

INDIAN DANCE

“Dialogue with the Gods”

By Amadio Bianchi

In Indian tradition dance is not a consequence of some human invention:

Just like the sacred scriptures called “Srutis” it is based on some kind of “divine revelation”. These “original” scriptures considered sacred, depict theatre, mime, dance and music and are attributed to Brahma, the divine creator.

This is affirmed in the first chapter of Natya Sastra, a work attributed to sage Bharata and considered to be the oldest form of dramaturgy.

Brahma had created a dance to satisfy the requests from other Gods. In a famous translation-interpretation of this ancient text it is written: “And so Brahma asked Gods’ architect to build a theatre and in order for the representations not to be disrupted he placed every portion of the building under the protection of one God: Chandra, the Moon was protecting the main construction; Guardians of space, the sides; Marut, the God of Tempest, the four corners; Varuna, a sky god, lord of the cosmic rhythm of the celestial spheres, the interior; Mithra, the God of light, was entrusted with the stage; Agni, the God of fire, the scene; Apsaras, the celestial dancers; Nymphs, the entire esidence; Yama, the God of death, the entrance door; the two Serent Gods Ananta and Vasuki, the doorjambes; the Trident of Shiva, Trishula, the top of the door, and so on...The very same Brahma whose task was to remove any obstacles, occupied the central portion”

“And so the specific form of pure dance called “Nritta” was being taught: the dynamic, powerful and virile aspects of “Tandava” were demonstrated by Shiva and the gentle, delicate and enchanting aspects of “Lasya” by Parvati, his consort.

“Brahma placed the emphasis on the educational value of dance as an art with the aim of achieving cosmic harmony: this art as spectacle – he said – teaches honesty and makes us willing to seek moral objectives together, gives pleasure to those who cultivate love, gives strength to those who need to attain authority over themselves, through discipline, wisdom to educated men”

In general, Indian dance suggests activities which relate to either human behaviour or divine provosts and the relative spiritual state of mind (“Rasa”). It also nourishes the sentiments (“Bava”) and develops aesthetic pleasure.

Therefore it can rightly be said that it has also been used as a means of diffusing knowledge of Vedic and Hindu principles.

Originally they were danced by young girls called “Devadasis”, and their episodic

presentations used facial expressions and intricate hand movements (“Mudra”), that made up a precise language, which is today well defined and systemised.

The tips of all the dancers’ fingers and toes are painted red to emphasize the intricate movements; especially the hands play the vital role. In fact: “the eye follows the hand, the spirit follows the eye and where the spirit rests a certain state of mind manifests itself; when the state of mind intensifies, a supreme joy is born”.

Pictures show “Surya” performing Bharata Natyam dance which originated in the South of India. This type of dance is considered the mother of all the classical Indian dances, which some hundred years ago became structured into a precise technique by masters called Nattuvanares.

It was reborn and reaffirmed in the thirties and continued its development to become the most complete and significant dance in the world.

This discipline can become one method of approach to a higher state of conscience, a Yoga that requires years of preparation and professional study to train the body and mind to flow into “Bhakti” (devotion to purity of being).

A performance of Indian dance, with the magnificent costumes and enchanting atmosphere becomes an emotive experience displaying a high level of emotion: “Dancer’s hands open like the petals of a lotus flower and her fingers splayed out plunge and soar like birds in flight. Her body movements are proud, now sensual, now they manifest devotion. Her facial expressions are constantly changing, mimicking sentiments and emotions. The eyes and particularly eyebrows express love, then contempt, suspicion, compassion, disgust, horror.

This art has lived in its simple splendour for 3.000 years.

The Siva Sutra, ancient Indian scripture written in early Sanskrit explains: “Nartaka Atma” - the Self is the actor -, “Rango (a) Nt(a) Ratma” – the stage is the Inner Self -, “Preksakani Indryani” – the senses are the spectators, “Dhivasat Sattva Siddhih” - through the higher spiritual intelligence, there is the realization of the Light of the Self -.