so that they don't disturb the overall mood or visuals of the scene. It is possible to apply patterns and time variations when choreographing the movements of the props.

Sometimes, in a dance drama, one dancer might have to portray two characters. If such a situation arises, the choreography should be carefully handled to avoid any confusion that may arise in the audience. If possible, a slight change can be done in the costume of this dancer to show the change of character.

Another very important aspect that should be considered is the harmony of the music and the dance. If the dance is choreographed for a song, the mood and flow of the dance should match the mood and flow of the music. To arrange slow, monotonous movements for a song which has an enthusiastic, upbeat mood and tempo will not be so suitable. Similarly, the nature of the character is important as well. Fast movements with a wide reach of limbs and frequent jumps may not be so suitable for an old man or a character who is supposed to ooze calmness.

A person who is choreographing a dance drama must not forget that a dance drama is one whole piece. A traditional Bharatanatyam program is often a compilation of several pieces in a repertoire. These can be performed by a soloist or one or more groups of dancers. In such a program, each item in the repertoire can stand on its own. But, in a drama, although there are solo parts by important characters, conversations between two or more characters, and group dances, each of these cannot stand alone. They belong to the larger, whole piece. Whether the dance drama lasts for a mere 30 minutes or continues for two or three hours, it is one piece, not a compilation. Therefore, the individual elements in a dance drama – the solos, conversations, and group dances, should connect with each other. The transition between the scenes should be smooth.

IV. CONCLUSION

Traditionally, styles and techniques of choreography are learned from the *Gurus* and other sources of inspiration, including other artists, Mother Nature, and even the people and movements we encounter in everyday life. While it is apparent that the Western-

based theories of choreography and movement are unwittingly applied in Bharatanatyam as well, the theoretical framework of choreography is not often taught by all. Nor are there many books written which apply such framework in Bharatanatyam. Personal understanding and preference of the choreographer, as expressed through their works, have so far been the driving factors in transferring the knowledge of these techniques in choreography. However, it is crucial that Bharatanatyam artists understand the theoretical framework of choreography and are able to apply it, as this can empower them by bridging the gap between the science of body movement and the artistic output they create. This knowledge will also invariably contribute to creating visually compelling and harmonious strings of movements on stage.

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