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Lecture Demonstration

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Dances of Rabindranath Tagore :
Assimilation of Different Forms--
Elements of

Dance Therapy

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Perhaps you are well aware of Rabindranath Tagore, an Indian poet who won Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. He had versatile genius. He walked in all the branches of literature at ease, Apart from it he was a social worker, village reformer, educationist and human activist.

In the first half of 20th century he set up a school of his own at Shantiniketan which was unique in nature and in contrast with other formal schools. In his school he introduced music, dance, painting as he believed the fulfillment and purification of human

mind can only be achieved through the cultivation of fine arts. He invited musicians, dancers, painter to his Institution.

In this way he was influenced by different dance forms like folk, Bharatnatyam, Kathakali, Monipuri. Candy dance of Java was a source of inspiration to him. While he was in Germany, he watched western Ballet dance and immensely influenced by it. He wrote a long poem called 'Child' in Germany. When he transformed it in his mother tongue Bengali he planned to shape it as a dance drama on the basis of Ballet script.

But a creative genius like Tagore could not be confined to a particular form or style. He tried to assimilate myriad forms and create a new.

Like seasonal drama, dance drama is also a new creation of Rabindranath. Prominence of song was there in seasonal drama. But in dance drama we find prominence of dance. It is the combination of poem, music and dance based on humanistic theme. Dance form of Tagore's dance drama reflects the successful assimilation of different forms. I am eager to show you a few of them.

First dance drama. 'Shyama'. Shyama was a court dance. She saw Bajrasen, a foreign merchant accused of stealing a set of jewels. At first sight Shyama loved Bajrasen and tried to free him. Shyama

manipulated one of her suitors Uttiyo to take the blame of the crime of Bajrasen. Uttiyo did that exactly. But ultimately Bajrasen rejected Shyama. I shall show the dance form of Kotal or executioner. Here Tagore accepted kattakali style..

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Chitrangada, another dance drama of Tagore. As the king of Monipur had no son, so he treated his only daughter Chitrangada as his son. She dressed like a man, took part in war. Once Arjuna, the third Pandava, came to that kingdom. Chitrangda saw him, fell in love. Her feelings of love, which was dormant for a long time, flourished suddenly. That reflects in her dance.....

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Rabindranath, so far we know, was not acquainted with Marian Chace, the mother of dance therapy. He was not even aware of the concept of dance therapy. But he was certainly aware of the inherent power of dance. To him dance was a means of mental emancipation through which one can get relaxed, can free himself from mundane trivialities. He felt that the whole world is dancing continuously

rhythmically. It can be felt when we watch with our inner eye the dances of wind and wave and trees and seasons. It is spontaneous, never mechanical.

Tagore did not like mechanical movements. Spiritual aspects in dance was his search that he found in Indian dance. Isadora Duncan wrote in her autobiography that she found in Indian Dance the source of the spiritual expression to flow into the channels of the body filling it with vibrating light -- the centrifugal force reflecting the spirit's vision. Anna Pavlova echoed the same view.

Rabindranath invented the healing power of dance in his own way. So Rabindranritya or dance introduced by Tagore contains the elements of dance therapy. At the end I shall show you famous Nataraj dance.

In Hindu mythology Lord Shiva is the god of both destruction and creation. Rabindranath imagined him as the Lord of dance under whose foot trembles both life and death ---

মম চিত্তে নিতিনৃত্যে কে যে নাচে

তা তা থই থই--তা তা থই থই.....

Who dances in my heart

Ta Ta Thai Thai--Ta Ta Thai Thai.....