

Cosmic Dance

A.C.Sekhar

July 21, 2004

Every Hindu is familiar with the figure of Nataraja, the Lord of dance as another form of Lord Shiva. who in Hindu mythology is symbolic of eternal construction-destruction continuum. The ancient sages and master sculptors of South India conceived the excellent artistic figure of Nataraja nearly 6000 years ago to represent the whole Universe and its rhythmic activities which are revealed to the West only in 20th century by modern Science and Technology. In view of wide acceptance of observations of modern Science and ancient philosophical discussions in India, the dance of Nataraja has come to be recognized as Cosmic Dance rendering not only an inspiration for the art of Dance Movement and Dance expressions in India, but also developing a religious fervor of great significance to all Hindus. Several forms of worship have been developed, and several temples and places of worship have come up. Several devotional poems, hymns, songs have been composed. Art, religion, and science have thus given in one composite form the meaning of life and guidance for righteous living for all Hindus.

In Indian classical dances the movement and positioning of body parts have special significance and give salient expression to some human perceptions and thoughts. Accompanied by music, such dances dwell upon some favorite themes or stories of Indian mythology. As in the case of many deities of Hindu philosophy, in the dance pose of Nataraja also there are four hands signifying the four Vedas which revealed the universe. The upper right hand showing upwards holds a *Damaru*, an instrument producing sounds similar to Om. This signifies that the Universe was created out of the Sound energy. The upper left hand holds a flame signifying destruction. Thus the two hands are symbolic of Siva's energy for Construction and Destruction, a continuous process in Nature. This also signifies the continuous process of Birth and Death of all beings and in fact of all parts of Creation. The lower right hand is posed in a form (*Abhya hasta*) to assure Divine Protection to those who seek. The lower left hand crossing over the body and pointing downwards (*Gaja Hasta*) is symbolic of how to seek the Divine Protection by the process of discrimination. The pose of the hand is symbolic of the trunk of an elephant which possesses high discriminative power. The left foot is raised high and the whole body is steadily balanced on the right foot stamping the dwarf demon *Mayalaka*. Several interpretations are given to this posture but the most popularly accepted view is that Man can raise himself to salvation by crushing the evils around him and maintaining a perfect balance between body and mind. It is a common feeling that a viewer of any graceful dance gets sometimes an awesome inspiration which should be attributed to the energies released by the movements of the dancer. Thus the rhythmic and rigorous movement of the body in the Nataraja dance indicates ceaseless flow of energy that keeps the entire Universe in a continuous dynamic state.

Modern astronomy has revealed to us that the Universe has been created with a big bang sound energy and that it consists of many galaxies, stars similar to our solar system with planets and satellites all dancing around rhythmically in elliptical movements, some dying and some new objects getting created, some crossing others in regular intervals and releasing several types of energies like light, sound, heat and other forms of electro-magnetic forces. The gravitational forces seem to maintain the harmonious balance in the different astronomical systems just as the mind force keeps a perfect balance of the body during dance movements. Science has proved only in the twentieth century that all matter even in subatomic stage is intrinsically dynamic, and that matter can be converted to energy and vice-versa. The subatomic state consists of a variety of 'particles' called protons, electrons, neutrons, photons, and many more, some stable and some unstable, some with and some without mass, They are all in continuous dynamic state in rhythmic movements releasing considerable amount of energy but interacting in a very orderly manner.

Thus we see a lot of similarity in the expressions conveyed by Nataraja dance and the natural state of affairs in the entire Cosmos both in the astronomical field and also in the subatomic fields. Hence it seems quite appropriate to consider Nataraja dance as Cosmic dance unifying the highest concepts in art, religion and science.