

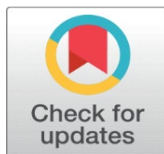
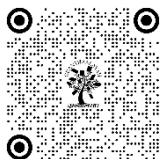


SILENCE – AN UNHEARD FACE OF LAYAM

Bhavani U. ¹, Dr S. Subbulakshmi ²

¹ Research Scholar, School of Music and Fine Arts, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

² Director, School of Music and Fine Arts, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India



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Corresponding Author

Bhavani Udayakumar,
bhavani.udayakumar@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Rhythm is an integral part of the universe. Every aspect of nature works in a pattern or cycle. This innate natural rhythm is called Layam. When this layam gets disrupted, it becomes Pralayam, Disaster. It is an equally important aspect in the Art forms like Music or Dance. According to the Indian Music system, the layam is the natural tempo, while Tala is considered the tool to measure the layam for the length of a specific composition. The concept of Tala Dasa Pranas describes the Ten lifelines of the Tala for any composition. As per that, Laya is the space or the rest between the two actions. This space can either be filled with sounds or silence. The aesthetics lie in understanding the appropriate usage of sounds and silence concerning proportion, place, and reason. Silence intensifies an emotion, letting one experience it for longer without any distraction or change. The placement of silence in different contexts might convey different meanings or emotions. Silence, due to lack of words or sounds, gives an individual the freedom of interpretation and imagination. Apart from music or dance, phrases like 'awe struck' or 'dumb struck' denote one's loss of words during an emotionally heightened situation. In this study, Silence, an important aspect of layam, has been studied concerning literature, Music, Jathi recitation, Nritta of the dance and the emotional expression or Abhinaya of dance. This study enables a better understanding of the importance and power of silence, an aspect of Layam.

Keywords: Rhythm, Layam, Silence, Emotion, Music, Dance

1. INTRODUCTION

The universe has been a constantly evolving ecosystem for millions of years till now. Through it all, one of the common phenomena is the rhythm or a pattern of occurrence of events over a certain period. This can also be called Layam. It is the innate natural tempo of the universe. The very basis of layam is to maintain order and balance. It is visible in every aspect of life, like the rotation of the planets, revolution around the sun, seasons, life cycles, day and night, birth and death, and so on. Each creation has a layam of its own. For example, the gestational period of an elephant is around 22 months, while for humans, it is about 10 months.

Maintenance of such layam in nature is essential as anything less or more would mean it will be a disaster. Layam or Time is a very dynamic concept that can be compared to the Shakthi, while the stillness of the cosmos to Shiva. An incarnation of Shiva known as the god of the keeper of time, Kala Bairavar.

Humans have invented many objects that could measure and indicate time through evolutions. It can be said that the people of Indian culture have mastered and have very advanced concepts of time, which is evident through various literary works. The mention of Kala or time can be seen in Vedic texts. Other literature describing different units or divisions of time are Surya Sidhāntha, Mnusmrit, Bhagavata Purana, Vishnu Purana, Mahābaratha, etc.

From the ancient Tamil civilisation, the smallest time measure given is Kuzhi. Where 10 Kuzhigal is equivalent to 1 miy, which is 66.6666 milliseconds. Tholkāpiyam, dated between the 4th and 5th century CE, records the different divisions of a day and year. A Tamil mathematic book called Kanakkathigāram by Kāri was written in the 15th century and gave detailed information on various time measures. [Accountability. \(n.d.\)](#)

Each living creature comprehends time differently. For a fly, which is small with a high rate of metabolism, time may move slower than for an enormous creature with a slow metabolism. [Time is in the Eye of the Beholder: Time Perception in Animals Depends on their Pace of Life. \(n.d.\)](#) All perceive time according to their need and nature. Human comprehension of time starts at 4 months once the understanding of circadian rhythm has begun. [Zélanti & Droit-Volet \(2011\)](#), [Yates \(2018\)](#) Young children can understand time very subjectively only. For example, a 3-year-old may not understand 10 minutes but can “after the mealtime.” Around the age of eight to ten, the comprehension of time is close to that of adults. [Qu et al. \(2021\)](#)

2. LAYA OF TĀLA

The Indian music system has a complex system of Rāgā and Laya. Laya is the natural rhythm, while Tāla can be considered the tool to measure that, Laya. The concept Tāla Daśa prānā means the ten lifelines of Tāla. This was first mentioned as a group of ten pranas in 1474 AD by Sāluva Gōpa Tippēdra in his text “Tāladīpikā”. Chathura Dhamodara Pandidar, in his Sangita Darpana, enlists the ten prānās through the slokam [Dāmōdara \(1952\)](#)

**“Kālo mārgha keiyāngāni grahe jātih kalā layāha
Yati prastāra kascheti tāla prana daśā smritāh”**

Several texts such as Abinavatālamañjī, Gītaprakāśa, Tālacamuttiram, Nartananirnaya, Paratacāttiram, Saṅgītachadrika, Saṅgītacūdāmani, Saṅgītadarpana, Saṅgītaratnākara, etc, describe the prana laya similarly. Laya is the space (time interval) or rest between two actions. It is of three types, Druta, Madhya & Vilamba. Druta has lesser space and hence is the fastest. Madhya laya is double the Druta in spacing and thus slower than the same. Vilamba laya has space double the Madhya and hence the slowest. [Girija Easwaran. \(n.d.\)](#)

3. THE SILENCE

Silence or Nishabdha is the absence of any sound. Silence is a profound phenomenon, more potent than actual words or actions. From ancient times, In Indian culture, Silence or mouna has been considered one of the highest forms of sadhana or practice that would contribute to self-actualisation and lead to the goal of a soul, attain Moksha. The Guru, or Lord Dakshinamurthy, is said to have maintained silence, through which he shared his wisdom and dispelled the ignorance of his disciples Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatsujata, and Sanatkumara. In the case of poet Arunagirinathar, he records in his Khandar Anuboothi that lord Muruga preached to him, "*Summairu Sollara*," meaning to observe silence after the Lord saved his life. He was in Mouna for up to 12 years before the lord reappeared and asked him to sing the thirupughal. In the words of Sri Ramana Maharishi, in Aksharamana Malai, "*Sollathu Solli Nee Sol Ara Nilenru Summa Irundhai Arunachala*". In this, he suggests that the lord Arunacheshvara is preaching to us the importance of silence without uttering a word by being silent himself. [Aksharamanamalai Verses. \(n.d.\)](#)

Many yogis and rishis were believed to have observed Silence for many years. It was traditionally part of various ritualistic practices followed by many commoners at a specific time or day of the week or month. Being silent is very challenging, yet it has numerous benefits. It opens the other senses, lets an individual be more mindful of one's surroundings, and increases self-awareness. "Speak only if it improves upon silence," says Mahatma Gandhi, who observed silence every Monday. There are three types of Mouna Kashta Mouna, Vaang Mouna, and Mano Mouna, where the first type is refraining from just speech, while the second type is refraining from any bodily movement, too, in addition to the first type. These two shall be observed with practice.

What is more challenging is the Mano Mauna, where one refrained from any thoughts to have a silent mind. It is said that the third type of silence can only be achieved with higher spiritual blessings from the supreme. The above classification is explained in Kandar Anuboothi too.

According to the Carnatic music system, silence is termed *Kārvai*. This is the space between two audible sounds. The placement of the silence can potentially convey different meanings in different instances.

4. POETRY AND MUSIC

A poem is a collection of meaningful words in rhythm. The meter or the Chandam is the length and shape of the phrase or sentence repeated throughout the poem or a particular segment. A familiar silence or pause that can be seen in most poetry is the one that defines the ending of a phrase or a sentence. Similar silence or pause can be observed in Music too. This may be practised for various reasons. The foremost reason may be to clarify it to the readers or listeners. The intended meaning may be appropriately conveyed only when the sentence is braked at the right juncture. A pause at the wrong place of a sentence or phrase may convey a different meaning. The following reason may be the practical possibility of reciting, singing, or playing while catching a breath necessary for further rendering. Another reason may be its aesthetics.

The planned silences other than sentences or meaning-defining pauses can convey an added emotion depending on what the creator intends. For example, Sri Lalgudi G. Jayaraman's thillana in Thilang rāgam has several *kārvais* that bring out

the beauty of the raga. [Carnatic Ecstasy. \(2014\)](#). The rāgam Thilang, in general, can be described as a joyful raga that gives the listeners a springy feeling [The Hindu. \(2021\)](#). Thus, the kārvais may create an element of surprise that may leave the listener feeling a pop of joy. Also, a pause is typically seen after a question or exclamation. For example, Kambar exclaimed the beauty of Lord Rama as follows “*Maiyo? Maragathamo? Mari Kadalo? Mazhai Mugilo?*” Thirupuzhal is known for its Chandam or meter, which also has another unique aspect called ‘*Thongal*’. This is usually a word or small phrase at the end of each para. A pause or kāvai follows this Thongal before the beginning of the next stanza.

5. JATHI RECITATION AND DANCE (NRITTA)

Jathi is a rhythmical element, traditionally made with *Sorkattu* or a group of letters forming into words with no specific meaning, like Jam, Tari, Thaka, Naka, etc. Jathis are majorly used in compositions like Jathiswarm and Varnam. In recent times they can also be seen in krithis, slokas, Ashtakams, etc., according to the theme or the meaning of that composition. Generally, a jathi is divided into two halves, Purvangam (the first half) and Utharangam (the second half).

There is a very high scope for long silences in a Trikala jathi. As the name suggests, the jathi is rendered at three speeds, Vilamba Madhya and Dhurita. Vilamba, with a significantly smaller number of sounds/syllables between two beats of Tāla, has more length of silence.

The kārvais, in combination with the sorkattus, can create an aesthetic mathematical pattern. Generally, in a jathi, there can be seen several kārvais in each phrase. The aesthetic beauty lies when that pattern is repeated or constructed in a declining calculation manner, these kārvais help the artists and the audience to understand and visualise the structure of that jathi. Theermanam is a series of long rhythmical phrases that are usually repeated thrice. In this scenario, there is a higher possibility of observing pauses at the end of each segment. This aids in defining the conclusion of the same.

As silence was described as a means of catching a breather while rendering music, it is necessary to recite the jathi and the dancer. As dancing involves the whole body, it may not be practically possible to constantly move at maximum speed without any pause, as it may also not look aesthetically appealing.

The placement of the kārvai concerning the intonation of the reciter can convey different emotions or meanings. This helps uplift a dancer's efforts in attempting to communicate a particular emotion through the same. In the case of only Nritta, the silence kindles a sense of curiosity in the spectators, especially when the dancer chooses to stand still or strike a posture. Also, a dancer may fill the silence with graceful movements without strong adavus or steps, emphasising the silence. In the case of Bharathanatyam, a dancer is mindfully introduced to the concept of silence right from the first lesson, Thattadavu.

6. EMOTIONAL ASPECT / ABINAYA

Silence is one of the potent tools for conveying intense emotion. This can be commonly seen in movies. In horror films, the sounds are usually eliminated, leading to absolute silence before a jump scare. This helps to build tension before a horrifying moment. Such scenes are sure to startle the unexpected viewers. [Sound in Film making: How to Use Sound to Heighten Emotions in a Film. \(2018\)](#). The use of silence on the realisation of betrayal, hearing the news of a death or any other bad

news can widely be observed in movies. This silence is aligned with the emotional shock a character portrays while processing heavy information, which may be unbelievable. Sir Charles Spencer Chaplin is known for his Silent comedy. He created full-length movies with no dialogue, minimal music, and silence at crucial moments.

Like in the movies, silence conveys intense emotions, both negative and positive, in Natya and Music. For example, while the dancer narrates the story of the first meeting of Lord Meenakshi and Shiva, absolute silence gives the dancer a scope to emote the awestruck expression and draws the spectator's attention to that critical moment. In music, for example, in the famous Bharathiyar composition, "Chinnanchiru Kiliye", a pause is generally given after the words "Kannathil Muthamittal", which means when the child kisses the cheek. This silence portrays the intensity of joy one can experience when a kid kisses.

The famous poet Kamban describes the scenario of Lord Rama and Sita's first encounter as "*kannodu kan kavvi, ondrai ondra unna, unarvum ondrida annalum nokkinan, avalum nokkinal*". This roughly translates as, in their first meeting, their eyes looked at each other with such passion that they engulfed each other as their feelings united. This is one of the best illustrations that describe how the silence (absence of any words) that exists during the peak of emotions further enhances it.

7. CONCLUSION

In the words of Swami Tapovan "Silence is Truth. Silence is Bliss. Silence is Peace. Hence, Silence is Atman" [Power of Silence. \(2019\)](#). Silence as a concept to understand theoretically may be simple as it is just devoid of sound, yet practically handling it may be one of the most difficult things. It is very delicate and needs to be used appropriately with balance. Too much silence may be dull, while too little may lead to overwhelming stimulus. The silence should be used rationally after thorough consideration. Usage of silence at unnecessary junctures might feel like a mistake. When used accurately, especially in creative art forms, it brings out a superior experience for both the artist and the listener. The silence in Layam brings out aesthetical beauty, while the Layam in Silence brings out the technical beauty of an art form.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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