

॥ श्रीः ॥

TAKA-DHIMI-TA

Art and Article by Smt. Malathi Balaji



Sage Shuka addresses kRishNa in Shreemad BhAgavtam 10.21.5 as "naTa-va-ra-vapu:" - the best of best dancers. Krishna, the charmer as He is, seems to have displayed a variety of dance forms in His mesmerizing avatAra.

An effort is made here to categorize krishNa's dance under the dance forms mentioned in sangam literature. Ancient Indian dance forms are galore. The epics of the Sangam period mention several dance forms performed to the tune of 'PaN isai' and accompanied by the melody of musical instruments like 'yAzh-lute', 'kuzhal - flute', 'tannumai - drum', 'ekkam - trumpet', drum varieties like mattali, muzhavam and paRai.

The subject of interest here is the 'koottu கூத்து' dance referred by AzhvArs in Divya Prabandhams. There are more than six broad categories and seven sub-types in koottu dance. Out of which Krishna's dance could be attributed to a specific category called 'vinOda koottu வினோத கூத்து' - a folk dance meant to entertain local audience. Let us go through a few dance forms.

1. KuDa koottu, குட கூத்து, kumbha nATyam

Krishna, the pot dancer

KuDa koottu is a type of vinOda koottu, performed by cowherds in the junction of streets. The dancer skilfully balances tiers of pots on the head and hands. Sometimes he or she juggles the pots or balances many pots walking on a rope. Some modern-day improvisations of this dance are 'Karagam கரகம்' of Tamilnadu and 'BhavAyee பவாயீ' dance of Rajasthan.

Tiru arimEya viNNagaram

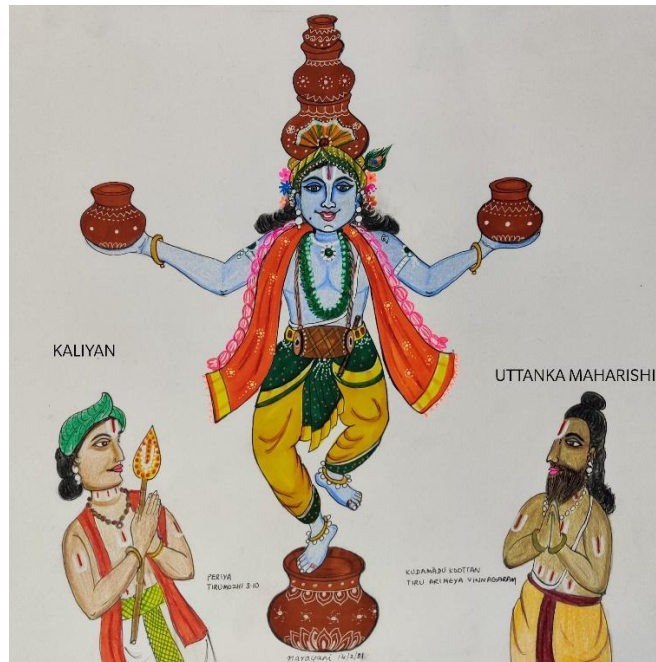
In the sthala purANam of arimEya viNNagaram, it is said that uttanga maharshi wanted to view the virATroopam of Krishna. When krishNa showed His frightful vishvaroopam darshanam, uttanka Maharshi was overwhelmed and scared. To pacify Him, Krishna revealed His simple jolly form as GopAla Krishnan dancing with the pots of butter/amRuta on his head. Hence this divya desa perumAl is called 'kuDam Adu koottan'.

(Other references are PeriyAzhvAr tirumozhi - 2.9.6, NAchchiyAr tirumozhi 10.7 and many more)

Govardhana uddhArana Significance:

After krishNa lifted the Govardhana hill on his little finger, on many instances, Krishna is said to have entertained the cowherds with this pot dance to remind them of His Govardhana fame. Tirumangai AzhvAr sings about this dancing krishna in his periya tirumozhi 3.10.8 - kunRadhanAl mazhai thaDuttuk kuDamADu kUttan குன்றுஅதனால் மழைதடுத்து, குடம்ஆடு கூத்தன்.

Tattva: The dance portrays the 'para tattvam' that Hari is the creator and maintainer of all movable and immovable creations of the whole universe.



2. Kuravai Kootu, குரவை கூத்து, rAsa kreeDA.

Kuravai kootu is a group dance in which a specified number of women dance together in circles. There is one to one interaction either by joining hands, clapping hands or beating sticks of partners. Today, we see this Kuravai kootu style in the Dandiya Raas of Gujarat/ Rajasthan, Garbha of Gujarat, Kummi and kOIATTam of Tamil Nadu, dinDi dance of Maharashtra and kaLi ATTam of Kerala.

Krishna, the aesthetic dancer

The Raasa KreeDa dance of KrishNa with His dear gOpis, in the enchanting backdrop of the Brindavan forest, is an ethereal scene to conjure in our mind. This is referred as Kuravai kootu by our AzhvArs. குன்றினால் குடை கவித்ததும்* கோலக்- குரவை கோத்ததுவும் குடமாட்டும்* - (PerumAl tirumozhi 7.9)

A few other references of rAsa kreeDA are: (BhAgavatam, Dashakam 10.33, PeriyAzhvAr tirumozhi 2.3.5, 2.7.7, Periya tirumozhi 2.1.9)

Tattva: This dance portrays the eternal and loving bond between 'jeevAtmA' and 'paramAtmA'.



3.nOkku kootu, நோக்கு கூத்து

This dance depicts special themes such as heroism, victory, energy and anger. Today, we can see thematic dances like Shiva tANDavam and KrishNa tANDavam in the bharatanATyam of Tamilnadu, mOhini ATTam of Kerala, Kathak of Uttar Pradesh and in many more classical dance forms and cultural dramas in India.

Krishna, the vigorous dancer

The kAlinga nardanam of KrishNa in the kAlindi river is an example of this nOkku dance. Celebrating His victory over the black poisonous serpent kAliya, Krishna danced on each of its hoods to the admiration of the celestials and the cowherds who played drums of different sizes. The sound from His anklets also matched the waves of the river that served as drum sounds.

PeriyAzhvAr tirumozhi 3.9.7.

kALiyan poygai* kalanga pAyndiTTu* avan-
neeLmuDi aindilum* ninRu naDam seydu*
meeLa avanukku* aruL seyda vittakan*
tOLvali veeramE pADippaRa* toomaNi vaNNanai pADippaRa.*

It seems Krishna danced to victory even after He conquered the wrestlers called 'mallars' who were instigated by kamsa to fight against Him in mathurA. (PeriyAzhvAr tirumozhi 1.6.6).

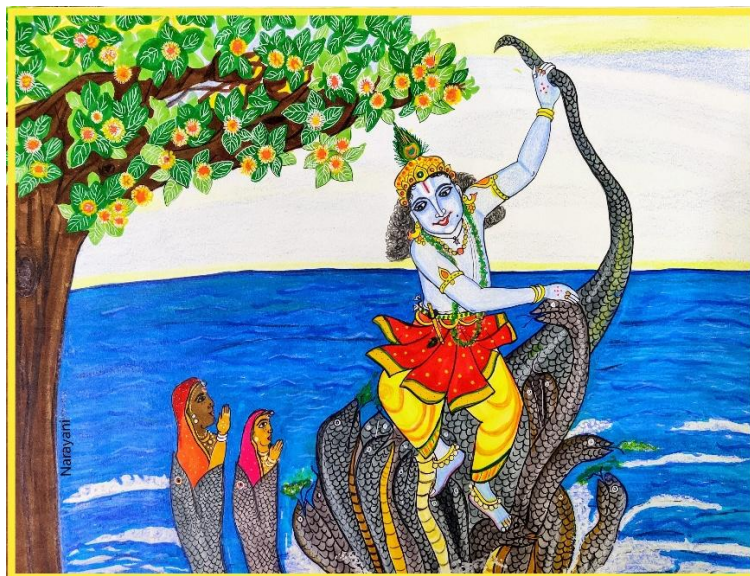
PeriyAzhvAr tirumozhi 1.6.6

kAy malar niRavA! karumugil pOluruvA! *
kAnaga mAmaDuvil kALiyan uchchiyilE *
tooya naDam payilum sundara! ensiRuvA!

AyamaRindu poruvAn edirvanda mallai
andaraminRi azittADiya tALiNaiyAy*
Aya! enakkorukAl ADuga sengkeerai*
AyargaL pOrERE! ADuga ADugavE.

Swami dEsikan attributes this dance style to the ArabhaTee vrittam (heroic anger) of nATya shAstra. (yAdavApyudayam 1.2.1). Bhagavatam 10.16, Periya Tirumozhi 3.8.7 are some more examples.

Tattva: Only when the mind is filled with love for KrishNa, the uncontrollable senses like the kAliya serpent, get subdued. In other words, KrishNa is the only saviour.



4. marakkAl koottu மரக்கால் கூத்து

Tirumangai AzhvAr mentions in his Periya Tirumozhi 11.5.6 that krishNa danced with tall wooden legs, a dance form called "marakkAl koottu". (The alternative is dancing with the toes on top of a wooden pole that is fixed on the ground).

kanrapparai karanga kaNDavar tamkaNkaLippa
manRil marakkAl koottu ADinAn kANEDee |
manRil marakkAl koottu ADinAn Agilum
enRum aRiyan imaiyOrkkum sAzhale ||

Tirumangai AzhvAr says in the role of a lovelorn woman called ParakAla nAyaki : Oh Sakhi! Your bhagavAn is the lay man who merely dances "marakkAl koottu" on the road junction. How can you say that He is the Paramapurushan?

The friend replies – “Even though he danced with his wooden legs at the crossroad, one cannot deny the fact that he is the most amazing Lord ever and the one who is worshipped by crores of devas”.

Tattva: This dance depicts the undisputed Lordship (Ishwaratvam) of shreeman nArAyaNa over everybody.



5. Navaneeta nATyam, நவநீத நாட்டியம்

This is a new type of dance that KrishNa performed to lure the gOpis and get a gob of butter.

Krishna, the butter dancer

Swami Desikan explains the butter dance scene so tastefully in GopAla Vimshati (4).

Avirbhavat vanibhRuitAbharaNam purastAt
Akunchitaika charaNaM nibhRuitAnyā pAdam
dadhnA nimantha mukhareNa nibadhda tAlaM
nAthasya nanda bhavanE navaniita nATyam

YashodhA is churning curds to get butter in nanda-bhavanam, the home of Nanda. The 'layam' or rhythm arising from the curd churning process matches with the resonating sounds of the mother's gold necklaces, bangles and anklets.

Our smart KrishNa choreographs a dance on the spot for the rhythm produced from the sound of churning butter. He dances with one leg fixed and the other leg moving in different directions. Dancing to Krishna's tune, the butter slowly appears on the top of the pot. The mother is then amused, and she gives him a handful of "Navaneetam" (butter mixed with sugar). Mission accomplished!

In tiruppAvai 7 - kAsum pirappum kalakalappa kai pErttu, vAsa naRungkuzhal Aychchiyar mattinAl, Osai paDutta tayir aravam kETTilayO, ANDAL describes the rhythmic sound of butter churning by the gOpis and the corresponding tinkling sound of their ornaments.

Tattva: This dance portrays the prapatti tattvam, in which chEtanas surrender unto the supreme Lord Hari to attain mOkshAnandam which is denoted by the butter.



6. KrishNa, the natural dancer.

PeriyAzhvAr who made detailed cuddly poems on KrishNa's childhood stages, describes many instances of His spontaneous dance.

Dancing for elderly cowherd women.

PeriyAzhvAr tirumozhi 1.10.8

The Lord who climbed on a sand hillock, played His flute and danced to make the elder cowherdresses happy. The rishis bowed to Him and the dEvas extolled Him. That krishNa, my Lord is coming to hug me.

mUttavai kANa * mutumaNaR kunRERi *
kUttu uvantADik * kuzalAI isai pADi **
vAyta maRaiyOr vaNangka * imaiyavar
Etta vantU ennaip puRam pulkuvAn * empirAn ennaip puRam pulkuvAn.

Dancing and singing with his friends in the forest.



PeriyAzhvAr tirumozhi 3.4.5

kaNNan holds up the peacock feathered umbrella (tazhai) for the boys, all day under the hot sun, yet He manages to sing and dance with his cutely decked hair.

suRRi ninRu Ayar tazhaigaLiDa*
suruL pangI nEttirattAI aNindu*
paRRi ninRu Ayar kaDaittalaiyE*
pADavum ADakkaNDEn*

Dancer who defeated the apsaras

PeriyAzhvAr tirumozhi 3.6.4

Enthralled by his walk and flute music, the apsara dancers like mEnaka, tilOttama, rambhA, oorvashi etc. gave up dancing and singing on heaven and earth.

kAnagambaDi ulAviyulAvik*
karuNchiRukkan kuzhaloodina pOdu*
mEnakaiyoDu tilOttamai arambai*
uruppasi aravar veLhi mayangi*
vAnakam paDiyil vAy tiRappinRi*
ADal pADalavai mARinar tAmE*

May this happy dancing KrishNa enliven our hearts for ever.

Shubham.