



THE UNIQUENESS OF JAVALI IN THE BHARATHNATYAM REPERTOIRE

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Abstract

The Javali holds a distinctive place within the Bharatanatyam repertoire, offering a unique blend of expressiveness and romanticism rarely seen in other compositions. Unlike more devotional or dramatic pieces, the Javali introduces a lighter, often sensuous narrative, performed primarily in the latter half of a Margam (Bharatanatyam performance sequence). This research paper explores the structural, emotional, and thematic uniqueness of Javali within Bharatanatyam, its development across different schools, and its role in bridging classical technique with everyday human emotions.

Key Words: Bharatanatyam, Javali, Sringara Rasa, Carnatic Music, Margam, Abhinaya

Introduction

Bharatanatyam, one of the oldest classical dance forms of India, integrates rhythm (nritya), expression (abhinaya), and storytelling (natya). Within its structured performance format, the Margam, lies a piece called Javali, which stands apart in both form and sentiment. While the early pieces in the Margam reflect devotion or pure dance, the Javali introduces playful, romantic, and often secular themes, lending the dancer a chance to explore Sringara rasa (erotic love) in nuanced ways.

This paper aims to identify and analyze the unique characteristics that make Javali a significant yet unconventional part of the Bharatanatyam tradition.

Historical Context

The Javali originated in the 19th century and developed alongside other Carnatic compositions like padams. Composers like Dharmapuri Subbarayar and Patnam Subramania Iyer contributed prolifically to this genre. While Padams often deal with deep yearning and a sense of divine love, Javalis are typically lighter and set to quicker rhythms. The Javali became popular in dance courts, where the focus was on conveying everyday romantic interactions, often from the viewpoint of a nayika (heroine).

Objective

- To explore the structure, style, and emotional themes of Javali.
- To differentiate Javali from other compositions like Padams within Bharatanatyam.
- To understand its contribution to the expressive dimension (abhinaya) of Bharatanatyam.

Literature Review

Scholars such as Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam and T. Balasaraswati have written on the importance of expressive storytelling in dance. In Abhinaya Darpana, Nandikeshvara emphasizes the role of Sringara as the king of Rasas, which Javali embodies beautifully. Dr. V. Raghavan distinguishes Javalis from Padams based on tempo, textual simplicity, and immediacy of emotion. Where Padams dwell on spiritual longing, Javalis are often rooted in human interaction—flirtation, jealousy, and humor.

Methodology

A case study-based approach has been used to analyze key Javali compositions performed in different Bharatanatyam schools (Kalakshetra, Vazhuvoor, etc.). Through literature review and performance analysis, the paper identifies the structural and emotive patterns that characterize Javali.

Analysis

Structure and Music

Javalis are composed in Carnatic music style and are generally in languages such as Telugu, Kannada, or Tamil. They follow pallavi-anupallavi-charanam format and are typically set to Adi or Rupaka tala, making them rhythmically lively. The melodies are light and suitable for expressive interpretation.

Emotional Themes

Unlike devotional pieces, Javalis reflect human emotions: desire, rejection, seduction, and mischief. The nayika is bold and expressive, often directly addressing her lover with urgency or complaint.

Case Study 1: “Smarasundaranguni” (Telugu Javali by Dharmapuri Subbarayar)

In this piece, the nayika pleads with her beloved not to leave. The brisk tempo and repetition of phrases allow for vibrant and exaggerated expressions—head tilts, glances, and quick mudras that convey urgency.

Case Study 2: “Parulannamata” (Telugu Javali)

Here, the heroine confronts the hero’s deceit. It provides an opportunity for sarcastic expressions and ironic gestures. The use of irony and satire is less common in other compositions, making Javali unique.

Discussion

Why is Javali Unique?

1. Sringara-Focused: It unapologetically centers romantic desire and interpersonal dynamics.
2. Lighter Mood: It offers respite after emotionally intense pieces like varnam or padam.
3. Facilitates Expressive Freedom: It allows dancers to play with eye movements, facial expressions, and timing, adding layers to performance.
4. Contemporary Relevance: Though traditional in origin, its secular themes make it relatable to modern audiences.

Artistic Significance

The Javali contributes to preserving everyday emotions in a classical format. It shows how classical dance is not limited to spiritual or mythical themes, but can also engage with human realities—romance, rejection, flirtation—while maintaining artistic rigor.

Conclusion

The Javali holds a unique space in the Bharatanatyam repertoire as a bridge between classical depth and human intimacy. Through lively rhythm, secular themes, and scope for expressive artistry, it adds richness and balance to a traditional Margam performance. Its continued relevance and popularity highlight its capacity to evolve while remaining rooted in tradition.

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