

# Invention of Perini Tradition; Dr. Nataraja Rama Krishna

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**Brief note on Author** : Mr. V. Ramakrishna is a freelance Kuchipudi performer, teacher and choreographer with 15 years of great experience in the field of Dance. Besides, he had acquired his master's degree in dance from the Department of Dance, Central University of Hyderabad and came out with distinction and prestigious University Gold Medal "Nataraja Ramakrishna's Sarada Devi medal". Later he appointed as Asst. Professor at IIT, and left the job for attaining PhD in dance from the Central University. He qualified in UGC NET and presently pursuing his PhD in 'Origin and Evolution of Perini dance form' under the guidance of Prof. M.S.Siva Raju, Department of Dance, University of Hyderabad.

## Abstract:

Dr. Nataraja Ramakrishna was a great scholar in digging the disappeared art forms like Perini, and naming Āndhra Nātyam to the Temple dance traditions (Ālaya Nṛtyālu). If Nataraja Ramakrishna would not be there, then Perini would be in History for study purpose but not vision to us. His most of the life dedicated to the dance by developing Ālaya Nṛtyas and propagation of Perini dance form.

To propagate dance he made many lecture demonstrations, seminars and also had published over thirty books in Telugu and English languages on dance. Most of the books have become education for the dance students. His extensive research on perini and temple dance forms shows how he loves towards art.

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## **Invention of Perini Tradition; Dr. Nataraja Rama Krishna**

Vakkala Rama Krishna\*

If we want to know how he turned to Perini? What made him to do research on it? And how he reconstructed Perini? For these questions definitely we need to go into Dr. Nataraja Rama Krishna's life. He was born on March 21<sup>st</sup> 1923 in 'Bali' (Islands) Indonesia to Indian migrant family, his father Shri Ramamohana Rao who hailed from East Godavari district and Mother Damayanthi Devi from Nalgonda district. He was the second son and his elder brother Shyam

sundar and younger sister Sarada. His mother was a Veena exponent, singer and said to be a poet as well. Ramakrishna lost his mother at the age of three. The family later returned to India.

At the age of 14 his older brother Shyam Sundar had introduced Nayudupeta Rajamma, popularly known as 'Raji' a maestro in 'Saivagama' tradition and she was a scholar in Sanskrit and Telugu, an expert in Abhinaya and in classical music, she herself was a Devadasi of Sri Kalahasti temple near to Tirupathi chittoor district. She was an old lady near to 70, she taught him not only what he should learn but also how to present them before an audience. The Abhinaya, related to Andhra region temple tradition, Sattvikabhinaya of court dancers along with hastabhinaya, Vachikabhinaya, for them co-exists with the sattvika bhava why because every dancer belonging to the devadasi tradition would sing for her own dance. In his two years of learning Dr. NRK has become an adept of rendering Kshetranya 'Padams', 'Gita govindam' of entire text, Javalis and other 'Sringara' compositions.

When he learnt at Sri Kalahasti laid a strong base for every creative activity that he started upon in later years and also taught him to attune his voice with the tinkling noise that reflects the temple premises when the temple pillar was struck with a stone. This helped him in later years to work on the 'Vibration theory' of sound and its impacts on dance.

His father was great follower of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. So he joined Dr.NRK in Ramakrishna Matt in Madras. There Swamy Saraswatananda taught him how to meditate, read with him all the Saiva and Vaishnava books in the library and also he spent his evenings in the Kapileshwara temple at mylapore, he was practically attracted to the temple priest , who used several 'Mudras' while worshipping Siva. He found many mudras were similar to the ones he learnt at Sri Kalahasti. And also he read 'Agama Texts' in Ramakrishna mutt library.

Later he went to Pandanallur for his further dance training under Guru, 'Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai' taught hastabhinaya that he already learnt earlier and learning soon came to an end. His father has shifted him from madras to Nagpur to study in a college after his matriculation. There he met a kathak dancer 'Siddhaji' who introduced him to 'Champa Bai' a singer. One of his friends encouraged him to dance. Champa bai sang several songs on Sri Krishna and he danced to them. Ramakrishna's abilities reached Raja Ganapati Rao Pandya, the prince of Bhandara Samsthanam near Nagpur, a great patron of arts. With initiative of a friend, Ram Bhav sir Deshpande Ramakrishna also was asked for dance. After his performance everybody hailed Ramakrishna as "Nataraja", at that time Ramakrishna was just 18 and which later has become his family name.

He spent three years there and he completed his graduation and then he got admission into post gradation but he had already graduated in Abhinaya and joined as a disciple of 'Sunderji' to learn Kathak. He felt the performance of Kathak in the courts was just like the "Mejuvani" of the Devadasi dance. Ramakrishna became equally proficient in the 'nritta' aspect from his Kathak maestro. Ramakrishna was respected and feared for his proficiency in singing, Hastabhinaya and Sattvikabhinaya.

Ramakrishna has started his work to propagate dance along with education. He started writing articles, demonstrations, lectures on dance in general. His study, performance and teaching took him to various places in Andhra. With the help of Mr. Vaddadi Bapiraju he learnt Kuchipudi from illustrious Kuchipudi Guru, 'Vedantam Lakshminarayana Sastri' at Vizag. There he was

greatly impressed by Mr. Sastri's 'Hastabhinaya' which he learnt from him and also he learnt Bhamakalapam.

In later years, Ramakrishna combined the expressive modules of Nayudupeta Rajamma, rhythmic variations of Kathak and the sensitivity of 'Mudrabhinaya' of Sastri to form into a unified style of his own. Ramakrishna meanwhile concentrated on Andhra's 'Lasya' a tradition which was hence the proud treasure of the Devadasi alone. He learnt the two versions of bhamakalapam, one from Vedantam Lakshmi Narayana Sastri and the other by Pendyala Satyabhama, an expert performer in the Abhinaya tradition.

He (Ramakrishna) opines on Perini as; in every classical dance forms, predominates only srngara rasa and even male dancers are also showing interest to perform lasya related dance but not in tandava mode of dance related to vira and roudra rasa. And also he says that he has not seen the tandava containing Vira rasa by men. Generally, the dance scholar's, and Performers believe that the tandava mode of dance is suitable for men and lasya for women and the women performs 'komala – lasya' and men performs 'uddhata tandava' as per learned and Sastras concerned.

And he searched for an art form which predominate 'Vira' and 'Roudra' rasas and the rest of the rasas would be in a small amount. Is there any dance form which is particularly confined to men? If it is there, then how its performance, tradition, art and style would look? As he heard about Perini for the very first time from his guru late Nayudupeta rajamma and also he studied books, literature, History, etc. and also he went to search for Perini performance is still alive (performing) anywhere in India. For the purpose he met many dance gurus, performers, scholars and connoisseurs, all over India. But he did not get what he actually wanted regarding Perini performance. He also met many gurus, scholars, artists, and tried to gather information regarding Perini and its performance. But all of them told that they had never seen Perini performance live and studied the same what the learned wrote in the treatises regarding Perini but they don't know how they perform? Who will perform? And what type of tradition it was?

He decided to give shape to Perini which is almost vanished art form. Already he knew Nrittaratnavali and about writer Jaya and his work and contribution towards Kakatiya's period music and dance traditions. Then he started his research from Kakatiya's period inscriptions, literature, music and dance traditions. Apart from his research, he traced for especially 'folk art forms' in telugu land any classical art form might be transformed into a new folk art form. So to ascertain these art forms he showed interest on Telangana region, and found some solo and group folk forms which are specially confined to men. In this connection he found "Virakallu". It is a sect, which performs only by men. Is the sect being alive? Or is there any legacy in their clans? Regarding this folk form he then finally traced "Viramusti" and their dance style. But it was too late; the concerned sect people were let off their dance tradition and went off for work and education. But he found some information with the help of old people who lived in those remote places concerned to their sect but he did not see the dance form.

And then he moved to Rayalaseema to find out any art form related to Perini. But he did not get it. Then moved to Andhra, but at konasima in Andhra, they are performing "Viratnatyam" from his ancestors'. He met the families and ancestors compared "Viranatyam" dance with "Viramusti" he found only some similarities but these two forms are in folk. It is fact that every classical dance forms comes from folk and forms new classical art form in the same way

Ramakrishna thought that the Perini dance form can be reconstructed with the help of “Viranatyam” or “Viramusti” forms.

By examining the treatises *Nrittaratnavali* and related *natya sastras* he came to a conclusion that these treatises are not enough to reconstruct Perini dance. But he did not neglect his investigation. He visited many temples which have built in the Kakatiyas period and also *natya mandapas*, *bali pitham*, etc. to trace Perini related dance sculptures, postures, etc. by observing these sculptures he understood how the dancers begins the dance, how they enters and exits on to the stage, how many dancers were participated, how many musicians were there and whether it was performed in *tandava* or in *lasya* like all these aspects he ascribed and also he found only women dancing postures in large, compare to men dancing sculptures and also he observed holding the musical instruments, ornamentation of sculptures, etc.

Jayana has taught 108, 64, 32 *Jola Measurement* in construction of *Natya mandapas*. Why jayapa has told these measurements what might be the reason to choose these measurements to construct mandapas. In this way he examined sculptures of the four corners on the pillars the way of standing and holding the musical instruments around the mandapa. What are the instruments they used? Whether these instruments are available today? In this way he observed.

In connection to his research he visited many temples like, Thousand pillar temple, Pillalamarri Erukeshwaralayam, Someshwaralsyam, trikūteshwaralsyam, annaramu aileshwaralayam (ailen mallanna gudi), ghanapuram and in Jalālpur some of the important temples and also Ramappa temple.

At same time Andhra Pradesh Sangeet Natak Academy appointed late Rallapalli Ananta Krishna Sharma to translate the Sanskrit version of *Nritta Ratnavali* into Telugu. They have also decided to include the dance postures of Palampeta Ramappa Temple with the textual material in the text. The academy members have asked late Rallapalli Anantha Krishna Sharma to help them in this work. Sharma garu frankly said that only scholars who excel in dance, science and traditions have the compatibility to translate this text, and then this was assigned to NRK as he was capable. The Academy requested NRK to give a commentary on all the *Nritya Bhangimas* (dancing Postures) found on the Ramappa temple. NRK was inspired with the presence of figures of instrumentalists along with dancers and thought for a while about the initiation into dance by playing these traditional instruments. He got inspired by the study on the *nritya bhangimas* of Ramappa temple. By studying the *Nrittaratnavali* and observing the dancing sculptures along with instruments and poses he came to know that jayapa has written another two treatises namely; ‘*Gitaratnavali*’ and ‘*Vadyaratnavali*’ if these treatises might get then his research will come to a perfect shape along with the song, Music and instruments.

By observing the Ramappa temple sculptures finally he found the sculptures having instruments playing by the beautiful lady sculptures to both the side of the dancing woman. Then he focused on them and he started examining the instrument where the dancer was placing the fingers on the instruments by that measurement he assumed the rhythm which is being produced sound by the sculpture by beating the hands at a distance. And also he analyzed each and every dancing sculpture along with the side drummers (*mardhangikas*) with the help of their various movements and placements of hands and legs and also the facial expressions. He assumed the sound patterns, measurement and its grandeur.

He thought for a while about the instrument that is not there in today's dance tradition. It is some kind of an old tradition which was related to the old karnatic mridhanga bani. So he decided to find out the same kind of baani (type), finally he found the same tradition in Srikakulam District, Mr. Duupam Suryalingam and in Vijayanagaram late Mr. Korukonda Satyam. There styles were same and they called these traditions as 'Druvapada Baani' and it is still alive in the 'Turpu Bhagavata tradition'. Whenever they play the mridhanga, he enjoyed the mystic 'OM'. Then he decided to choreograph 'Perini' with the help of old Karnatic baani mridhanga style and he thought that this baani is appropriate to his research..

Ramakrishna already came across some jathis when he first studied the agama traditions at Srikalahasti, while undergoing training under Nayudupeta Rajamma. The prerana jathis were also published in Bharatarnava. He also remembered the mudras the temple priest used at Kapileshwara temple in Mylapore in Madras. He studied the agama texts, especially detailing the traditions of dance therein and helped him in reconstruction of dance form "Perini".

Perini was started as Siva Prerana during Kakatiya's time; this dance has taken several names like Siva Prerana in Saiva cult and Madhava Prerana during the times of Raghunatha Raya in Vaishnava cult. And it is transformed from male oriented dance form to female oriented dance form and it's been performed as temple adoration by Men and then it transformed or migrated to the kings' court performed as 'KELIKA' by women in Lasya tradition.

According to Ramakrishna; the performance of Perini had been categorized into two types;

**(Perini Tandavam is of two types)**

1. Performed by men

The men who performed these ritual dances in Siva temples are Veerulu, Maheshulu, Pasupatulu and Mailarudevas. It is a pure form of dance – Nritta- in various talas. There is no place for Nritya or Abhinaya. In the Tandava of the virile type Abhinaya or nritya does not have any place. Only some verses are recited in praise of Siva. It is a composition of Nritta containing 125 Vinyasas.

2. Performed by women

The women perform them as Kelika (entertainment) at the kalyana mandapas of the temples when the Gods have their durbars. It is an entertaining performance and has Nritta, nritya and Abhinaya. The performance starts with Nritta and ends with Abhinaya. This is a classical performance meant for the learned scholars who initiated. Many scholars in these parts opine the present day classical style of Bharatanatyam evolved as a kachari in the courts of Zamindars in the south was evolved from Perini of old.

**Madhava-Prerana:**

According to Dr. NRK; after kakatiyas, from 14<sup>th</sup> cen. onwards 'Veera-Vaishnavam' had come into existence and the performers' performs Perini as "Vishnu-Prerana". But there were no special karanas for lord Vishnu, like Siva. It is a belief that; Vishnu loves Abhinaya. In the times of Sri Krishna devaraya the dance scholars had been invented the new karanagaharas for lord Vishnu but that have not been got popularity by the artists. That might be the reason for Vishnu Perini the performers' performs with a slight difference of karanagaharas in this tradition. In the kakatiyas time it had got popularity as Siva prerana and it was performed in tandava tradition and

in Sri Krishna devaraya, Raghunatha raya's time might transform into 'madhava prerana' and performed in Lasya tradition.

But he wanted to reconstruct the Perini in 'Siva Prerana' which is related to lord Siva adoration in the temple sanctum sanctorum. Late Dr. Nataraja Ramakrishna talks about reconstruction of Perini Tandavam in his words – *'The revival of this form which has been taken up is based on "Nṛttaratnāvalī" of Jayana and the sculptures that were shaped at Palampet after the tradition described in this treatise. Beside the other works consulted are "Bharatarnava" of Nandikeshwara, "Sabharanjani" of Sarvagna Kumar Yachendra, and for jatis; "Nandishwara Bharatam" originating in Bobbili. The tradition followed is 'Saiva Agama' of Sri Kalahasti'.*

*"And I have reconstructed this form with the aid of all the material available and taught it to one of my disciple Mr. K. Sudarshan. Financial assistance had been provided by the Andhra Pradesh Sangeet natak academi, Hyderabad for the project. Two drummers from Srikakulam district who play the maha maddela and Druvapada bani have taken part as accompanists. Besides maha maddela and a wind instrument Mukha Veena used to accompany for the songs. Now it is difficult to get Mukha Veena players so also the rare instrumentalists of Panchamukha Vadya, Surya mandala, chandramandala, etc."*

### **Perini Repertoire:**

The items that are being performed in the Perini Siva Tāṇḍavam are; Mēlaprāpti or Melavimpu, Tahanavinyāsam (pushpānjali), YatiNartanam or Pallavi, Suddha Nritta, Srunga Nartanam, Kaivaram (Pancamukhaśabdanartanam), Bhramara or Bhramana narthanam, Navarasa angahara Nartanam, Shiva Panchamukha Shabda Nartanam and Śrunganatyam or Śrunganartanam. This Śrunganartanam dance was performed in the past decades but now-a-days it is disappeared in Perini performance.

It begins with a presentation of *Melavimpu*; and it has been done in seven tala (Sapta tala) varieties then performs Tahana vinyasa, yathi narthanam and then it concludes with five jathi tirmanams. In this way he choreographed this part. It is an important part in Perini performance. When this item comes to a conclusion then the performers should feel the emotion of the deity.

The dancer has to pray the deity like; "o god! Entre your power into my body, purify me and through my body, introduce your sacred dance to the world". He believes that this type of emotion of lord Shiva should happen in the performer's soul, so that the performer can do justice to the Siva Tandava. So it is a very difficult dance to perform and also to get taste the feel of Shiva deity.

*Tahana Vinyasam*: It is also called 'Pushpanjali'.

The word 'Anjali' means 'an offering'. Offering can be made in various ways. But general meaning of the 'pushpanjali' in dance forms like Bharatanatyam and other dance forms is the dancer or the dancers offering flowers to the deity or welcoming the spectators. But in this dance form, they do not carry any flowers in their hands and there are no such offerings in this item. Performers perform some sort of dance movements consisting of hands and legs according to the mridanga syllables like "*tamtam, tam.....*"

And at the end of the performance they conclude with a typical movement which has been mentioned in 'Sabha Ranjani' treatise by Sarvagna Kumar Yachandra. Which goes like this: the performers have to touch the right foot big toe to the left leg heel and bring back to the right side and place the big toe on the ground delicately then pull the ankle bells in front of the right foot and it should repeat three times in this way.

*Pallavi or Yathi Narthanam*: means it is a dance for Mridhanga jathis which are composed in many varieties (chandorithula) of tala metres. It is a tradition that it concludes with a tirmana for every jathi vinyasa. But in Perini this tirmana concludes with performing five times. In the beginning for every jathi consists one sthanaka, then aakasha chari, then performs combination of rechaka vinyasa and then gati prastaram, karanam, and again chari vinyasa and finally concludes with a particular sthanakam.

Traditionally, these total arrangements are in one meter (tala) but it follows 108 unique meters (apurva talalu) in the variety of sound utterance also they perform. It is a 'Suddha Nritha'. After this suddha nritham followed 'Srunga Narthanam'.

This *Srunga narthanam* has been composed with the help of Ramappa temple dancing sculptures and in its 'Kutupa; arrangements. In this dance there is no scope for particular bhava prakatana but there is a scope for performing number of siva tandava postures.

*Bhramara or Bhramana narthanam*: especially bhramana narthanam has been performed in the 'Koota Tahanas'. In every koota tahana performs five bhramanas then it becomes 25 bhramanas and 25 bhramanas will become 125 Vinyasa. Then follows 'Navarasa angahara narthanam' is the most difficult part in Perini performance to the performers as well as mridhanga accompaniment too.

How it is difficult to perform in bharanatyam 'pedda varnas' of karveti nagara govinda sammayya (traditionally it is known as Nayakuralu varnalu), for kshetranya padams performs suddha satvikabhinaya as similar in Perini 'Bhramara narthanam' also.

*Navarasa angahara narthanam*. This dance has a special feature called Angika abhinaya. It is a most significant feature in this part that the dancers perform rasabhavas not only with the mukharaga (face expressions) but also with the body movements (Angika). But the performers have to learn in a separate way of training. The dance navarasa angahara narthanam he has been composed with 9 unique meters (apoorva talas).

*Siva panchamukha narthanam*: They perform in praise of five elements in the aspect of lord siva linga i.e., Pruthvi linga, tejolinga, vaayulinga, aakashalinga and jyotirlinga and concludes the dance. It contains the mnemonic sound of old style classical mridhanga and kaivara songs. It has composed like adoration method (aaradhana paddhati).

The Perini performance starts with *gharghara* and concludes with *Siva panchamukha sabda narthanam*.

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