

Perini: is a virile art form predominates Vira and roudra rasas? Or was a Desi dance form contains comic sentiment?

Vakkala Rama Krishna
PhD Dance Scholar
SN School of Arts and Communications
University of Hyderabad

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 IIIT, 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:

Perini is such an oldest dance form emerged from centuries ago in the Indian dance history in the name of Desi tradition. From Bharata's Natya Sastra period to 10th century AD - only Marga style evolved. After 10th to 13th century AD the word 'Desi' was newly introduced to the Telugu land and it was highly popularized and in most of the Telugu literature the writers remembered Perini in their works. From 14th to 19th centuries this Perini Art form was performed by Women as Kelika in the Kings courts. This is an art form in the beginning it was highly developed in the Śaiva's cult and transformed into Kelika (Court dance). It is an extensively practiced Desi dance form in the medieval centuries. After Bharata the following treatises like *Bharatarnava* (3rd 4th cen.AD), *Sangita-Samaya-Sara* (12th Cen. AD), *Sangitaratnakara* (13th cen. AD) and *Nrittaratnavali* (13th Cen. AD) the four authors were discussed about Perini Art form in their treatises.

Perini is a recent art form and it was reinvented by late Dr. Nataraja Ramakrishna. This art form got popularity for Virasaivas in Kakatiyas time and the present performers they are being performed only in the valor sentiment. But according to the treatises the performance of the Perini should be done in Comic sentiment. And most of the things regarding revival of Perini performance have contrary confined to the sastras.

**Perini: is a virile art form predominates Vira and roudra Sentiments (rasas)?
Or was a Desi dance form contains comic sentiment?**

Vakkala Rama Krishna *

According to the classical treatises, it is an art form having its root from 2000 centuries ago. It is such an oldest art form, highly developed in the Deccan part of India especially concerned to the Telugu speaking people. Before late Dr. Nataraja Ramakrishna we don't have any idea regarding Perini art form. After his reconstruction of Perini, then it took shape into a separate Tandava tradition pertaining to Shiva cult.

By studying the form, I found lot of dissimilarities in the present Perini performance when I compare to all texts confine to Perini. First of all I would like to explain in brief what Perini is and how it would be performed according to classical treatises. By textual evidences I would also like to focus on these dissimilarities of Nataraja Ramakrishna's revival Perini to get the facts and give clarity to the Perini art form.

Confined to Śāstras: Perini dance Form

Re-invention of Perini art form, by late Dr. Nataraja Ramakrishna was the person who gave a vision on fully vanished art form. By studying the form, I found some dissimilarity in the performance. First of all I would like to explain in brief what Perini is and how it would perform according classical treatises. By textual evidences I would also like to focus on these dissimilarities in the revival of Perini and get the facts and give clarity to the people on Perini. I just want to give some outline about Perini and in detail we will discourse in the coming chapters.

Perini:

Perini consists 5 parts, known as Panchangas; namely, gharghara, vishama, bhavashraya, kaivara and gita. These are the five parts which Perini performer has to perform in order. According to the old treatises;

The dancer who performs this dance called '*Peranin*'. It is described as having his body smeared with ash all over the body and his head is to be clean shorn except for a small tuft of hair or leave the hair up to shoulder level. Perinin or performer should expert at language, having good body line, knowledgeable in instrumental music, good command on tala, laya and five elements of dance. Besides this, being a melodious singer. He is to have, in addition, a replica of the serpent's hood over his head and He holds a rangayashti or staff in one hand and a fly-whisk or chamaram in the other. The ankle bells are tied firmly around the shanks. Four, six or eight dancers dressed like him first enter the stage either singly or in couples sequentially and place

themselves on stage. He is well versed in the five elements of **Gharghara, Vishama, Bhavashraya, Kavicharaka** and **Gita** which constitute the main substance of this dance. Its main rasa is comic sentiment.

Performance:

In this order it starts with Gharghara part which is nothing but foot work followed by steps or producing the sound by bells tied to the shanks by shaking the legs in different movements like above said in six or seven types of foot works. But they did not mention hastabhinaya or hand gestures. It has been focused only on foot work and there is no song to follow in this part.

The second part is Vishama. In this part also there is no scope for abhinaya. In some other texts it has been named as Nŗtta and it can be performed in two divisions one is lasya and the other is Tandava. The performers have to execute some karanas and charis. In this part also there is no song to follow abhinaya it is totally an absence of having bhava and Abhinaya.

Bhavashraya, it is an important part which consist abhinaya to imitate awkward thing like monkey, goblins, devil, through a disfigured face, lips, eyes, stomach, shoulders, legs, etc. to create comic sentiment and it is also called vikata. In this vikata the performer has to perform these types of comic plays in absence of tala. There is a scope for abhinaya to give comic effect without following certain tala. It is an important thing which we can see in this part. Bhavashraya or vikaṭa is also known as vāgadam that it is opined by a few, that it follows the movements of the bird *bhandika* in some text. It does not contain songs and even tāḷa.

Kaivara it is also known as Kavicharaka. In this part the performer has to praise or enlist the good qualities of kings. It is totally dedicated to kings. It has scope to perform abhinaya in this particular part.

And the last part is gita. In gita they did not mention the songs that have to sing by the performers. Just they mentioned that the performer has to sing the song in śuddha rāgas or sāḷaga ragas with contains alapa they have to sing prabandhas is known as gīta. According to this part, in the Perini qualities they already mentioned that, the Perini performer has to have knowledgeable in instrumental music, good command on tala and laya besides this being a melodious singer. In this way the performers has to perform.

Dissimilarities (observation):

The dissimilarities which I found in the performance are;

Today's Perini performers are performing in the name of gharghara they are performing Melaprapti which means its starts with instrumental music then, for that music the performers producing the sounds with the ankle bells by doing foot work and while performers entering on to the stage they are praising Lord Shiva like *harahara pramada ganadhiva deva...* Praising of deities is not there in the Gharghara part!

The next item is vishama, in the place of vishama they are performing Tahana Vinyasam which means pushpanjali. Literally means, offering the flowers but here there are no offerings; just they perform nritta to the syllables of mridhanga like *tam tam tam*. At the end they concludes with a typical step which is, touching the left leg heel to the right foot thumb and brings forward, like this way they done three times and they called it as *pushpanjali*.

Then the third item is yathi nartanam in the place of Bhavasharayam or vikata. It is an item the performers has to imitate the awkward things of animals to create 'comic sentiment' but here they are performing yathi nartanam it consists yati type jathis performing like *sama, vishama, Damaruka, pipilika, Mridanga, and the like* yati formations in jatis.

The next item is kaivaraka or kavichara which means praising the good qualities of the kings. The performers they start with the praise of King Ganapathi deva of Kakatiya kingdom with first verse and then, they perform panchabhuta narthanam praising of lord Shiva with the incarnation of five lingas. I did not understand why they are praising the lord? According to treatises, the performers have to praise the king's good qualities but not the deity!

And the last item is not there in present Perini. That is gitam in this gitam the performers has to sing songs which are laid down in the prabhandas.

If we see the costumes of Perini performers it is totally different what is said in the treatises. The present dancers are not holding the stuff in hands and serpent hood headgear on the head and I have not seen so far the performers wearing the bells to the shanks place, they tied bells around the ankles like how the other performers of Indian classical art forms they tie.

And from the first part to the third part that are Gharaghara, Vishama and Bhavasharaya they don't have any song to perform these are all musical pieces or music oriented items and

gharaghara is the only item which contains steps to create ankle bell sound to the music or rhythm. For this part they are performing Melaprapti. In Vishama they have to perform leaps and jumps and conclude with a posture called karana. But here they are performing pushpanjali.

Especially in Bhavasharaya item they mentioned clearly that the performer has to perform ludicrous thing with the absence of tala. Means here there is no tala and song, to perform the imitations to create comic sentiment. But this part is not there in the present Periṇi performance. In the fourth part kaivara they starts with the praising in the Kakatiya king Ganapati deva in the beginning of the item then follows the panchabhutaradhana of Shiva deity in Linga incarnation. And the fifth part is not there in the present Periṇi performance. These are the differences which I found in Dr. Narataja Ramakrishna's revival of Periṇi art form.

The Periṇi performers belief that this Periṇi had been performed in front of the soldiers to invoke Shiva deity's divine powers and seek his blessings to get strength in the battle field before going to the war in the Kakatiya's time. In this connection they perform Rudra-Periṇi which is in valor state to inspire the soldiers to get ferocious sentiment so that they may defeat the enemies in the war. For this purpose they used to perform this Periṇi in front of the soldiers to get inspire. So they called it as *Prerana* which means inspiration. And this art form is totally dedicated to Shiva cult.

But the thing which I observed, by studying the whole performance said in the old treatises has totally mismatched with the present Periṇi performance. According to the treatises they did not mentioned any cult (Shiva or Vaishṇava) or not even deity to praise. If we take panchangas of Periṇi the first part is Gharaghara which means the Periṇin or the performer has to produce sound by the bells tied around the shanks and performs six or seven types of footwork. In the second part vishama also they did not mentioned any deities name or praise of deity, just the performer has to perform jumps or leaps and concludes with a posture and they did not mention that the performer has to follow to a song or music. In the third part Bhavasharaya or vikata or vagada, it contains imitations of animals and ludicrous things to create comic effect, this part is not there in the present Periṇi. The performers are not exploring on this part they keep on telling that this dance is in ferocious sentiment and performs roudra rasa.

Next coming to kaivara it is said that the dancer has to admire the good qualities of kings but they have been performing Pancabhutadhana of lord Shiva actually they have to praise the good qualities of king's but not the deity. And the last part is gitam which is not there in the present Perini performance.

By studying all these parts I am sure that the mention of Deities is not there in the whole performance of Perini Form. Then how the present Perini performers are performing the whole performance on Lord Shiva deity? The treatises, elucidates Perini to perform Comic Sentiment (Hasya Rasa). But present Perini performers are performing in roudra rasa (ferocious sentiment)? Even they did not explain or enlighten on Shiva cult in the whole performance then why the performers are performing in devotion of Shiva deity?

According to the treatises and the telugu literature, Perini started its journey with Lasya tradition and then it transformed into Desi tradition and it disappeared after Kakatiya's and again it takes birth as Kelika in the kings courts of Raghunatha nayaka's time and again it declined and vanished. But now we could see the Perini art form by late Prof. Nataraja Ramakrishnas' revival. But this dance form is unclear and unfinished.

But anyway Late Ramakrishna had done a worthless effort regarding Perini as he was known about Shaivagamas and old Desi art forms therefore he dared to reconstruct Perini. With his effort now we are able to see Perini. It is his version of Perini which is reconstructed with his own thought and observations but has no authenticity.

Reference

- Ramakrishna, Nataraja. 1987. *Andhranatyam Perini-navajanardhanaParijatam*. Perini International. Hyderabad.
- Narayan RaoVelcheru and David shulmar. 2002. *A lovers guide to warangal. Kridabhiramamu by Vinukondavallabharaya*. Permanent black. Delhi.

- Sarvagnakumar Yachanra, Velugoti. 1949. *Sabharanjani*. Vavilla Ramaswamysastrulu and sons. Chennapuri. Machilipatnam.
- Ananthakrishnasharma, Rallapalli. 2007. *Jayapavirachita Nrittaratnavali*. Pottisreeramulu Telugu University, Hyderabad.
- Apparao, P.S.R. *NatyaSastramu*. Hyderabad.
- VasudevaSastri, K. 1998. *Bharatarnava of Nandikeshwara*. SaraswathiMahal Library. 74. Thanjavur.
- Ramakrishna, Nataraja. 1984. *Perini Siva Tandavam*. Perini International, Hyderabad.
- Kalakrishna. 2012. *Perinitandava nritya vikasamu*. World telugu conference. Pottisreeramulu telugu University, Hyderabad.
- Bhavanarayana Rao, Dwaram. 2004. *Sri Parsvadeva virachita Sangitasamayasa*. Sri lakshmi ganapathi binding works. Kovvuru.
- Kusuma Bhai, K. 2001. *Nayakarajula charitra-Kala samskruthi*. Sri sai process, Hyderabad.
- Nagabhushan Sarma, M. 2006. *Nartanam*. A quarterly Journal of Indian dance. Vol. VI, No.3. Kuchipudi Kala Kendra Mumbai.
- Kusumareddy, K. 2011. *Telugu Natyakala Samskruthi*. Sri Udaya printers. Hyderabad.
- Burnier, Radha and Raja, K. Kunjanni. 1976. *Samgitaratnakara of Sarangadeva*. Vol. IV. Chapter on Dancing. The Adyar library and research centre. Madras. India.
- Sastry, S. Subrahmanyam. 1953. *Sangitaratnakara of Sarangadeva with Kalanidhi of Kallinatha and sudhakara of Simhabhupala*. Vol.IV. Adhyay 7. The Adyar Library. Madras.

