

# **NRITTASWARALAYA**

**AESTHETICS OF PERCUSSION IN BHARATNATYAM**

**Satish Krishnamurthy**

PROJECT REPORT  
SUBMITTED IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS OF THE  
JUNIOR RESEARCH  
FELLOWSHIP, IN THE FIELD  
OF CULTURE, OF THE  
MINISTRY OF CULTURE,  
GOVT. OF INDIA





**NRITTASWARALAYA**

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**SRISHARDHA KAPIL SALGIA**  
(04-06-1983 to 10-07-2020)

---

A multi-talented, multifaceted, dynamic, feisty, and exuberant personality.

A life cut too short; an angel taken away too soon!!

Was it time to move on to another world without a goodbye? So she pondered ....

But not Her -

With a proper adieu she embraced death.

In her stead she left multifarious strings of unending memoirs.

She had been a part of many lives. not just touching upon but etching a permanent mark!

Creative to the core and always bubbling with innovative ideas supplementing it with astute analysis spoke volumes of her passion and dedication to anything that she took the onus upon.

Having a Masters in Pharmacy, she could effortlessly cruise around with her passion to Bharatanatyam, Carnatic music, works of literature, gardening ...the list goes on. Her dedication, devotion, and eye for precision to any challenges were euphoric.

The rock support of her husband Dr. Kapil Salgia

gave her freedom to explore. Her parents-in-law Dr. Salgia and Mrs Salgia along with her two lovely daughters Shriya and Shanaya were always there to support her ventures. The transition from her parents Mr and Mrs Krishnan who gave her a liberal upbringing, to her in-laws was smooth.

Throwing caution to the winds even during the final stages of the disease that shrouded / engulfed her she never gave up.

Unfinished tasks- she left none.

"Sprinkles Cancer Care Foundation" - A social activity initiative - her dream child was inaugurated just a few hours before her death.

I immensely thank her for supporting me in wording this book.

Ragini shall always live on in our heart and thoughts forever!!!

**- Satish Krishnamurthy**  
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## Foreword

Sound is energy capable of being received and perceived. Sounds create a whole range of impressions in our minds which largely depend on the pitch, harmonics, speed, rhythm, timbre and many of its other components. Thus, sounds can act as excellent catalysts to add character to abstract arts such as dance. The prime focus of this volume is to explore the use of percussion sounds, particularly from the South India like Mridangam, Ghatam, Kanjira, Morsing, Thavil, Udukku and Konakkol to enhance the beauty of presentation of Bharatnatyam and add rhythmic aesthetical dimensions to the art of dance and thereby create a new relational collaboration.

Rhythm, in its exactness, can only be perceived. Just like air can only be breathed and so perceived, rhythm in dance is perceived through the dance itself. Implied in this perception is the fact that one can anticipate the next piece of a rhythmic sequence. This implication has been used in various permutations to create rhythmic patterns portrayed with complex footwork in Bharatnatyam. Speaking of the Indian Classical dance form of Bharatnatyam, it is a dance form that involves intense footwork coupled with mime. To achieve this, different ways of portrayal of rhythm in Bharatnatyam were explored, a collaborative effort with a Bharatnatyam dancer was undertaken and a series

named NRITTASWARALAYA was done. Traditionally Bharatnatyam repertoire, or MARGAM as it is commonly known, was formatted and passed down the generations without any serious conformity to the rhythmic patterns of the accompanying percussion instrument. Rhythmic nuances of the Jathis, Korvais or even the poetic or musical compositions of the great vidwans and saints of the carnatic yesteryears were performed with uncanny ease. This left tremendous scope for the beauty of sound production of the accompanying percussion instruments along with the sound of the dancer's foot in sync with the finer rhythmic nuances of percussion to be explored in detail. The exploration revealed several possibilities of interspersing various rhythmic patterns and cross rhythms of Mridangam with equally intricate footwork which opened up a brand new horizon in the experience of dance and percussion music.

With a hope that this aesthetic exploration would just be the first step towards the realisation of adwait or union of various elements in creating the divine harmony, I hand over this volume to all my esteemed readers.

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. BACKGROUND

Music is the organized movement of sounds through a continuum of time. It is a part of every known culture of humankind, be it of the ancient times or modern. It's by far the best way to express rhythm and rhythm is the very soul of music. Rhythm, derived from the Greek word *rhythmos* meaning regular recurring motion, is innate to everything. Every element of nature has been carefully constructed in congruence with this innate rhythm. The rising and setting of the sun, the phases of the moon, the seasons, the currents of the rivers and the oceans and even the human breathe and hearts follow a definite rhythm for sustenance of life. Thus rhythm is the very soul of Music and dance. The role of rhythm in the perception of music is very important. Rhythm along with melody forms the most important element for all people to understand and enjoy music and dance.

Traditionally percussion instruments, especially Mridangam, Thavil, Ghatam etc., came into use in order to keep the rhythm of an ensemble and also to add a completely new dimension by the playing of complicated rhythmic nuances on percussion. However, the scriptural and sculptural evidences of evolution of Indian Classical arts bear testimony to the fact that there always existed an

inherent relationship between music, rhythm and dance movements. The earliest mention of the Mridangam in Tamil literature is found perhaps in the Sangam literature where the instrument is known as 'tannumai'. In later works, like the Silappadikaram, also we find detailed references to it as in the Natyasastra. During the post-Sangam period, as mentioned in the epic Silappadikaram, it formed a part of the antarakottu[5][6] - a musical ensemble at the beginning of dramatic performances that would later develop into Bharatnatyam.

## **1.2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

From times immemorial south percussion instruments has always been a part of a carnatic music concert or a classical dance recital only as a mere accompaniment. In reality each south percussion instrument, be it the Mridangam, The Ghatam, The Thavil, The Kanjira or any other or even Konnakkol (mouth percussion), is unique in its pitch, sound production, rhythmic quality and of course melodic beauty. The question always was why these instruments also cannot be given on par importance in a carnatic concert or dance recital?

## **1.3. OBJECTIVE OF STUDY**

Various collaborative features are now being explored to expand the dimension of Rasa which is the ultimate flavour of the indulgence in fine arts as a performer and also as an audience. This is the very basis of this collaborative work. This study aims to bring forth the uniqueness of each instrument,

1.3.1. To present rhythmic aspects of each of these through the Indian classical dance form of Bharatnatyam,

1.3.2. Exploration of the use of different instruments in the same korvai or mohra to enhance the beauty of the dance as well as create a distinct impact of the sound of that instrument in the recitals,

1.3.3. Explore the difference in the percussion playing methods in a Carnatic concert and in Dance recitals.

As the study progressed it dealt with many more aspects that are explained further as those motives are dealt with and hence this scope of objective is not exhaustive. In fact, it has been observed that as we went deeper in exploring aesthetics, newer dimensions with tremendous scope of research further presented themselves.

#### **1.4. SIGNIFICANCE**

A new dimension to appreciation of classical dance is opened up by this study. Classical music and dance have a reputation of being understood and thereby appreciated only by a few knowledgeable connoisseurs or religious practitioner of the art form. With this study an audience of no formal exposure to pure classical art forms is also able to appreciate and experience and enjoy the Rasa which is the ultimate aim of indulgence in arts.

#### **1.5. SCOPE OF THIS STUDY**

Improvisation is a continuous process. In this project the beauty of the rhythmic sounds of different instruments was explored. For this 3 different south percussion instruments were played by the percussionist alternatingly as required during the study and Konnakkol was also rendered by the percussionist. Due to obvious practical difficulties more than 3 instruments were not been able to use but it does not eliminate the possibility of it. The

compositions of carnatic music explored rhythmically were exhausting as a result of which much more compositions with similar scope could not be explored. However, they have potential to be explored as a separate study itself.

# METHODOLOGY

## 2.1. HOW IT WAS DONE

Collaboration with an experienced Bharatanatyam dancer was made and a series named NRITTASWARAYLAYA was conceptualised. Initially it was very important for the study that the dancer was acclimatised to playing the mridangam or the percussion instruments nuances on the feet. She realised that in order to play the percussive sounds on her feet, she had to understand the Konnakkol part of it, the complete talam and also the pauses in the talam in the most detailed way possible and her feet had to be quicker than her thoughts.

## 2.2. INITIAL CHALLENGES

The foremost challenge was that when a percussion instrument is played, many minute sounds are also generated that are a part of the mathematical calculation aspect of the percussion. In a dancer's perspective, it is impossible to play each and every sound that was produced while playing the percussion. Hence, although improvisations were constantly attempted, the dancer always presented the pre-planned and the rigorously practiced versions.

The second challenge was that as the dancer was able to play the percussion nuances on the foot, the recital began to seem increasingly like a different classical dance

form altogether and the concept was heading towards a tangent. In order to restore the innate kinetic portrayal of the steps in Bharatnatyam, the dancer had to understand in detail how to portray all the percussion intricacies and at the same time preserving the traditional and technically correct portrayal of Bharatnatyam.

To understand and adapt the footwork of Bharatnatyam to dance the rhythmic intricacies of the percussion instrument, the dancer had to retrace back to practicing the basic steps of Bharatnatyam called adavus in intricate rhythmic patterns of the Mridangam with the help of the percussionist. This was the process that was undergone by the dancer and the percussionist to arrive to the very beginning of the Nritya Laya Series.

### **2.3. NRITTASWARALAYA**

The series was named Nritya Laya, where Nritya stands for Dance and Laya for Rhythm. At the beginning, the collaboration focussed primarily on reaching out to an inexperienced audience in such a way that the beauty of the concept was completely highlighted. As the concept was accepted and appreciated, further improvisations in the form of exploring musically difficult compositions in the Nritya Laya format was attempted.

#### **2.3.1. PALLAVI AND THANDAVA LASYA**

PALLAVI in carnatic music is the thematic line of a composition. It is the first line with which a composition begins. As an extrapolation of this fact and in accordance with the first piece of recital in Bharatnatyam being invocation of the Gods and obessiance to all the Gurus, Vadya Vrindam and the

audience PALLAVI in the Nritya Laya series was composed.

The PALLAVI was fused with a THANDAV LASYA presentation in reverence to Lord Shiva as he is the Lord of Dance and the embodiment of rhythm.

The Pallavi was composed as an invocatory piece in Raagam Brindavana Saranga set to Adi Talam.

The swaras used were:

Ni, Sa, Ma, Ri, Ni, Pa, Ni, Sa

Ri, Ma, Ni, Pa, Ma, Pa, Ni, Sa

Being an invocatory piece, the Pallavi is kept very light and easy in terms of both the rhythmic patterns and the dance. Hence konnakol and easy rhythms are used in this. Also the body stretching and movements are showcased a lot in this song.

The pallavi begins with chathushra vilambam.

When Ri line is sung a Konnakkol is also recited by the percussionist above that and a rhythmic part is created and portrayed by the dancer too.

This is followed by thisra vilambam. Then chatusra madhyamam, Thisra madhyamam, Chatusram drutham, Thisra drutham and finally Anudrutham speed is taken. This speed is chosen by the dancer to seek the blessings from the Lord, the musicians, the audience and the mother earth.

The transition from the Pallavi to the Thandava Lasya is depicted by the change in raagam from Brindavana Saranga to Revathi with the rendition of the following shloka:

Shudhaspatika sankaaasham.  
Trinetram panchavatrakam.  
Gangadharam dashabujham.  
Sarva bharaana bhooshitham.  
Neelagreevam sashaankaankam.  
Ghyanaayagno paveethinam.  
Vyagra charmo thareeyamcha  
Hanernyam abhayapradham.

Neelakanthaya....(musical piece)  
Mrityunjayaaya....(mridangam piece)  
Sarveshwaraaya....(Kanjira piece)  
Sadaashivaaya.....(Kanjira Piece)  
Shriman Mahadevaaya  
Namaha..(Dhitdhit Tai)  
Namaha..(Dhitdhit Tai)

Namaha(rendered on Ghatam instead of spoken)

The above shloka is a description of Lord Shiva and also his various names taken from the sacred Rudram Chamakam. Rhythmically these have been rendered in beats of 4 and musical support is provided by either an instrumentalist like a violinist or flutist or by a vocalist or by both.

Before the beginning of the Thandava and the Lasya a small teermanam is played interspersed with the Divyanamam,

“OM NAMAH SHIVAAYA SHIVAAYA NAMAH OM  
SHIVA SHIVA SHANKARA PARAMAH SHIVA  
OM NAMAH SHIVAAYA SHIVAAYA NAMAH OM  
HARA HARA SHANKARA GANNAADHIPATHE”



The teermanam is composed in such a way that it is in both Chatusram and Thisra nadai and the same is emphasised beautifully by the dancer's choreography.

Further the Thandava and the Lasya pieces begin with Thandav in Khanda Nadai and Lasya in Thisra Nadai.

The piece ends with a long teermanam having both Khanda Nadai and thisra nadai and finally ending with Khanda nadai.

### **2.3.2. GANAPATHI SHLOKAM, MAHAMANTRAM, PADANTH AND GANESHA PANCHARATNAM**

The use of shlokams from the Vedas and Puranas and the Upanishads in Nritya Laya pieces is a unique attempt. It is commonly observed that since these shlokams are taken from the sacred scriptures, they are in ad lib format that is they were never created to be rendered in any set tala and so were always rendered by the vocalist in his or her manodharana so as to give maximum scope of mime to the dancer. This also opened up a wide scope for the renditions of these shlokams in any rhythmic cycle and this is what has been a unique attempt in this collaboration. The shlokams were rendered by the vocalist in the ad lib format during Nritya Laya presentation while the mridangam was played in different rhythmic cycles to match the tonal pronunciation nuances of the shlokams.

Vakratunda Mahakaaya Suryakoti Samaprabha |  
Nirvighnam Kuru Me Deva Sarva Karyeshu Sarvada ||

This was the first shloka used. The rendition of the shloka is usually in the virutham format, that is, it is devoid of any set tala. The shloka is usually rendered as per the manodharana of the vocalist and gives immense scope to the dancer for abhinaya.

In Nritya Laya, this shloka is rendered in the simple chatusram that is the 4 beat cycle facilitating the dancer to make an entry onto the stage and set the pace for the further pieces.

The next rendition is that of the Ganesha Mahamantram from the Rig Veda,

Om Gananaam Tva Ganapathikum Havaa Mahe  
Kavim Kavinamupamashra Vastamam |  
Jyeshtharajam Brahmanaam Brahmanaspatha  
Aanashrunvannotibhisseedhasaadhanam ||  
Om Mahaganapathaye Namaha |

In Nritya Laya, the rendition of this shloka by the Mridangist is in all the 5 jaathis to create the Panchajaathi format starting from chatusram moving on to tisram, khandam, mishram and finally sankeernam. Each jaathi is played 4 times. The concluding verse of the shloka, “Om Mahaganapathaye Namah” is rendered as though it is a teermanam to the Panchajaathi and hence is sung 3 times.

The next piece is inspired by the way the Padanth's are rendered in Kathak. The verse chosen is as follows:

Ganaanaam Ganapathim Ganesha Lambodara Sohe  
 Bhuja Char Ek danth Chandrama Lalata Raje |  
 Brahma Vishnu Mahesha Taale de Dhrupada Gaave  
 Ativichitra Ganaanaam aaja Mridang Bajave ||  
 This shloka is rendered a total of three times.

The first time the Mridangist's playing of the Mridangam, the recitation of the shloka and the dancer's footwork are in sync to delineate the harmonic patterns.

The second time is attempted in the form of a call and answer like a very concise jugalbandhi where the dancer plays every word of the shloka with the footwork.

For example:

Padanth	Dancer
Ganaanam	Thajham, tha
Ganapathi	Thathathatha
Ganesha	thathatha
Lambodara sohe	Tat jham thathatat jham

At the end of the Padanth, when the final word "Mridanga Bajave" is narrated the teermanam "*Kitathiku Tharikita Thom, tha,, Kitathiku Tharikita Thom, tha,, Kitathiku Tharikita Tho*" is performed by the dancer.

The third time the entire shloka is rendered with improvised complex rhythmic patterns played on the Mridangam and by the dancer's Nritha which then ends with a teermanam on the Mridangam and various poses of Lord Ganesha by the dancer.

This shloka is immediately followed by a

traditional Mridangam pattern of a Mutthaippu as the teermanam. A mutthaippu of 40 aksharams is chosen and played three times with a gap of 4 beats played 2 times. This makes the total aksharams of the Mutthaippu as 128.

The beauty of the mutthaippu lies in the way it is rendered. The way the piece is played on the Mridangam and rendered by the dancer is exactly the same but the Konnakkol shollus of the Mutthaippu as narrated by the Mridangist go exactly opposite to it. This can be explained as follows:

Mutthaippu played on Mridangam	Footwork to mutthaippu by dancer	Mutthaippu konnakkol shollus
Tai dhithdit tai Tomtattom	Tai dhithdit tai Tomtattom	Tai dhithdit tai Tom,,tat,,Tom
Tai tai dhithdit tai Tom,tat,tom	Tai tai dhithdit tai Tom,tat,tom	Tai tai dhithdit tai Tom,tat,tom
Tai tai tai dhithdit tai Tom,,tat,,tom	Tai tai tai dhithdit tai Tom,,tat,,tom	Tai tai tai dhithdit tai Tomtattom

The entire Mutthaippu is rendered in this fashion which continuously appears cross between the Mridangam and footwork and the shollus of konnakkol only finally converging at the samam.

Yet another variation in fusing rhythms with shlokams has been attempted. The Adi Shankaracharya created Ganesha Pancharatna Stotram was taken and various rhythmic patterns were set to it.

Mudaa-Karaatta-Modakam Sadaa Vimukti-Saadhakam  
Kalaa-Dhara-Avatamsakam Vilaasi-Loka-Rakssakam |

Anaayakai[a-E]ka-Naayakam Vinaashitebha-Daityakam  
Nata-Ashubha-Ashu-Naashakam Namaami Vinaayakam ||1||

Nate[a-I]tara-Ati-Bhiikaram Navo[a-U]dita-Arka-Bhaasvaram  
Namat-Sura-Ari-Nir-Jaram Nata-Adhika-Apad-Uddharam |  
Sure[a-I]shvaram Nidhi-[I]ishvaram Gaje[a-I]shvaram  
Ganne[a-I]shvaram  
Mahe[a-I]shvaram Tama-Ashraye Paraatparam Nir-Antaram ||2||

Samasta-Loka-Shamkaram Nirasta-Daitya-Kun.jaram  
Dare[a-I]taro[a-U]daram Varam Varebha-Vaktram-Akssaram |  
Krpaa-Karam Kssamaa-Karam Mudaa-Karam Yashas-Karam  
Manas-Karam Namas-Krtaam Namas-Karomi Bhaasvaram ||3||

Akincana-[A]arti-Maarjanam Cirantano[a-U]kti-Bhaajanam  
Pura-Ari-Puurva-Nandanam Sura-Ari-Garva-Carvannam |  
Prapan.ca-Naasha-Bhiissannam Dhananjaya-[A]adi-  
Bhuussannam  
Kapola-Daana-Vaarannam Bhaje Puraanna-Vaarannam ||4||

Nitaanta-Kaanta-Danta-Kaantim-Antaka-Antaka-[A]atmajam  
Acintya-Ruupam-Anta-Hiinam-Antaraaya-Krntanam |  
Hrd-Antare Nirantaram Vasantam-Eva Yoginaam  
Tam-Eka-Dantam-Eva Tam Vicintayaami Santatam ||5||

The first canto of the shlokam is rendered in simple 8 beat cycle of Adi talam with the complication of Athita graham added to it. To play the canto in athita graham a musical piece was composed and played by the instrumentalist, either violin or flute, and the piece ended exactly at the time frame before samam when the shlokam was set to start.

Careful consideration was given to the fact that when the words of the shlokas were split to depict the jaathis, the words did not lose their innate meaning and context, so the authenticity of the shlokam was maintained at all times.

The first canto was ended with a teermanam with rhythmic complexities and musical nuances also ending at athita graham paving the way to the next canto.

The second canto of the shlokam was rendered in ad lib format with percussion support to the mime of the dancer.

The third canto was once again set to a taalam of 13 beats cycle. The cycle is divided as 9 and 4 beats starting at athita graham. Once again, careful consideration was given to the fact that the words when split in pronunciation as per the jaathis did not lose their meaning and authenticity.

The fourth canto was again rendered in ad lib format and the fifth canto was composed in the Panchajaathi format starting at athita graham. The rhythmic patterns are set in the descending order of the jaathis with sankeernam followed by khandam, mishram and ending either in tisram or in chatusram. Once again the various names of Lord Ganesha are recited with the dancer ending the piece with various poses of the Lord while following the rhythm.

The possibilities of rendering rhythmic patterns to the ad lib composed shlokams are limitless. The combinations of the rhythmic nuances with scope for improvisations are exponential in number.

### 2.3.3. SHIVA PANCHAAKSHARA STOTRAM

The Shiva Panchaakshara Stotram by Adi Shankaracharya was chosen for the depiction of Lord Shiva through the Nritya Laya concept.

Naagendra-Haaraaya Tri-Locanaaya  
Bhasma-Angga-Raagaaya Mahe[a-Ii]shvaraaya |  
Nityaaya Shuddhaaya Dig-Ambaraaya  
Tasmai Nakaaraaya Namah Shivaaya ||1||

Mandaakinii-Salila-Candana-Carcitaaya  
Nandi-Ishvara-Pramatha-Naatha-Mahe[a-Ii]shvaraaya |  
Mandara-Puspa-Bahu-Puspa-Su-Puujitaaya  
Tasmai Makaaraaya Namah Shivaaya ||2||

Shivaaya Gaurii-Vadana-Abja-Vrnda-Suuryaaya  
Dakssa-Adhvara-Naashakaaya |  
Shrii-Niilakanntthaaya Vrssa-Dhvajaaya  
Tasmai Shikaaraaya Namah Shivaaya ||3||

Vashisstha-Kumbhodbhava-Gautama-Aarya-  
Muuni-Indra-Deva-Aarcita-Sekharaaya |  
Candra-Aarka-Vaishvaanara-Locanaaya  
Tasmai Vakaaraaya Namah Shivaaya ||4||

Yajnya-Svaruupaaya Jattaa-Dharaaya  
Pinaaka-Hastaaya Sanaatanaaya |  
Divyaaya Devaaya Dig-Ambaraaya  
Tasmai Yakaaraaya Namah Shivaaya ||5||

This shloka composed by Shri Adi Shankaracharya extols the 5 letters in the name of Lord Shiva namely NA

MAH SHI VA YA. This shloka is approached differently as compared to the other aforementioned shlokas. In this piece, the entire shloka is set to various rhythmic patterns with the verses each sung twice thus giving it a form similar to a varanam of a traditional Bharatnatyam Margam. Yet the difference is maintained in the way the entire composition is dealt with.

Just like in a varanam, the composition begins with a jathi yet the jathis are set to traditional Mridangam solo playing patterns. The jathis set before all the paragraphs are in the same jaathi as that of the succeeding paragraph. Each paragraph of the shloka is composed as follows:

First paragraph Nagendra Haraya.. – Chatusram

Second Paragraph Mandakini Salila.. – Thisram

Third Paragraph Shivaya Gauri.. – Khandam

Fourth paragraph Vashishta Kumbodbhava.. – Mishram

Fifth paragraph Yaksh swarupaya.. – Sankeernam

The paragraphs are sung twice. The first time it is rendered by the vocalist in adlib format for the dancer to portray abhinaya. The second time the paragraph is rendered like a konnakkol accompanied by the intricate footwork of the dancer. The footwork is composed exactly in sync with the konnakkol and the Mridangam.

While the paragraph is being sung in ad lib, the sound effect during this rendition is supported by the percussionist playing the Kanjira. The kanjira is especially chosen for this purpose as it is a melody percussion instrument that is able to match with a few lower octave Shadjmam and Panchamam notes sung by the vocalist.

Another new feature in the compositions of the



jathis is that words like Nandi have been used to recite them.

For example, the second jathi composed in the thisra nadai begins as follows:

Nan,,di thadhin,, kinathom  
 Nan,,di Thathadhin,, kinathom  
 Nan,,di Thakathadhin,, kinathom..

1	2	3	4
Nan,, di	,Thadhin, ki	NathomNan,	,,di, Thaka
5	6	7	8
ThaDhin, kinaTom	Nan,, di,,	Thakathadhin,	,,KiNaThom

Even the choreographic aspect of the Jathis has been transformed to avoid making it appear very flat and mundane and also enhance the overall beauty of the rendition. Apart from using the traditional adavus in the Jathis the dancer has woven a story of Lord Shiva in a couple of the Jathis of this piece. Such a type of choreography is one of its kind and has been very well received by the audience.

The instruments used to improvise the piece according to the words of the shloka and the mimes of the dancer are Mridangam, Ghatam and Kanjira.

The percussionist at his discretion, many a time, only uses shollus to buttress the performance.

The piece is concluded with the continuation of the rhythm in chatusram and the chanting of the verses from Rudram Chamakam as:

*shan chame mayashcha me priyam  
chame & nuka mash chame  
ka mash chame so-mana sash chame  
bhadram chame shre-yash chame  
yas-yash chame ya-shash chame  
bhagash chame dravinam chame  
yanta chame dharta chame kshe-mash chame  
dri-tish chame*

The various possibilities of the use of rhythm to structure different shlokas differently so as to beget a new variant every time is the motive of the above exploration. The resulting Nrithaswaralaya pieces are a unique and innovative attempt to bring forward the beauty of pure rhythm in Traditional classical Bharatnatyam without compromising with the technique of traditional classicism.

#### **2.3.4. KAMAKSHI SWARAJATHI**

Moving on from the use of Shlokas, the same approach was used to set rhythmic patterns to an already composed musical genius composition which is the Swarajathi in Bhairavi raagam and Mishrachaapu talam composed by Shri Shyama Shastri in praise of the goddess Kanchi Kamakshi.

The Kamakshi swarajathi is a composition that comprises of a Pallavi and 8 charanams. The swarajathi is rendered with the swaras first and then the sahityam. The swaras composed by the great composer show great mathematical progression in every charanam with progression even in the beginning notes of the charanams.

Due to this symmetrical asymmetry the swarajathi in itself proved as a great medium for rhythmic exploration

in the Nrittaswaralaya format and hence this composition was chosen.

The swarajathi rendition was begun with the Pallavi and not with a jathi keeping in mind the sedate tempo of the composition. The mimes of the dancer and the rhythm of the Mridangam exactly follow the progression of the swaras to maintain the sync and innate rhythmic beauty of the composition.

The adavus set for the swaras exactly follow the patterns created by the great composer which delineates the prowess of the dancer and the Mridangist to pause and present congruently. For this, some smaller charanams were rendered twice while the longer ones were rendered only once. Such a manner of presentation highlights the fact that even the dancer and the percussionist know the complete composition with the exact placement of every swaram and all the pauses without which such a presentation is impossible.

The tattumettu following every sahityam was arrived at only after about 4 to 8 avartanams of Mishachaapu. Improvisational efforts in this composition are still being done.

### **2.3.5. ENDARO MAHANUBHAVULU**

A similar approach was attempted with the Pancharatna Kriti of Saint Tyagaraja in Ragam Sri set to Aadi Talam.

The piece in itself is a lyrical, musical and rhythmical brilliance and unmatched till date.

The dancer begins this piece with a jathi unlike the earlier composition. The jathi is set such that it is performed in four speeds as against the more conventional

Trikala (3 speed jathi) starting with Vilambit Kala then Madhya Kala, Dhuritha Kala and finally very high speed of Anudhrutha kala. Verses from the Vishnu sahasranama are incorporated in the jathi like,

Shree Raama Raama Raameti Rame Raame Manorame  
Sahasranama Tattulyam Raama Naama Varanane.

The teermanam of the jathi is ended such that it exactly coincides with the beginning of the pallavi of the composition at anaagatha graham.

The teermanam used was: *tai dhitdhit tai, tai tai dhitdhit tai, tai tai tai dhit dhit tai.*

The teermanam itself is 36 matras which is 4 more than the 32 matras of Aadi taalam. Hence the final 4 matras of the teermanam end at the first beat of the next avartanam and the pallavi commences from the second beat of that avartanam.

Beat –	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Teermanam	Tai dhit dhit tai tai	Tai dhit dhit tai tai	Tai tai dhit dhit tai	Tai dhit dhit tai tai	Tai dhit dhit tai tai	Tai tai dhit dhit tai	Tai dhit dhit tai tai	Tai dhit dhit tai tai
	Tai tai dhit dhit tai	En, da	Ro,,	,Ma	,ha	,nu	Bha,	Vu,
	Lu,							

The same pattern is continued even with the thattu mettu of the anupallavi of the composition where it ends at the first beat of the next avartanam.

The thattu mettu itself was rendered exactly in the pattern the swarams of the charanam were composed by the Great Saint Tyagaraja.

A very unique attempt with this composition has been the rendition of the swara part of the charanams. In the first four charanams the swara portions were only rendered by the dancer on foot and by the percussionist trying to produce the effect of the swaras being played by the dancer like an instrumentalist. The sahityam was then rendered by the vocalist, the accompanists and the dancer which gave a new dimension to the way this kriti was approached and presented.

The above presentation is explained as follows:

### Charanam 2

Beat	1	2	3	4
swara	Ri,GaRi	RiGaRiRi	SaNiSa,	Sa,RiSa
Sahitya	Ma,nasa	vanachara	Vanasan,	Chaaramu
swara	,RiSaNi			
	Vaa,,	En,da	Ro,,	
5	6	7	8	
SaRiSaNi	,NiGa,	,GaRiSa	RiGaRi,	
nilipimu	rtibaa	,gugapo	Gadane,	

The charanam swaras were rendered by the dancer and the mridangas as follows:

1	2	3	4
Tai, thaka	tathakita	Thaka, tai	Tai, thaka
taidhidittai			
5	6	7	8
tathakita	Thaka,tai	tai,	Dhit dhit tai,

Such a rendition pattern has been followed upto the 4th charanam. As the rhythmical complications increase in the latter charanams the vocalist, the accompanists and the dancer all rendered them together while highlighting the rhythmical nuances at all the places.

The dancer's perspective taken into consideration here states that it is extremely difficult to accommodate or choreograph the thattu mettu in the way it has been attempted in this piece as most adavus do not have the flexibility in being rendered in musical nuances. Therefore it was a great challenge for the dancer to choose the adavus for the swarams and the thattu mettu for the sahityam without compromising on the pattern and without altering the words and their meaning in the sahityam.

A deeper analysis of the approach to this musical composition of Endaro Mahanubhavulu and also the earlier Swarajathi or any other poetic composition reveals the marked difference in the approach to playing the percussion instrument by the artist for a dance recital and for a classical music concert.

In a musical concert, be it a vocal or an instrumental, if this kriti is being rendered by the main artist, the

percussionist has the freedom to play his or her own improvisations without affecting the improvisations of the main artist. Thus, the percussionist may or may not follow the swara prastarams of the main artist depending on the mood and tempo at that moment.

When a percussionist accompanies a dance concert and if this composition is being used in dance portrayal, it is a tacit rule for him or her to follow the footsteps of the dancer and provide accentuation for the dance. During abhinaya especially, if there is no foot work by the dancer, the percussionist ideally will never play as otherwise it takes away the focus from the mood of the composition in a dance.

This point has been highlighted with the approach to this composition in Nritya Laya. At all times the percussionist exactly plays what the dancer plays on her feet and vice versa. Even during the sahityam when the dancer renders the thattu mettu, he plays the same pattern on the percussion and not the swaras or else.

This kind of playing is extremely important in aesthetics of the sound of percussion in any concert.

### **2.3.6. MALLARI**

Mallari is a traditional musical composition played in temple processions in Tamil Nadu on the Nadaswaram and the Thavil. It is always rendered in Gambheera Nattai Ragam and played always at dawn. The sharp pitched sounds of the Thavil and the Nadaswaram playing the gambheera Nattai ragam infuse tremendous energy in everyone who is a part of the procession. Thus traditionally, Mallari is a very energetic composition.

In Nrityaswaralaya the Mallari has been attempted

in Khanda Triputa Talam and Gambheera Nattai Ragam. The rendition of the mallai is however with changing nadais during the avartanams itself making it the extremely difficult Panchanadai Mallari in another challenging Khanda Triputa Talam.

	1	2	3	4
1st Speed	tha	ka	dhi	na
	tam	,	tam	,
	tam	,	,	,
	dhi	na	tam	,
2nd speed	Thaka	Dhina	Tam,	Thadhi
	Tam,	,,	,,	thatam
3rd speed	thakadhina	Tam, thadhi	Natam, tam	,dhinatam

5	6	7	8	9
tam	,	tha	dhi	Na
dhi	na	tam	,tam	,
,	,	tha	tam	,
tha	tha	ka	dhi	na
Natam	,tam	,dhi	natam	,tam,
,dhi	natam	,tha	thaka	dhina
Tam, tam,	,,,	,thatamdhi	Natam, tha	thakadhina

The mallari starts with the Vilambam speed with rendering like Sankeernam that is punches of 9. The madhyamam speed is rendered as 3 times Thisra and 3 times Khandam coming to the total of 36 matras. The thisra nadai is rendered three times in accordance with the



norms of playing a Mridangam tani Avartanam. Hence, the khanda nadai is also played 3 times and finally the Dhrutham speed is repeated 4 times.

The madhyamam and the dhrutham speeds and fused to render the mallari in a mix of both the speeds. Yet again such complicated renditions which are traditional to playing Mridangam Solos are extremely difficult to render completely on the feet as well by the dancer. Thus the dancer choreographed the mallari in dance in such a manner that all the important transitions and punches were well defined on the footwork. Such choreography coupled with the cross rendition of the mallari on the konnakkol and the percussion playing method brings about a beautiful overall presentation.

1	2	3	4	2	2	3	4	3	2	3	4	4	2	3	4
tha	ka	dhi	na	tat	tam	,	tha	ka	dhi	na	tat	tam	,	tha	ka
dhi	na	tat	tam	,	tha	ka	dhi	na	tam	,	tha	ka	dhi	na	tam
,	tha	ka	dhi	na	tam	,	tha	dhi	na	tam	,	tha	dhi	na	tam
,	tha	dhi	na	tam	,	dhi	na	tam	,	dhi	na	tam	,	dhi	na
tam	,	tha	tam	,	tha	tam	,	tha	tam	,	tam	,	tam	,	tam
,	ta	dhin	ki	na	tom	ta	dhin	ki	na	tom	ta	dhin	ki	na	tom
,	ta	dhin	ki	na	tom	ta	dhin	ki	na	tom	ta	dhin	ki	na	tom
,	ta	dhin	ki	na	tom	ta	dhin	ki	na	tom	ta	dhin	ki	na	tom

The above korvai is used for ending the Mallari in the traditional format.

The korvais are played 3 times each, hence it can be played for the first time on the Mridangam, second time on the Ghatam, and then on the Kanjira and towards the end

of the Korvai, all the percussions can be played together along with konnakkol.

### 2.3.7. THILLANA AND LAYA VINYASAM

#### 2.3.7.1. THILLANA

The piece-de-resistance of a dance or a musical concert, the Thillana, offers exponential scope for rhythmic work and a small part of this is attempted in this Thillana of the Nrithaswaralaya Series. Set in ragam Sindhubhairavi and Adi talam, this thillana is in Athitha graham.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
,	,	,	,	,	,	,	,
dhom	,	,	,	tom	ru	ta	ni
dhom	,	,	,	tom	ru	ta	ni
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
,	,	,	Na	dru	da	,	ni
dhi	ra	na	Na	dru	da	,	ni
dhi	ra	na	Na	dru	da	,	ni

The thillana begins with an atami to a Mishra Korrappu. Korrappus are characteristic Mridangam rhythmic patterns and were almost never incorporated into Bharatnatyam dance by any Dancer or Choreographer. The beauty of the korrappu is brought out by the dancer in the form of atami where the dancer exactly gives the punches when the reduction happens. Also, the dancer along with the percussionist has to constantly count as a skip of even a microbeat will cause a huge difference to the footwork on the whole.

The Mishra Korrappu uses the sam of the talam at

“Dhom” that is the first beat of the cycle. It starts with a gap of 2 chatusrams from the sam and rendering 8 Mishrams, the continues with leaving a gap of 1 chatusram from Sam and rendering 4 Mishrams, then a gap of half chatusram and rendering 2 Mishrams and finally a single gap and rendering of 1 Mishram.

After the end of the atami to the Mishra Korrappu, mai adavus are performed to the various jaathis with gati bhedam followed by the anupallavi and the charanam with the sahityam based on Goddess Lakshmi.

Lakshmi Ksheera Samudra Raaja Tanaya  
Sree Ranga Dhaameshvari |  
Daasi Bhootha Samasata Deva Vanithaam  
Lokaika Deepankuram ||  
Sreeman Manda Kataaksha Labdha Vibhava  
Brahmendra Gangaadharam |  
Tvaam Trailokya Kudumbineem  
Sarasijam Vande Mukunda Priyaam ||

This shlokam on Goddess Lakshmi has been set as the sahityam for this thillana.

While the Mishra Korrappu takes “dhom” as the sam the teerrmanam of the last mai adavu concludes with “Na” as the Sam which can be shown as below:

1	2	3	4
Thadhin,	kinatomta	Thadhin,	kinatomta
dhom	,	tomru	tani
5	6	7	8
Thadhin,	kinatomNa	Druda,,	,,ni
Dhira	na,,Na	Druda,,	,,ni

### 2.3.7.2. LAYA VINYASAM

The thillana leads to the Laya Vinyasam which has been conceptualised in the format of a tala vadyam concert where different percussion instruments are played in call and response pattern.

In this jugal bandhi, the dancer plays a role impersonating any percussionist while the percussionist himself plays three different percussion instruments, namely Mridangam, Ghatam and Kanjira, alternately while also rendering Konnakkol. Such a rendition on the part of the dancer requires that she should know every single microbeat involved in the rhythmic nuances, every single place in the talam where the piece starts and the ends and also all the pauses. Such a dedicated rendition by the dancer trying to be on par with the percussionist uplifts the entire mood of the piece. Although the piece turns out to be quite complicated in terms of playing and even more complicated in terms of dancing but the sheer ease and exactness with which it was rendered was found equally exhilarating to watch.

The Laya Vinyasam is composed of Khanda teermanam, Thisra teermanam and the Mishra teermanam.

Khanda teermanam is as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5
Chatusra					
nadai	,	,	,	,	, tha dhinki
Thisra nadai	Tha dhinki	Na tom tha	Dhin ki na	Tom tha dhin	Ki na tom

6	7	8
Na tom ta dhin	Ki na tom ta	Dhin ki na tom
Khanda nadai		
tadhinkinatom	tadhinkinatom	tadhinkinatom

Similarly, Thisra and Mishram teermanams are played in Chatusra, thisra and Melkaala Thisra and Chatusra, thisra and Mishra nadais respectively.

When the teermanams are being played they are played in slow speed in chatusram, madhyama speed in thisram and dhrutham speed in the respective jaathi nadai at the end.

As these teermanams end the Laya Vinyasam progresses towards few more korrappus and another call and response pattern between the percussionist and dancer is done where the dancer is expected to repeat the call of the percussionist at the exact same beat or microbeat as the percussionist. These types of patterns are very typically played in tala vadyam concerts. The call and response get closer and closer with the dancer and the percussionist converging at a point leading towards the Mohra-Korvai.

It must be emphasised here that unlike a pure percussion concert where spot improvisations have scope, this is a collaborative effort between a dancer and a percussionist. As a result, all these rhythmical portions are always preset, predetermined and rigorously practiced by the dancer without which it is impossible to render a precise presentation.

The Mohra-Korvai composed for this Laya Vinyasam is keeping mind the Nrithaswaralaya concept.

Hence the traditional shollus of the Mohra-Korvai of have not been used as it would limit the scope of choreography to the dancer. The Mohra-Korvai used in this Laya Vinyasam is as follows:

Tha..Thi..ki..ta..dho..

Tha.Thi.ki.ta.dhom.

Tha Thi ki ta dhom

Thathikitadhom.

Tha Thi ki ta dhom Tha Thi ki ta dhom Tha Thi ki ta dhom  
tha tha Tha.

Tha Thi ki ta dom Tha thi ki ta dhom Tha thi ki ta dhom  
Tha tha tha

Tha Thi ki ta dhom Tha Thi ki ta dhom Tha Thi ki ta Dhom  
tha Tha tha

The beauty of the Mohra Korvai rendered by the Mridangist is that he makes it sound different every time while keeping the actual calculation the same.

The final teermanam is played like the way a mridangam climax is played in a concert where the percussionist builds the tempo very high and suddenly ends in Samam leaving the audience in anticipation for more.

## CONCLUSION

Sound's constructed nature and the wide variety of relationships that it can have with visual form are well explored and established in this study. Intricate rhythmic nuances that are characteristic of the traditional rendition of the Mridangam have been successfully employed in Traditional Bharatnatyam. The resulting conjugation has fostered a new dynamic concept that surpasses all barriers in experiencing art in one of its purest forms. The area also leaves room for immense amount of improvisations in the concept as rhythmic permutations and combinations are exponential in nature.

Nrithaswaralaya was widely presented and very well received by the general audience and the experts alike. Without limiting the concept to purely mathematical permutations of traditional percussion playing techniques, the concept focussed on how the different sounds produced and the cross rhythms played on percussion, rendered in Konnakkol and the dancer's footwork enhanced the overall presentation of a classical dance recital with giving due importance to percussion.

The way the percussionist plays as an accompanist for vocal music, instrumental and dance concerts was also noted to be extremely crucial to the overall aesthetics of the concert as a whole.

The playing of swaras on only percussion and dance was a very novel exploration and it was found that this attempt has opened up more scope for experimentation with complex kritis of Carnatic music. The constant change in the gati or nadais of the composition has also opened up the scope of how the sounds produced during such variation in speeds can be explored further.





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### **TUTELAGE**

- Learned the art of playing Mridangam, Ghatam, Thavil, Moorsing, Kanjira from renowned guru Shri T. S. Nandakumar.

### **SKILLS**

- Proficient in playing Mridangam, Ghatam, Kanjira, Thavil and Moorsing along with the unique talent of mouth percussion namely Konnakkol
- Style endowed with rich cultural Pathaanthara and undiluted Classicism

- **Tala Vadya Kutcheris –**
  - o Leads a highly acclaimed team of Percussion Ensemble with several live performances to the credit within the country and abroad alike.
- **Cultural Festival performances –**
  - o Earned rave reviews from critics and connoisseurs alike for regular performances at some of the most prestigious culture promotion festivals in the country like Kalaghoda Arts Festival, Khajuraho Festival, Surya Festival, Mysore Dassera Festival, Celebrate Bandra Festival, Haridas Sammelan etc. to name a few

### **Accreditation and Fellowships**

- Graded artiste for Mridangam, Ghatam and Kanjira by one of the strongest upholder’s of Indian Classical Music, the All India Radio
- Recipient of the junior fellowship
- Recently received grade from Cine Music Association.

### **Teaching Experience**

- Mentor for several young aspirants in the field of Mridangam through his registered institute “Swaralaya Sangeeth Vidyalaya Foundation”
- Mentor for several students in France by means of web classes
- Regularly invited by several institutions in France and Vienna for conducting workshops from basic to advanced levels
- Conduct regular workshops on Taalam and Percussion at Prithvi Theatre and recently conducted Taalam workshop at the coveted NCPA