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[Home](#) [Current Issues](#) [Past Issues](#) [For Authors](#) ♦ [Pay Online](#) [Editorial Board](#) [About Us](#) [Contact Us](#)

Volume 04 Issue 10 October 2020

A Review on Various Algorithm for Data Security and Privacy in Cloud Computing || Renuka S. Durge, Vaishali H. Deshmukh

Impact of COVID - 19 on Banking Sector || Nidhi N. Shah , Shubham M. Palande , Aditya P. Vedpathak , Kalyani S. kinge

Diversity of macrofungi in Sirsitaluk of Uttara Kannada district, Karnataka || Gourish K.C., Krishnappa M

Participation of Women in Environmental Protection and Management: A Case Study of Dakshin Kannada District of Karnataka State || Manjula Mallya M

PERFORMANCE OF DIFFERENT TELECOM SERVICE PROVIDERS OF INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TRAI || Dr. Mahesh Dutta Mishra

THE STUDY OF VIRTUAL RECRUITMENT: THE NEW NORMAL || Jaisree Vijaychandran Nair, Abhishek Anil Nair, Dr. Aparna Dixit

NANOTECHNOLOGY IN DRUG DELIVERY || Musangi Sumanth, Faizan Jamal

Prediction of false news detection made by public figures using Gated Recurrent Unit || Akanksha, Nirupma Tiwary

Analysis of Marketing Strategies of Telecommunication Companies in India || Mr. Abhishek Saxena, Prof. Dr. Nutan Nigade

A Review on Fake News Detection using Deep Learning Techniques || Akanksha, Nirupma Tiwary

A Study of world financial crisis due to COVID-19 || Pratiksha S.Kokane, Milind D. Karkare, Praveen Suryawanshi, Pravin Thorat

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Terrorism in India: Integrated Approach Using Machine Learning models And Data Mining Analysis || Navanshu Khare

A Review on Optimization and control algorithm of storage array used for E Vehicle || Thejaswini R , Dr S Pradeepa , Dr H B Phaniraju

SMART GLOVES FOR HEARING AND SPEECH IMPAIRED || Aditi Shenoy, Akshay Prakash, Atif Kundlik, Pranav Menon, Kintu Patel

LEAF DISEASE RECOGNITION USING DEEP NEURAL NETWORK || M.B. Khadilkar, S.P. Sagat

Analysis of Strength & Hardness of Weld Specimen of Mild-Steel Square Bars by Varying Arc Length and Voltage using Semi-Automatic Shielded Metal Arc Welding Machine || Chandra Shekhar Nagendra , Dr. Sridhar K, Aditya Nayak , Naresh Nayak

Comparative study of adsorption capacity of matki seed husk for the removal of congo red, crystal violet, and methylene blue from aqueous solution || Dattatraya Jirekar, Pramila Ghumare

Dance and Music in Indian Temple Architecture || Vinit V. Bobade , Jayashree C. Gogte

Noise reduction in Interferometric Gravitational Wave Detectors || M. Chaudhari

Microbial Contamination in Mobile Phones and Measures for its Prevention || Pradeep Kumar Sahu, Dr. Ashish Patel, Dr. Kshitiz Varma, Thaneshwar Kumar Sahu

STUDY ON AIR QUALITY AND AIR POLLUTION TOLERANCE INDEX OF SOME ROAD SIDE TREE PLANTS AT SATNA CITY M.P. || Arvind Singh yadav , Dr. Sadhana Chaurasia , Mateswary Choudhary

Smart Agriculture monitoring and control system using IOT || D.J Shajeeva

Experimental investigation on eco-friendly self-curing concrete incorporated with polyethylene glycol || Anupama C N1 , Pushpalatha R Gadag

STUDY ON MAGNETIC FIELD AND MAGNETIC FORCE || VIPULA TRIPATHI

DESIGN AND SIMULATION OF ELECTRONIC WELDING MACHINE USING H-BRIDGE INVERTER AND USING 8051 CONTROLLER || Ms. SHEETAL.S.PARMAR.MR.PRAMOD MODI

Dance and Music in Indian Temple Architecture

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Abstract -Fine arts in the form of dance, music, painting, sculpture or architecture have a great power of attracting the attention of human beings of diversified interests and tastes. Indian art in the form of dance, music, theatre, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture have evolved through the centuries in complementing each other. They coexist as an intertwined system of Hindu philosophy. The art forms of music, dance and architecture define the three-dimensional space by sharing a special relationship. Human existence and his activities, structure the architectural space. The ancient Hindu temples are well known for their magnificent architecture and construction. Almost all the temples across the country have majestic and beautiful sculptures carved on their interior and exterior façade. These sculptures include various Gods and Goddesses, mythological creatures like Yakshas and Yalis, Flying Gandharvas, Dancing figures, Musicians playing various instruments, animals like horses, elephants, bulls are most prominent. It is also mysterious to see that the pillars which in absence of heavy carvings are made to produce melodic sounds. This paper attempts to illustrate upon the connection and relation between the art forms of music and dance through the folklore of temple architecture.

Key Words: Temple architecture, Natyashastra, Sculptures, Mantapas

1. INTRODUCTION

The architecture of India is rooted in its history, culture and religion. Indian architecture progressed with time and assimilated the many influences that came as a result of India's global relation with other regions of the world through its past. The establishment of traditions and cultural interactions led to the examination and implementation of the various architectural methods practiced in India. Music and Dance have been the integral part of the Indian performing arts and showcases the diversity with the region. The temples play an important role in the social, economic and spiritual life of the people.

Choodamani Nandagopal in her article – 'Indian dance and other arts' say 'What the thousand words cannot communicate, dance hand gestures or few lines and colors create a great sense of visual impact of everlasting nature. Many philosophical or religious paradoxes that are found extremely difficult to touch the minds of people are conveyed with ease through the medium of art. Every culture in its formative stages have applied the visual and performing art forms to communicate the complex ways of religion and thereby brought the followers into the fold of collective

consciousness. The art would take the people to a state of wellbeing which could motivate them furthering the cause of human progress.'

The temple in Indian art is symbol of the universe inhabited by Gods, demi-gods, human beings and animals which are represented on the walls, pillars, ceilings and door jambs. Both good and evil which exist in total reality are taken into account. This is an important theme in Indian art. The temple is also the spiritual center regulating not only the religious life but also the social activities of man. Here, one gets to learn all fine arts and the very art of living. Hence all aspects of life are depicted on the temple walls. (Banerjee 2004:23).

Some of the temples built between 8th and 16th century have the interesting architectural elements like musical pillars and musical steps. They are made of solid granite stones. The musical pillars and steps are often carved from a monolithic solid granite stone with calculated geometry like length, diameter and carvings and are tuned to produce the proper pitch and scale and tones. The produced sound thus fills the atmosphere with melody. They were played to accompany the devotional hymns and often as the percussionists to the vocal singers and dance performers.

In the Thillai Natraja temple at Chidambaram, the Raj Gopuram has carvings of 108 postures of dancing (Bharatnatyam). Similarly, the ancient sculptors infused music in the stones used in the temple construction. They not only produced musicians playing various instruments but also chiseled various sound producing elements. One can come across musical pillars, musical stairs, bronze and stone musical icons, musical bells and musical pipes made out of stone.

2. NATYASHASTRA – EVOLUTION OF INDIAN PERFORMING ARTS

Natyashastra is a written Sanskrit text on the performing arts, drama, theatre, dance, music and other various topics. The word Natyashastra also refers to a global category of literature encompassing the ancient Indian tradition of dramatic performance. The work dates back to as far as at least 1st millennium BCE. The text consists of 36 chapters with total 6000 poetic verses covering the subjects that include dramatic composition, structure of a play and the design of the set, genres of acting, body movements, costumes and make up, musical scales and instruments and overall synchronization of the art. The Natyashastra is notable as an ancient encyclopedic treatise on the arts, one which has influenced dance, music and literary traditions in India.

India being the land of rich culture and heritage had music, dance and drama as the integral part of the cultural society since beginning. The art forms so developed were