Abstract
There exist two basic fundamental dimensions to the art of expressing emotions (Abhinaya) in the Indian Classical Dance. There is the Outer dimension which is an outer or external level of expression of emotions - very well visible to the eye of the spectator. Then, there is the Inner dimension which is an Inner or Internal level i.e. an inner mental expression of emotions – to some extent, invisible to the eye of the spectator - but from where at some point, in one's maturity as a dancer, Everything starts….the Dance itself, the Inner Elevation of the dancer and the gradual progress to higher levels of Consciousness. The dancer's development of specific emotional states relies on mental visualizations - a form of meditative visualization. Sellers (2001) says “Meditation is thus within the domain of performance.” There are clear strong links between the external performance of gestures & facial expressions and the internal performance of mental or meditative visualizations. Hence Abhinaya (the art of expressing emotions through Indian Classical Dance) constitutes of a physical aspect of 'abhinaya’ and a mental aspect of 'abhinaya’. This paper analyzes how the gesture language of emotions in Indian Classical Dance needs - not a synthesis of both - but rather requires an interplay between physical ‘abhinaya’ and mental ‘abhinaya’.

Keywords: Gesture Language of Emotions, Abhinaya in Indian Classical Dance, Inner Invisible Dimension, Outer Visible Dimension, External Performance, Mental Visualization

Sri Rabindranath Tagore made a most fundamental statement about the transmission of emotions through Indian music. He says: "Indian melodies are invariably an attempt to transcend materialism of everyday life so as to lay bare the innermost recesses of our being. Words are limited to their worldly meaning but good music leads to a higher level". This applies exactly to the art of Abhinaya i.e. the art of expressing emotions in Indian Classical Dance When Tagore says that "Words are limited to their worldly meaning," the same can exactly be said about, and applies directly to the language of gestures in dance. ‘Abhinaya’ i.e. the art of expressing emotions through the language of gestures and facial expressions is and can remain limited to their worldly meanings. Sri Rabindranath Tagore further says that words are limited to their worldly meaning but good music leads to a higher level – in other words, unless one transcends the worldly meaning, only then can one be lead to a higher level. I would draw a parallel here - it is only when the dancer gradually transcends the language of gestures in Dance that not only the Dance itself, but the dancer and the spectator are lead to a higher level. Therefore, it is the whole responsibility of the dancer to bring the language of expression of emotions to transcend one first dimension i.e. the outer material/mundane level which is closer to what is more of a physical, a more superficial interpretation of the language of emotions; towards a second Innermost, Subtler and Higher dimension – i.e. towards an Intuited interpretation of the philosophical Truths transmitted through Abhinaya.

The outer and inner dimensions of this art of expressive emotions in dance are permanently evolving in a dancer – whether learner, budding or experienced dancer. Both dimensions involve total immersion, total involvement – to the extent of even total surrender of the mind, heart and soul/spirit to That One Spiritual Truth. That Truth, ‘Rasa’ (aesthetic experience) lies behind, at the very crust, and forms the very core of both Technique i.e. the Outer dimension, and Essence i.e. the Inner dimension. That Truth has to be neared to, through the physical Abhinaya – only then, does Inner Abhinaya settle in, which only then makes Abhinaya complete. And also only then, does the ‘Rasa’ (aesthetic experience) emerge and ‘tasted.’ These two dimensions i.e. the outer and the inner are reflected in all the components, characteristics and requirements of Abhinaya. The outer aspect consists mostly of, for eg. the technical aspect of gestural language i.e. learning the whole vocabulary of gesture language ( e.g. ‘hastas’=hand gestures, ‘bhavas’=emotions, etc.). It is in a way like learning any language - French, English, Hindi, etc. But mastering the language so as to allow oneself to go beyond, to transcend meanings, to attain levels of sophistications of language in order to convey subtleties;
hence to be able to manipulate the language so as to put forward Formidable Levels of Truths – is a totally different Inner task – and this can be undertaken only at one’s level of the Inner intellect.

At the very outset, in the practice of Abhinaya itself i.e. when practicing the gesture language of emotions in Dance, those two dimensions are, or can be present. In Abhinaya practice, there is (I) the Practice itself i.e. the outer dimension and (II) the Enjoyment of that Practice i.e. the inner dimension : (I) The practice of Abhinaya consists of rehearsing the vocabulary and/or what is contained in a dance choreography so as to perfect the technique or the technical language – this is the outer task – this is, or can be a similar process to what Tagore says “an attempt to transcend materialism.” (II) But rehearsing internally the evolution of feelings & sentiments, or the shift of feelings in the portrayal of a character, situation or story – this consists of an Inner task – a process, as Tagore describes it, “to lay bare the innermost recesses of our being.” Gradually the quality, the fluidity, the level of sophistication & refinement in the physical aspects of the language of gestures become totally subjected to, and dependent on this Inner task. This is because it is the Inner Evolution of the language of gestures within oneself and one’s Inner Maturity which will now direct, propel and instigate the right, rather, authentic Abhinaya – at this stage, the Inner Invisible Dimension of the art of expressing emotions takes control. Therefore what Tagore said above, about Indian melodies that - “words are limited to their worldly meaning but good music leads to a higher level” - also applies to the Indian classical dance art of Abhinaya, in that the gestures & facial expressions are limited to their worldly meanings as opposed to good, authentic, unimitated Abhinaya which can lead to a higher level. The physical gestures become only physical instruments which are manipulated by the power of the mental/Inner so as to transmit the feelings – both negative and positive. Abhinaya i.e. the gesture language of emotions, in its absolute form makes one enter, discover, ponder on, experience and bathe into the reality of both the negative and the positive states of being. There is a satvic (purity) feel as the dancer immerses or attempts to immerse into the purity of these two opposing states of nature which reflect the outer state and the inner emotional states of man, animals, the plant kingdom and all living and non-living phenomena. Hence Abhinaya has to convey both Outer and Inner states in order to be complete. None of these two states exist on their own. They sustain and are dependent on each other because they are complementary to each other. So, there is Outer and Inner Abhinaya. Even if we depart from the outer physical Abhinaya and after slow gradual interiorization, when we reach inner mental Abhinaya “to penetrate fully the Inner Conscience” as Tagore puts it - depending on the dancer’s acquired capacity, maturity, experience, sensitivity, elevated thought-power and intuitive sight – both aspects do remain Spiritual as they are both capable of delivering Truths, whether in the Visible and Invisible forms. All the more, the spiritual evolution which occurs cannot be complete unless there is mastery of both the Visible (Outer) and Invisible (Inner) states in Abhinaya. The completeness of the Outer and Inner aspects of Abhinaya (the art of expression through the language of gestures & facial expressions in the Indian classical dance) - as explored above, is all about the way Tagore describes the equivalent in music: “I feel as if Music wells up from within some unconsciousness depth of my mind that is why it has a certain completeness.” Similarly, Abhinaya, the expression of emotions in dance must well up from within some unconsciousness depth of one’s mind in order to achieve a certain completeness.

As far as Indian Classical Dance is concerned, philosophical symbolical meanings form the most fundamental basis for sustaining authenticity in the art ‘Abhinaya’. Philosophical/symbolical meanings form the essence which can bring complete justice to both Outer and Inner dimensions of the art of Abhinaya in Indian Classical Dance. But why is this interplay between physical ‘abhinaya’ and mental ‘abhinaya’ so fundamental to Indian Classical dance? Why should we dancers need to move beyond performance, beyond the ‘Show’? Hindu Philosophy has deliberately used the Arts/Performing Arts for e.g. Indian Classical Dance - as a vehicle or as a medium to propagate myths, allegorical stories, images of gods/ goddesses and symbolic rituals. These illustrate and explain highly symbolical philosophical concepts and universal values. Traditionally, the Indian classical dance has been used as a medium to recount stories or describe characters, gods/goddesses from the Hindu mythology; and one of the main objectives was to give more visual/aural impact to the philosophical symbolical concepts i.e. to make them more appealing not merely to the eyes, the ears – but to the mind and the Intellect. Hence in order to do justice to that Philosophical Depth, Indian classical dancers almost have the duty to progress towards that Inner Subtle level of Abhinaya i.e. that state of mind where you can infuse, through your ‘abhinaya’, the profound Breath & the Sacred Aura of symbolical/philosophical Truths contained in the Vedas - which will eventually make Indian Classical Dance essentially ‘a feast for the Mind’ – rather than merely a feast for the eyes.

These are a two brief examples of very High philosophical concepts and meanings which are transmitted through the medium of Indian Classical Dance Language of Emotions – using here, more specifically, the example of the emotion of Motherly Love. I) The Bala Gopala Tarangam of the Kuchipudi Classical Dance The Bala Gopala Tarangam dance recounts the birth and the childhood pranks of Lord Krishna [regarded as a manifestation of God on earth and representing the Supreme All-Perfection]. a. The birth of Lord Krishna symbolizes the birth of Wisdom in one’s subconscious mind. Using the classical dance language of gestures, the dancer shows a cradle which symbolizes the subconscious mind. Then the dancer (enacting Yashoda, the newborn Krishna's mother) places the newborn baby Krishna (representing Divine Wisdom) - into the cradle. This symbolizes the birth of Wisdom in one’s subconscious mind. The dancer continues by swaying the cradle and
this precisely symbolizes Divine Wisdom activating one's subconscious mind or figuratively 'swaying' in one's mind i.e. the mind is kept under the control of Divine Wisdom. [The birth of Lord Krishna is a favorite piece danced and even elaborated by other Indian classical dance styles like Kathak, Bharata Natyam, etc.] A still more thrilling episode on which nearly all Indian classical dances thrive - through the medium of each one's individual style of gesture language - is the episode of 'ghee' (clarified butter prepared by Lord Krishna's mother)-stealing by the child Krishna [see photo]. Symbolically, the stealing of 'ghee' is the stealing away of our negative/evil thoughts by Lord Krishna (representing Divine wisdom); and sharing back the stolen 'ghee' by the latter symbolizes that - after Divine Wisdom steals away the negativity of man, He returns or gives back to man positivity/positive energies. In other words, when man allows his mind to be captivated by Divine Wisdom, the latter has the capacity to take away (figuratively, 'steal away') man's negativities and restore back to him positivity/positive energies.

II) The 'Ninda Stuti' in the Bharat Natyam classical dance style In the Bharat Natyam classical dance, there is for e.g. a 'Ninda Stuti' - a dance item in which Parvati's mother tries to discourage her daughter in the love bond between Parvati and the god Shiva. Note that Hindu philosophy uses allegorically the romance/love between a goddess and a god to symbolize the yearning of the individual consciousness to merge with the Supreme Consciousness - [goddess Parvati, here, symbolizing the individual consciousness; and god Shiva symbolizing the Supreme Consciousness]. According to Hindu mythology, the goddess Parvati was a princess. Despite the best privileges of a princely life, she chooses the god Shiva as her lover/husband. But the god Shiva lives as an ascetic on a mountain, totally disconnected with material comfort. So princess Parvati’s mother, the Queen – like any mother, is pretty worried about the status of her daughter. She tries to - sort of - criticize and scorn at the attributes of the god Shiva, with the intention to sway her daughter's mind away from this totally un-mundane Shiva, chosen by her daughter who belongs to the high wealthy society of the royal elite. In short, the main philosophical-symbolical meaning of this allegory is as follows: Princess Parvati allegorically symbolizes man, who, even after having reached the peak of a materialistic life, is still not happy within himself. This is because, deep within himself, he yearns to merge with a Higher Level of Consciousness - symbolized here, in this story, by the god Shiva. On the other hand, the Mother Queen symbolizes this materialistic man - who, either out of ignorance or out of a lack of inner strength, cannot bring himself to go beyond the mundane, materialistic, glamorous aspect of life.

What is the most challenging in Abhinay (the language of emotions in dance) is being left behind i.e. it is that very Inner dimension which is often ignored by dancers in their busy schedule of giving ‘shows’. The technique or the skill learnt which can remain at a worldly level, does not then achieve or attempt to achieve this superior transgression - as Tagore says - "to penetrate fully the inner conscience". Incidentally, in parallel with these Inner (Invisible) and Outer (Visible) dimensions, there is also the question of teaching & learning - not only of Abhinay (the Art of Expression in dance) but of any art/performing art disciplines, in general - which consists of two aspects: the Visible (Outer) teaching/learning aspect and the Invisible (Inner) aspect of teaching/learning. Both coincide with two aspects of the study of arts/performing arts - the technical aspect and the intuitive aspect respectively. In the Greek world, the moral or intellectual power of the artist was not determined by his manual dexterity (i.e. the outer visible aspect) but by quality of the works that he produces i.e. the extent to which the individual intuits - which depends totally on the inner, invisible, intuitive aspect of any art/performing art works (Dillon, 2004). The visible, outer aspect of teaching & learning in the arts/performing arts constitutes of the technique-teaching/learning. But beyond technique-teaching/learning or mere teaching/learning of skills, there is the process of leading the student or the artist himself progressing beyond technique i.e. through different levels beyond the technicalities, in order to enter the intuitive world of the art or language of expression of emotions in Abhinay. Not only is this absolutely fundamental for all art/performing art disciplines, in general, but it is so, equally for the art of Abhinay - otherwise whatever has been taught or learnt about techniques or skill will remain at the level of the imitation phase. In any art/performing art subject, once the student has grasped the techniques, what remains most importantly is his transition to the intuitive sphere of the subject. In Indian Classical Dance, once the dancer has internalized the vocabulary of the language of emotions, there is a process of internalization and immersion of one's Self into the Subtle Philosophical Truths of mythological stories recounted, through the Language of Emotions (Abhinay). Although a dancer can obviously choose to remain only at the level of the story or the mythological descriptions, but beyond their physicality, at a more profound, subtle level – this superior transgression across various stages or levels of consciousness, as Tagore puts it, "to penetrate fully the inner conscience" – makes the reach of Abhinay for one’s Inner Conscience.
The External, Visible form of the Abhinaya language of emotions becomes almost dictated by one’s Internal, Invisible, Intuited mental grasp. The dancer’s Sense of Elevation will now dictate or direct the authentic Abhinaya in its completeness, in its generosity, in its intensity and in its fervor. The Abhinaya process and any resulting soul-feeling experience is now due to its instrumentation through gradual elevation of thought-power and comprehensive mental sight of the dancer. Rabindranath Tagore (Sharma, 1998) sums up the inner ethereal dimension of the Hindu basic philosophical concept of arts/performing arts: “Everywhere in this earth the spirit of paradise is awake and sending forth its voice. It reaches our inner ear without our knowing. It tunes our harp of life which sends aspiration in music beyond the finite, not only in prayers and hopes but also in temples which are flames of fire in stone, in pictures which are dreams everlasting, in the dance which is ecstatic meditation in the still center of movements.” To me - the language of emotions in Dance i.e. Abhinaya, is itself, Meditation. Therefore, in reality, it is an ongoing process to be an Indian Classical Dancer – because in order to move beyond the mundane, physical level of mythological stories and its mere descriptions i.e. from their Outer Tangible Form to their Inner Intangibility, from their Outer Visible Beauty to their Inner “Ethereal” One & from the Outer Visible Being to the Inner Invisible Being – the dancer cannot just emote from the surface-level, but must penetrate the world of philosophical truths contained in them - whereby the search into their symbolism represents man’s effort to decode and master a destiny which is out of his reach because of the darkness which surrounds him.

REFERENCES