Tagore's Dance-dramas

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In a *Kathopanishad* simile, the evolution of the Supreme Spirit is compared to an inverted tree, with its roots drawing sap from diverse founts and yet growing skywards with a vertical thrust. The towering genius of Rabindranath Tagore might have derived its vital inspiration from several sources for its flowering in the visual and performing arts, but what always emerged was an unmistakable creativity of his own. Such an 'inverted tree' also came into being in Tagore's dance, where cross-cultural dialogue played a role in the evolving dance idiom.

This study's starting point is the account which Santidev Ghosh, a remarkable chronicler of dance-related events in Tagore's life, has provided, alongside the account of his own dance-learning in the Indian subcontinent and abroad, encouraged by Tagore. Santidev documented, like a faithful Boswell, what he saw as the process of efflorescence of Tagore's dance-interests, observed over three decades at Santiniketan. This study uses many other important sources and examines three key hypotheses: What was the evolutionary nature of Tagore's dance persona? What were its cardinal features? And what kind of cross-cultural liaisons did he undertake to arrive at a clear philosophy and a coherent choreographic mind that could lead to a genre of Rabindra Nritya?

Tagore had a teen-age exposure to Western dance in England and retained an obvious penchant for the terpsichorean muse all his life. Seminally inspired by Spenser and Weiner, he penned, in 1881, two music-dramas and one opera, and encouraged Santiniketan—established in 1901—students to participate in song and dance, himself participating in these activities whole-heartedly. Once Visva Bharati was formed in 1925, his interest gathered momentum: by appointing dance-teachers, laying down dance-courses à la Dartington Hall, UK, and often appearing on stage as a dancer himself in his plays and musicals. He proceeded to compose several celebrations of the seasons and create musical dramas like *Natir Puja* (The Danseuse's Worship), *Tasher Desh* (The Land of Cards), and *Shap Mochan* (Deliverance from Curse)—to be accompanied, wherever feasible, by dance. His enthusiasm for choreography reached its pinnacle in *Chitrangada, Shyama* and *Chandalika,* fully formed dance-dramas, in the twilight years of his life. He never spared any pains to source dance-teachers from the four corners of the country and abroad. India is a sub-continent and he sent emissaries to—and gathered knowledge from—Manipur, Cochin, and Malabar besides welcoming talent from Kathiawar and Madras. In the Asian continent, he had close liaison with Java, Bali, Siam (now Thailand), China, Japan, Burma (now Myanmar) and Sri Lanka.

In all these endeavours, he was enviably ahead of his time in that he had already motivated his young students to dance *en masse* in the seasonal festivities in 1919, before

formally introducing dance in the study curriculum in 1925. He was possibly the first choreographer and participating dancer, with an early systemic foray into dance, using the foundation of Bengal's folk-dance ethos—the veneering of classical dances and seminal subcontinental and later, regional influences of the Asia-pacific. This was truly remarkable, considering that India's dance-doyen, Uday Shankar, appeared on the scene only in 1929 and founded his Almora training centre almost a decade later in 1938. It was also only in 1929 that Rukmini Devi Arundale, the 'uncrowned queen of Indian dance', was first exposed to Anna Pavlova in Australia and took another half-a-decade to establish her school—Kalakshetra—in 1934. Even then, both Shankar and Rukmini Devi aimed at producing trained dancers through their illustrious efforts, while Tagore situated dance in a *holistic education approach* at Santiniketan, in the teeth of such castigations as revealed in the local reportage: "The boys are learning musical gymnastics, to the tune of *mridang*"! Finally, Tagore inexorably pruned his dance-idiom—including the classical dances—of its mythic links, using it boldly against shibboleths of ritual, upholding gender equality and feminine rights, and challenging the scourge of untouchability. His early exhibition of feminine talent on the public stage against heavy cynicism was another pioneering move in the social context.

What Tagore left for posterity is by no means a polished 'grammar' of dance that can be methodically followed by the uninitiated, but the record of a conscientious process of work towards it as well as a few finished products from his last few years that have incandescent designs of music, melody and dance for 'body-mind orchestration'. His musicals and dance-dramas are vastly popular today, but not many try to follow the specific choreographic leads Tagore left, and only a handful, like Valmiki Banerjee, are reconstructing the dance-vocabulary and set-sequences based on his ideation, complete with dance-syllabus. Tagore's own dance-paintings, rarely analysed, remain a pointer to what perhaps he had in mind.

European Fount

Tagore's dance-consciousness had a cross-cultural dimension, uncannily similar to the evolution of his musical psyche. But, as we shall see later, while he had good training and consistent exposure in his musical upbringing, he had no such luck in dance. As a teen-ager, during his 18-month stay in England, he picked up Western social dances in 1878-80, trying his hands at such esoteric numbers as 'gallop' and 'lancer' with suitable female partners. On return, the youth choreographed, in European style, the song 'Come, my friends, let's join hands and dance round and round...' in the play *Manmoyee* (1880).

Tagore was deeply influenced by European musical thought, especially by Herbert Spenser, who recognised music as an idealisation of the natural language of emotion and its links with various inflections of voice which accompany feelings of different kinds and intensities. In terms of musical tempo, for instance, Spencer considered—and Tagore concurred in wholeheartedly—that the *staccato* was appropriate to passages of exhilaration, resolution and confidence; *slurred intervals* were expressive of gentler and less active feelings; *pitch-changes* should result from passion; slower movements of *largo* and *adagio* should be used

for depressing emotions like grief or for such sobering emotions as reverence; and rapid movements of *presto* should represent increasing tempo of mental vivacity. Tagore applied Spenser's ideas, in toto, in his music drama *Valmiki Prativa* (Valmiki's Virtuosity) and *Kaal Mrigaya* (The Fatal Hunting), both composed in 1881, where he specified glissando among successive notes for weeping and staccato for widely-separated notes for laughter.

European opera also underwent major changes, shifting attention towards thematic contents under Richard Wagner (1813-83), who introduced *lieder* (text-based songs). Opera was no longer a mere opportunity for 'strong-lunged' singers to 'juggle their high C's' without any attention to text! It was the Wagnerian model of music drama that Tagore adopted in the above plays, in the first of which he participated himself in the eponymous role using dance-postures. He also penned a traditional opera, *Mayar Khela* (The Illusionist Game), whose songs could be sung independently and, much later, would attempt to convert it into a dance-drama in 1939; this did not proceed beyond the first act.

Era of 'Free Movement'

Tagore's budding instinct for dance found expression in 1911, at the age of 50, in the Grandfather's songs of *Raja* (King of the Dark Chamber) to which he added dance cadences. This continued in *Achalayatan* (The Stilled Frame). His friend Willy Pearson added an explicit touch of Western dance—with Tagore's 'clear consent'—among the untouchables in *Achalayatan* (1912), and repeated his dancing feat with more intense participation in 1913-14.

Then came the crowning glory of *Falguni* (The Spring Mood, 1916), with Tagore's pulsating appearance as the blind dancing *baul* (mendicant singer) in 'Let's go, let's go...' and 'Who's the madcap who drives me insane...' sketched by artists Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose. Pearson, too, danced with aplomb in *Falguni* in 1916.

To set the record straight, that was also the time when Tagore initiated Santiniketan students in executing dancing steps, carrying flowers and going round the stage in his play *Sharadotsav* (The Autumn Festival). The group-dances were 'You've come, O the beguiling one...' and 'We've tied the Kaash flowers...' By 1919; Tagore composed dance, for the first time, for girl students to the tune of 'The two hands play on ceaselessly the cymbals of cosmic time', inspired by the cymbal-wielding dance of a village-girl from Saurashtra in 1923. He participated himself in a group-dance with the song 'O wayfarer, O lover' in the musical *Vasanta* (Spring, 1923). These rhythmic dances were, on the whole, aimed at manifesting the hilarious mood of boys and girls in celebrating the cycle of seasons, which became a regular phenomenon in Santiniketan. Up to the enactment of *Arupratan* (The Ethereal Jewel,1924), only facial expression aided by easy, minimal footsteps were used.

Assimilation from Indian Subcontinent

From the mid-1920s, Tagore recognized the need of a formal initiation process in dance in two streams: gradual incorporation of group-dances both from Indian and foreign folk forms, and

codified classical dances brought in by teachers in Santiniketan. In the first stream, he introduced dance as a subject in Santiniketan's holistic teaching, and the folk forms—with rhythmic steps and swaying bodies, sans *abhinaya*—were introduced in group-dances for all rites and festivals. The latter were primarily culled from Baul, Bratachari and Raibenshe of Bengal and elsewhere. Over time, Manipuri rhythms and, later on, Kathakali rhythm-based dances were added to the footwork even in group-dances, but the *joie de vivre* of folk-dances supremereigned.

Regarding the classical stream, it must be understood that in the Indian subcontinent any teaching and incorporation of styles involved intense intercultural dialogue among far-flung regions. In Tagore's time of difficult physical communications, this meant a three-fold process: gathering first-hand information about the forms; inducting suitable teachers in Santiniketan; and, above all, assimilating the forms suitably with the corpus of Tagore's songs for purposes of dance-based expression, especially in solo dances. As Tagore noted, an enlightened atmosphere was being created in the country for teaching and learning dances. But the forms undoubtedly needed guided discipline under qualified teachers. A succession of Manipuri teachers like Buddhimantra Singh (1919-20); Naba Kumar Singh and his brother Vaikuntha Nath Singh (1925); and much later, Senarik Singh, Mahim Singh (for percussion) and Nilambar Mukherjee worked with students. Manipuri got its pride of place in Santiniketan's scheme of things, with the generally soft temperament of Tagore's *dramatis personae* found to suit classical Manipuri's *lasya*. In particular, the codified dances of *Chali, Achouba Bhangi Pareng* and *Vrindavani Pareng,* and the *Gamaka* process—with Khol percussion—appealed to Tagore's dance-spirit.

Kathakali was another classical dance whose rhythmic dance-components like *Kalasam* and *Saari* (with only a veneer of gestural *abhinaya)* under Shantidev (trained in Kathakali through three successive, prolonged visits) and later on, under a fully-trained teacher, Kelu Nair, from Kerala were incorporated in the training process. Among other classical forms experimented with from time to time were Mohiniyattam from Kerala under Kalyani Amma and later Velayudh Menon; elementary Bharatanatyam from Tamil Nadu under Vasudevan and later Mrinalini Sarabhai from Gujarat—student in Santiniketan; and Kathak under Asha Ojha. Besides, the circular group-dance Garba from Kathiawad was incorporated in a few dances

Winds of the Asia-Pacific

From the Asia-Pacific region, a transcultural wind blew in two different ways: first, through Tagore's own travels in those countries and, second, through Pratima Devi's visits and Santidev's dance-apprenticeship in that region under Tagore's active vigilance so that they could collect and absorb essential India-friendly elements from local dance-forms. As observed by Tagore himself and his scholar-companion, Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay, the poet's dance exposure in 1927 included the following: the female dance Ronggeng of Malaysia to the tune of *Pantum,* moving in circles in fast tempo, maintaining distance from each

other and expressing emotions in delicate shades; the female dance Legong of Bali—by gorgeously dressed, pre-teen girls carrying Japanese fans; Haja of Bali—short humorous dance-skits with music; the major Golek dance of Bali—with rhythmic music of Gamelan orchestrated with both five notes and seven notes (the latter possibly taken from India), marked by fast melody and very different from European instrumental music; Kambiong dance of Java, floating rhythmically with superbly graceful body-movements; *Tembem* and Batjjak-dojok dances of Bali; and the Bedojo dance by masked females in male costume on humorous themes.

Other traditional male dances they avidly witnessed were: Wireng Pandji Henem (on Javanese historical episodes); Wireng Raden Hindrajit kalijan Wanara Hanoman (duels between prince Indrajit and monkey Hanuman from the *Ramayana*); Wireng panah hoedoro (dance with bow-and-arrow on a *Mahabharata* theme); Wireng Raden Werkoedorokalijan Praboe Partipejo (fight between prince Vrikodar and king Prateep); and Petilan Lagendrijo (about ancient Java stories). Other dances were: female Wineng (based on martial arts); the famous *Serimpi*, very graceful and performed by royal princesses; and Jogjakarta's conversational song-and-dance. On the whole, from Tagore's exposure to Javanese and Balinese dances came a clutch of sketches and photos; a large amount of dance-literature; and high inspiration from Java's Terpsichorean excellence. . .

In the 1930s, three trips were made by Santidev to Sri Lanka to imbibe elements of the vigorous and masculine Kandyan dance from that culturally rich land and incorporate these elements in Tagore'e dances. Sri Lanka's visiting group also helped and, later, Ananga Lal from there joined dancers in Santiniketan. In 1939, Santidev went to Java and brought back, after nearly six-months' training, select elements from Gamelan-based undulating female dance Serimpi and Java's solo dance (with some 45 *Angika abhinayas)* Golek; the serene feminine dance Legong and Bali's entertaining (with angular Mudras) Kabiyar dance; Siamese dance—akin to Bharatanatyam—of Thailand. On his way, he learnt the ritual Poye dance of Myanmar with shades of Siamese Rama dance—enriching the assimilation process in Tagore's dance.

First Fruits of Blending

On Tagore's return from Java in 1927, the simplistic *Varsha Mangal* (Ode to the Rains) celebrations of earlier years acquired new veneer in *Rituranga* (Splendours of the Seasons): with both production and decor acquiring a Javanese nuance and Surendranath Kar designing a stage with a pronounced Japanese influence. Experimentation had begun already with *Natir Puja* (1925), performed exclusively by girls, showing dance in a Buddhist garb so that prevalent prejudices against dance as a low vocation would diminish. *Rituranga* (1926) followed, to be performed entirely in dance and *Nabeen* (1930) was chosen for performance by teachers and students in unison.

It is important to note that, once experimentation began, there was no turning back, leading to surrender of body and mind to a rhythmic unity. A wonderful medley began taking

place among many streams and styles, with new forms emerging. Some examples were: use of suggestive Manipuri Gamakas and Khol rhythms for group-dances; novel Manipuri compositions (tinged with Kathakali and Baul) for plays like *Natir Puja* and *Nataraj* (1926); Vasudevan's solo and duet dances for *Rituranga* (1927) with Javanese costumes and Japanese décor, mentioned earlier, especially for 'Traversing the lonely furrow...'; Santidev's use of Kathakali for 'There comes the furious wind...' along with vibrant gestures of Baul and Manipuri; Srimati Thakur's use of Western modern dance for the enacted poem *Jhulan* and ballet for the long passion poem on Christ, *Shishu Tirtha* (1931); use of the folk forms Raibenshe and Jari for 'Your call has beckoned us now...'; and a host of others like *Nabeen* and the transient *Kaaler Yatra* (1932). In particular, the large corpus of Tagore's songs on nature—complete with planting saplings, ploughing earth and harvesting (even carrying spades and axes), and celebrating the six seasons that could, in course of time, be set to dance-sequences—got a tremendous boost in varied footwork and colourful group-dances.

Two points are worth noting here. First, Pratima Devi, the energetic daughter-in-law of Tagore, had a stint in 1930 at the Dartington School at Devonshire, UK, where Kurt Joss, a student of Rudolf von Laban, the famous dance-scholar from Germany, was engaged in a workshop-based production of dance-drama. It was a great opportunity for learning how individual scenes coalesced into a whole, how students applied their full energy to create cooperative choreography, and how the idea of harmony in European music was used effectively to combine different dance-idioms and dancers to create a harmonious whole. This experience came handy for her to evolve, for Tagore, group choreography later and hone training methodology.

Second, many non-Bengali and non-Indian students were involved in dancing to Tagore's Bengali oeuvre., Srimati Thakur, hailing from a rich Gujarati family, was associated intimately with Santiniketan's seasonal celebrations throughout 1920-27, when she left for Germany for training in European modern dance under Laban, Joss and Mary Wigman. On return in 1930, she danced for Tagore with poems like *Jhulan* and songs like 'Come to the Neepa woods...' with aplomb, followed by her intense participation in *Shishu Tirtha*. Elizabeth Sass Brunner, a Hungarian student, danced to 'I know you, O foreign lass, from beyond the high seas...' Vasudevan from Chennai was good as a dancer but not as a trainer.

Final Flowering

The choreographic repertoire was now increasing. The message had spread and Ruth St. Denis danced to his poems in 1929. In the 1930s, when he was in his 70s, Tagore created *avant-garde* themes in the form of five complete dance-dramas: *Shapmochan* (1931), *Tasher Desh* (1933), *Chitrangada* (1936), *Chandalika* (1938) and *Shyama* (1939). All five had songs supported by dance from beginning to end—with the first two having some spoken words, while the last three were entirely musically woven. *Shapmochan* (inspired by the Buddhist Kush Jataka and derived from his earlier plays, *Raja* and *Arupratan)* bordered on spirituality and carried forward the text-music interface into choreography. It used the *Kalasam* rhyth-

mic variations of Kathakali for wrathful Indra (with African wooden spear in hand); and Manipuri, fused with group-dance, for the other sequences. *Taster Desh*, a clarion call against a fossilised society, drew initial inspiration from the modern dance of a visiting French dancer and its derivative genre under Srimati Thakur, but later, got blended with group-dances based on Indian folk forms and solo dances sourced from Manipuri, Kathakali and Kandyan repertoire.

Chitrangada, inverting the *Mahabharata* theme into a full-blooded feminist play, adopted a completely musical version taking off from Manipuri and, in between the lyric's lines, using unusual mnemonic group-dances based on comparable folk rhythms and even traditional Japanese style by Miki, a student. Later, Arjun's dances were transmuted into Kathakali—with eyes, face and hand-gestures suggestive of the songs' meanings, but without the traditional *abhinaya* of Kathakali. Feet-movements used rhythms like Keharva and Chautal from Manipuri beats, Teora and Dadra from southern beats, and Tagore's own Jhaptal for the lyrics. *Chandalika* (derived from a Nepalese Buddhist legend) tackled a daring untouchability theme and the production was based on the Southern rhythmic styles of *Swaram, Kaikuttikali* and *Kalammuli* in group-dance formations, but doing without *abhinaya. Shyama*—another take on human relationships—combined, for its brilliant first team, Bharatanatyam for Vajrasen (Mrinalini), Manipuri for Shyama (Nandita), Kathak for Uttiya (Asha Ojha of Jaipur *gharana),* Kandyan dance for Kotal (Anangalal from Sri Lanka) and Kathakali for Prahari (Kelu Nair).

The increased tempo of well-defined choreography was almost explosive in the decade prior to the poet's demise. There were further visions of setting the short story *Ekti Ashadhe Galpa* (A Confabulated Story) in mimed dance, and turning the earliest operas *Mayar Khela, Kaal Mrigaya* and *Valmiki Pratibha* into full-fledged dance-dramas, injecting more rhythms suitable for dancing—but they were not to be realised. Even the musically expanded play *Dakghar* (Post Office) did not see fruition in Tagore's lifetime.

Framework of Tagore's Choreography

The only thing constant in the above choreographic process, spread over a quarter century, was change! The dynamic, dazzling chiaroscuro in Tagore's dance-filigree was founded on Tagore's words: "Dance is the language of the non-verbal...ranging from the quivering grass-blades in the winds up to the garland of rhythms grafted in the stars...Verbal expressions can only convey this universal resonance, as known to every dancing atom...The flow of rhythm from such cosmic genesis into the body and limbs of the human being can make the creation process manifest..."

Once dance teaching started in the early twenties in Santiniketan—much, much before Rukmini Devi's Kalakshetra and Uday Shankar's Almora Dance Centre—the learning embraced *abhinaya* of the classical traditions as well as group-dances of folk tradition without *abhinaya.* What mainly came into vogue was classical *nritya* supported by *abhinaya* in solo roles and non-classical *nritta,* mostly among group-dances, sans *abhinaya*—both to support Tagore's music with occasional *bol* (mnemonic) intervals. Group-dances followed

mostly the Manipuri approach of *mandala* (circular) and *saari* (linear), without entering into diverse patterns on stage. This was in remarkable contrast to the group choreography of Western ballet—both classical and modern—that executes countless patterns in still and moving forms. Ballet-groups on stage can be very large, whereas even Kathakali groups seldom exceed four. The tenets of entry, exit, sitting, standing, beckoning, instructing, etc., for Tagore were clearly stylised, although ballet-dancers can mix stylisation with natural movements at will. In modern ballet, contrary to our slow classical approach, movements are usually not re-traced. This is against the grain of Indian dance used by Tagore, where the 'mirroring' of each movement remains sacrosanct. Finally, Tagore's dance-dramas tell stories in full, which is seldom needed in Western ballet presentations.

Tagore's choreography follows *sahitya* (literature) as an immutable pre-requisite, completely in tune with the Indian classical dance traditions for *abhinaya.* This comes in the form of verbalised music, again in contrast to Western ballet going in tandem with orchestration of instrumental music, and also used by Uday Shankar for his brilliant choreography. The literary potential of *sahitya* is fully utilised by Tagore in both *nritta* for group-formations and *nritya* in classical solo repertoire. With the enormously rich treasure trove of his music, the *vachika* (textual) aspect of choreography can be endlessly exploited. But, unlike the practice in classical dances (other than Manipuri), each line of the lyric is not expressed in *sthayee bhava* (predominant sentiment) nor adorned in *sanchari bhava* (with embellishments). In contrast, melody and rhythm of individual lyrics are viewed as an organic whole, and simple *mudras* of hand and *charis* of feet express the overall nuances. This is more in keeping with the Indian folk traditions that also play down varied facial expressions and *abhinaya hastas* (expressive hand-gestures).

As regards *sattvika* (facial) and *angika* (gestured) aspects, so essential for solo dance-segments, it is an imperative for Tagore's choreography that singers and dancers get together and analyse lines of the lyrics. They must keep in mind the meanings of *librettos* and the dialogue of dramatic characters, appreciate the songs' *bhava,* and decide on the final interpretation. Still following Spenser onr*Rasa* (evoked emotion), Tagore uses solemn and serene *ragas* (and their variations) rendered in *vilambit laya* for articulating prayers, devotion and paying tributes; songs in *drut laya* and rapid-fire rhythms to embody happiness and wondrous joy; and *meend*-based melodies with *komal* notes in *madhya laya* and broken rhythms to express sorrow, disappointment and downright despair, suitably altering the timbre of voice in consonance with the prevailing *rasa.* In other words, different musical moods need precise comprehension and are then rendered in a favourable *tala.* An outburst of anger and its cool, measured response between two characters in a dance-drama, for instance, would take the guise of a special song with *laya* and rhythm of one kind, and its calm reply with the opposite kind, to make the contrary *bhavas* complete and enjoyable.

A melting pot of dance forms and *abhinaya* styles, built upon the foundation of his melodies, lyrics and rhythms, gave rise to the edifice of Tagore's distinctive choreography. In his later dance-dramas, this damascened filigree was more successfully designed and

executed, grafting many approaches to dances according to the nature of the characters and their musical underpinning. Thus, the gentle Manipuri dance would go hand-in-hand with virile Kathakali dance, Bengal's Baul dance side-by-side with Sri Lanka's Kandyan dance, south India's Bharatanatyam with north India's Kathak dance without any apparent contradiction, and achieve an organic harmony.

Conclusion

How did, incidentally, Tagore's music evolve? Very early exposures to Panchali (musically-recited religious poetry), Baul (mendicants' philosophical songs), Keertan (devotional group-singing), folk music and narration of epics by household employees, were followed by an all-pervading ambience of high-quality dhrupad, khayal, tappa and sundry forms of Hindustani classical music. This experience was tinged by the Western opera, when he was a teenager in England, Western classical music, popular librettos and even Italian serenades. What came later was a fascinating commingling of the south Indian Kritis by Carnatic maestros, Sagun and Nirgun Bhajans by Indian saint-poets, and many nuggets of folk-ditties heard all over the vast country. But, all this time, the creative process was surging—blossoming into some 2200 songs neatly recorded in his compendium *Geetabitan* and notated meticulously in the *Swara Bitan* volumes. His diverse musical output shows an unparalleled blend of melody with superbly-etched poetry.

On a similar pattern, there can be no difficulty in developing *margams* (set repertoires) of dance-sequences *outside of his dance-dramas*. Following the lead given by him till the end-thirties, many parallel *margams* (with support vocabulary, basic grammar and training syllabus, as indeed are being attempted by Valmiki Banerjee, among others) can emerge. A possible *Margam*, for instance, can begin with the celebration of nature: 'Fly the victory-flag over the conquered deserts'; 'Let's get back to till our tempting lands...'; and 'O householders, open your doors to herald the riotous sprinkling of colours...', and go to the ultimate adoration: 'Victory to the emergence of nascent humanity...'

A standard academic approach to possible *margams* of Tagore's dance—containing video-illustrations of choreography carried on an accompanying VCD or DVD—could incorporate, besides Tagore's elaborate ideas developed for his dance-dramas, some guidelines on accompanying music instruments (namely, Esraj, flute, cymbals and even Japanese Kuto, besides percussion); costumes (planned often by Pratima Devi and Nandalal Bose, apart from Tagore's own suggestions); stage décor (with preference for such colours as indigo, yellow, blue and red for 'wings' and 'skies', and indigo for 'back curtain', as outlined by Nandalal); lighting (with the above four colours and the white behind the wings and the 'spots') and sets (with imaginative hints from Surendranath). These guidelines could, in principle, help in the presentation of Tagore's dance, which is seldom properly structured nowadays; the results could be strikingly at par with the work of Uday Shankar and Rukmini Devi Arundale, compared to whom Tagore was an out-an-out pathfinder.

Tagore was neither a finished dancer nor a choreographer himself, but an ardent visionary

who— instead of creating a well-delineated dance-corpus—showed the way in which others from the coming generations could proceed. The final spark of imagination evinced by Tagore in his line-drawings of dance in the 1930s adds one more dimension to his choreographic visualisation. Was he thinking in these abstract lines about a hitherto unexplored domain of the mystic of dance? Or, was he hinting at what would be the culmination of his thoughts on dance? Who can now tell?

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