



A Study Of Goswami Tulsidas's Poetic Works And Their Implementation And Influence In Bharatanatyam

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Abstract:

Goswami Tulsidas is a well-known figure in the field of Bhakti literature and devotional poetry. He is celebrated worldwide for his devotional writings, particularly Ramcharitmanas, which retells the story of Ramayana. His works blend spirituality with poetic elegance. Many of his works have served as a rich source of inspiration for Indian classical dancers. This paper aims to study some of the important poetic works of Tulsidas and their influence on Indian Classical Dance. By analysing prominent performances by renowned dancers who have brought Tulsidas's verses on stage, the paper aims to highlight the challenges and opportunities in translating his works into the visual language of dance especially Bharatanatyam.

Keywords: Tulsidas, Odissi, Kathak, Khajuraho

INTRODUCTION

Tulsidas (1532-1623 CE) was a great Hindu Saint, poet and philosopher. Believed to have been born in Uttar Pradesh, his works are known for bringing together spirituality and poetic elegance. His works have made divine and moral lessons accessible in a simpler language. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Rama since his childhood. He was a disciple of the sage Narhari Das, under whom he studied ancient texts and developed a deep devotion to Lord Rama. This devotion became the foundation for many of his popular works especially Ramcharitmanas.

Goswami Tulsidas ji was one such iconic figure who is responsible for preserving Hindu culture and traditions. He is acclaimed as one of the greatest poets in the world literature. His writings have a huge impact in shaping the art and culture of India that can be seen till date as street plays (Ramleela) classical music and Hindi literature. (Sudheendra, 2023)

INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE

India is a country with rich treasures of different art forms. These art forms trace the roots to the age-old traditions and culture of India. There are eight Indian classical dance forms recognized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi – Bharatanatyam from the state of Tamil Nadu, Kathakali and Mohiniattam from Kerala, Kuchipudi from Andhra Pradesh, Kathak from Uttar Pradesh, Manipuri from Manipur, Odissi from Orissa and Sattriya from Assam. These classical dance forms are deeply rooted in the country's ancient mythology and serve as a medium to narrate stories from epics, scriptures and religious texts.

Ancient temple sculptures and inscriptions also offer glimpses into the early evolution of classical dance traditions and their relationship to the Mahabharata and Ramayana. The temples at Khajuraho, for example, feature exquisite carvings depicting dancers in various poses, suggesting the integration of dance into religious rituals and cultural ceremonies. While these sculptures may not depict specific scenes from the epics, they reflect the reverence and



importance accorded to dance as a form of worship and artistic expression in ancient India (Mohapatra, June 2021)

All the classical dances of India frequently draw upon the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas to depict various key episodes from the Indian mythology. These episodes and stories are infused with bhakti and are conveyed through the help of music and text. There have been many writers and composers, whose compositions have become an integral part of Indian classical dance tradition. For example, “Shree Rama Chandra Kripalu Bhajaman” is a very famous Bhajan by Goswami Tulsidas which takes the center stage in many Classical dance performances these days.

OBJECTIVES

- To Investigate the connection between classical dance forms and Tulsidas’s works.
- To study thematic Bharatanatyam productions that have used Tulsidas’s works for literature and text.
- To identify and highlight various challenges and opportunities in translating his works into the visual language of dance especially Bharatanatyam.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research work is done by following the **Descriptive Research Methodology**. The research tools used are important websites, books, YouTube, and and perspectives of classical dancers. For citing the references APA style has been used.

MAJOR WORKS OF TULSIDAS

Tulsidas’s most popular work Ramcharitmanas was composed basically in Awadhi. It retells the story of Rama from his birth to the victory over Ravana and return to Ayodhya. It emphasises the values of righteousness and the importance of living a virtuous life.

Apart from the Ramcharitmanas, there are the five major works of the Tulsidas which are as follows:

- **Dohavali:** It has a collection of at least 573 miscellaneous Doha and Sortha in Braja and Awadhi. Out of all-around 85 Dohas of it is also included in the Ramcharitmanas.
- **Kavitavali:** It has a collection of Kavittas in Braja. Just like the epic, Ramcharitmanas, it also has seven books and many episodes.
- **Gitavali:** It has a collection of 328 Braja songs divided into seven books and all are of Hindustani classical music type.
- **Krishna Gitavali:** It has a collection of 61 Braja songs especially for the Krishna. Out of the 61, 32 songs are dedicated to childhood and Rasa Lila of Krishna.
- **Vinaya Patrika:** It has a collection of 279 Braja stanzas. Out of all, around 43 hymns are attended to a variety of deities, Rama’s courtiers, and attendants. (Singh, 2023)

FAMOUS BHAJANS OF TULSIDAS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION IN CLASSICAL DANCE

Choreographers from diverse cultural backgrounds bring their own unique perspectives and artistic sensibilities to their interpretations of themes like Mahabharata and Ramayana in classical dance. They explore the concept of adaptation by reimagining the epics through contemporary lenses, incorporating diverse perspectives, voices, and experiences into their choreographic narratives. Choreographers draw upon the rich tapestry of characters, stories, and motifs from the epics to create choreographic narratives that resonate with audiences of all ages

and backgrounds, transcending linguistic, cultural, and geographical boundaries. (Mohapatra, June 2021)

Several of Tulsidas's famous bhajans have been beautifully choreographed and presented by renowned classical dance exponents. These bhajans give ample scope for storytelling and expression. Furthermore, the rich vocabulary of Indian classical dance enhances the storytelling process when correctly intertwined with the text.

- **Shri Ramachandra Kripalu Bhajaman** is a heartfelt prayer written by Tulsidas, glorifying the virtues of Lord Rama. The composition beautifully brings forth various heroic aspects and qualities of Lord Rama such as valor, compassion, nobility and grace. This particular bhajan has been widely adopted by classical dancers such as the legendary Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi dancer Late Yamini Krishnamurthy, Madhavi Mudgal etc.

Fig no. 1 Bharatanatyam dancers presenting the poems of Tulsidas at Goswami Tulsidas Samaroh



(Image source – Free Press Journal)

Many dancers have given their own touch to this magical composition. Manju V. Nair, a Bharatanatyam dancer from Kerala choreographed and presented this bhajan from the point of view of mother Kaushalya who is reminiscing the childhood of his son Rama who is about to return back to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile.

As per a report published in Times of India, Lucknow - 65 dancers in the 6-30 age group presented tales of Ramayana through Bharatanatyam moves during a cultural programme 'Shree Ram Charitrartham' at Aishbagh Ramlila Ground. There were six performances which began with 'Shuddham Brahma' followed by "Shree Ramachandra Kripalu" written by 16th century poet Tulsidas. (TimesofIndia, 2023)

- **Hanuman Chalisa** is another important and popular work of saint Tulsidas dedicated to Lord Hanuman. Renowned Bharatanatyam performer and Guru Late Rukmini Devi Arundale has choreographed performances based on the Hanuman Chalisa. Many of the Arangetram performances nowadays feature Hanuman Chalisa as a special item.
- **Ram Naam Mani Deep Dharu** is yet another gem in the poetic treasure of Tulsidas. Bharatanatyam dance Padma Subrahmanyam has used this bhajan to present abhinaya focused on the transformative power of devotion.
- **Thumaka Chalat Rama Chandra** is a bhajan which describes beautifully the childhood of Sri Rama, bringing out tender emotions. Bharatanatyam rendition of this bhajan by Malavika Sarukkai beautifully captures the childlike innocence and divinity of baby

Rama. The Kathak Guru Kumudini Lakhia has also presented this bhajan with subtle nuances and expressions.

These Bhajans continue to inspire classical dancers to bring in their own interpretations and nuances to the narrative aspects of Tulsidas's works.

ANALYSIS OF THEMATIC CLASSICAL DANCE PRODUCTIONS BASED ON TULSIDAS'S WORKS

Various classical dance productions based on the works of Tulsidas, were reviewed by the researcher. Some of them are listed below:

In the year 1957, Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra was asked by the then Prime Minister, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, to choreograph and present a ballet on the 'Ramayan'. The academy used the popular text of saint-poet Tulsidas's 'Ramcharitmanas' and covered the life of Lord Ram from his birth to his coronation in about 2.15 hours. Thereafter, Kendra's ensuing production ran to packed houses at the Feroz Shah Kotla Grounds, next to Delhi Gate, and later moved to the Kendra's premises with a continued fanfare. (Background, n.d.)



Fig no.2 "Ramcharitmanas" production by Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra

The Hanuman Chalisa choreography by the renowned dance school "Sreedevi Nrithyalaya", available on YouTube, is a captivating blend of devotion, tradition and artistry. Through the vocabulary of Bharatanatyam, the dancers vividly depict each verse of the Hanuman Chalisa, portraying Hanuman's strength, devotion and divine service to Lord Rama. Each scene from Hanuman's leap to Lanka to his humble devotion are artistically executed with precision. The performance is not only visually stunning but involves audience in the divine narrative through the representation of bhakti and valor.



Fig no. 3: “Hanuman Chalisa” by Sreedevi Nrithyalaya

Abha, the story of Ramayana in a margam format presented by Parshwanath Upadhye, Sruti Upadhye and Adithya P V and produced by Punyah Dance Company, is a thematic dance production gaining popularity across the world. The trio have beautifully selected some verses, bhajans and segments from Tulsidas’ works to bring forth the story of Sita.

As mentioned in a review by Satish Suri, “The idyllic opening was set by the mellifluous sound of the flute as the three dancers, Parshwanath Upadhye, PV Aditya and Shruti Gopal, set the tone for a vibrant exposition of the alarippu through the Tulsidas bhajan ‘Mangala bhavana... Ram Siya Ram Jai Jai Ram’ and the mnemonic syllables set the rhythmic scale of rigour and grace.” (Suri, 2018).

CHALLENGES IN CHOREOGRAPHING TULSIDAS’S WORKS

While many dancers select Tulsidas’s work for their performances, there are many challenges that seem to occur while setting a choreography based on these works. This is primarily due to the poetic, spiritual and linguistic complexities of his compositions.

Tulsidas’s poetry while lyrical, is not always composed with rhythmical variations suitable for dance. Dancers may need to adapt the verses creatively to fit classical tala framework. On the other hand, some compositions like Ramcharitmanas are long and highly structured which require careful selection of appropriate verses and segments so as to ensure that the narrative flow is maintained.

Tulsidas wrote primarily in Awadhi, a dialect that is not as widely understood by contemporary audiences. Classical dancers must translate the essence of the verses while retaining their poetic beauty, exclaims Ratnam Janardhanan, a Bharatanatyam Guru from Nagpur. Interpreting this language into dance movements requires deep understanding, and there is a risk of losing nuances in translation.

Tulsidas’s poetry is highly symbolical and often uses metaphors and layered meanings. It is very important for a dancer to understand the underlying meaning from a scholar or expert before approaching to choreograph such pieces. For instance, consider the line “Raam Naam Mani Deep Dharu”. The literal meaning could be “place the jewel-like lamp of Lord Rama’s name in your heart”. But the metaphor of Lord Rama’s name as a “jewel-like lamp” signifies the light of knowledge and wisdom. The word “bhavsagar” is a recurring metaphor in Tulsidas’s works denoting the “ocean of worldly existence”.



CONCLUSION

Classical dances have played an integral role in preserving the ancient literature and works of famous saints by reinterpreting them visually in front of audiences. Implementing Tulsidas's works in Bharatanatyam in the 21st Century is a way of preserving and contemporizing Bhakti literature. Tulsidas's literature enriches classical dance by providing stories that are deeply spiritual and timeless allowing dancers to connect with audiences on multiple levels. Several of Tulsidas's Bhajans have been beautifully interpreted and presented by renowned Indian classical dancers across different dance styles such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Mohiniattam and Odissi. Several Bharatanatyam dance-dramas have creatively adapted Tulsidas's poetic works, bringing his timeless narratives to life through expressive choreography. Classical dances can become a powerful medium to revive and spread Tulsidas's philosophy to newer audiences. However, renowned Gurus and experts in Classical dance field suggest that dancers must navigate language, symbolism, emotional depth, and narrative complexity to effectively translate his poetic works into a classical dance format.

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