

Some Thoughts on Odissi Dance*

DINANATH PATHY

I. THE OBSESSION WITH CLASSICISM

In the Indian context there is nothing called classicism. The Sanskrit word *shastriya*, which is generally believed to be a translation of 'classic' or 'the classical', represents a misunderstanding of both the words, 'classicism' and *shastriya*. A *shastra* is a written text, a codified version of the practices of a given period which tries to claim an authority in a subsequent period of time. Dependence on the practice (*prayoga*) and later on the textual prescription becomes a tradition (*parampara*) with the people who follow it. While the *shastra* or the text remains constant, the practices that form the tradition become variables. Therefore, a need arises to write different texts in different periods of time. To comprehend and contextualize the variables in textual codifications, scholars resort to new interpretations (commentaries) and such attempts finally embody regional aspirations. While there is a basic text like *Natya Shastra*, there are other texts like *Nartananirnaya*¹.

Nartananirnaya is a remarkable work in that it marks a transitional point in the evolution of dance in India. In contrast with its precursors in the field, which follow in the main the descriptions of dances given by Bharata in *Natya Shastra*, the *Nartananirnaya* describes entirely new forms. These new forms were shaped by regional styles that were not included, though their existence was acknowledged by Bharata, which was termed by his successors *marga*, that is, the main path. The *Nartananirnaya* is of particular interest here because, on examining the dance tradition it describes, we find that it is this tradition in which present-day Indian classical dance styles are rooted rather than in the tradition of Bharata. The *Nartananirnaya* thus belongs to a period in which the styles that had a marginal existence in Bharata's time joined the main stream of dancing on their way to becoming the dominant current in the evolution of the art form.

In course of time there arose an idea based on these texts that there is a main stream, and, unless subsequent regional texts refer to the main texts as their source, they are not considered classics. This has happened with Sanskrit language vis-a-vis other languages. This equation keeps changing. In today's world, English is the main language and other regional languages are known as *bhasha* languages. The national (mainstream) and regional contexts become points of reference in our anxiety to be recognised as classical because

* This is an excerpt from the author's book *Rethinking Odissi*, published by Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, in 2007 (xxiii + 351 pages, price Rs 2000). Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are reproduced here with the author's permission, with minimal changes from the original text.

there is every possibility that the mainstream tries to push all that is regional to the level of *deshi*. In a democracy, an attempt is constantly made by the regional to join the mainstream on an equal footing and get accepted as classical. These attempts acquire a validity when we try to understand how regional political parties play a major role in the formation of the central government.

These relations and contexts that were academic in nature change into political equations. Classicism is a complex² and vexed issue, while conceptual models and structural systems give the issue an intellectual parameter, textual traditions and living continuities give it applicability.

Kapila Vatsyayan, examining the issue, hints at specific terms like *shastra* and *prayoga* or *margi* and *deshi*, which are more relevant to the attempt to understand classicism in Indian dance. There are still other categories such as *natyadharmi* and *lokadharmi* involving the elite and the common as two societal phenomena.

In discussing the classicism of Odissi dance, Ratna Roy opens up a new perspective on the distinction between the classical and the traditional. She is of the opinion that the traditional would not be local or national but international or global, when the genres of dance would be pitted against ballet and would be found wanting not because of the lack of antiquity or defined grammar or years of training, but because of the terms attributed to them by the people of India. So, ultimately, the issue does not really belong to the realm of art but to the arena of politics, where Third World peoples have to define themselves as the 'other' and measure up to yardsticks constructed in a foreign tongue.

Classical³ has very little to do with dance as a form because there is no Indian Dance form which is known as *shastriya* Bharatnatyam or *shastriya* Odissi *nrutya*. The word is used as a term for periodisation, sometimes to refer to pre-8th century, at others to pre-10th century and in some cases even pre-6th century developments in Indian art. In this sense, 'classical' is ancient and is opposed to medieval as well as the 'contemporary' or 'modern' (Vatsyayan, 1994: 23). Classical is obviously a Greek term used in the western context to denote both a period and a certain standard of artistic quality.

By opening up the issue of 'classical' in dance, we posit it in an international arena against what is known as primitive and folk and even deductively in the linear developments of classical ballet of the western world. We even come closer in theory and practice to the ballet dance form. How much we differ from their dance motifs is another matter. Little wonder then that the tribal (primitive), rural (folk) and urban (classical) classifications of socialists, placed in a unilinear progressive graph has not been able to contain the complexities of the Indian social structure, where the so-called *shastrik* is equated with the *laukika*, where the terms 'sanskritisation', and 'vernacularization' exist in a purely sociological context, where they denote the process by which a less affluent or privileged class of people begin to acquire the behavioral patterns of elite groups in a society.

Taking into account the spread of Odissi dance across coastal tracts of Orissa over a period of fifty years, one could clearly identify its elitist urban base as opposed to tribal

dominance in the western tracts and folk filtration in the southern parts of the state. Though the use of the term *shastriya nritya* is vague, it has a sacramental and elitist connotation.

The term *shastra* in its contemporary sense stands for an abstraction from a set of facts, a technical manual, or treatise. It also refers to a literature or body of texts and differentiates itself from the oral. Therefore, a *shastra* is a deduced conceptual model which provided for applicability and thus offered scope for variation and modification. Each *shastra* is only a framework or structure and thus more universal than the local. So, in course of time, a basic text like *Natya Shastra* of Bharatmuni gave rise to several local texts. When we look at *Natya Shastra*, we benefit from the basic paradigms (or even preliminaries) like *hastabhinaya* (gestures of the hands) *sarirabhinaya* (gestures of the limbs), *carividhana* (explanation of the *cari* movements), *gatiprasara* (the different types of *gatis*), *mandalavikalpam* (diverse *mandala* movements), *aharyabhinaya* (costumes and make up). In order to comprehend the specificities of a regional dance form we have to depend on several regional texts such as *Abhinaya Chandrika*, *Natya Manorama* and *Abhinaya Darpana Prakasha*, being the well-known texts as far as Odissi dance is concerned. While pleading for classicism, the Orissan dance scholars upheld Bharata's *Natya Shastra* as their source book, but always depended heavily on regional texts. *Abhinaya Chandrika* furnished them with peculiar technical details of Odissi dance like new information on *Visama pada*, description of tala, costume, ornaments and makeup. Similarly, the *Abhinaya Darpana Prakasha* is one of the important treatises on Odissi dance. Though the author of the text *Abhinaya Darpana Prakasha* refers to Bharata in his book, he does not quote from *Natya Shastra*. The work displays remarkable regional flavour while describing *gita*, *vadya*, *nritya*, *natya vrittis*, *nritya* and *lasya* and *tandava* (Patnaik, 1990: 125). The author also discusses eight varieties of *sthanakas*, four varieties of *mastakabhedas*, and many other technicalities. The work is remarkable for the elaborate direction it contains for movement and placing of each *hasta* to indicate each different meaning.

Classicism also emphasises the applicability of the *shastra* and the term *prayoga*, which insists on *vyavahara* or *abhyasa* that is always rooted in the specificity of time and space. In a time and space framework, it comes closest to *deshi* and it would stand differentiated from the universal movement and constant flow of *shastra* (Vatsyayan, 1994: 25). Therefore, classicism is not just *margi* to be accepted on its own terms, but could also take the *deshi* along. One can argue that the *margi*, universal principles as well as the *deshi*, empirical facts, are both embedded in classicism.

Kapila Vatsyayan rightly concludes: "What is of greatest significance is the fact that *shastra* takes cognizance of the empirical, the applied in its fundamental conceptual framework and in this sense it is unique on one level, but representative of the Indian system on another, because it may well be a *shastra* of *prayog* or a *prayoga shastra*."

The Orissan revivalists had little understanding of such complexities, and therefore their idea of classicism differed in intent. The classical was considered to belong exclu-

sively to the temple and not to the streets. Debaprasad Das, not being aware of either the views of anthropologists that tribal, folk and classical are exclusive categories or the art-historical view of Niharranjan Ray that the three categories are not mutually exclusive, had intuitively thought Odissi dance to be an evolutionary phase of the primitive and that the classical phase of sophistication had been achieved through gradual chiselling and refinement. The idea of classicism in Odissi dance is so ingrained in the minds of the dancers, gurus and scholars that a slight modification of the specified style or adoption of primitive and folk elements into the prevalent style is termed *lokadharmi*. This is certainly a misunderstanding of *natyadharmi* or the classical, because one may argue that both the primitive and folk have qualitative and aesthetic qualities as art forms and therefore they should be viewed without bias. If this had not been the case, the dance texts, *Abhinaya Chandrika*, *Abhinaya Darpana Prakasha* and *Natya Manorama* would not have included folk dances in their codifications.

*Abhinaya Darpana Prakasha*⁴ mentions *jangali nrutya* and its synonym *jakkadi* where men dance holding peacock feathers and swinging arms. This obviously resembles a Jhagidi dance of the Kondh tribals of Phulbani (*K. V. K Journal*, 1997: 36). Nilamadhava Panigrahi (1995: 10) describes this dance as Turuska dance and connects its source to the Muslim invasions (could also be Mughals). It is quite revealing that Kairata (*Kirata*), Bahurupa (*Bahurupia*) and Chitra dance were performed by both men and women in *Abhinaya Darpana*. Could Kairata and Bahurupa be the tribal Kirata dance and folk Bahurupia dance we come across today? *Abhinaya Chandrika* codifies several tribal and folk dance forms to be performed on festivals and during processions; to cite a few, these are Bhilla, Cadduka, Patua and Tunga (Maya Das, 2001: 20-22).

The Odissi revivalists were obsessed with textual classicism without understanding the ramifications of the texts. They failed to appreciate the fact that both text and practice grow/evolve and texts need to be written often to sanction new practices (traditions), even if their idea of textual classicism was true. In this connection, the view of Nilamadhava Panigrahi about the name 'Bharata' is to be taken with a pinch of salt. Bharata or Bharatacharya may not always refer to the Bharata of *Natya Shastra*, it is a synonym of *nata*. *Amarakosa* mentions *Bharata ityapi nataka* (2nd Kanda—*Sukra Varga*—12th sloka). It would therefore be quite appropriate to name any drama teacher or expert dance guru as Bharata. Therefore, Sadashiva Rath Sharma's reference to *Bharatnatyam* in his *Margessay* (Vol. XIII, 1960) could be considered a representative dance of Indian subcontinent and not necessarily of the South. Similarly, *gotipua* could be an exclusive dance of a group of boys and not necessarily of the *gotipua* as we understand it today. Texts are written and therefore proliferation is common while copying the texts.

Too much obsession with the texts⁵ and not looking beyond them is a mistake as a text could be interpreted and reinterpreted in several ways. We should not be oblivious of the fact that textual codification is a process and our understanding of the term might be relative. How will we account for the author of *Natya Manorama's* Kerala connection? The

authors of *Abhinaya Chandrika*, Maheshwar Mahapatra, *Sangeeta Narayana*, Purushottama Mishra/ Gajapati Narayana Deva, or *Abhinaya Darpana Prakasha's* Oriya translator, Jadunath Singh/ Braja Sunder Singha belong to what is now South Orissa, which was once a part of Andhra Desa and the Madras Presidency. There is no trace of Odissi in this area even now. Moreover, the revivalists have tried to exclude all southern dance forms like sakhinata as anti classical labelling them as *dakshini*. Should *dakshini* be termed *deshi* and Puri-Cuttack area be identified with *margi*? Sometimes we, for our own convenience, shift our stand with regard to classicism.

But what we normally refer to as classicism in the context of Odissi is a completely different issue and has very little to do with texts or other categories discussed so far. Sangeet Natak Akademi,⁶ an autonomous organisation of dancers, musicians, theatre artists, film personalities, dance and drama critics and connoisseurs, and funded by the government of India, accords classical status to a form of Indian performing art. One would be surprised that the Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi never passed a formal resolution (at least we do not find any reference to it in the writings of the revivalists) declaring Odissi dance as classical. It would have meant that at least Odissi dance was recognised as a classical dance form in its land of origin. Thereafter, perhaps the Orissa Akademi would have applied to the Delhi Akademi to declare Odissi as a classical dance whatever the result might have been. This would have been a perfect bureaucratic procedure. The constitution of the Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi would have been modified to include a clause to say that the Akademi reserves the right to upgrade any form from tribal and folk and raise it to the status of classical or weave elements with support from visual and textual evidences into a classical dance form. The Sangeet Natak Akademi also does not have any constitutional provision to declare a performing art form as tribal, folk or classical and upgrade any *deshi* category to *margi*. The Orissa Akademi has never felt such a need and the Delhi Akademi confers such status by convention. The Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi has no provision for declaring a visual art form as classical or otherwise, whereas its sister organisation, Sahitya Akademi, wisely and in all appropriateness, never declared Oriya language, a provincial language for the purposes of giving awards as a classical language. By convention and understanding, Sanskrit is considered the only classical language and, of course, it goes without saying that there are classics written in provincial languages. (Tamil was recently recognised as a classical language).

It would be seen that classicism is an issue concerned only with the performing arts, and that too specifically with Indian dance forms. Sangeet Natak Akademi *suo moto* did not accord classical status to any of the regional dance forms, and it anticipated a move, a pressure⁷ which is always of a political nature backed by scholarship and creative work. There is no fixed procedure because certain forms like Bharatnatyam and Kathakali were instantly taken into the fold and Odissi had to struggle to get recognition first as a branch of Bharatnatyam and later as an independent form. One wonders if the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi should have had an Oriya Chairman (like Bhupen Hazarika from

Assam who propelled Sattriya dance into the classical fold) to see that Odissi dance was instantly accepted as classical. I enquired at the Sangeet Natak Akademi about a letter of authority which declared Odissi as classical. What letter, to whom? was the curt reply of the officials. I tried to scan the proceedings of the Akademi, it was too laborious a process to excavate old files and this did not lead to any substantial findings. All we have are only the woes and worries mentioned in the autobiography of Kalicharan Patnaik in his fight for the cause of Odissi classicism. What was the Jayantika group for? Were they spearheading the cause of greater classicism or trying to reconstruct Odissi after it was accorded classical status by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi? Several questions come to the mind and finally we are tempted to conclude that classicism was an obsession and the clamour for classicism has not died down yet. The fight for Odissi dance was over, now it should be the turn of Odissi music to gain classical status.

The clamour for classicism is meant to attract patronage and recognition so that one could come to the level of other famous and renowned dancers like Rukmini Devi Arundale and Pandit Birju Maharaj. Classical status would enable artists to get Sangeet Natak Akademi awards, and ICCR foreign travel grants. With such intentions and aspirations, the issue of classicism has become politicised.

Around 1958, while a fierce debate over according classical status to Odissi dance was raging, Humayun Kabir, then minister in charge of Education and Culture in the Government of India, made a statement in the Parliament and his plea was that the Odissi dance had been accepted as a traditional Indian dance and its classical status would be decided in a committee⁸. In an article on Kalicharan Patnaik authored by Nrusingha Charan Samantsimhara, and published in booklet, *Mo Kalibhai* (1970), the author had confessed that Odissi got recognition as classical dance form due to the initiative of Kalicharan Patnaik and the blessings of Lord Jagannatha.⁹ (Patnaik 1990: 342)

II. STYLE: FLOWERING OF A DANCE PERSONALITY

Any art form practised by an individual carries the stamp of his individuality. In a literary work, one seeks to locate the artist's individuality. However, painting and sculpture display ambiguity and are largely attributed to a community or placed in a specific period of history rather than traced back to individual masters. At present, research in art history¹⁰ has made it possible to find out stylistic peculiarities in the area of visual art and ascribe a work or a group of works to a particular master. Apart from the choice of colours, compositional patterns, mannerisms in delineation of forms, and other peculiarities of an artist determine a style. Sometimes recurring features like costume, an architectural set-up, a distinctive landscape help one in identifying a style. In dance and music, the problems are of a different kind. One sees the musician and dancer on the stage singing and dancing but one normally fails to identify the gharana to which they belong. As individuals they are

known, but their work and their style remain a puzzle unless one is a discerning connoisseur.

Of course, in dance, there are certain features like costume, which catches one's imagination when one watches groups of dancers from different regions. For example, Kathakali is instantly recognizable. But distinguishing Odissi, Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi and Mohiniyattam from each other proves somewhat difficult. Since they come from southern dance traditions they have similarities that blur the distinctions. To understand style and individuality in their dance we may dress them in the same fashion and colour and ask them to perform *nritta* not *abhinaya*. Our task will be rather difficult. Devadasi dance tradition is the source of most of the South Indian dance forms. Historically, Orissa is grouped with the South when it comes to studying style in art forms. Odissi dance tradition was sustained by maharis known as Telangi Sampradaya.¹¹ Moreover, Odissi dance revivalists also heavily relied on Bharatanatyam and Kathakali for elaboration of the dance form. Most of the important Odissi dancers like Indrani Rahman, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Sonal Mansingh, Minati Mishra, Kiran Sehgal and Guru Mayadhar Raut come from a Bharatanatyam and Kathakali background. It is therefore natural to find Southern dance elements in Odissi. Except the *tahia* on the head and *bengapatia* around the waist, the costumes worn in Odissi and other southern dances, the *sari* worn with a fan-shaped *panchi* in the front and *kachha* at the back are almost similar. Wearing a *kachha* is a southern fashion. *Veni* or the long plait donned by maharis and by Priyambada Mohanty and Sanjukta Panigrahi earlier in Odissi dance was also associated with Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam. Therefore, awareness about the southern dance forms will deepen our understanding of Odissi dance styles.

The pertinent question is how to distinguish styles in Odissi dance. A dance performance has to bring out stylistic movements (*angika*), express feelings, sentiments and moods (*sattvika*), and is accompanied by melodious songs and music (*vachika*) and display elegant costume (*aharya*). Primarily through these aspects a dance performance has to be understood, appreciated, and judged.

In the presentation of the entire repertoire, there is involvement of techniques as well as art. In learning a dance form, the student has to master the techniques, which are like learning the alphabet and the grammar while understanding limitations and determinants. At the learning stage, a student obviously cannot and should not cross the limits set by the grammar of the dance. But the sum of the techniques is not what a dance consists in. Art in dance, which is normally subjected to scrutiny, concerns a style existing beyond these rudimentary elements. Yet, only through these rudiments can one understand a dance.

Odissi dance has a fixed repertoire that has been largely accepted. This consists of *mangalacharana*, *sthai* (or *batu*), *pallavi*, *abhinaya* and *moksha*. These segments could be understood in terms of their property: *mangalacharana*, apart from paying obeisance to the mother earth, the *rangabhumi*, guru and *rasikas*, the spectators, also announce the arrival of the dancer. This is just an introductory part with invocatory song danced to *mardala* or *pakhawaj* with *ukutas*. The second sequence is meant to establish the visual essentials of

the dance relating it to different sculptural poses on the temple walls to the accompaniment of *mardala* (uttering bols like *khandi*, *gadi* and a *rasa*). The third sequence, *pallavi* is an elaboration of the visual connotation with the help of a musical mode, *raga rupa*. This is danced to both *svara* and *tala*. *Pallavis* are named after their ragas such as *Vasant pallavi*, *Kalyan pallavi*, *Sankarabharana pallavi*. *Abhinaya* is a sequence where the dancer with *bhava*, emotion mimes an Oriya song. The dancer has the opportunity to make appropriate facial expressions and communicate a *rasa*. The final dance sequence is called *moksha* or emancipation, release or finale. This again is a *nritya* dance but with a difference: no song is sung and the dancer follows the beats of the *mardala*.

A second look at the sequences of the repertoire would reveal its inner structure, which could be divided into two segments: *nritya* or abstraction with invocatory shlokas, mostly in Sanskrit as in *mangalacharana*, abstraction to confirm visual quality as in *sthai*, abstraction to confirm lyrical quality as in *pallavi* and pure abstraction as in *moksha*, and *nrutya* (narrative) as in *abhinaya*. *Nritya* is not exclusive of *nrutya* but the emphasis shifts and depends on syllabic pronouncements. This two-fold segmentation is also known as *nirgita* (*nritya*) and *sagita* (*nrutya*).

Nritya is abstract in the sense that it has no meaning to convey except configuring the space with the help of the language of the body. Technically, it consists of a number of grammatical movements like *sthanaks*, *thani*, *chali*, *ghera* or *bhaunri*, *puhanis*, *dian chari*, *mandala*, *rechaka*, *parija* and *hata* (*bandha*) (Debaprasad, 2002). A dancer uses these movements and gestures as needed in a dance performance and, in the initial stages, has to learn these movements, absorb them into his/her own bodily movements and assimilate the techniques. This is the time to negotiate and develop a relationship with the repertoire. Only then can the dancer achieve mastery like a good poet who chooses his own words and right expressions, an act indicative of determination, analysis and creativity.

In *nritya*, the dancer can talk of aesthetics and beauty, beauty of the movements and the whole being. Its magnificence lies in this. In *nritya*, the physical body becomes unimportant; it is the graceful movements of the dancing body that create the splendid language. In *nritya*, a dancer possessed of a style, grace and a perfect body creates superb dance images, s/he changes him or herself into those sculptural visuals. These are the high points in a dance and are the dancer's own creations, own manifestations. A dancer tries to capture these rare moods through dance, if s/he is totally immersed in the creative process. Through a lot of practice, a lot of work it comes naturally. These images or configurations are not pre-planned; they arise spontaneously. If a dance form is rich and if its grammar is coherent, the dancer feels like creating his own and adds to its richness. Herein lies the challenge of creating within a framework and going beyond that. This is what defines creativity and style.

In general, techniques are mastered but style emerges spontaneously when the techniques are thoroughly absorbed into the system and understanding is deep. When a dancer ends her/his training in acquiring these *adabhus*, s/he tries to build her/his own style. In

learning how to paint one acquires technical virtuosity by studying how to master a human figure, an animal, a bird, and a tree and many other motifs (*adabhus*) like in a dance. But the learning does not end there; s/he has to proceed further in order to create a picture entirely hers/his. This particular picture might belong to the tradition of her/his master but the picture is verily hers/his. This indicates her/his mastery over a style. By creating her/his own style s/he does not deviate from tradition but contributes to the evolution of a style. Unless the practitioners keep adding something of their own, the style reaches a dead end and becomes repetitive like a craft production. It is for this reason that improvisations are allowed in a particular raga within a *gharana*. Similarly, improvisations are a must in a dance. Normally, each line of the song is repeated many times in a dance so that the danseuse can improvise through *hastamudras* and *abhinaya*. In any improvisation, *lokadharmi* (realistic practice) and *natyadharmi* (classical or conventional practice) are blended giving an opportunity to the dancer to substantiate her/his art. This is known as *manodharma* (Venu and Paniker 1995: 41 and 86). *Manodharma* acting could be altered depending on the imagination and vision of the dancer: In some other dance traditions (like in Mohiniattam), a second *pallavi* called *Anu pallavi* is added to create greater scope for renderings.

Going beyond prescription and rigidity and distancing oneself from techniques is art. All great artists and dancers say this and do this vigorously. This is a kind of revelation that comes to them. Aesthetics is about distancing, distancing from this physical body, which has acquired the technique; only then can a dancer convey love and anger, jealousy and fear through dance. One distances oneself from the realm of everyday and then enters the realm of beauty. You dance the same *sringara rasa*, but each time your dancing body conveys a different meaning.

Style consists in identifying oneself with the character one portrays while dancing. You have to sub-ordinate, surrender, forget your ego and finally yourself and only then can you create a style which would be aesthetically unique. A dancer has to consider herself an instrument of her own art. There comes a time in dance where your movements are all there, you are aware of all your movements but you rise above these. It ceases to be mechanical. Flowering and flowing out are required of you. When you rise above the movements, you are no more conscious of your dress, your blouse, or ornaments. When you rise above the movement, the movement is *nritta*. Then only *nritta* will be *moksha*, real release and freedom from the body.

Great dancers used to dance extempore. Birju Maharaj, the great Kathak exponent, danced and sang only two lines: it was the season of rains and it rained. The rain is like mother's milk because it is refreshing like that. Then he went on to show a woman opening the window and rain falling on her face and her closing the window. It was all done extempore on the stage (Lakshmi 2003: 305-306).

In Odissi *abhinaya* the masters excel in the area of style. It is the *bhava prakasha*, the expressive feelings, emotions and modes that dominate the dance sequence. They are full

of meaning, and the interpretations of a particular song differ. The dancer emotes the appropriate expressions that are in keeping with the import of the song and creates the right mood. The master dancer exploits all the possibilities which are otherwise not codified in a choreography to be expressive. Kelucharan's rolling on the floor in the concluding portion of *Kevata Prasanga*, when the boatman, out of pure joy, ecstasy and devotion, pays his respects to the very soil which Lord Rama has just trodden, constitutes a stylistic departure and a masterly feat. Similarly, in his rendering of *astapadis* of the *Gita Govinda*, particularly of *kuru yaduandana chandanasisiratarena* Kelucharan creates his own unique style with profound intensity. In the portrayal of Radha, her intensity of longing, her mood swings, Kelucharan rises far above the prescriptions of the choreography, travels beyond the limits of time and space and reaches a state of eternal bliss. (Ileana 2001)

The swinging of the torso and steadiness of the hips are among the major contributions of Kelucharan towards evolving a classical style of Odissi. In Kelucharan's style, the definite movement of the upper torso both in *tribhanga* and *chauka* are the master's peculiarities.

In Debaprasad's rendering of another piece of *astapadi*, *yahi Madhava yahi Keshava*, the bitter anguish of Radha at the deceitful behaviour of Krishna is brought out in extremely poised gestures and moods and it denotes his individual style. His inner vitality and understanding of the requirements surpass the limitations of the body.

Pankajcharana's style in *abhinaya*, especially in the delineation of *sanchari bhava* is extremely lyrical. His elongated body frame was eminently suitable for languorous moods in *abhinaya*. While doing *abhinaya*, he never opted for ornate footwork but dwelt at length on the pervasiveness of the mood. Similarly, Sanjukta Panigrahi had a distinctive style of her own, which was linear, punctuated with jerky, but lucid and vigorous movements and footwork. Her *abhinayas* were wavy and stylized to the point of being exaggerated but never unnatural. Her tall and slim body had a contoured artistry that was capable of sketching sculptural poses. She had devised a choreography number known as *moksha mangalam*, a concluding piece like *mangalacharan* but interlaced with *nritya* and *abhinaya*. Sanjukta was a great dancer who had the ability to transcend the limits of prescribed grammar. Without being populist, she had devised her personal style, which was unique among her contemporaries.

If one is allowed to attempt a comparison between dance and painting styles of the three eminent *gurus*, one could say that Pankajcharan had a Puri style, authentically Orissan (I am not using the word Odissi) in form and content like the images in *Sahijatras*. It was lyrical and devoid of ornate footwork. When I say Puri style I mean not the present touristic exaggeration and garishness. I refer to earlier lyricism that had nothing to do with unwanted deliberations. His style claimed affinity with *devadasi/mahari* style of Puri, which again is unshowy and subtle. His style is inward flowing; you could even label it as philosophical and introvert. Pankajcharan's personality goes very well with his style, which is somber, lucid, lyrical and confident.

Priyambada Mohanty is of the view that Pankajcharan's dance items (choreographs) have the stamp of the *mahari* tradition distinguished by *atibhanga* and a peculiar flip-flop walk. Some of his popular items are the *pallavis* in ragas *Sankarabharana*, *Arabhi*, *Kalyan*, *Gativilasa* and *Deshakhya*. His *sthai* is sculpturesque, in which the transitions are very smooth but with assertive *chauka* punctuations. Although he is known for his lyricism, his vigour and vitality and the use of space as in *Glani Samhara* are stunning (Mohanty Hejmadi 1990:10-11).

Kelucharan was vivacious and populist in his style and in order to understand his art you can bring in the images of Cuttacki *medhas*. Kelucharan was modern not in the sense it is generally understood but in relation to two of his other contemporaries. He was extremely accommodative and in response to popular demands of his time, made his art over-ornate and most of the time gorgeous with unwanted intricacies. The flashes, which were spontaneous decorations, were also among Kelucharan's special stylistic features. He was extremely capable of being spontaneous when situations demanded him to be, and he always used his creative instinct (since he was from a *chitrakara*, traditional painter's family) to weave dance patterns. I had watched how Kelucharan once used his 'rolling' (sequence taken from *Kevata Prasanga*) to pick up a flower from the image of Jagannatha that was placed at a corner of the stage to offer it to Janaki Ballava Patnaik, the then Chief Minister seated on the other end. Rolling on the stage on the ground was a sequence in *dhuli dandanata*, and Bhagaban Sahu, the legendary drummer from Narendrapur in Ganjam district, used this as a very convincing repertoire in his drumming recitals. This kind of adaptability was Kelucharan's forte. Great masters do not ever commit mistakes. There is a famous Chinese saying: 'One who has arrived cannot make a mistake'. Once a Chinese master painter, while making a drawing, upset the inkpot by mistake and the ink got splashed on the paper. The master remained unmoved and created the image of a dragon out of the spilt ink. Kelucharan emphatically used to say that what he did and would do, would be Odissi, and he proved this by innovating and going beyond the limits of tradition.

Debaprasad's dance style could be compared with painted wooden images of Berhampur *Thakuranijatra*, a complete departure in stylistic manifestation comparable to both the images of Puri *Sahijatra* and Cuttack Dussera Durga *medhas*. While similarities could be discerned between *Sahijatra* and *Thakuranijatra* images, the Cuttacki images remained worlds apart. He was the most conservative of the three *gurus* and had a southern predilection keeping in tune with the waist movements of *sakhinata*, and *gotipuanata*. Debaprasad was in favour of using waist swings. He emphasised that such swings were of a local origin and were normally not adhered to in other classical dances. In Odissi it was known as *Samachhinna Udvahita*. He further said that in no sequences should the dancers' body be forcibly contrived, which might result in *asouthava* (inaesthetic stance). While delineating *rechaka*, Debaprasad laid great emphasis on *pada rechaka*, *kati rechaka*, *kara rechaka* and *kantha rechaka*. He was a stickler for the old Odissi style with its earthy movements (Mohanty Hejmadi, 1990: 16). His *abhinayas* are totally devoid of *sancharis*, adhering strictly to the

bhavas of the lyrics. He liked Oriya lyrics more than the Sanskrit ones. One can see flashes of Odissi practiced in forties and fifties in his style. On one hand he was extremely popular for his direct, bold, and less ornamented expressions, simple but meaningful gestures, sharp and targeted feelings; on the other, for his un-compromising attitude he was branded a traditionalist and conservative. His traditional outlook and conservatism did not limit him to the Jayantika repertoire but induced him to search for compatible motifs in Orissan folk and tribal performing arts. He went back to the roots to make Odissi authentic and saved it from the commissioned touristic styles. His search for earthiness took him to several *Prahalladanataka*, *sakhinataka* and *Ramanataka akhadas* in South Orissa. In the words of Priyambada Mohanty Hejmadi, Guru Debaprasad Das has played a very critical role in the development and popularization of Odissi deviating least from its traditions.

A distinguishing feature of Debaprasad's style was his application of *shavda svara pata* sounds to dance numbers in *mangalacharanas* like *Durgastaka*, *Devi Mahantmya*, *Shiva Tandava* and other *tandava* dominated dance choreographs. This added heroic and vigorous dimensions to otherwise *lasya*-oriented Odissi dance. His students, Durgacharan Ranbir, Sangeeta Dash, Sudhakar Sahu, Dhuleswar Behera, Gajendra Kumar Panda and Niranjana Raut dance in this style and have preserved this tradition.

Ramli Ibrahim of Sutra Dance Theatre, Malaysia has refined his master's style to a considerable extent. He uses his upper torso, shoulders, arms and hands in pure abstractions creating dance spaces charged with vibrant dynamism. His dance creates in me visions of painted wooden images of Durga, Kali and Rama. These lie dormant in *mathas* the year round and suddenly come to life when the festive occasions arrive. The strength and artistry imbued in those figures were a sort of perennial source of inspiration for Debaprasad and now remains relevant both to Ramli and me in terms of Odissi dance and painting.

A number of Kelucharan's disciples carry on their *guru's* style of dance. Most important among them are Sonal Mansingh, Kumkum Mohanty, Gangadhar Pradhan, Ratikant Mahapatra, Sujata Mahapatra and Aruna Mohanty. Of all, Sonal Mansingh excels as a creative dancer who has been able to evolve a style of her own. "Widely traveled, with an exposure to various cultures, she had imbibed a sharp and perceptive understanding of various dance forms and over the years has evolved her own art of aesthetic presentation" (Kothari and Pasricha, 1990: 115). To Kothari, Sonal's approach has been both artistic and cerebral, and she has shed light on the close relationship between poetry and dance. She has also a heightened awareness of *auchitya* in her presentations.

The lay visitors to dance performances may have no need for such an academic exercise and may not be interested, but they might be interested to know whose student the dancer was. *Kathak* dance tradition has four *gharanas* such as Lucknow *gharana*, Jaipur *gharana*, Benaras *gharana* and Raigarh *gharana* or Janaki Prasad *gharana* (Vaidyanathan 2004: 29). Similarly, Chhau has three recognizable styles such as Mayurbhanj, Seraikela and Purulia. Even Bharatanatyam has four styles such as Tanjavur, Pandanallur, Vazhuvur and Kalakshetra (Vaidyanathan, 2004: 99). In most recent publications on dance, four styles or

gharanas of Odissi have been mentioned: Pankajcharan gharana, Kelucharan gharana, Debaprasad gharana and Mayadhar gharana. Their able disciples, strong both in practical and theoretical aspects, should prepare separate manuals with clear-cut instructions for imparting training in each of the four gharanas. Teachers in the Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyala, Bhubaneswar should be in a position to teach the essentials of each gharana and their differences. There should be comparative analysis of stylistic peculiarities. Odissi dance needs an academic and creative overhauling on the basis of styles. If we label these four as eminent gurus responsible for reconstructing the dance form and consider them able to spread it through their disciples, we should then in all fairness concentrate on understanding and evaluating their styles and their differences. Otherwise, we would be doing a disservice to Odissi dance by rendering it prosaic and hackneyed.

Such ill-balanced emphasis on a few chosen gharanas in the field of pata painting has relegated into background Sonapur, Nuapatna, Paralakhemundi, Chikiti and Digapahandi gharana. Sooner or later a time may come for these painting gharanas to be completely wiped out. We should make sure a similar fate does not overtake Odissi.

III CHOREOGRAPHY: AN EVER-CHANGING PHENOMENON

Both in Sanskrit and Oriya, choreography may be called *nrutya prabandha* or *nrutya rachana*. It is a space-time construct with meaningful and pleasing visual quality communicating to the viewers the multiple and multilayered relationships achieved through a definite musical and rhythmic structure based on movement. The choreographer, through his imaginative devices, lays out a workable structure and time frame for his dancers to follow individually and as a group to bring out the *prabandha* to life. Music, light and other minimal stage properties enhance the quality of the performance. Although the choreographer uses a lot of traditional dance motifs such as *chauka*, *tribhanga*, *bhramari*, *chari*, *beli* and *thani*, he is not guided by the traditionality of these components, rather he reinterprets their contextuality and applies them to fulfil the design concept. The choreographer has to be all in one, a dancer, a musician, a light and set designer, a composer and, overall, a commanding voice with enough self-confidence to lead his/her dancers to the goal s/he has set for himself/herself and others. As Shanta Serbjeet Singh has rightly pointed out, he is like a juggler who can keep fifty objects in the air at the same time. Choreography is a three-dimensional projection or a spectacle that might appear as a highly geometrical configuration (*panjara*). But it liberates the dancers and sets them free to develop their own individuality within the framework of the composition.

A successful choreographer always chooses issue-based themes having contemporary relevance. It is extremely difficult to remain style-wise within the tradition and yet achieve contemporaneity in its presentation. A creative choreographer creates spectacles with human elements bisecting, intersecting, configuring and liberating a dance space with poise,

juxtaposition, void and fullness, all made meaningful to the viewers. In short, a choreography creates an illusion with meaning.

Dancing is a deeply ingrained instinct of human beings. Through gradual evolution it has become a natural mode of self-expression. Dancing excitedly at the advent of rain, dancing to celebrate a kill in some remote rock-cut caves, dancing to rejoice at a sumptuous communal feast, dancing over a victory are one part of the racial memory. These dances express outbursts of energy, spontaneity and instinct. These were performed through shared rhythmic patterns. When the primitive man enjoyed a settled pastoral life, dance formed a part of joyous community living. Sowing seeds, planting trees, and gathering a bounteous harvest were celebrated with dance. The village shrine and rituals associated with it provided the impetus. Shamanistic and ritualistic dances linked members in a society with celestial beings and the under-world of devils and demons. The metaphysical provided human beings with a view of the cosmos. The dancers enacted the cosmos dancing in a circle and tried to possess its spirit using masks. When we look at the dances of forest tribes and peasants, we realise the simple formations of the performances, their verve and vigour. There occurs a remarkable fusion of separate entities into the whole, which unfolds an amazing range of forms and lines. These were never choreographed as the term choreography is understood today, but may be regarded as historical progenitors of choreography.

Therefore, the earliest geometrical patterns of choreography are the circle and the square, which were identified with Bharata's *Natya Shastra*. Alice Boner's 'principle of composition' was intuitively developed while studying sculptural compositions. These were later substantiated by Kapila Vatsyayan's detailed textual study of *The Square and The Circle of the Indian Arts* (Vatsyayan, 1983). This study, which comprises the principles of *Natya Shastra*, *Vastu Purusa*, *Shilpa Panjara* and *Sangita Purusa*, contains useful insights into the basics used in a composition. The diagrams deal with the unmanifest and the manifest, the unstruck and the struck and the metrical cycle. The space-time prerequisite to choreography is an integrated science that gives us the world-view of Indian artistic traditions. Vatsyayan concludes that everything falls into a pattern, and the seeming heterogeneity of period, style, region or locality vanishes. There is always an eternal timeless fixed centre and an axis, and around this movement takes place both as rotation around its own axis and centre and a revolution in space and time. This study may sound too abstruse and academic but it has evolved from the intuitive to the structural, which has relevance to any choreography.

Choreography is a matter of redesigning the existing as well as invented dance motifs into a novel pattern with the help of the spatial grammar and time mathematics and of creating grace and harmony through the principle of correlatives and correspondences. The primary instrument of a dancer is her / his body. The creative instinct and the intellect construct the idea, and the body expresses it. The body has to be perfectly trained so that the mind can use it in any way it wills. The choreographer evaluates each movement and finds its unique quality. Apart from the design, the movement has to integrate intellectual,

physical, emotional responses and has to have a definite motivation. We are familiar with old movements, and most of us unquestioningly accept them. The choreographer does not merely accept a movement, but tries to understand it.

A few years ago choreography was unknown to Odissi. Dhirendranath's *Odissi Dance* does not make any exclusive reference to choreography, which has emerged as a highly sensitive and challenging area. There was hardly any choreography in the temple dance sustained by the *maharis* through the centuries. Nor was it known or understood by the *sakhipilas* and *gotipuas*. The revivalists had not determined the principles of choreography, and the great gurus of later years never properly understood what choreography was. They were all busy enlarging the span of the performance from fifteen minutes to two and a half hours and perhaps to fifteen hours. This was all that choreography meant to them.

It is observed that most Odissi gurus, while fashioning a new choreography, behave like a touristic pata painter who, in order to make a *janma pati*, birth painting or a *lila* painting makes unnecessary compartments, circles and triangles around and along the inner border. The painting becomes larger in terms of space, gets overcrowded with unnecessary ornamentations and loses its charm as a painting. Similarly, in dance-dramas, attempts were made formerly to string together in a disjointed manner, a variety of performances having little coherence and meaning. However, it remained a mixture, or what is called a 'free style'. This amounted to painting a large rectangular or circular pata painting having little bearing on the core theme. Now, even a *mangalacharana* item can be performed for full one hour and a half, *sthai* and *abhinaya* could be added to it in a clever way without announcing that one is really doing not *abhinaya* but *mangalacharana*. It reveals an anxiety only to lengthen a piece rather than give it a structural coherence.

Most of the dancers are concerned primarily with traditional performances, and do not wish to do more than perfect them, and dance them with all the virtuosity at their command. But there are only a few dancers who are possessed of creativity. They have the courage to venture into new territories of dance language; they cross the *lakshmana rekha* of the tradition to discover newer challenges. The choreographer grasps a thing, formulates its dance design, decides the beginning, crescendo and the end, and searches for new techniques and style. Everything said and done, dance is an abstract art. Conformity to actual conditions and insistence on symbolic representations are things which if carried too far can become an impediment to aesthetic presentation. Odissi, by its very nature and, for that matter, many other dance forms, are suggestive rather than expressive. The suggestions express moods and meanings. Therefore, these have to be subtle and meaningful. The dancer should not be over-expressive and emotional like in Jatra performances and films. The audience which is not discriminating might show its appreciation by clapping, but it makes classical dance items appear more filmy. Traditional hand gestures, *charis*, *bhramaris*, *belis* and *thanis* should be enough for composing a new choreography because these technical components could be reinterpreted, a new twist and meaning could be given to them. There is danger in borrowing the properties of other dance forms unless the borrowings are

cleverly manipulated and appropriated. But at the same time this may dilute the originality, the *nritya* aspects.

Expression is not to be confused with *bhava*; rather expression is a means of expressing *bhava*. The term 'expression' may be understood as interpretation or the science of interpretation (hermeneutics). Both gestures and expressions are part of hermeneutics and are within the larger domain of *abhinaya*. The problem in new choreography is how to situate a thematic requirement in choreography in terms of expressive dance motifs. Should the motifs be realistic or to say *lokadharmi* as generally happens in Jatra, theatre or should these be *natyadharmi* as in a classical dance recital? It is commonly said that ordinary movements of life should eventually support motif-building in a classical dance. In new choreography, such uncommon gestural expressions are needed and unless the interpretation is done artistically it loses its aesthetic value. An aesthetic experience is defined as "the awareness of the intrinsic value in a subject-object situation in which the felt qualities of experience are attributed to the object" (Prem Lata Sharma, 2000:29). Aesthetic experiences in dance are different from ordinary experience because, in a dance expression, it exhibits an organic structure having a beginning, growth and an end.

Kapila Vatsyayan's observation seems apt for new-age choreographers in Odissi although it is a general assessment of several classical dance forms :

When a language begins to be used by a large number of people at different levels, there is a danger of abuse of language. Further, when a language moves into different cultural milieu, it acquires a regional flavour and occasionally the regional flavour results in liberties which are frequently taken with the grammar of the language, not by creative artists but by poetasters and imitators. If the analogy of language which is used creatively and abused is extended to the field of dance particularly classical dances, it will become clear that with the dissemination of these forms to a large number of performers and with these highly academic disciplines becoming fashionable and 'in' there has been an unfortunate decline in training standards, leading to an absence of the essential ethos of these dance forms.

Odissi dance has now become mostly dance-drama, which is otherwise termed ballet (Oriental ballet). How far dance drama conforms to a ballet dance is a different matter but why it came to be termed so is to be seriously examined. In Oriya, how dance-drama as a term is to be translated is difficult to decide. Should it be Odissi Jatra though drama or simply Jatra? While drama is basically a proscenium performance with colonial and post-colonial styles, Jatra is performed on a three-dimensional stage watched by people sitting around. When we say dance drama, a certain colonial ingredient is woven into it, which finally leads to ballet or Indian ballet. This is a 'free-style' performance which might eventually develop into Odissi choreography, but in the end, in actual performance, it remains an experimental contemporary dance.

Should dance-drama be termed *gitinatya* in Odissi dance style bereft of its dialogue

components? Perhaps one could say so and face stiff resistance from Odissi gurus and dancers. Without specially naming most of the contemporary Odissi dance choreographies, I could say that the dance-drama choreographies are almost like Jattras or *gitinatyas* with too many narrative elements enacted on the stage with real-life imitations. Modern Odissi ballet dancers without having the trained bodies of the European ballet dancers perform on the stage not using any of the codified Odissi *mudras* but using elaborate facial expressions and realistic body movements. In such performances, one gets the feeling that the choreographer has not done his homework and therefore no proper synchronisation of limbs and body movements takes place. The Odissi choreographer rightly believes that there is enough scope for Odissi ballet dances. But due to the lack of understanding of time and space and wrong use of *mudras*, the performance turns out to be spontaneous and expressive.

In Odissi ballet choreography there is excessive use of acrobatics and mass drill. But even this could have provided visual sharpness and balance if performed after days and months of rehearsal. The *hata nata* or the *bandha nrutya* of pre-Jayantika Odissi would have been quite helpful here but it was given up because it was difficult to learn and practise. At times Odissi choreographers use traditional rasa techniques for *mandali*, *ardhamandali* and at *bhramaris* and at other times impromptu actions to fill in the gaps.

The choreographer has to understand the implications of time-space dimensions and the use of the temporal and the spatial. In dance, the spatial character is displayed not on flat surfaces but in a volume of space having several dimensions. The temporal dimension is reinforced by its visual character. Taken together, they constitute the essential frame of reference in terms whereof a dance experience may unfold at higher levels of synthesis, its formal, gestural and expressive aspects.

Form is the most important component in a dance choreography. The word 'form' has at least three distinct meanings: (1) that the body of the work of art is regarded as the intermediary between the material and the content, the vehicle for the dance expression (2) that it is the structural organisation of the work of art, regarded as the relations between the parts, or ways in which the materials are moulded or patterned in a particular work; (3) a generic pattern or scheme of organisation common to a number of different works of art, e.g., tribal, folk, classical and European ballets.

My aim is not to deal with individual choreographies, catalogue them and then analyse them. My intention is also not to suggest changes in any of the existing choreographies which have been danced not once but many a time. I seek to understand the design that underlies the composition structure, the way it is exploited by dancers.

The intuiting of a temporal work of art as a whole depends on memory. In the appreciation of a work of spatial art, such as painting, we have the whole before us and, in a sense, we work from the whole into parts. However, in a temporal work of art such as music and dance, we have the parts presented in seriatim and in a sense we work from the parts to the whole. Apprehension of the whole, therefore, depends on memory. The concept of *bhavana* or *charvana* of Indian aesthetics takes full account of this process of grasping the whole by

contemplating the parts, which come in succession and sink into the subconscious (Prem Lata Sharma 2000:36-39).

While talking of ballet and classical dance we have to bear in mind the psychophysical nature of European dance and the spiritual nature of Indian classical dance. In the history of European dance as in music the tendency is to break the rules, which held good in their time and theory whereas, in the Indian context, continuity is maintained through gradual evolution and change. Theory in India has always been respected as an unfailing guide in evaluating and confirming the merit of all artistic creations; it was never challenged or repudiated by artists.

Odiissi dance has emerged and evolved from a traditional Indian system of *Natya-Shastra* that has codified specific theories for application. Though Odiissi dance has its own regional peculiarities, nevertheless its basic source is Indian. But, while choreographing a new composition, a choreographer will no doubt use traditional motifs but the structure will be his, entirely new. The principles leading to unity are those of dominance, harmony and balance and those leading to variety, the corresponding antithetical principles of thematic contrast and rhythm. Obviously, the above principles of organisation are articulated rather than discrete; almost always they operate in conjunction with one or the other. One of the highest ideals of formal organisation is a structure in which all the elements and units are so articulated, closely knit and interwoven into an organic whole in such a way that the dropping of a single note would be felt as a loss.

Thus, we see that certain choreographies are strictly embedded within tradition, but still absorb innovative ideas to be different from existing compositions. The others are completely experimental and may not finally lie within the prescriptive modes of traditional Odiissi.

Choreographers should be aware of such distinctions and should not mix both traditional and contemporary compositions and claim for both styles the status of traditional Odiissi. The situation of Orissan painting and sculpture is different: there are a set of artists who stick to traditional Orissan style and others to the modern and contemporary. Such distinctions help artists to grow and there is no confusion. Odiissi gurus and dancers have hesitations about being labelled modern or they were aware of what they are doing, but do not like to spell out properly their choreography.

It is heartening that Odiissi choreography has evolved and all the major gurus have choreographies, which they call 'items'. These items, which are mostly traditional, keep on circulating among their students and when each of them perform, they do so quite differently. Yet it is satisfying that still these are known as Deba Sir's, Kelu Sir's and Pankaj Sir's items. While the basic theme of the items remains the same, they evolve through the efforts of their custodians. An Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya student once told me that his teachers, Minati Mishra, Pankajcharan Das and Debaprasad Das used to permit him without hesitation to dance their items and the teachers also exchanged items among each other. The *dashavatara* (ten incarnations of the Lord) item is danced by almost all the dancers as

a kind of 'must' for setting the stage and it must have been danced a million times. This choreograph has lost all its edge, sharpness and novelty; yet an intelligent and imaginative choreographer can still make it new and enjoyable. What I try to hint at is that the sense of change brings freshness and novelty to a work of art. This is also possible within the totality of a tradition. A leaf, a flower, a tree must have been painted and sculpted a million times and more. But a leaf turned out by a master is a unique piece produced for the first time. Of course it is not only the choreography at work but it is also the perfect blend, technical virtuosity and the benefit of long experience, understanding and creativity. If it comes from a great master, he does not consciously change it for the sake of pleasing people, but it changes each time the master performs the same choreography. Change is an inbuilt component in a work of art. It understands and grasps the change in a different way. Most of the time we tend not to appreciate that which is stable, definite and known but that which provides the element of suddenness, the excellence, the *chamatkar* in a dance recital. These qualities emerge only from a master and not from an ordinary dancer and it has very little to do with choreography but everything to do with the mastery of techniques. A master could alter the Jayantika ideas a thousand times but still could perform authentic Odissi.

But when you are trying to compose a new choreography and you are not intellectually sound, mere good dancing will not suffice. You have to be careful of other things, say of music. Music plays a very important role in composition, and in India these two sister arts have grown together. The composer cannot play a role which is subservient to that of a musician. It is observed that music is sadly lacking in new compositions. Therefore, the choreographer has to spell out his needs, and he should have the ability to take the choreograph in its totality.

With a number of bad choreographies of the *gitinatya* type Odissi has been polluted to a great extent. We have to remember that a good choreography is not an elaboration of a dance number, lengthening time and testing the patience of the viewers. Choreography is a creative work which demands vision, technical virtuosity, sharp and sensitive eyes and ears and a holistic approach to a composition. A composition, to lie within the parameters of Odissi, has to wholly conform to the dance tradition and has to follow Odissi music. Otherwise, a choreographer may choose a 'free style' and be completely on his own, but then his composition is bound to be experimental and not traditional Odissi.

A dance has to be treated as a text where the form, content and the aesthetics have to blend properly. The dance choreography should be read, appreciated and analysed as a text and preserved/documented for future use. Unfortunately for Orissa no adequate measures have been taken to treat dance as a text and to preserve it for posterity.

NOTES

1. *Nartananirnaya: A Landmark in the Literature of Dance*, in Berlinger Indologische Studien, Bandb, ed. Dr Inge Wezler (Reinbek: Verlag für Orientalistische Fachpublikationen, 1991, p. 1)
2. As the curator of Art and Crafts in the Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar in the early seventies, I collected a lot of *papier mache* Ramayana masks from Jaypur town and primitive wood carvings from Digpahandi town in South Orissa. My colleagues in the museum did not approve of my action. They said, as the curator of the Orissa State Museum, I should collect classical objects and not folkish things. After a few days, they purchased (not collected) Cuttack silver filigree works worth one lakh rupees. I thought that the silver filigree works which were made from an expensive metal like silver were more classical than things made of paper and wood. Till date, Orissa State Museum has not been declared a classical museum and it has an ethnographic and handicrafts gallery.
3. "An eminent dancer like Sanjukta Panigrahi was not sure what the term 'classical' meant when Odissi was given the status of classical dance. She, in an interview to *The Telegraph* in 1993, said that 'I would say that acceptance of Odissi as a classical dance form did come quite late in the day. In fact, it was in the year 1966 when Guru Kelucharan was felicitated by the Sangeet Natak Akademi that Odissi dance was formally acknowledged.'" (Barnali Sen, *The Telegraph*, 10 April 1993: 8) Sanjukta Panigrahi was right in saying so, because all the fight for getting a classical status from the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, was to drum support for an 'Akademi Award'.
4. "We are aware of the controversy concerning Tigiria and Dharakote surrounding the Sanskrit author or even the Oriya translator of *Abhinaya Darpana Prakasha*. The Oriya translation reflects typical South Orissan Ganjami words like *Ete* (for *Ehi*) *Kuthare* (for *Kothare*) *Ko Sthulare* (for *Keun Sthulare*)" etc (Panigrahi, 1995:7) Should this regional dichotomy in terms of language be an issue in the debate on classicism?
5. A few years ago, somebody made a nasty and superficial remark that a dancer dancing with a four-piece stitched sari solapith *tahia* and *bengapatia* and Pandit Raghunath Panigrahi lending his melodious voice is bound to be classical. Even though the remark is an irresponsible one, it has a psychological import. It means that Odissi dance as a form could be classical, but whatever a dancer dances wearing an Odissi costume and in the name of Odissi dance can never be classical. Most of the time, a discerning viewer could feel the classicism and he would not need a text to confirm his feelings.
6. "When the question of the recognition of Odissi came up last year at the Dance Seminar organized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, against the wishes of the Chair, to accept Odissi as one of the great systems of classical dancing in India, one of the arguments advanced was that Odissi is a variety of *Bharata Natya*. This was accepted by all those present as true; and it was on this basis that Odissi has been accepted by the Akademi as equivalent with *Bharat Natya* from the point of view of the annual awards." (Charles Fabri 1969 reprinted 1981 : 64)

Recently the position of Odissi dance vis-a-vis the Sangeet Natak Akademi has changed. The Sangeet Natak Akademi every year gives an annual award to Odissi dancers. This year (2006), the Sangeet Natak Akademi award has been given to Kashinatha Puja Panda who is a great exponent of Odissi music. Would it mean that Odissi music has received the classical status? In present-day Orissa, there is a clamour for recognising Odissi music as classical.

7. I am reminded of a pertinent issue which has a bearing on classicism in art. Sitakant Mahapatra, the then Secretary, Culture, Government of India, had submitted a manuscript on *Osabhilasa* to the Lalita Kala Akademi, New Delhi for publication. This manuscript had contained English translations of the seventeenth century Oriya poems and nineteenth century drawings. The manuscript was sent to Karl Khandalwala for review. Khandalwala was the Honorary Editor of Ancient publication. He gave an opinion that, since that was a manuscript belonging to 'folk' category (a text or a painting belonging to seventeenth century and after cannot be brought under the classical category was the thumb rule) it could not be published.

The Akademi had funds only under the publication head meant for printing 'classical texts' and 'classical paintings'. I was then the secretary of the Akademi. I could sense a 'design' to get the publication delayed. I told Khandalwala Saheb that in the Orissan context the time frame for 'classical' and 'folk' cannot be held valid, because in Orissa 'tribal', 'folk', and 'classical' exist simultaneously and the 'so called' time sequence did not hold good. Finally, the book was published with the help of funds allotted for 'classical' texts.

8. If by being classical a performing art form is benefited, why not make attempts to get *Chhaunata*, *Prahladanatak*, *gotipua* and *sakhinata* recognised as classical? At a time when the whole country is in ferment over the extension of OBC quota to 27 per cent and more, such a move will completely annihilate the tribal and folk forms. But who will take up the issue with the Sangeet Natak Akademi? There will immediately be pro and anti groups fighting each other and the academic issue will snowball into a major political debate.
9. *Deshe deshe jananam yadruchya hridayavallabha /
Ganam cha vandanam nritya tad deshbihidhiyate //*
On the basis of this above description Odissi can be seen as our *deshinacha*. We do not have *marginacha*. Since it is *deshi*, we have given the name Odissi to it. Our father and forefathers have discussed this. (See *Odissi Dance* by Kalicharan Patnaik, 1955 and *Odissi Nritya Alochana*, 1978, P 131)
10. "Aside from the sixty-six folios of the *Amarushataka pothi*, illustrated on both sides with a great number of scenes, which are part of the Museum Rietberg's collection in Zurich, we have been able to trace two other palm- leaf manuscripts that are stylistically very close to the Master of Sharanakula's work: The first is the *Ushavbhilasa* manuscript illustrated in colour, now in the Orissa State Museum (OSM); the second consists of nine folios of a coloured *Radhakrishnakeli pothi* that is dispersed. Four folios belong to the Suresh Neotia Collection in Varanasi, and two leaves from the Konard and Eva Seitz Collection were recently gifted to the Museum Rietberg Zurich, which already owned a third folio. Two more folios are in a private collection in Germany." (Eberhard Fischer and Dinanath Pathy 2006: 47)
11. "The Ganga Kings, who were responsible for the construction of the Jagannath Temple at Puri and the institution of dancers and singers in ritual of Puri temple, had matrimonial relations with Chola and Chalukya kings of the South. It was natural then to notice the impact of southern culture on Odissi." (Rajguru 1978: 51-52).