

# KUCHIPUDI

## *A Dance-Drama from Andhra Pradesh*

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Kuchipudi is a village in the Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh—it is from this village that the dance-drama takes its name. Although Kuchipudi is a comparatively recent form, dating from the fifteenth century, the village is situated in an area renowned well before this time for its culture, history, dance and music. Kshetrayya, the famous composer of padams (dance music) lived in the Krishna District (Movvapurī-17th C).<sup>1</sup> A more ancient reference comes from the Nāṭya Śāstra the famous treatise on Hindu dramatic theory where Andhra was said to have evolved a delicate and graceful style of dance—Kaiśikī Vṛtti. Remnants of sculptured carvings of dance poses and musicians throw light on the historical past of Andhra Pradesh's dance tradition.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most renowned patrons of the arts were the Satavahana kings who ruled Andhra Pradesh from the second century B.C. In their capital city, Srikakulam, they built a magnificent temple to which were attached three hundred houses of the dancing community. This community performed dance in sacred dedication to the deity and also participated in temple rituals. The Krishna river flooded and destroyed Srikakulam; the temple dancers then settled in the Buddhist area of Chantasala, Krishna District, about two miles from Kuchipudi village. The wealthy kings of this area began to patronise dancers who became known as 'Raja Nartakis' although some still adhered to the deities in the temples. From the 6th-10th centuries the Jain Vengi rulers patronised the arts. Vengi is about 40 miles from Kuchipudi. Later, the Kakatiya Empire was formed and about 1230 A.D. one of these kings, Kakati Ganapati Deva made a peace treaty with Jayappa, a powerful ruler, appointing him Commander of the Elephant forces of the Empire. Jayappa took a great interest in the dance forms then existing and wrote a treatise Nṛtta Ratnāvalī on these dances. He was said to have given as a gift to a group of dancers the village of Modokkuru. There was a shift from Jain religion to the worship of Siva at this time. After the Kakatiya Empire came the Kalinga Empire and a change to Vaisnavism. The Kalingas annexed Srikakulam of the Krishna District. This was during the 13th

century A.D. Ananda Tirtha, a religious leader, was a devoted adherent to Kṛṣṇa. He propagated this form of worship and converted many of the court ministers. One of these ministers, Narahari Tirtha, settled in Srikakulam bringing dancers to enact sequences from the Gita Govinda. Many compositions in praise of Kṛṣṇa evolved during this period, one of the most famous being Kṛṣṇakarnāmṛta by Lilā Śuka, a similar work to Gita Govinda. These compositions were often set to music and danced. The kings continued to patronise the arts, and many of the dances were dedicated to them.<sup>3</sup>

This upsurge of emotional devotion to Kṛṣṇa expressed itself in literature, music and dance. It spread to many regions in South India. This then was the seedbed from which was to grow the Kuchipudi dance form inspired by the founder, Siddhendra Yogi, or Siddhappa, an orphan from one of the villages of this region.

Siddhappa was a Brahmin by birth, and he became a well-known figure in the Krishna District, as he wandered from house to house seeking food and rest. He was particularly beloved by the dancing community. The priests and elders of the temples disapproved of the boy mixing with dancing women, but appreciated his religious dedication and attraction to the arts. One night after watching a temple dance performance at Srikakulam, Siddhappa fell asleep and woke up crying "Kṛṣṇa! Kṛṣṇa!". The priests consorted amongst themselves and sent him to the big monastery or Mutt at Udupi, Mysore, and Siddhappa remained there for about twenty years.

At Udupi he was cared for by disciples of Narahari Tirtha, and became knowledgeable in theologic... texts such as the Vedas. Siddhappa leaned towards dance and music and became an able scholar in the Nāṭya Śāstra, learning the mudras (hand gestures) described therein.

To fulfill his life's duty, Siddhappa left the temple and returned to Srikakulam and went to seek the bride his parents had arranged for him before their death. To go to this village where his bride lived he had to cross the river Krishna. When only halfway across, a torrential downpour and storm made the river dangerous. Siddhappa threw his sacred thread into the river promising Lord Kṛṣṇa he would become an ascetic if saved. He was thrown unconscious against the river bank and taken to his future father-in-law's house; he declined the marriage and adhered to his religious vow.

The proud and jealous wife of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Satyabhama, captured his imagination. He drew an analogy with her relationship to Kṛṣṇa to the proud and jealous soul of man trying to quell this undesirable feelings to submit to unity with God. He composed many verses and songs in her name, and eventually a dance drama, Parijatam (now Bhama Kalapam). Siddhappa wished that only Brahmin boys should enact this drama and want about enrolling only the most dedicated. This caused ill-feeling amongst

the Brahmin community who felt this to be lowering their caste, since they had only been teachers of dance up to now, and not performers. To convince them Siddhappa obtained a letter of sanction from the head of the Udipi temple giving them authority to perform. The orthodox community still refused to accept this, and the troupe was ostracised at wedding and religious functions within the community.

Nothing daunted, Siddhendra (as he later became known) put on many performances with his troupe and proved to be a great success. As a mark of their dedication Siddhendra tied a ball to the wrist of newborn children in this community. Although he drew on many other existing forms of dance drama for his presentations, Siddhendra presented his own distinctive style. Bhama Kalapam was most often performed and became almost a legend; its religious interpretation won many devotees and had popular appeal amongst the people of Andhra Pradesh. The eulogy of Satyabhama became virtually a cult as people identified themselves with the heroine and their own devotion to God.

Siddhendra decided to take the artists to a special place away from the scorn of their community. They occupied a piece of wasteland and settled there as a permanent base. They were known as Kucheeelu, a dialect form of the word Kusulavulu meaning a travelling troupe of players. The land became known as Kusechavulapuri and later Kuchela Puri. A rigorous training syllabus was devised by Siddhendra and the enthusiastic players trained every day when they were not performing. Discipline was strict and the Brahmin boys were taught Sanskrit and music as well as dance.

So famous was the dance drama becoming that the troupe found itself in demand throughout the State. Many legends grew up concerning the religious spiritual power that surrounded the performances of Bhama Kalapam. It was said that the Vijayanagar Emperor, Veera Narasimha, invited the troupe to his court in 1507 A.D. On the way they encountered a village, Siddhavatam, whose people were terrorised by a tyrannical ruler, Sambeta Guruvarya. During the performance at the court, the troupe inserted an episode showing the cruel dealings of this ruler. The king was astonished and had the ruler beheaded.

Many other troupes of travelling players adopted Kuchipudi style. However, under Moslem rule the artists suffered from lack of patronage. They redeemed themselves however since they impressed a travelling Moslem ruler, Nawab Abdul Hasan Tan I Shah with a performance. This ruler granted them the land where the village of Kuchipudi stood. There was a dispute about the partition of the land, and in 1763 a legal partition deed was drafted by Mosalikati Kamoji Pantulu and Kandrejula Jogi Pantulu, agents of the Nizam ruler of Hyderabad. The deed shows that the land was to be divided amongst the following families: Vēdantam, Vempati, Hari Bhāgavatula,

Pasumarthi, Jyosyula, Mahamkali and Yeleswarupu. These families still live in Kuchipudi today and have devoted their lives to dancing.<sup>4</sup>

Kuchipudi dance drama suffered a decline at the turn of the century along with many other art forms. It was revived after India achieved Independence and an Academy of Dance was built to train students. Another establishment exists at Eluru village 40 miles from Kuchipudi, directed by Pahlada Sarma. Mr. Banda Kanakalingeswara Rao was mainly responsible with aid from the Sanghet Natak Akademi for the revival of Kuchipudi. An establishment was built called Siddhendra Kalakshetram where students were trained. The first principal was Chinta Krishnamurthi. Since his death Pasumarthi Venugopalakrishna Sarma has been the principal of Siddhendra Kalakshetram. It is run by a committee who take any decisions of importance regarding the institute that the Principal is unable to do by himself.

A troupe was taken abroad in 1960 and 1962 and the dance drama gained renown and popularity in India. Today the troupe still performs in the traditional manner although the performances are cut down. They used to perform from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. for two weeks. The repertoire included Pahlada Natakam, Sasirekha Parinayam, Usha Parinayam, Lava Kusa, Ramanatakam, Mohini Rukmangada, Harischandra, Gayapakhyanam and Rukmini Kalyanam. Up to 1963, besides Bhama Kalapam, the village also performed Pahlada Natakam, Usha Parinayam and Lava Kusa.\*

In Madras a school was set up by Vempati Chinna Satyam who is the son of one of the Kuchipudi dance teachers. Sri B. Seetaramasarma who is at the Kalakshetra Institute, Madras (Tiruvanmiyur), hopes to start training there. He is also from one of the traditional families of Kuchipudi. With the Director of Kalakshetra, Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale, he hopes to produce in traditional style a revival of one of the Kuchipudi dance dramas that are no longer performed, among others he mentioned to me the most prominent in his mind is Lava Kusa and he hopes with the aid of one of the other dance teachers from the village to produce this within the next two years.\*

A solo dance form of Kuchipudi sometimes referred to as the Devadasi tradition of Kuchipudi, is very popular with dancers today. Yamini Krishnamurti is one of the most famous solo performers of Kuchipudi in this style, although many Bharata Natyam dancers are also including items from Kuchipudi in their performances.

### Presentation

Although sometimes performed for secular purposes, Kuchipudi should

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\*Personal information given to me by Sri Seetaramasarma in 1976 in Madras.



impart to the audience great religious feeling or 'bhakti' for Lord Kṛṣṇa. Religion is dominant and the actor's vocation is held sacred. Its ancient heritage reveals itself in the orthodox style of presentation, and it is possible today to see the general form of stage preliminaries as laid down in Bharata's Nāṭya Śāstra. Its qualities are not dynamic and powerful but subtle and gentle; the soft, feminine movements and gestures carry great charm. The three traditional types of dance nṛtra, nṛtya and nāṭya are contained in a Kuchipudi performance. The pure dance (nṛtta) relieves the more serious histrionic interpretation. Nṛtya, pure dance and abhinaya, are found in pieces called śabdams which were originally solo dance items in praise of a king or patron and have now been incorporated in the dance drama as a whole, as have many other types of dance composition. Nāṭya is the traditional theatre. Both stylised or conventional acting (nāṭyadharmī) and natural style (loka dharmī) are present; the tāṇḍava (vigorous) and lāsya (graceful) aspects of dance are included. Thus the traditional style of dance drama from Andhra Pradesh incorporates the basic traditional dramatic techniques and theories found in the Nāṭya Śāstra and another text, Abhinayadarpaṇam blended with their inherent style.<sup>5</sup>

The performance begins with the recital of extracts from the four vedas. After this the stage is sprinkled with holy water; The dancer carrying a vessel dances in a wide circle round the stage and with graceful hand movements sprinkles water from the vessel onto the stage. This is Puṇyāhavācana. Then flower petals on a silver plate are brought in by another dancer who allows the flowers to trickle through his fingers as he dances. Raṅgālamkāra comes next—the sprinkling of colored powders on the stage. Then a brass stand with 58 tiny oil lamps dangling from it is carried in and offered to the Raṅga Adidevatā, the deity of the stage. Indra's banner or Jarjara is then set up on the stage being a protection against the activities of evil spirits. The musicians, including the Sūtradhara, sing invocatory songs to invoke the blessings of the gods for a successful performance, this includes the Nandi Stuti. The Sūtradhāra stands up with the two other vocalists and all three sing.

According to Sanskrit dramatic traditions the Sūtradhara is the manager of the troupe and takes part in the drama to announce and introduce the play to the audience, linking the different scenes together with descriptions of relevant events. He acts as a person to whom the actors can respond during a soliloquy and in conversation. Here in Kuchipudi he introduces the characters and discusses their situation sympathising with their problems and generally acting as a third person. He carries a curved stick called a Kuṭilaka. This was given to Bharata by Brahma, the Creator of Life. At the commencement of the dance drama, when the preliminaries, as described above are over, the Sūtradhāra offers prayers to his guru and welcomes the audience. He narrates the story to the audience giving them the ideological and moral implications of the theme. In Kuchipudi his role incorporates

a comic aspect as that of the *Viduṣaka* (clown) as he punctuates his dialogue with wit and humor.

The presentation of the Madras troupe differs from that of the orthodox company in Kuchipudi village, although the preliminaries are more or less the same. The theme of both dance dramas is the three cornered love episode between Kṛṣṇa and his two wives, Rukmini and Satyabhāmā. The Madras troupe gives its own version and deviates from the original by the scenes with Rukmini and Narada actually appearing instead of only being described. The village troupe presents Satyabhāmā and Kṛṣṇa as the only main characters and concentrates on Satyabhāmā's emotions of thwarted love, building it up to religious feeling with God; this is difficult and requires great skill in abhinaya on the part of Satyabhāmā. The Madras troupe has more pure dance though emphasis is placed on abhinaya in the role of Satyabhama. The Sutradhara in the Madras version did not participate in the dance drama except in the preliminaries. He acted more as a dance master would in Bharata Natyam. There was no spoken dialogue in the Madras presentation but in Kuchipudi the Sutradhara often comes on to the stage talking to the various characters as they enter. The Kuchipudi village presentation does not contain as much pure dance (*nṛtta*) as the Madras performance.

I thought it would be interesting to describe the visual images of each dance drama below. I have to point out however that although the Kuchipudi village presentation remains the same, I did see another dance drama, *Chandālika* by Tagore, presented by Vempati China Satyam in 1976; Sri Kṛṣṇa Parijata was performed in 1967. *Chandālika*, although containing Kuchipudi dance sequences, resorted a great deal to cinema techniques in acting, scenery and especially the music. This has provoked some criticism. I prefer therefore to describe the dance drama I saw 8 years ago, and I hope the Madras troupe will repeat this style of presentation again. Mr. B. Seeta-ramasarma of Kalakshetra (also from the village of Kuchipudi) hopes to produce a dance drama in orthodox style within the next two years. I shall now then describe the performance of Sri Kṛṣṇa Parijata I saw by the Kuchipudi Dance Academy in Madras in 1967.

The Sutradhara stands between two holy men and in song they introduce the dance drama and its theme. Narada enters dancing, he carries a swan-shaped tambura and a pair of fish-shaped clappers. He explains through abhinaya that the time has come to create another quarrel; then he leaves as the vocalists sing an exit *daru* (song).

Rukmini enters to a *pravesika daru* (entry song) which she interprets with graceful and lively dance. Her sari is heavily ornamented in gold; her long braid is adorned with flowers and sways as she dances. Rukmini symbolises pure divine love expressed here for her husband, Kṛṣṇa, without the taint

of jealousy or anger. She explains her background and character as the vocalists sing. Kṛṣṇa enters and a song of praise (Churnika) is sung, the text consisting of mantras (Sanskrit slokas). Rukmini expresses her devotion and explains how even in childhood Kṛṣṇa performed many miracles; these songs of Kṛṣṇa's childhood are known as Tarangams. They dance affectionately with each other.

Narada enters intending to provoke a quarrel. He presents Kṛṣṇa with a divine, sweet-smelling flower, Pārijāta, asking Kṛṣṇa to give the flower to his favourite consort. Kṛṣṇa gives the flower to Rukmini. Narada approves of this.

Satyabhāmā's abode is the next scene. Her jealous, haughty personality is strongly conveyed through her dance as she enters. She performs a sabdam, a dance sequence in part abhinaya and in part pure rhythmic dance with lively patterns known as jatis. Kuchipudi style of dance is noted for its jatis. Satyabhāmā preens herself as Narada enters. With a mischievous gleam his eye relates the episode of Kṛṣṇa and the Pārijāta flower. Satyabhāmā immediately flies into a rage, as she hurls insults on Kṛṣṇa and Rukmini. Narada, pleased with the success of his scheme, exits. The test of the dancer in this role is now portrayed for she must give full vent to her emotional anguish and display her jealousy and pride. Chandrakala, in China Satyabhāmā's troupe, does justice to this role. In a restless manner she moves from one side of the stage to the other and with sulky glances appeals to the audience explaining in anger her hatred of Rukmini; finally she sinks to the ground in exhaustion; morose and disconsolate she gets up and again berates her callous husband. Hand movements and particularly facial expressions are important here. At this moment Kṛṣṇa enters. Satyabhāmā turns on him telling him to return to Rukmini whom he prefers. Kṛṣṇa calmly and firmly placates her, offering to plant the Pārijāta tree in her garden. The song that follows explains that the tree has been planted in Satyabhāmā's garden, but the flowers fall into Rukmini's garden.

Rukmini is seen gathering the flowers for her morning offering to the gods as the next scene opens; Satyabhāmā is insulting her with her biting sarcastic remarks. Rukmini retorts that she should remember the true meaning of worship; her attitude to god should be the same as to her husband Kṛṣṇa; union with the universal soul only comes with a submissive attitude, there should be no jealousy of God's love, which is given to all. Narada intervenes and while joking about Kṛṣṇa's popularity points out the purpose of his plan which was to show Satyabhama that union with God is only attained through the suppression of jealous desires. The scene ends in tableaux form as Kṛṣṇa, dressed in blue with a crown of peacock feathers, stands between his two wives raising his arms in blessing as they kneel down at his feet while the musicians end the performance in a song of praise to Lord Kṛṣṇa. A Mangalam is also sung.

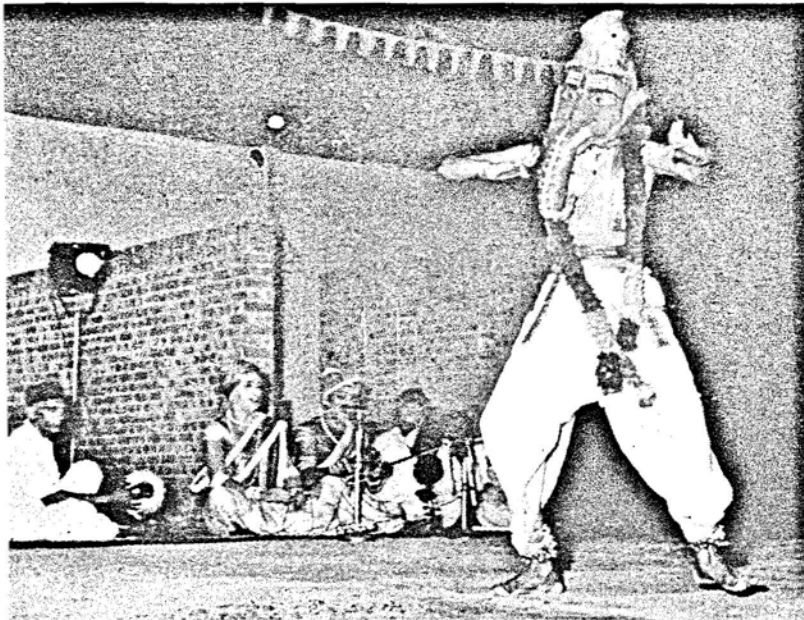


Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma in Kuchipudi





Scenes from a Kuchipudi performance



This was performed with girl dancers only, but the recent performance of Chandaliika did contain male dancers. The village performance still only performs with male actors mostly from the traditional families.

The more orthodox presentation in Kuchipudi village concentrates mostly on the mood of Satyabhāmā. They perform Bhama Kalapam now, and not the other compositions. The same moral point being made with Rukmini representing divine love and the erring Satyabhāmā the soul of man. The vocalists complement the key situations and moods in the dance drama illustrated by the abhinaya of the dancers; the Sutradhara acts as a go-between for Kṛṣṇa and Satyabhāmā using spoken dialogue. Vedantam Satyanarayana Sarma is famed for this role of Satyabhāmā. The performance lasts for about two-and-a-half hours.

After the preliminary items, the Sutradhara enters; an imposing figure with his white turban, white and gold upper cloth slung over his shoulder, his white pleated dhoti and crooked staff. The vocalists sing the entry daru praising his talents and giving the audience an idea of his status. The Sutradhara announces the play to the audience in slokas, interpreting them and explaining the theme and moral behind it. The curtain, a piece of decorated cloth, is brought on to the stage and held by two attendants. There is a rustle of expectancy in the audience for they know that the famous Satyabhāmā is about to appear. She stands behind the curtain and the musicians herald her with a song of her background giving her character its divine significance. Then a long and intricately ornamented braid (jada) is thrown over the curtain. It is Satyabhama's and traditionally represents a challenge to the audience; if any member considers that he can perform the role better than the actor he can contest the part, and if successful, retrieves the braid.

Satyabhāmā starts to dance and coyly lifts the curtain, peeping beneath it at the audience first to one side then the other. The curtain is removed and she dances towards the audience, her jewels glittering and her rich, silk saree catching the light as she moves. The Sutradhara comes up to her requesting her name and background. In this role Satyabhāmā is not so proud and haughty, she explains who her father is and how famous he is; she explains that she is the wife of Lord Kṛṣṇa but that she is sad for Kṛṣṇa has rejected her love for Rukmini's. The mood evoked from the audience here is one of sympathy and is substantiated by the songs from the musicians. The text of these songs is in literary Telugu poetry and as the lines are sung, Satyabhāmā interprets them with abhinaya, otherwise dialogue is spoken. Satyabhāmā with deep emotional distress, relates her unhappy plight to the Sutradhara who consoles her and asks her to tell him how all this came about.

Kṛṣṇa, it seems, is upset by Satyabhāmā's attitude, for when he was last with her they looked in a mirror, and Kṛṣṇa asked her who was the most

beautiful, whereupon she replied that she was. Kṛṣṇa reminded her that she must quell her jealousy and conceit, for these were her main faults and contributed to her pride. He left her angrily, and ever since then she has been thinking of him. She reproaches all the things that before had given them utter bliss in their love, the moonlight, the flowers and their fragrant scent and the cool nights; all these she now despises as they bring back a flood of memories. However she is still madly jealous of Rukmini and rails at the latter's possession of Kṛṣṇa and his favors. Satyabhama describes Kṛṣṇa in detail, his blue-hued skin, his graceful movements, the shining jewels he wears and the peacock feathers in his crown. All these she yearns for. Tears stream down her face and she delicately wipes them with her veil. The Sutrādhara moved by her story suggests that she write a letter to Kṛṣṇa setting out clearly her feelings; showing repentance and requesting him to come to her. The climax of the role of Satyabhāmā comes at this point as Satyabhama sits down to put her thoughts into writing as the musicians sing enhancing her mood of sorrow. Satyabhama, changing her expression gently and subtly, pours out her heart to Kṛṣṇa while the audience become completely absorbed. The letter is as follows:-

Oh Lord Kṛṣṇa! you are the One who experiences ecstatic bliss from drinking the honey of Lakshmi's lotus-like face.  
 One who blessed the Chola King Muchukunda with boons. The son of Nanda, the shepherd,  
 One who held aloft the mountain, Mahendragiri, and whose beautiful face would put to shame even the splendor of the full moon.  
 To such a One I am writing this letter and request you to kindly allow me to hear about your welfare.  
 Since my father gave me away in marriage to you in this splendid mansion glittering with diamonds  
 I have spent all my time with you, and we have been so happy making love, in our bed full of sweet-scented flowers,  
 Though I am the object of your affection, Rukmini has filled your mind and taken possession of you  
 You have left me alone.  
 In my present loneliness my enemies torment me. Kamadeva (Cupid) Constantly shooting his sharp arrows pierces my heart which has broken into fragments.  
 The cries of the cuckoo and the parrot are unbearable; the humming of the bees gives me a headache.  
 The moon overwhelms me by pouring his cool rays upon me,  
 The Southern breeze burns me like the fire of the deluge.  
 Knowing you as I do as the Omnipotent who holds the entire created Universe in your being,  
 As the one who is the protector of all living beings possessed of the three qualities, Satva, Rajas and Tamas,  
 And who grants fulfilment of their desires,



I am always thinking of you. Your lotus feet are fixed in my heart and  
 I worship you.  
 I am helpless without you and have found no solace since you threw  
 me into the cruel clutches of loneliness.  
 It is not right on you part to be angry with me.  
 I earnestly request you to come to me and satisfy my longing desire.  
 Please relieve me from the torments of my enemies.  
 (This portion is in literary prose. After this comes a verse)

*Verse*

Fearing the cruel arrows of Kāmadeva  
 I, your servant, am sending this letter.  
 There may be mistakes, and I beg you to forgive them and come to me.  
 A mere written reply cannot satisfy me.  
 You must come in person when we can discuss things,  
 I need your presence.

One who worships at your feet,

SATYABHĀMĀ<sup>6</sup>

The translation is somewhat free, but adheres near enough to the text so that the impact of this exquisitely expressed passage can be felt.

Kṛṣṇa receives Satyabhāmā's letter and although deeply moved, still detects elements of pride in it; despite the Sutrādhārā's persuasive arguments he refuses to come. Satyabhāmā, beside herself, swoons at the news. Kṛṣṇa finally consents when he is convinced of Satyabhāmā's humility. But he finds Satyabhāmā angry when he visits her; she accuses him of preferring Rukmini which is an insult to her. Kṛṣṇa placates her tactfully reminding her that she must learn to curb her jealousy. Her husband represents the Universal soul and she must submit to him in all matters without resentment of another's love. Finally Satyabhāmā quells her pride and jealousy; she falls at Kṛṣṇa's feet asking for forgiveness, and he blesses her. A song of praise to the divine pair ends the performance.

Besides the dance drama there is also solo dance and Pagati Vesham. The first we have discussed briefly, and dancers will take items such as sabdam, or Satyabhāmā writing her letter of anguish to Kṛṣṇa. Tarangams are also performed. There is one tarangam which is popular, Bala Gopala Tarangam. In this the dancer stands on a metal plate with a pot of water balanced on her head, she moves the plate forward in time to the music (pancha nadaka)—it takes great skill and practice to perform this.

Pagati Vesham was a dance performed by the Kuchipudi performers



when they would go by themselves in the morning and sing or dance before houses etc. in the town.

Mention should be made of some of the old masters in the village. Sri Chinta Vengataramayya and his sons Krishnamoorthi and Ramamoorthi, Vedantam Ramayya and Ramakrishnayya. Mahankali Satyanarayana is much known for his portrayal of asura characters. Chinta Krishnamurthy before his death was almost legendary for his masterly portrayal of the Sutradhara.

### Training and Technique

It takes five years for a Kuchipudi artist to be trained, and another five until he is a competent artist. The syllabus presents a detailed and comprehensive course. In Kuchipudi village there is a training institution, Siddhendra Kalakshetram, which has a government grant; it was built during the revival of Kuchipudi. In this institute girls are also being trained nowadays. Another training institution exists at Eluru, a village about forty miles from Kuchipudi. In Madras a training school, The Kuchipudi Art Academy, has been set up by a master from the village of Kuchipudi, Mr. Vempati Chinna Satyam.

Siddhendra Yogi, as stated above, is responsible for the form of the dance drama; he drew up an exhaustive and detailed syllabus for his pupils which is believed to have formed the basis for the curriculum followed in Siddhendra Kalakshetram today. The main classical texts on drama and dance which the syllabus adheres to are Bharata Muni's *Natya Sastra*, and Nandikesvara's *Abhinayadarpanam*. Slokas from these texts are memorised concerning the theory and interpretation of dance, and gestures and movements. The music also has to be learned as the dancer sings with the vocalist while interpreting through gestures; this is a particular feature of Kuchipudi presentation. The syllabus then, covers theory, practice and music.

There are numerous legendary but traditional stories contained in the texts mentioned above such as how drama was originally created by Brahma at the instigation of Indra and other Gods in the Hindu pantheon, and how Indra's banner is brought in to ward off any evil demons who would prevent a successful performance. This banner is seen in the preliminaries to a performance even today; it is dark blue with a white elephant in the centre. The student must be aware of these legends. He must also learn the appropriate salutations to his guru. One prayer is addressed to the Earth Goddess, Bhudevi, where the dancer apologises to the Goddess for stamping on the ground while dancing. The students must know the varieties of dance and principles of styles. Technique is outlined in great detail in the texts; the student must learn these details and the theories relevant to them. For

instance there are 28 single-handed gestures (Asamyuta) and 23 gestures for the combined use of hands (Samyuta).

To loosen their muscles and acquire grace for movements and dancing, strenuous exercises must be learnt by the new students. Some of these are Kali, Samu, Kuppi, Niluvu Mogga, Ali Prtyali and Chakra Dandem movements. Some of these are steps and poses to acquire good deportment and a sense of poise. Some of the exercises resemble yoga. The jumping exercise (kuppi) must be executed without the feet making any sound when landing. There are also some steps to be learned such as Adavu Samu Chowkam, Mande Koppu, Kaththera Vatu, Jaru Adavu, Chuttu Adavu etc. Their music lessons consist of the elementary swaras or notes and ragas (scales). The basic tala (rhythmic) systems must also be learned. They should know the exercises for voice and religious songs.

Second year students start with revision. They go on to learn other traditional legends such as the reason why dance came to earth; Siva's wife, Parvati, instructed Usha, the beautiful daughter of King Banasura in the graceful (lasya) style of dance. Siva brought the vigorous, tandava style to earth. Usha was said to have taught the dance to the milkmaids of Dvaraka and thus the dance tradition spread. More practical exercises are given in hand gestures, head and neck movements. There are nine movements for the head, eight for the eyes, and four for the neck. Head gestures are; Sama Udvahita, Adhomukha, Alolita, Dhuta, Kampita, Paravrtta Utkupa and Parivahita. For example Alolita means rolling the head to show sleepiness, possession by an evil spirit, intoxication and so on; Paravrtta is when the face is turned denoting anger and shame. The eye movements are listed under glances. These are Sama, Alokita, Saci, Prlokita, Nimilita, Ullokita, Annuvrtta and Avalokita. Examples of these are Sama (level) a straight look to show the effort made to discern another's thoughts; Pralokita (wide glance) or looking from side to side, shows excessive affection, moving and idiocy. Neck movements are Sundari, Tirascina, Parivartita and Prakampira. The neck can be moved to and fro, upward and downward, left to right and backwards and forwards. All these movements must be combined with hand and body movements to a smooth coordination before a successful performance can be attained. It might be amusing here to give another example of the theory which relates to the characteristics of a good dancer and a bad one. This is as it is given in Abhinayadarpanam page 43:-

- "23—25. Characteristics of a Dancing girl (patra). She should be slender-bodied, beautiful, young with full round breasts, self-confident, witty, pleasing knowing well when to begin (a dance) and when to end, having large eyes, able to perform in accompaniment of vocal and instrumental music, and to observe the proper time, hears tala (rhythm), having splendid dresses and possess-

ing a happy countenance. A girl having all these qualifications is called a dancer (patra).

“26—27. Her disqualifications. The ten kinds of women that should be avoided in the natya are women with white specks in the eyeballs, or women who have scanty hair, or have thick lips or pendant breasts; who are either very fat or very thin, or are either very tall or very short, or hunch-backed or have no voice.”

Enough to quell the self-confidence of any aspiring novice!!

After this the second year student must begin to learn extracts from such compositions as Rukmini Kalyanam. For practical dance they start to put their steps together in patterns for dance pieces such as Sabdams and Jatisvarams. Their music lessons continue progressing from the elementary exercises to more advanced ones.

For the third, fourth and fifth years, their knowledge continues to advance along these lines. They continue to learn extracts from compositions and widen their repertoire of dance including more sabdams, tarangams, jatis etc. The music becomes more advanced and they must know the theory of the 108 Karanas or dance poses, although only 30 are used in practice. They must know the whole of Bhama Kalapam by heart and should have some knowledge of the Gita Govinda and Narayana Thirtha's compositions.

Boys start young for this training, usually at about the age of seven; they are drawn largely from the villagers' families. After ten years the student's technique has become automatic and he is thoroughly matured in the art. There is still a ceremony called Gujekattu Utsavam or the wearing of bells; this stems from the time that Siddhendra tied a bell to the leg of any new born child amongst his community of actors. When the bell is tied it shows that they have completely dedicated themselves to their profession.

With such an intensive course there is little time for other pursuits. They start their day at five in the morning and continue until eleven when there is a break. They recommence training in the afternoon until late evening. In previous times the performances would last for three nights, but now it is only two hours. In Kuchipudi village it is still true to say that the orthodox methods of training runs in families. It is often handed down from father to son, but the institution provides opportunities for outsiders.

#### **Make-up and Costume**

Every actor must be able to apply his own make-up though there are

assistants for the costumes. The salient feature of Kuchipudi costume is the ornaments. These are numerous, especially those for female roles. Although they are made out of wood and artificial stones or glass, they are attractive and effective. Contrasting with this, the clothes are simple and plain in design, though the colours may be bright. For the most part male roles wear a colored silk dhoti tied in orthodox style (Panchagadnam) and their upper half adorned with jewels. The Sutradhara, however, wears only traditional white cotton, and a white cotton upper cloth, angavastram. In Madras, of course, the girls taking male roles wear a long-sleeved shirt or blouse.

Some male roles have a colored upper cloth and the costume can be very elaborate, such as the king in Prahlada who wears richly colored silk clothes—a silk shirt and pleated silk lower garment with bright silk pyjama trousers underneath. Narasimha, the manlion incarnation of Visnu, has a terrifying mask of gaudy colors and a bright silk shirt heavily ornamented in gold and red. Pink silk garments cover the lower part of his body and make him appear terrifying and magnificent. The Sutradhara's plain cotton dhoti is worn in the orthodox way, pleated in the front and tucked in at the back; he wears the sacred Brahmin thread across his chest and brown beads round his neck. He has gold earrings and a white and gold cloth tied round his head (paga); sometimes wrist ornaments are worn. Distinctive to this part is the curved stick which is carried in the hand, the design of which has been laid down in the *Natya Sastra*, and is called a Kutilaka. According to legend, the stick was presented to Bharata Muni by Brahma after the performance of the original drama. It is supposed to ward off evil. The upper cloth is worn slung over one shoulder. Krsna is traditionally dressed in blue. He merely wears a pleated dhoti and pyjama trousers of blue silk. His chest is daubed with blue make-up and he wears a tiara of peacock feathers (Nemala Paratu) on his head. His chest is also adorned with many jewelled necklaces. Many ornaments decorate his arms and wrists. Narada, the sage, has a white beard and may have a knot of white hair on his head. Like the Sutradhara his upper body may be adorned with sandal paste and red Visnu marks. He is distinguished by carrying a pair of wooden clappers and a swan-shaped tamboura (musical instruments).

Female roles, besides their silk saris, are heavily adorned with ornaments. They also wear a gold belt round their waists. Facial make-up as for male roles is natural with modern cosmetics used except for the lips which are bright red; they wear the red dot of kum kum powder on their forehead. Make-up for both male and female roles is natural and not stylised. Some of the kings wear large, black moustaches. A list is given below of the numerous ornaments and their description in English.

Big Jada—long ornamented braid worn by Satyabhama

Small Jada—braid

Sidha—false hair

Ragidi—large round ornament worn at the back of the head  
 Chandra Vanka—small crescent, moon-shaped ornament worn on right side of center parting of hair  
 Suryudu—hair ornament worn on left side of parting, in shape of the sun  
 Thamalpakalu—betel-leaf shaped ornament worn on hair.  
 Mogali reku } flower and leaf-shaped ornaments  
 Ketaki reku }  
 Thurai—crest-shaped hair ornament  
 Papata Pinjalu—Ornamented links worn on center hair parting  
 Kammalu—earrings  
 Cherru—silver chains hooked on to the ear as earrings and attached to the back of the hair  
 Jukalu—pendant earring  
 Karna Patralu—ear ornament  
 Thayethulu—talisman worn round neck  
 Baju Bandulu } upper arm ornaments.  
 Danda Kadiyalu }  
 Muthyamulu—pearl necklaces  
 Pocheelu—elbow ornament  
 Kankanarulu—wrist ornament  
 Kadiamulu—ankle ornament, silver chain with small bells  
 Pathakam (small and large)—pendants  
 Patteda—necklace  
 Billala Molathadu—a belt made of connecting links  
 Addabasa—nose ring  
 Bulaki—large nose ornament worn in center of nose over upper lip  
 Mukka Pudaka—nose ornament  
 Mungera—the famous, large, jewelled nose ring worn by Satyabhama, it curves up from her nostril to her cheek  
 Rings for eight fingers

These are the ornaments worn for female roles, now are listed those for male roles:-

Kireetam—golden crown  
 Bhuja Kireetam—shoulder ornaments  
 Sankhu Chakrams—ornaments shaped like a *conch* shell  
 Karna Patralu—ear ornaments  
 Canda Bherundam—wrist ornaments  
 Haralu—necklaces  
 Nadumu parra—gold belt  
 Gada—club  
 Dalu—shield  
 Karalam—mask.

A sword is carried by some roles. The actors put these on themselves and they also have a knowledge of how to make them.

Of those listed above, the most important is the ornamented braid or big Jada worn by Satyabhama. It is this braid which is thrown over the curtain as a challenge to the audience as described above. For Kuchipudi actors it has a special religious significance. Legend has it that Lord Visnu wore the braid when he assumed the role of Mohini, the divine temptress, and when reincarnated as Krsna he gave the braid to Satyabhama. The braid consists of several small ornamented pieces linked together with black thread. The pieces are all set with stones and coloured in gold. On the left side of the braid at the top there is a large round piece 1 1/2 inches in diameter representing the sun. On the right side the crescent moon is represented. A thread of pearls connects the ornament to the forehead and over this is a small parrot which represents 'jiva' (the soul). The back portion of the braid begins with the hood of a serpent denoting supreme knowledge, and going on down in the form of a plait are 27 pieces representing the 27 stars of Indian astronomy. At the end of the braid three bunches are hung representing the three worlds (bhuvanas); on these three further bunches or balls hang on each of the larger making nine in all, these are the nine planets. Thus the ornament represents the Universe and Satyabhama the Soul attached to it.

These ornaments are made from light, white pith wood known as Punugu or Badia wood. It is extremely easy to carve into delicate shapes. There is one village called Kandapalli in Andhra Pradesh where this wood is found in abundance and families for generations have carved and painted toys from the wood. Kuchipudi ornaments are all set in coloured stones and glass, with a background of gold lacquer. Altogether there are held to be 32 pieces for female roles and ten for male.

Some of the costumes described, it may be noted, are from themes not mentioned in the presentation. For instance Pahlada, but this may be used rarely, and can only be seen in the Eluru schools's presentation under the direction of Korada Narasimha Rao.

### Compositions and Music

Siddhendra Yogi is said to have composed two dance dramas—Parijatam, which later became known as Bhama Kalapam and Golla Kalapam. Golla Kalapam is a discourse between a milkmaid and a Brahmin. The humble milkmaid reminds the Brahmin that in God's eyes all are equal.

Although Siddhendra Yogi's compositions are mainly acted today, there were many other composers in the old troupes who were led by a Bhagavata and their dance drama form was known as Yaksagana. A list of some of these older compositions have been made by Mr. B. Rajanikanta Rao. Mr. Rao has noted that many of these older compositions had a similar theme to Bhama Kalapam. Golla Kalapam also appears but in another

version. From the printed version on Siddhendra's Bhama Kalapam, it is evident from some of the songs that there were other composer's works incorporated in the dance drama, this is discernible because in previous times the author's had a custom of incorporating their name. Within the text two examples are some slokas by Tarikondavenkatahama, and also a song by Venkatachalapathi; though most of the songs bear the name of Siddhendra.

Coming on to music it must be remarked that Kuchipudi does include wide variety of music forms, which in turn influence the different dance pieces. Some of these forms are Sabdams, Darus, Jatisvarams, Curnikas and Tarangams.

Sabdams are popular as a solo item but can be included as an attractive dance item to introduce a female role. A sabdam is a song of praise for the deity of a patron; they can also relate incidents from the Puranas. If the former, the sabdam will end with the phrase 'Salamure' (I salute you). The musical form is simple, consisting of melodic sections separated by rhythmic syllables—solkattus. The words are interpreted by hand gestures and the rhythmic syllables are not spoken but intoned with the pitch of the raga. A sabdam is usually composed in Khamboji raga. The words are lyrical and the attractive rhythmic sections add spice to the performance. The following are some of the sabdams which are popular today.<sup>19</sup>

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Dasavatara Sabdam | This depicts the 10 incarnations of Visnu. Composed by Siddhabattula Rangadoss of Pedu Pulivarru  |
| Manduka Sabdam    | (Frog dance)—a composition by Melatur Kasinathayya. This occurs in a Furanic story. A frog is transformed into a beautiful maiden by Brahma. The words are amusing, imitating the sounds frogs made on a rainy day. The dancer leaps around like a frog often hopping around on his haunches. He accompanies this dance by gestures showing turtles and crabs moving about in a pond. The frog dives into a pool and emerges as the beautiful maiden—her beauty is like a full-blown lotus. |
| Prahlada Sabdam   | By Venkatarama Sastry. This relates the story of Prahlada, the boy who defied his father by insisting on worshipping Visnu and not his father as commanded. Narasimha, the man-lion incarnation of Visnu finally destroys Prahlada's father, Hiranyakasipu.   |

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Sri Rama Pattabisekam   | Relates the coronation of Rama when he returns to Lanka (Ceylon).   |
| Tulajaji Sabdam         | Anon. Thought that composer was a scholar maybe from 18th century Tanjore.  |
| Sarabhoji Sabdam        | In honor of Raja Sarabhoji of Tanjore   |
| Sivaji Sabdam           | In honor of Marathā, a ruler of Tanjore   |
| Thathi Sabdam           | In praise of one of the Rajas of Kalahasti  |
| Jakkula Purandri Sadbam | This depicts the mythical Hindu legendary belief in the origin of the world—the churning of the milky ocean by gods and demons for the nectar of immortality. The dance depicts Mohini, the temptress, beguiling the demons and serving nectar to the gods she then vanishes with the pot of nectar ignoring the demons. This is said to have been presented by a court dancer, Jakkula Kanta, and the composition is a salutation to a king of the Gajapati era. |
| Chamundeswari Sabdam    | Reveals the life of Goddess Durga, noted for her fight with the buffalo-headed demon, Mahisasura. She triumphs symbolising good over evil.  |
| Ardhanarisvara Sabdam   | This depicts the female and male aspects of Lord Siva. The Tandava (masculine) style is presented by the right half of the dancer's body, then she turns to the left and performs the lasya (feminine) style.   |

There are more than one-hundred Sabdams, but the above gives some idea of their range. Many compositions have been lost with time.

Darus are story-songs. The narrative is sung in daru form. Darus also enhance the emotional crises in the dance drama. The word is derived from the Sanskrit dhruva. It can relate to any mood or situation. The form is divided into three sections common to classical South Indian music: pallavi, anupallavi and charanam. The pallavi is the introduction; the anupallavi a development and refrain of that and the charanam contains the main body of description. In a dance drama, where the story is important, the words are thought to be superior to the music which takes second place. The music, therefore, sounds repetitive for the same raga form is used again



and again. The audience's attention should not be distracted from the words so hardly any ornamented notes are sung. In Kuchipudi the text is in Telugu. Jatis (lively rhythmic pieces) are interspersed within the story to give it life, the dancer interprets these with lively, pure dance steps, contrasting with the abhinaya interpretation through hand gestures during the narrative of the charanam section. The five types of jatis are Tisra, Chaturasra, Khanda, Misra and Sankirna.

Professor P. Sambamoorthy describes the darus

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Patra Pravesa daru       | entrance song for characters describing their background. There is also an exit daru.   |
| Svagata daru             | A musical soliloquy. The tune is reflective in nature and sung in a slow tempo. Svagata means welcome. It is a welcoming piece. |
| Varnana daru             | A descriptive song  |
| Samvada daru             | Musical dialogue. Imitative of prose where the characters have a normal discussion  |
| Uttara Pratyutthara daru | Musical dialogue but in a different form. One character asks questions and the other answers.                                   |

In Kuchipudi Bhama Kalapam there are entry and exit darus and descriptive darus to enhance moods and relate the story. One of the most famous is the accompaniment to Satyabhama when she writes to Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Dr. V. Raghavan in his article on 'Music in Ancient Indian Drama' explains how dhruvas (darus) fitted into the Sanskrit drama forms of old. There were five categories—entrance dhruva, Pravesika and also exit dhruva; between these are Prasadiki which enforces a mood already introduced and Akspiki used for announcing a change in mood or situation. Antara were songs which filled in missing gaps in the situation. These were symbolic in style and were often only links in the play, the playwright used not to write them.

Jatisvarams are lively rhythmic pieces in energetic masculine style. Curnikas are in Sanskrit and are chanted in a prescribed stylised manner according to the lyrical phraseology of the text and the number of lines; the last phrase in each stanza ends on a high-pitched note and the syllables are drawn out. It is a recognised form of chanting Sanskrit slokas. Curnikas

are in praise of Gods (in Kuchipudi in praise of Krsna). They are usually sung in Devagandhari raga.

Narayana Tirtha wrote a long poetical composition—Krsnalila Tarangini in a Sanskrit form known as Taranga. The poem was on the early life of Krsna based on the Gita Govinda. These episodes of Krsna's life have been illustrated through dance, and these dance pieces known as Tarangams occur in Kuchipudi. One of the most famous is Balagopala Tarangam where the dancer has to balance a brass pot of water on his head and stand with his feet on the rim of a brass plate. The plate is move in time to the rhythm (tala) and the dancer turns round while executing the dance and moves forwards and backwards. Another gimmick associated with this tarangam is dancing on an upturned earthen pot; in the old days the dancer could draw pictures on the floor with his toes on rice powder. Tarangams are in highly poetical Sanskrit and lend themselves well to music. The different rhythmic patterns or nadai are attractively designed and descriptive ragas such as Anandabhairavi are used.

Musical instruments in Kuchipudi are mrdangam, cymbals, sometimes violin, flute and tambura. Sometimes in a special performance the vina is played; Ragas mainly used in Kuchipudi are Anandabhairavi, Bhairavi, Huseni, Mukhari, Mohanam, Purvikalyani, Begada, Bilahari, Kambhoji, Todi, Shanmukhapriya, Sri, Arabhi, and Sankarabharanam. As mentioned above the special characteristic of Kuchipudi dancing are the lively rhythmic pure dance items in these the talas frequently change and this is what gives the dance its zest.

Kuchipudi is an amalgamation of several types of dance and music as well as literary compositions. It is up to the dance master to weave these into a composite, smooth-running whole. In Kuchipudi village the Sutra-dhara so has a large part to play in the continuity of performance. Apart from the form mentioned above other compositions such as benedictory slokas, Utpalamalu and Kamdardha are sung in the beginning. Kamdardha is two lines of words followed by a sequence of jatis. The style is light and lyrical, pleasing and holding the attention of the audience by rapid and catchy rhythms.

It is possibly the music which combined with the dance has caught the eye of the public who are attracted by the lively movements and singing. Thus Kuchipudi is popular today and the troupes many places outside Andhra Pradesh and Madras.

## FOOTNOTES

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