

The Taal, laya and swara of Ghungharus in kathak and Its Present State

Richa Jain

Research Scholar
Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut

Dr. Bhawna Grover

Prof. & Head, Performing Arts
Deptt., NBSCFF, SVSU

Introduction

Ghungharus or ankle bells are often regarded as the most important ornament or piece of jewelry of a classical dancer. The relationship of Ghungharus and the dancer is that of body

and soul. The dancer being the body and ghungharus being its soul. Ghungharus are both a visual treat (Drishya) and an auditory bliss (Shravya) 1 . On one hand it produces a sweet rhythmic resonance through tapping of feet and on the other hand it gives a certain grace, elegance and beauty to the dancer.

Ancient Literary references

In ancient times, Ghungharus were referred to as Noopura or Kinkini or noopurpadika. Bharata in natyashastra mentions four types of noopura- noopura, kinkinika, ratnajalaka, saghoshakataka 2 .The importance of ghungharus can be understood from the evidence that even Bharata , named a karananupur and a charinupur padika. Acharya Nandikeshwar in his book Abhinay Darpan has given ghungharus the status of moon amongst all the other celestial planets. Nandikeshwar writes

सुस्वराश्च सुरुपाश्चसूक्ष्मानक्षत्रदेवताः ।
किंकिणयः कांस्यरचिताएकैकांगुलिकांतरम ॥ 29 ॥

The Solah Shringaar as mentioned by Damodar Pandit in his book Sangeet Darpan also mentions Kinkini as one of the shringaras 4 .The beauty of any nayika too is never considered complete without a Kinkini. For instance the Abhisarika Nayika , as mentioned by Jayadev in Geet Govind , leaves home to meet her lover at the destined place at night and hurriedly leaves behind her golden anklet or Noopur 5 . In most of the dancing sculptures ,as seen at the temples of Konark, Khajuraho, Brihadeshwara temple at thanjavur , Belur- Halebidu and the like, the celestial dancers are seen wearing intricately designed kinkini.. Even Lord Krishna, the natwarnagar, often referred to as a fine dancer through his rendition of ras with gopis and radha is visualized wearing a kinkini. The reference can be found in a traditional kavitt of Kathak below:

नाचतश्यामसंगीतमधुरधुन ,
बाजतधुँघरुछननननननन

ता थई ताथईतैतथईता
ता थई ताथईतैतथईता
ताथईता थई तडतथई

Meaning, Krishna dances on the melodious music and while he sways in synchronicity with the rhythm of the music , his ghungharus resonate with the syllables 'Chhana, Nana' , . Similar references can be found for shiva and Ganpati in kathak.

Progression of kathak and usage of Ghungharus through Tatkar

It is stated that Kathak , originated from the tradition of story telling, where the dancer recited and sang the stories from the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata. To enhance the impact of performance ,these Kathiks or kathakars , as they were popularly called started emoting the stories through simple and graceful dance movements 6 , along with the usage of simple patterns of footwork , which could be heard through their ghungharus. Thus started the tradition of tatkar in kathak . During the Mughal era , between the 16 th and 17 th century , the repertoire of kathak began to grow. Kathak now being viewed as an aristocratic entertainment gave way to dazzling turns, complexity in dance syllables and high speeds of todas, tukras and tatkar. Kathak did suffer a setback during colonial times but revived itself post independence and continues to grow till the present times.

Structure, mould and procedure of wearing ghungharus

Ghungharus are made of kansa or bell metal , which is an alloy of tin and copper. They are tightly interwoven in a dori or rope at a distance of one finger from each other .The size of each ghungharu is equal. Initially ghungharus were of do kalionly , meaning a ghungharu had only two parts. It was followed by teen kali ghungharus and now in present times we have char or chekalighungharus, the most commonly used are char kalighungharus. Acharya Nandikeshwar has mentioned the technique of tying the ghungharus. According to Nandikeshwar ,ghungharus should be woven in a blue colored string , tightly fastened to the leg, just above the ankle. Generally a minimum of 100 to 200 are worn in each leg, however they can be more 8 .

The procedure of wearing ghungharus is one of the primary lessons imparted by the guru to the shishya. One side of the

string or rope is enveloped around the thumb of the toe and the ghungharu is wrapped around the leg , just above the ankle. Each layer is neatly placed over the other. Once this is done, both sides of the rope are tied together tightly. The ghungharus allow complex rhythm patterns to be heard by the audience that enhances the rhythmic aspects of dance.

Tala and Laya of ghungharus in kathak

Although Ghungharus are worn in most of the classical dance forms and even in folk dance forms, kathak perceives ghungharus as an instrument to display varied and innumerable rhythm patterns through what is called Tatkaror footwork. It is an exclusive feature of kathak , that distinguishes it from other classical dance forms. This however does not mean that footwork is absent from other classical dance forms, it only means that in Kathak , there is a separate section focusing only on footwork and its different patterns , to create scintillating varied , rhythmic and lyrical sounds. The charming footwork of kathak can be seen from the starting of the performance where the dancer begins with vandana , followed by thaata , aamadtodas, tukras , paran, gat nikas , pramelu , kavittand the like but tatkaris the segment where the entire focus is on feet and it's wide ranging rhythmic patterns. Tatkar , is the basic footwork and the variations in Tatkar are known as Paltas , which can be double, four times, eight times or higher speeds or can be in fractions called Aaddhi, Quaddhi and Biaddhi 9 . Tatkar can also display a variety of types like chhand ki Tihaiyan, ginti ki Tihaiyan, sawal - jawaab, which is a conversation between the tabla player and the dancer 10 .

Both tatkar and paltas offer exhilarating patterns of sound. Fast speed Tatkaror tatkar ki badhant , generally known as Kramlaya or pair bajana starts with the basic tatkar of the tala (Time beats) and gradually proceeds to display different footwork patterns ending in fast speed. A brief mention may also be made of a Larhi. The ground is provided by Ekaarbols like dig, Takeet, Dhin , and variations by Aakaar syllables like Ta or by a shuffle of ekaarbols. 11

The variations in the sound of the ghungharus, are created by varying the way in which the foot is stamped. Sometimes the whole foot is stamped hard to create the syllable ta , sometimes it is only the heel to create di or ga, ghin , kiddha , sometimes it is only the ball of the foot to create Ghinak. The combination of usage of these , gives rise to various footwork patterns , some of them being takeetakeet ta ka, takeetakeetghinn, tharikeet , khade pair ki nadhindhinna and the like. Some of them have become specific to gharanas . Like dancers of lucknow gharana are often seen performing takeetakeetghinn. While jaipur gharana dancers concentrate on layakari through tatkar like the jaatiyon ki tatkar. The most popular bol of the benaras gharana being teedha dig dig.

For the students , there are set patterns that are practiced innumerable times over all the years of relentless training. However , the masters of the art are often seen playing with rhythm patterns , giving ample scope for extempore

improvisations. The resonance thus created is indicative of a dancer's tayyaari , creativity and thorough understanding of tala and layakari.

Swara in ghungharus –

Sharangdev in his book sangeet Ratnakar, defines Swara as –

श्रुत्यंत्रभवियान्निधोऽनुरणात्मका
स्वतोरञ्जयतिश्रोताचीनतमसस्वराउच्यते

Meaning musical sound which is uniform and which by itself is pleasing to the ears is swara 12

Similar principle is applicable to ghungharus as well. The uniformity of the sound is maintained by stomping the foot with equal force each time. However , one must know how to control the force according to the syllables or bols of the tatkar. Just the way there is modulation in singing , such modulation can be exhibited through ghungharus as well. Where to hit with force and where to hit with controlled force , is the key to it. The footwork becomes more impactful , if there are correct pauses when needed, along with clarity in execution. The body weight when balanced correctly on both feet , enables the dancer to execute high speeds and a rhythmic rendition with ease. Great maestros and legends of kathak had remarkably mastered this technique. On one hand , they could produce tunefulness of all ghungharus combined together and with equal ease and command they could resonate the sound of just one ghungharu. That is where we could hear the tala , laya and swara of ghungharus with perfection.

Melody and Layakari in ghungharus- then and now

The current times, that we are in , are fast moving times. Years of relentless , vigorous and devoted training, unshakeable determination, complete surrender to the guru are things of the past. In words of legendary kathak dancer Damyanti Joshi, "I may frankly tell you that the future of kathak is very bleak. The reason being that students are not prepared to do the sadhna that we have done" 13 . The times of Damyanti Joshi, Roshan kumari, sitara devi, Rohini Bhatte and the like were times of training under guru shishya parampara., under which the student would stay with the guru and train day and night. The students were not allowed to take stage until they became superbly skilled and had picked up the finest of nuances from the guru. The hours of training in a day were unlimited. Practice of basic tatkar for hours daily was the norm. Training was also given in classical vocal music, instrumental music like harmonium and sarangi and percussion instruments like tabla and pakhawaj , to enhance the knowledge and develop the aesthetic sense of the student . Focus on unfaltering layakari, pandhant of bols or syllables and their correct rendition through feet and ang and back breaking riyaz laid the foundations of becoming a kathak dancer. The present scenario, however is far different. The condition is such that the number of hours of training is

limited and students are often seen dropping out because of academic pressures or lack of sustained interest. The remaining ones that are comparatively more patient than their peers are in a hurry to take the stage, without undergoing rigorous training. The glittery charm of dance reality shows, the easy access to get famous through paid promotions on social media platforms have disoriented the youth and disturbed the very structure of classical dance forms. The focus is more on becoming a performer than on training. Short videos of just one toda or tatkar or only spins or a dance on bollywood numbers with few kathak gestures is the commonest thing that we get to see on social media platforms. A dancer today is assessed on the basis of the 'likes', he or she gets on social media, which many times are paid, rather than the content being presented or the tutelage received. Even on stage, the young kathak performers are seen presenting tatkar with exaggerated energy, such that the sound of ghungharus is more of noise than melody.

Suggestions

Thus, the dance of today's dancers lacks quality and an in-depth knowledge of the swara, taal and laya in ghungharus. The need of the hour is comprehensive and vigorous training and unconditional love for the sound of the ghungharus that needs to be developed amongst young students. The government should also set up gurukul ashrams for kathak and other classical dance and music forms, so that our rich heritage of dance and music is passed on, in its original form, from one generation to the next and the legacy of the naad of ghungharus reverberates still eternity.

References :

- 1 Pt Tirath Ram Azad, Kathak Gyaneshwari, pg463, Natashwar kala mandir, Delhi.
- 2 Dr. Manorama B.N, <https://www.sahapedia.org/ghungharoo-historical-and-literary-perspectives.>, 5 th march 2020, visited on 9 th march 2022.
- 3 Pt tirath Ram Azad, Kathak Gyaneshwari, Natashwar kala madir, Delhi.
- 4 Dr Mandavi Singh, Bhartiya Sanskriti mein Kathak Parampara, pg224, Swati Publications, Delhi.
- 5 Dr Manorama B.N <https://www.sahapedia.org/ghungharoo-historical-and-literary-perspectives>, 5 th march 2020, visited on 9 th march 2022.
- 6 Dr. Mandavi Singh, Bhartiya Sanskriti mein kathak Parampara, pg 105, Swati Publications, Delhi.

