

ISSN 0041-3135

RNI No. 25269/57

# TRIVENI

(Estd: 1927)

INDIA'S LITERARY AND CULTURAL QUARTERLY



Vol: 92

JUL-SEP 2025

No.3

Rs. 100/-



**PADMA BHUSHAN GURU SHRI VEMPATI CHINNA SATYAM GARU,**  
**KUCHIPUDI EXPONENT**

# TRIVENI

## INDIA'S LITERARY & CULTURAL QUARTERLY

VOLUME: 92

APR-JUNE. 2025

NUMBER: 2

**Founder Editor:**

Kolavennu Ramakotiswara Rao

**Former Editors:**

Dr. Bhavaraju Narasimha Rao

Prof. I.V. Chalapati Rao

**Editor:**

D. Ranga Rao

**Advisory Board:**

Dr. Prema Nandakumar, Trichy

V. Sivaramakrishnan, Mumbai

Manoj Das, Pondichery

M.V.R. Sastry, Secunderabad

N. Sitarambai, Hyderabad

**Printer:****DRUSHYAPUBLICATIONS**

30-1596/2, CHANDRAGIRI

COLONY, NEREDMET,

SECUNDERABAD 500056

Cell : 9182036871

**Publishers:**

4-1-104/1, Street No 3,

Bhavani Nagar, Nacharam

Hyderabad, Telangana 500076

Email: trivenijournal@yahoo.com

Website: trivenijournal.org

**Website Developed and****Maintained by : KALYANTEJA****INSPIRED WEB SOLUTIONS****THE TRIVENI SYMBOL**

*Padma* (the Lotus) represents the purity of love, *Jyoti* (the Flame) the light of Wisdom and *Vajra* (Thunderbolt of Indra) the splendour of power.

**TRIVENI** is devoted to Art, Literature, History and Culture. Its main function is to interpret through English the creative writing in different languages of India to the people of all States and to the world outside.

Original articles pertaining to literature, art, history, culture and of general interest (other than political) are considered for publication in **TRIVENI**. Articles should be brief. **The soft copies of the articles can be emailed to trivenijournal@yahoo.com.**

**Individual Membership: India&Nepal Others**

Life Membership	Rs. 2,000/-	(US \$ 200)
Donors	Rs. 5,000/-	(US \$ 500)
Patrons	Rs.10,000/-	(US \$1000)

**Institutional Membership:**

Life Membership	Rs. 5,000/-	(US \$ 500)
Donors	Rs. 10,000/-	(US \$1000)
Patrons	Rs. 25,000/-	(US \$2000)

Annual subscriptions will be effective for one year from the date of receipt (i.e. 4 issues). Remittances are to be made in favour of **TRIVENI FOUNDATION** by Ac. Transfer, Money Order, Bank Draft or Local Cheque (A/c. payee) on any Scheduled Bank in Hyderabad. No out-station cheques can be accepted.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Prof. Y. Sreedhar Murthy, Chairman**

**Prof. P. S. Sarma**

**A. Venkat Rao, IPS (Retd.)**

**V. Vijaya Kumar**

**D. Chakrapani, IAS (Retd.)**

**Triveni Madduluri**

**Padmasri Dr. A. Saibaba Goud**

**Prof. Muralikrishna Iyyanki**

**P. Murali Krishnam Raju, Treasurer**

**S.T.L.S. Ravi Chandra, Secretary**

## ADVISORY COUNCIL

**Sri R. Prabhakara Rao, IPS (Retd.).** Former Director General of Police, Andhra Pradesh

**Dr. V. Kondal Rao, Chairman,** Jayanthi Trust, Hyderabad.

**Sri M. Gopalakrishna, IAS (Retd),** Former Spl. Chief Secretary, Andhra Pradesh

**Sri A. V. Appa Rao, Chief Engineer (Retd.),** Hyderabad

**Dr. Vijay R. Kolavennu,** San Francisco, USA

**Sri L.V. Subrahmanyam, IAS (Retd),** Former Chief Secretary, Andhra Pradesh

**Padmasri Dr. Harsh Gupta**

**Prof. Jonnalagadda Anuradha**

**Prof. P. Uma Maheshwar Reddy**

**Sri Y.S.R. Venkat Rao**

**Prof. Ravi Chandra**

## CONTENTS

	Page No.
Guest Editor's Page	7
Dance as Yajna: The Vedic Origins and Sacred Framework of Indian Classical Dance	9
Natyayoga	21
Bharatanatyam Kala Vaividyam	25
“Kuchipudi: Evolving from Ensemble Drama to Expressive Solo – A Legacy in Balance” Indian Dance: A Cultural Mosaic	39
India: Where Expression is Worship	49
Andhranatyam The Lasya Dance Tradition of the Telugu Region	59
Kathakali, and Other Forms of Bharata Natya	65

## NEW MEMBERS

The following is the list of Donors/ Members who have joined the TRIVENI family during April Jun 2025 . The TRIVENI FOUNDATION welcomes them.

### Patron:

Mrs. Swarajam Kandi

Rs. 15,001/-

Hiren Sarma

Rs. 10,000/-

Prof. Murali Krishna Iyyanki

Rs. 10,000/-

S.V.S. Sarma

Rs. 10,000/-

### Life Members:

Mr. Ramesh Palaparthi 2000/-

S.N.Murthy 2000/-

Vemaraju Vijaya Kumar 2000/-

B.Murali 2000/-

### Donors:

Dr. K. Mullick

Rs. 5000/-

## AN APPEAL

Journals like TRIVENI devoted to literature, culture, and human values cater to a limited number of intellectuals and are not to be considered as successful business propositions in any country. Its publication is only possible by the generous support of the cultured and enlightened readers. This earnest appeal is to solicit the patronage of philanthropic persons to enlist themselves as Subscribers, Patrons and Donors and extend their co-operation to the cause of Indian literature, culture and human values and/or help us in any way possible.

Cheque/DD can be drawn in Favour of  
'Triveni Foundation' payable at Hyderabad.

Bank Details:  
Andhra Bank Tarnaka Branch  
Account No. 057810100029288  
IFSC Code: ANDB0000578  
MICR Code: 500011050

We also invite writers and the intellectual community to come forward with their articles and share their ideas, experiences with the readers of TRIVENI.



Triveni Journal  
July-Sep 2025  
Pg. 7-8

## Editor's Page

**Dr Gowthami.K**

Guest Editor



We are delighted to present this special edition of Triveni, dedicated to the sacred and dynamic universe of Indian classical dance. For nearly a century, Triveni has stood as a confluence of literary brilliance, philosophical depth and cultural consciousness. In this issue, we turn our focus to classical dance not merely as an art form, but as a timeless embodiment of expression, ritual, discipline and inner awakening.

Indian classical dance is not just performance - it is sādhanā, a spiritual path where every gesture becomes a mantra and every step a prayer. Rooted in the Nāṭyaśāstra and enriched by regional traditions and devotional movements, these art forms speak a language that unites body, mind and soul. Though classical traditions evolve with the times, their essence remains deeply connected to the sacred and symbolic dimensions of Indian culture.

This special issue features thoughtful reflections and scholarly articles by practitioners and researchers who offer deep insights into the art and philosophy of dance. Each essay adds to the mosaic of understanding dance as both a tradition and a medium of transformation.

The opening article, "Dance as Yajna" by Mrs.

Nisthala Sudhamala, explores the concept of dance as a spiritual offering—a yajna in the truest sense. Drawing from sacred texts and her rich experience, she presents the dancer as a medium between the divine and the devotee, where intention and awareness elevate dance to a cosmic bridge.

In the following article, "Natyayoga," Dr. Uma Vyjayanthimala Kallakuri reveals the profound synergy between yoga and dance. Her essay journeys into the inner landscape of a dancer's discipline, where alignment, breath and focus become tools of inner transformation. She compellingly portrays classical dance as a form of embodied yoga—where outer movement meets inner stillness.

The next contribution, "Bharatanatya Kala Vaividhyam," authored by Dr. Gowthami K., explores the rich diversity within Bharatanatyam, particularly the dual dimensions of nṛtta (pure dance) and abhinaya (expressive dance). Despite being rooted in ancient scriptures, Bharatanatyam continues to evolve, retaining its essence while embracing innovation. Its vaividhyam—its variety—lies in its ability to convey subtle moods, devotional fervor and storytelling across time and cultures.

In her piece, "Kuchipudi: Evolving from

Ensemble Drama to Expressive Solo – A Legacy in Balance,” Madhumathi Kulkarni traces Kuchipudi’s journey from traditional ensemble theatre to a solo expressive format. She highlights both the challenges of modernization and the dancer’s responsibility in preserving the legacy while embracing contemporary relevance.

She also presents “Indian Dance: A Cultural Mosaic,” a panoramic reflection on how diverse classical forms reflect the unity and plurality of Indian identity. Each form, while stylistically distinct, is united by deep philosophical and spiritual foundations. Her observations situate classical dance within both the local and global cultural landscapes.

Another compelling essay, “India: Where Expression is Worship,” by Tripti Sanwal, a celebrated Kathak dancer and scriptwriter—focuses on abhinaya as the soul of Indian classical dance. For her, dance is not mere entertainment but worship through expression, where bhāva becomes a medium of divine communication. She emphasizes the power of narrative in dance as a vessel of cultural memory.

In her contribution on “Andhranatyam,” Satwika Penna turns the spotlight on a revivalist tradition that is both regional and richly classical. Once confined to temples and later marginalized, Andhranatyam is now reclaiming its significance. Satwika presents a scholarly yet heartfelt case for its preservation, highlighting its blend of devotion, literature and feminine grace.

Adding historical depth to this volume, we

proudly reintroduce a classic: “Kathakali and Other Forms of Bharatanatyam” by V. Raghavan, originally published in the 1933 edition of *Triveni*. This archival gem offers rare insights into early 20th-century perceptions of Indian dance, when Bharatanatyam was still emerging from social stigma and colonial critique. Raghavan’s article reminds us of the long cultural revival that has restored classical dance to its rightful place of prestige.

Together, these articles form a rich tapestry of thought, technique, emotion and devotion. From academic analysis to personal reflection, each contributor offers a unique strand to the evolving narrative of Indian classical dance. This issue is not merely a collection of writings—it is a celebration of cultural resilience, a testimony to how dance continues to shape and be shaped by the Indian ethos.

We hope this edition of *Triveni* inspires dancers, scholars and art lovers to engage with Indian classical dance not just as an aesthetic experience, but as a transformative cultural force. May these pages awaken the rasa within you the essence of beauty, devotion and spiritual elevation that defines our artistic heritage.

We invite scholars to contribute to future editions of *Triveni*. Upcoming issues will feature articles on Indian music and dance, and we encourage writers and researchers to share their insights and scholarship with our community.

**Dr Gowthami.K**

Guest Editor





## Dance as Yajna: The Vedic Origins and Sacred Framework of Indian Classical Dance

Nisthala Sudhamala

The Vedas are the ancient and sacred scriptures of Hinduism. The word *Veda* originates from the root *vid*, meaning “to know”. As the saying goes, “*Vedayate iti Vedah*”—the Veda is that which reveals itself. It unveils the esoteric knowledge of the cosmic cycle of creation and the all-pervading Paramatman. The wisdom enshrined in the Vedas guides one along the path of Dharma by illuminating the fourfold aims of Sanatana Dharmic life: *Dharma* (moral order), *Artha* (prosperity), *Kama* (desire), and *Moksha* (liberation).

Regarded as the primordial breath of the Paramatman, the Vedas are considered divinely revealed and are known as *Apaurusheya*—not of human origin. These mantras were not composed but *heard* in the hearts of sages immersed in deep penance, seeking only the mysteries of creation and the way to liberation. Hence, the Vedas are called *Shrutis*, meaning “that which is heard”. This is why our sages are revered as the seers of the Vedas—not their

authors. Importantly, among these seers were many women, whose voices stand alongside those of the male sages in this spiritual tradition.

It was Sage Krishnadvaipayana, whom we all know as Veda Vyasa, who systematized this vast body of knowledge by dividing it into four parts for easy understanding: the *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda*, and *Atharvaveda*. Each of these is further structured into four segments: the *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, and *Upanishads*.

The *Samhitas* form the mantra portion of the Vedas—a compilation of hymns composed in praise of various deities. These mantras, often poetic and profound, lay the foundation for the ritualistic and spiritual dimensions of Vedic practice.

The *Brahmanas* serve as detailed expositions on these mantras. The word *Brahma* itself carries multiple meanings—one of which is *mantra*. As stated in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, “*Brahma vai mantrah*”—Brahma is indeed mantra. The term *Brahmana* is thus used because these texts

---

*sudhamala@gmail.com*

explain the significance and usage of Vedic mantras. *Brahma* could also mean *yajna*. Accordingly, the *Brahmanas* elaborate on the methods, meanings, and symbolic aspects of yagna. They not only interpret the deeper nuances of each mantra but also prescribe the precise rituals and procedures to be followed during their recitation.

The *Aranyakas*, as their name suggests, were traditionally studied and recited in forest dwellings. This was mentioned by Saayanacharya in *Aitareya Brahmana*. These *Aranyakas* were meant for those in the *Vanaprastha* stage of life—one of the four ashramas observed by our ancestors: *Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanaprastha*, and *Sannyasa*. These texts bridge the ritualistic with the philosophical, offering contemplative insights suitable for forest-dwelling seekers. The concept of *Prana Vidya*, which is propounded in the *Samhitas*, is more deeply explored in the *Aranyakas* in a more philosophical form. The spiritual thought introduced in the *Aranyakas* finds its culmination in the *Upanishads*.

The *Upanishads*, forming the concluding portion of the *Aranyakas*, are often referred to as *Vedanta*—the “end of the Vedas”. These texts delve into the highest philosophical truths, guiding the seeker toward an understanding of the cycles of birth and death, and the path to liberation. While references to yajnas

and rituals are found in the *Upanishads*, they ultimately assert that true salvation is attained only through knowledge. The word *Upanishad* is derived from the root word *sad*, prefixed by the words *upa* and *ni*. The root *sad* holds meanings such as destruction, attainment, knowledge, dissolution, and completion. The combination of the prefixes *upa* and *ni* means “sitting near”. Thus, the *Upanishads* are texts that destroy ignorance, lead to the realization of Brahman, and dissolve sorrow. They also signify knowledge received by sitting near the feet of the Guru—a sacred transmission of wisdom from teacher to student. Another interpretation suggests *Upanishad* means that which leads to complete and immediate attainment of true knowledge (*upa* = without any delay, *ni* = completely, *shad* = leading to the attainment of knowledge).

The knowledge of the four Vedas is collectively referred to as *Trayi Vidya*, denoting the three types of Vedic mantras—*Riks*, *Yajnas*, and *Samans*. As stated, *Teṣam ṛg-arthavasena padavyavastha*—the *Riks* are mantras composed in meaningful lines (*padas*), arranged according to their sense and set in specific *chandas* (the poetic metre of the Vedas). When these *Riks* are sung melodically, they become *Samans*—*Gitiṣu Sama-khya*. The remaining mantras, distinct from the *Riks* and *Samans*, are termed *Yajnas*—*Seṣe Yajur-sabdah*, as described by Sage Jaimini.

As discussed earlier, the Veda in its primordial form was one unified body of sacred knowledge. However, for practical purposes, especially with regard to sacrificial rituals, the mantras were systematically categorized based on their function. Over time, these collections evolved into distinct *Samhitas*, giving rise to multiple branches (*shakhas*) associated with the oral traditions of different sages. These branches often differed in pronunciation, intonation, and even in the inclusion or omission of certain mantras, reflecting the unique regional and pedagogical lineages.

Sage Patanjali, the author of the *Mahabhashya*, recorded the number of Vedic branches as follows:

21 branches of the *Rigveda*

101 branches of the *Yajurveda*

1,000 branches of the *Samaveda*

9 branches of the *Atharvaveda*

Most of these branches have disappeared over time, and only a few—two or three from each Veda—survive today.

The disciples of Sage Veda Vyasa were each entrusted with one of the four Vedas:

*Paila* was given the *Rigveda*

*Jaimini* received the *Samaveda*

*Vaishampayana* was assigned  
the *Yajurveda*

*Sumantha* was entrusted with  
the *Atharvaveda*

**Rigveda:** The *Rigveda* is organized in two formats: 1) *Ashtaka* and 2) *Mandala*, the latter being the more widely followed system. It comprises 10 *Mandalas*, 85 *Anuvakas*, and 1,017 *Suktas*—though some sources cite 1,028, including the *Khila Suktas*, which are considered supplementary. The mantras in the *Rigveda* are composed in a variety of *chandās* (metres), such as *Gayatri*, *Jagati*, *Brihati*, *Pankti*, and *Trishtubh*.

Of the 21 original branches of the *Rigveda*, only two survive today: 1) *Shakala* and 2) *Bhaskala*. The *Suktas* are hymns of praise to various deities. The very first *Sukta*, the *Agni Sukta*, begins with “*Agni meele purohitam*”. Deities invoked throughout the *Rigveda* include Indra, Varuna, Ushas, Savita, Pushan, Mitra, Vishnu, Rudra, Marut, Parjanya, and others. The well-known dialogues of Urvashi–Pururava, Yama–Yami, and Sarama–Panis are also found in the *Rigveda*.

The renowned *Purusha Sukta* is found in the *Dashamandala*, which also includes verses on worldly matters and medical treatment. Hymns on rituals related to *Sraddha* and marriage are included in this section (Verses 161 and 163). Discussions on medicine and the role of physicians (*Bhishaks*) appear here as well,

which is why *Ayurveda* is regarded as the *Upaveda* of the *Rigveda*. This Veda is also known as *Hotra Veda*, since the Ritvik (one who has the knowledge of ritual sacrifice & perform rituals) termed *Hotr* recites these mantras to invoke the deities to receive their *havirbhagas* (offerings) during a *yajna*.

**Yajurveda:** The *Yajurveda* primarily consists of mantras used in *yajnas* and the corresponding sacrificial rituals. These mantras are described as “*Aniyataksaravasano yajuh*”—they have no fixed syllables—and “*Gadyamatro yajuh*”—they are in prose form. The two major traditions of the *Yajurveda* are 1) *Krishna Yajurveda* and 2) *Shukla Yajurveda*.

The *Krishna Yajurveda* contains mantras (verses) set in specific *chandas* (metres) as well as mantras in prose form, while the *Shukla Yajurveda* consists exclusively of verses set in *chandas*. The *Shukla Yajurveda* is associated with the *Aditya* tradition, and the *Krishna Yajurveda* with the *Brahma* tradition. It is said that Sage Yajnavalkya received the *Shukla Yajurveda* by the grace of the Sun god.

Of the original 101 branches, only five remain today. These include mantras used during *Chaaturmaasya* rituals such as *Soma*, *Vajapeya*, *Rajasuya*, *Pitṛumedha*, *Puruṣamedha*, and *Asvamedha*. It also details the construction of the *yajna kunda* (fire altar), the *Satarudriya Homa*,

and the famed *Rudradhyaya*. Texts such as the *Katha Upanishad* and *Taittiriya Upanishad* are embedded in the *Krishna Yajurveda*, while the *Isha Upanishad* appears in its final chapter. The *Shatapatha Brahmana*, one of the most influential Brahmana texts, belongs to the *Shukla Yajurveda*. The Ritvik known as *Adhvaryu* performs the actual *yajna* procedures while simultaneously chanting from the *Yajurveda*.

**Samaveda:** The *Samaveda* derives its name from “*Saama amscheti tat namnah samatvam*” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad): ‘*Sa*’ refers to the *rik*, and ‘*ama*’ to the musical notes such as *Gandhara*. Thus, *Saama* denotes the singing of *rik* mantras in specific *swara sthanas*. Jaimini defines *Saamans* as mantras meant for singing: “*Gitiṣu Sama-akhya*”. The word *Saama* also means beautiful or pleasant speech.

During *yajnas*, the *Udgaata* praises deities by singing these *Saamans*. According to the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, no *yajna* is complete without the chanting of *Saamans*. A verse declares, “*Samani yo vetthi sa veda tattvam*”—only one who understands the *Samaveda* truly comprehends the essence of the Vedas. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna affirms, “*Vedanam Samavedosmi*”—Among the Vedas, I am the *Samaveda*.

Of the 1,000 original branches of this Veda, only 3 survived as of today. *Gand-*

*harvaveda*, the *Upaveda* of the *Samaveda*, deals with music and performing arts. It is said that Sage Angirasa taught Lord Krishna the *Samaveda* using a specialized technique known as *Chalikya*. According to the *Chandogya Upanishad*, Lord Krishna mastered this method and later enchanted the world with the music of his eternal flute.

**Atharvaveda :** While the *Rigveda* is considered the source of eternal, transcendental knowledge, the *Atharvaveda* is associated with worldly knowledge. The *Gopatha Brahmana* recounts how this Veda got its name: when Brahma undertook penance to begin creation, the sages *Atharvan* and *Angirasa* were born from his body. The *Atharvaveda* was revealed through them and thus has two major sections—*Atharvan* and *Angirasa*.

The *Atharvan* section contains mantras related to *mantra*, *tantra*, and medicine, while the *Angirasa* section includes related to *marāṇa* and *uchaṭāna*. In addition, the Veda addresses themes of *yajna* and *Brahmavidya*. Certain vedic verses describe the causes of disease, attributing them to invisible germs (1-5-2-35), and affirm that sunlight can destroy these pathogens (1-12; 4-37).

The *Atharvaveda* also contains antidotes for snake venom, insights into politics and governance, strategies for warfare, legal

frameworks, marriage rites, and more. It comprises 20 *Kaṇḍas*, 760 *Suktas*, and 5,987 mantras. Many scholars view the philosophical hymns in this Veda as early precursors to the *Upanishads*.

In addition to the Vedas, our seers have given us six *Vedangas*—the auxiliary disciplines that support the understanding and preservation of Vedic knowledge. These six limbs of the Vedas are essential tools, each serving a specific purpose in the transmission, performance, and interpretation of the sacred texts.

The six *Vedangas* are:

**Shiksha** (Phonetics): This deals with the correct pronunciation of Vedic mantras, ensuring their sonic purity and effectiveness.

**Kalpa** (Ritual): It outlines the systematic procedures for performing Vedic rituals, offering structured guidance for yajnas and ceremonies.

**Vyakarana** (Grammar): This is the study of Vedic language structure and the etymology of words, preserving linguistic integrity.

**Nirukta** (Etymology): It aids in interpreting the deeper meanings of Vedic *suktas*, acting as a key to the symbolic and philosophical content.

**Chandas** (Metre): This governs the

rhythmic structure of Vedic hymns, categorizing them into various metrical forms.

**Jyotish** (Astronomy and Astrology): It determines the *muhurtam* (auspicious timing) for yajnas and vedic recitations, and plays a key role in preparing *panchangas* (calendar systems).

Sage Panini compares the Vedangas to the limbs of a human body, portraying the *Veda Purusha* (embodied Veda) as a living form of Brahma: *Shiksha* is the nose, *Kalpa* the hands, *Vyakarana* the mouth, *Nirukta* the ears, *Chandas* the legs, and *Jyotish* the eyes. This metaphor emphasizes that just as the body functions through its coordinated limbs, the Vedas become fully alive and functional through the proper application of these six auxiliary sciences.

Closely linked to the Vedangas are the *Upavedas*, or applied fields of knowledge that evolved in conjunction with the Vedas. Each Veda has a corresponding Upaveda that translates spiritual principles into practical domains:

Rigveda → Ayurveda (science of health and life)

Samaveda → Gandharva Veda (music, dance, and aesthetics)

Yajurveda → Dhanurveda (archery and military science)

Atharvaveda → Sthapatya Veda (architecture and engineering)

Together, the Vedas, Vedangas, and Upavedas form an integrated knowledge system, where the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the technical, are woven into a holistic cultural fabric—within which the Indian classical arts, including dance, are deeply embedded.

### **Dance in the Vedas: Roots and Reflections**

Having explored the Vedangas and Upavedas, which laid the structural and applied foundations of Vedic knowledge, we now move towards a more artistic and expressive dimension—the presence of dance and its associated elements in the Vedas. Though the Vedas are primarily known for their spiritual, ritualistic, and philosophical content, they also contain references that hint at the early evolution of Indian classical dance and music traditions.

### **Rigveda**

While the Rigveda does not contain codified dance terminology, it does reference dance (*nrti*) and female dancer (*nrtu*) in poetic descriptions. For instance, Ushas, the goddess of dawn, is likened to a radiant danseuse who stirs the world into motion:

“Ushas like a dancer puts her brodered garments on” – Book I, Hymn XCII.4

Elsewhere, Indra, the Maruts, and the Ashwini Kumaras are also described in dance-like expressions: “*tava tyannaryam*

*nruto pa indra...*” (Vol 1, 2 *mandalam*, 22 *suktam*, 28 *vargam*, 4 *mantram*). Here the term dancer is used as a simile, God Indra like a dancer ...

The Maruts, for instance, are referred to as “*kirino nrtuh*” (V.52.12) and “*nr-tavah*” (VIII.20.XXII). Here maruts are described using simile dancer

This Veda also mentions Apsaras as the wives of Gandharvas. The name Urvashi, often associated with dance, is prominent in the famed dialogue between Urvashi and Pururavas (X.95.8 ff). This interaction may have influenced the development of *samvaada*—the dialogue (*vachikabhinaya*) seen in classical dance-drama. Additionally, the *Rigveda* hints at group dancing during both joyous and sorrowful occasions, suggesting its early communal role.

### Samaveda

The Samaveda is the wellspring of Indian music and by extension, dance. Its *samagana* (melodic chanting) is rooted in structured tonal systems, which later shaped *margi sangita* (classical music tradition) as described by Bharata in his *Natyasastra*.

The *Rk-Pratisakhya* mentions one-tone, two-tone, three-tone, and four-tone singing, which eventually evolved into *mandra*, *madhyama*, and *tara sthayis*—the three primary registers in Indi-

an classical music. In early texts, the term “*yama*” was used for the seven-tone system, which later became known as the *saptasvara*. This framework, explained by *Narada* in *Naradiya Siksha*, became the backbone of *dhruva gana*, the structured singing style described in the *Natyasastra*.

Notably, Swami Pragyanda states that the wives of Ritviks who worshipped *Parabrahma* through *yagna* used to perform dance and veena recitals to the tune of *samagana* sung by their husbands. This hints at an early blend of devotional expression and performative art, which influenced the aesthetic tradition of classical dance.

### Yajurveda

The **Yajurveda** presents the most vivid connection between ritual and performance. In the context of the *Asvamedha Yajna*, dance and music are prescribed as essential components of the sacred rite. At the time of evening twilight, as the *homa* mantras are chanted, the *yajamani* (the one performing the *yajna*) is instructed to play the *veena* and *dundubhi* (percussion), while his wife accompanies him with *tambura* and *veena*.

A fascinating detail lies in the reference to *dasi nrtya* (7th *kanḍa*, 5th *prapaṭhaka*, 10th *anuvaka*), where a *dasi* dances with a pot of water on her head, striking her foot while chanting “*idam madhu.*” This act is

said to bring auspiciousness to the yajna, and the term *madhu* refers to the food offering for the gods. Whether this *dasi* could be the precursor to the *devadasi* tradition warrants further academic exploration.

### Atharvaveda

The *Atharvaveda*, with its earthy and practical tone, also includes references to dance. Words like *nrtiyanti* and *nrtaye* occur in its verses. In one verse, day and night are depicted as dancing sisters, a poetic symbol of cosmic rhythm and balance. In the Prthvi Sukta, One verse praises Earth thus:

*“Where the men are into dance... I trust only that Mother Earth; she can protect me from enemies.”*

This suggests that dance was not only a form of joy or devotion but also a symbolic expression of cosmic harmony and human celebration.

### The Divine Origin of Dance

The spiritual significance of dance finds profound expression in the *Natyasastra*, which asserts that dance is derived from the Vedas. In the very first chapter, it is said:

*Jagrahapatthyamrigvedaat samabhyo  
geeta mevacha*

*Yajurvedaa dabhinayayaan rasaanad-  
harvanaadapi*

— *Natyasastra*, Chapter 1

According to this verse, when the gods requested a form of moral and spiritual education that also provided entertainment, Brahma created Natya (dance-drama) by drawing from all four Vedas:

Rigveda → *Paṭhya* (narrative/language)

Samaveda → *Gita* (melody)

Yajurveda → *Abhinaya* (expression and movement)

Atharvaveda → *Rasa* (aesthetics and emotional experience)

Thus, *Natya* was extolled as the *Panchama veda*, the fifth Veda, and seen as the essence of all four. Since the Rigvedic verses are composed in *chandas* (metre), rhythm is innately embedded in them. Their chanting, infused with spiritual energy, became the foundation for Vedic music. Margi music, evolved from this tradition, later became the musical core of Indian classical dance. In turn, the *sahitya* (lyrics) of dance inherited the rhythmic and spiritual charge of the Vedas, forming an unbroken thread from sacred chant to aesthetic movement.

### Abhinaya

*Abhipurvastu nee dhaturabhimukh-  
yardha nirnaye*

*Yasmat prayogam nayati tasmad-  
habhinayah smritah*

— *Natyasastra*, Chapter 6



*Abhinaya* is the art of conveying the meaning (essence) of the lyrics being sung in a dance performance. This abhinaya captivates the connoisseur and a layman alike. The feelings churn the hearts of spectators while watching a proper abhinaya depending on the individual emotional states. This abhinaya is said to be of fourfold: *angika* (the whole-body movement), *vachika* (dialogue), *aharya* (costume, jewelry, makeup, props etc.) and *satwika* (expressions—reaction of the body according to the state of mind).

As we discussed earlier in this essay, the *Yajurveda* comprises a set of rules and regulations to perform specific yajna along with the music to be sung or played, the dance to be performed, the setting of yajna kund, the materials to be used, usage of various things, the hand gestures to be used while chanting mantras, etc. The essence of this is transformed as four-fold abhinaya in Indian dance.

Rasa is described as a state (feeling) experienced by a spectator while watching a performance which is thought-provoking and evoking emotions. This element of rasa along with *bhavas* finds its origin from *Atharvaveda*.

The set of letters, words, the story line, etc., which are the basis of the plot, are taken from the *Rigveda*, the rhythm, time cycle and tone of the song are taken from

the *Samaveda*. The actions of the *Rtvij*s, who offer the *Havis*, etc. to the gods through the sacrificial fire, *Homagni*, with the sound of the mantra, based on the body, bring auspiciousness to the *yajna yajamani*, all those individuals participating in the yajna and the whole world. It is believed that the abhinaya, which is done based on the body and soul, brings auspiciousness to the performer and the beholder alike.

### **Tracing the origins of Indian Dance through the Upavedas**

Dance and music are derived from the *Gandharva Veda*. Bharata described *nyayas*, the movements of body along with the hand gestures, feet positions, focus and concentration needed while using different weapons like sword and shield, bow and arrow (*dhanushkaranam*) etc., in order to perform war scenes on a stage. These movements are similar to the movements told in *Dhanurveda*, the veda for warfare knowledge. In his *Natya-sastra*, after elucidating 108 *karanas*, the movements of body along with the positions and movements of hands and feet, Bharata mentioned that these *karanas* can be incorporated in a choreography of a war scene.

In the *Sthapatya Veda*, the knowledge of sculpture, we find *nritya murtis* of different deities (Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Narasimha, Ganapati, Parvati, etc.). All

the deities are sculpted with respective details of holding weapons, flowers, parrot etc., with different hand gestures and positions of feet and body postures. All these postures, gestures are imitated in a dance performance. Sculpture and dance go hand in hand, both depending heavily on each other.

Bharata mentioned division of human body parts as *anga*, *upanga* and *pratyanga* for easy understanding and practice of different body movements. Bharata followed *Ayurveda*, the knowledge of human body and medicine in a holistic way in describing the above said division of the human body

### **Tracing the origins of Indian Dance through the Vedangas**

The influence of the *Vedangas* on Indian classical dance becomes evident when we examine how various aspects of these auxiliary Vedic disciplines are reflected in the *Natyasastra*. Among the six Vedangas, *Vyakarana* (grammar) and *Chandas* (metre) are explicitly discussed in the fourteenth chapter of the *Natyasastra*, where Bharata explains how they apply to dance. These aspects help define the linguistic precision and rhythmic structure of performances.

**Jyotisha** (Astrology) makes its appearance in the thirty-fourth chapter, where Bharata

describes the making of percussion instruments. He mentions the auspicious stars under which one should begin crafting an instrument. Such references align directly with *Jyotisha*, which governs auspicious timings (*muhurtas*) and time calculations, often used in rituals and recitations.

**Kalpa** (Ritual Procedure) is reflected in the third chapter of the *Natyasastra*, where the worship of Rangadevatas (stage deities) is elaborately described. The placement of deities, the selection of mantras, and the method of invocation follow the structured ritual format reminiscent of Kalpa Sutras.

In the sixth chapter, the sages request Bharata to expound on aesthetics using *Karika* and *Nirukta*. As previously discussed, *Nirukta* is one of the six Vedangas, dedicated to explaining the meanings of Vedic terms, and *karika* forms a part of it. This emphasis on etymology and semantic precision deepens the philosophical grounding of dance.

**Shiksha** (Phonetics) also plays a foundational role. It teaches the correct pronunciation of mantras to ensure efficacy. Drawing from this principle, Bharata explains how to articulate different segments of a performance, guide performers, and identify the characteristics of ideal spectators. These ensure that the performance achieves its intended emotional and spiritual effect.

### Conclusion: Dance as Yajna

The above discussion shows that the *Veda Samhitas*, *Vedangas*, and *Upavedas* collectively enrich the art of dance. Bharata himself acknowledges multiple times in the *Natyasastra* that a dance performance is equivalent to a yajna (sacred ritual). He prescribes *Tri Samagana Vidhi*, the chanting of the three principal Samans from the *Samaveda*, as a ritualistic prelude to performance: The first Saman should praise *Parabrahma*; the second, *Rathantara Saman*, pleases the sages; and the third, *Brihatsaman*, pleases the gods.

In this way, Bharata equates dance with a sacred offering, asserting that it is a

means of realizing the divine, transmitting wisdom, and imparting moral education. The ultimate goal of the Vedas is to uphold *Sanatana Dharma* through the pursuit of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha*—the four *Purusharthas*. Nandikeshwara affirms in his *Abhinayadarpa*: “*Natyasastra midam dharmarthakamamokshadam*”—The one who acquires the knowledge of Indian dance according to Bharata’s *Natyasastra* will be righteous in nature and there by achieve all their desired goals, prosper in material wealth and finally realizes the ultimate truth and becomes that truth itself. Thus, Indian classical dance emerges not merely as an art form but as a profound Vedic path toward self-realization and the embodiment of cosmic truth.

### About the Author

Sudhamala Nisthala holds an M.Phil. in Dance (Gold Medal), an MA in Telugu, and an MPA in Kuchipudi, along with Diplomas in both Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam. With over four decades of experience in teaching dance, she has choreographed 14 ballets, published 20 scholarly articles, presented papers at national seminars, and delivered numerous lecture-demonstrations. She is the co-founder of Nrityamala, Academy of Indian Dances and Centre for Higher Learning, established in 1984. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Dance.



*Rukmni Devi Arundale - Founder of Kalakshetra, Chennai.*



## Natyayoga

Dr. Uma Vyjayanthimala Kallakuri

Sanatana Dharma explains the term *vid* as knowledge and *vidya* is eternal knowledge. This *vidya* with all branches of its knowledge will lead to a higher state of mind along with the *chaturvidha purushardhas*, *dharma*, *kama*, *Artha*, and finally, *Moksha*. A *sadhaka* must look towards Sri Siva as *Dakshinamurthy*, the eternal preceptor for guidance here. He is *Nataraja*, the king of dancers and the first dancer; *Adiyogi*, the first Supreme ascetic; and, the giver of primal sound *OM*, and language with the sounding of his *Dhamaruka*, the kettle drum (which was codified by Panini as *Maheswara sutrani* in his *Ashtadyayi*). The dance of shiva has been described as the cosmic dance or the movement of the universe.

Angikam bhuvanam yasya vachikam  
sarva vaangmayam/

Aahaaryam Chandra taaraadi tum vande  
saatvikam sivam// 1 (*Abhinaya Darpana*)

Nandikeswara in his text *Abhinaya Darpana* pays obeisance to Sri Siva as that

eternal truth who has the universe for his body, and the moon and stars as his jewels. The primal sound emanating from his *dhakka*, the kettle drum is the percussor for the entire literature, both spoken and written.

The rhythmic dynamics of the universe are the graceful movements of *Nataraja*. The state of motion in the universe is governed by a system of rhythm, periodicity and mutual regularity. The art of dance, which is derived from the dynamic presence of the creator in the creation can, therefore, have a final objective, to merge in the all-pervasive *Nataraja*. The merging of the individual rhythm with the universal rhythm is *Yoga*. Thus, a practitioner of *Natya* endeavoring to merge in *Nataraja* is a *natyayogi*, a *sadhaka* of *Natyayoga*.

To understand the path of *Natyayoga*, one must investigate the origins of dance itself. Dance has been documented right from the *Vedas* where it was a way of life and how gods and demigods were described as great dancers themselves. Dance was part of rituals, community gatherings,

---

*Uma.kallakuri@gmail.com*

celebrating festivals and family occasions. The words like *nrit*, *nat* existed those times which are carried and in circulation today with the familiar terms like *nritya* and *natya*. The very mention of *Apsaras*, celestial nymphs in *Rig Veda*, the dance and music code described in the *Sama Veda* and the beautiful descriptions of costumes and ornaments, and dialogues between various gods in all the four Vedas provide interesting facts that dance was very much prevalent in the Vedic culture and life. The beautiful dancing of women balancing pots filled with water on their heads, chanting the phrase *Idam Madhu!* and striking their right feet for the accomplishment of the *Yajna* was described in detail in *Yajur Veda*. And this act of dancing with the pot over the head has been explained as the practice of *yoga*. We can see some interesting similarity in *Tarangam*, in the *Kuchipudi* dance form of south India, where a dancer balances a pot filled with water over her head and dances to the rhythms voiced by the *nattuvanar* (conductor of the recital, usually *Guru*) to the accompaniment of the percussion sounds. The *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, *kavyas* and other texts of importance to *Sanatana Dharma* have innumerable mentions, and descriptions of *Natya*.

The first known text on dance, *Natyasastra* by sage *Bharata* narrates and gives divine origins to the art of theatrics and dramaturgy. In his first chapter, *Natyot-*

*patti* (origin of *Natya*), *Bharata* describes that *Sri Brahmadeva* created *Natya* as *Panchama Veda*, the fifth *Veda* drawing inspiration from the four Vedas and borrowing recitation from *Rig Veda*, music from *Sama Veda*, *Abhinaya* (histrionics and gesticulation) from *Yajur Veda* and *rasa* or sentiment from *Atharvana Veda*. He also describes *Tandava* and 108 *Karanas* of *Nataraja*, which are the basic units of dance, and are his static and dynamic postures. *Natyasastra* also narrates various stories while prescribing the code of *Natya*. The story of the arrogant sons of *Bharata* being cursed by the *Rishis*, for their rude behavior and how they were forced to leave the heavens, their rightful homes and live on earth is explained. The *bharatas* or sons of *Bharata* can be taken as examples of degradation and loose morals of one's character leading to personal disaster and break in a *sadhana*. The mention of princess *Usha*, daughter of Demon king *Banasura*, and wife of prince *Anirudha*, grandson of *Sri Krishna*, as one of the creators of *Natyasastra* and propagator of *Natya* on this earth and a story from *Sri Shiva Maha Purana* about her *sadhana* and the blessing she receives from the divine dancing couple, *Sri Siva* and *Parvatidevi* can be explained that princess *Usha* might be the first *Natyayogini* who dwelled in the path of *Natyayoga*. The occasion was a grand evening recital by *Siva*, where he chooses a lady partner

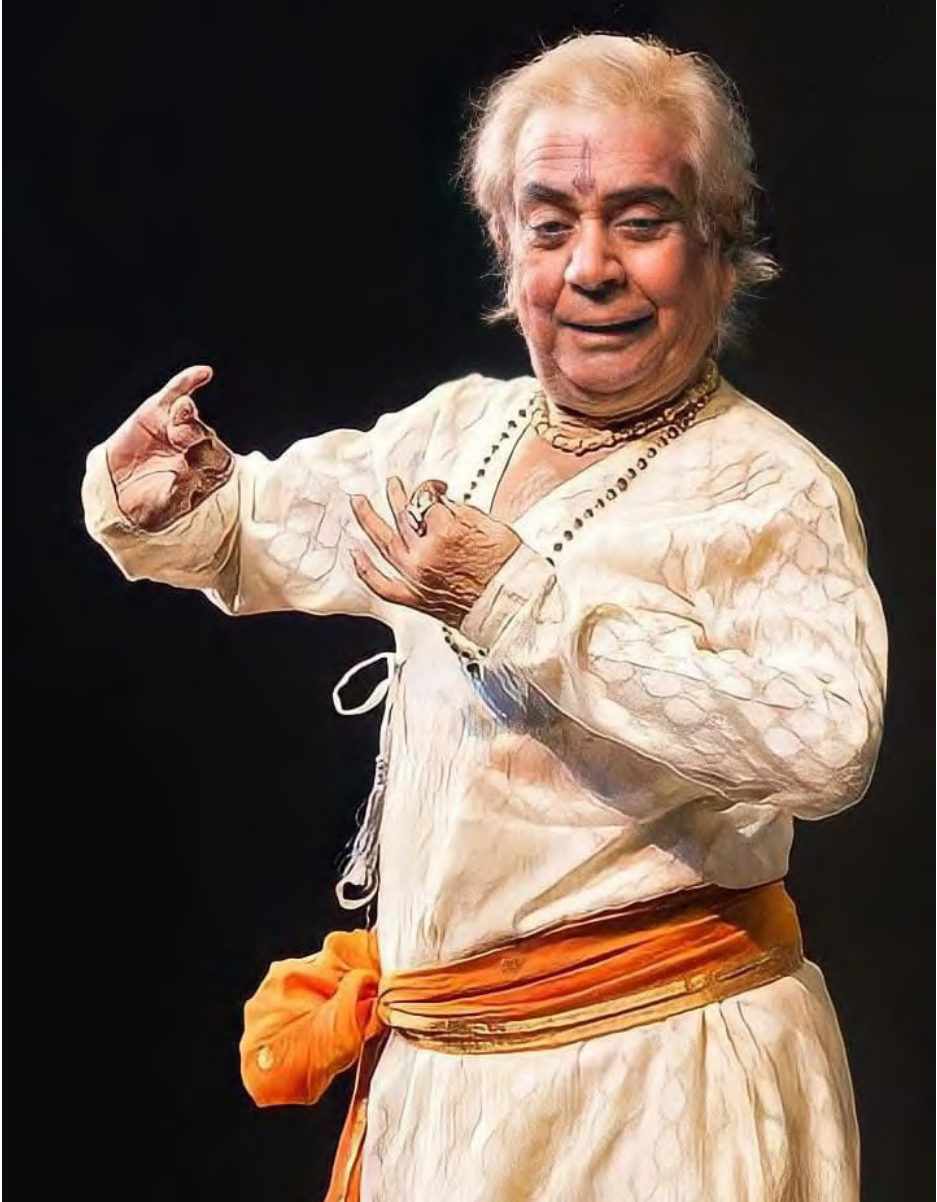
for that day. Usha won that place with her sadhana by performing the technique, Nyasa, identifying herself with the divine self and becoming one with Parvatidevi. This technique is only achieved by dharana and dhyana, continuous concentration and meditation.

The body becomes the instrument for Natyayogi. The codes of behavior and the conduct; the control on the breath, Pranayama; the stillness in the yoga asanas and the practice of static and dynamic Karanas; the hand gestures becoming mudras connecting and bridging the gaps between the outer and inner worlds; the technique of Nyasa along with dharana and dhyana; and

the awakening of serpentine power which is coiled in the mooladhaara chakra and finally accomplishing siddhi and state of jeevanmuktha become the limbs of Natyayoga. Like any sadhana in Sanatana Dharma, Natyayoga requires dedicated practice for several years and a guru who is a jeevanmukta to guide the practitioner. With the divine grace of Sadguru Sivanandamurthy garu and the blessings of Paramaguru tattvam here is the path of Natyayoga with its various limbs to pursue as a sadhaka to attain the merger in Nataraja: Yama and Niyama, Pranaayaama and Aasana, nyaasa, Dhaarana, Dhyaana, Karana, Kundalini Jaagarana, jeevanmukthi.

### About the Author

Dr. Uma Vyjayanthimala Kallakuri, an internationally reputed performer and scholar, holds M.A. degrees in English and History, and a Ph.D. in Dance and Yoga (comparative study). She is the founder and Artistic Director of Nrityamala Academy of Indian Dances and Centre for Higher Learning. Trained under eminent gurus like Sri Vempati Kodandaramasastry and Smt. Dr. K. Uma Ramarao, she is known for preserving rare temple traditions and choreographing items where dancers create symbolic imagery with their feet. Dr. Uma has taught Indian classical dance at universities in the USA and India, and is acclaimed for her innovative teaching methodology with a global perspective. Currently, she teaches at Illinois Wesleyan University, USA.



*Padma Vibhushan Pandit Birju Maharaj*





## Bharatanatya Kala Vaividyam (Nritya – Abhinaya)

Dr. K Gowthami

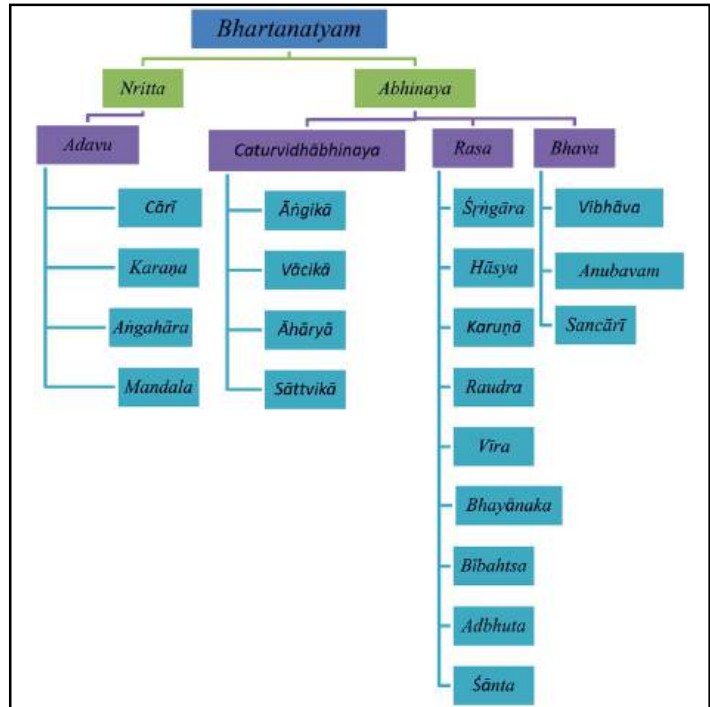
*Bharatanatyam* is regarded to be amongst the finest dance forms of India. This splendid dance form was a part of the rituals of temple worship from days of yore. The ethos of Indian dance is creativeness, holiness and happiness. The Technique of *Bharatanatyam* comprises of two main components 'Nritya' (the technical aspect) and *Abhinaya* (the emotional aspect). *Nritya* uses body movements without any meaning to convey. *Abhinaya* uses a combination of codified hand gestures and facial expressions, sometimes stylized, otherwise natural, to transform the written script into dance. The concept of *Abhinaya* evolved, whereby through suggestion, the thoughts and feelings of characters in relation to their causes and effects were communicated.

Dance spectators have vicarious, empathetic experiences. An uncanny impression is transmitted to the spectators by remarkable modes of progression. The *Abhinayadarpana* states that

[gouthami.dancer@gmail.com](mailto:gouthami.dancer@gmail.com)

“wherever the hands go, there the eyes should follow. Wherever the eyes go, there the mind, wherever the mind goes, there the feeling, wherever the feeling goes, there the mood (rasa) or flavour is found”.

*Abhinaya* is most effective when the accompanying music is modulating according to the mood and movement



of the dance. The combination of *Nritta* and *Abhinaya* is *Nritya*, or dance, that includes body movement together with the portrayal of emotions. In practice, it is the expression of words by the different parts of the body including major and minor limbs as well as subsidiary limbs. Without expression, the hand movements and gestures alone will be unable to bring forth the exact meaning of the situation. For example, anger and love can share the same hand gesture. To distinguish between the two, the facial expression must differ.

### 1. **Nritta:**

*Nritta*, can be divided into *Cārī*, *Karāṇa*, *Nritta Hastas* and *Mandala*. One leg movement called *Cārī*. The movement of two legs is known as *Karāṇa*, the combination of 4 to 9 *Karāṇas* is called as *Aṅgahāra*, and the combination of 4 to 5 *Nritta Hastas* constitutes a *Mandala*.

The main Technique of *Nritta* for dance rests on the study of the '*Adavu*'. *Adavu* is derived from telugu word '*adu*', meaning beat of the foot. Dr. Kanak Rele defined *Adavu* in her book "*Hand book of Indian Classical dance Technology*" as "*The basic rhythmic unit of dance within a specific tempo and structure that involves composite movements pertaining to Nritta*". The *Adavu* structure is followed by oral tradition, each having twelve variations making a total of 120 *adavus*. The *Adavu* counting depends on the guru's style. Sage Bharatamuni, the author of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, has not mentioned anywhere about *Adavu* in his book. However, he mentioned about 108 *Karāṇas* (simultaneous movement

of hands and feet) in the fourth chapter. *Karāṇas* are combinations of four elements, *Sthānas* (Specific Posture), *Cārī* (the cumulative movement of the feet, *shanks*, thighs and hips), *Mandalas* (position of Standing) and *Nritta Hastas* (Hand gestures employed in pure dance). The combination of these four elements, (*Sthānas*, *Cārī*, *Mandalas*, *Nritta Hastas*) is *Adavu*. This system followed by oral tradition, known as *Sollukattu*. Each *Adavu* identified by a rhythmic phrase.

### **a. Cārī:**

According to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Sage Bharata, the combination of the portion below waist to limbs and feet, *Uruvu* (thighs), *Katti* (hips), *Paada* (feet) and *Janghas* (shanks) is known as *Cārī*. The *Cārī* are of two types: *Ākāśikī Cārī*, movements in space (16 in count) and *Bhūmī Cārī* movements on the ground (16 in count).

### **Ākāśikī Cārī (movements in space):**



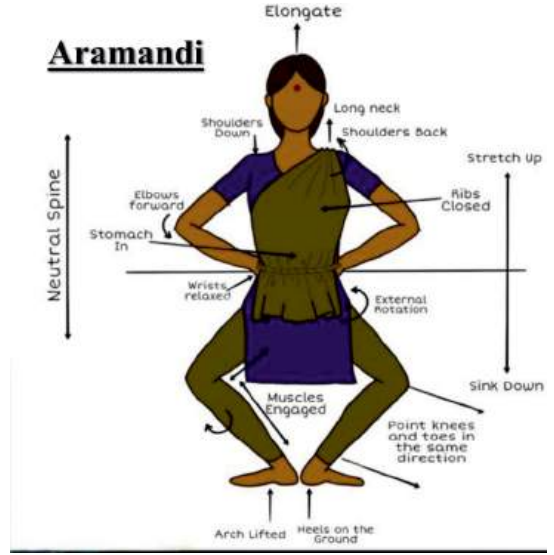
1. *Athi Krantha*, 2. *Apa Krantha*, 3. *Parswa Krantha*, 4. *Urdwajanuvu*, 5. *Suci*, 6. *Nupura Pdika*, 7. *Dola Paada*, 8. *Aakshiptha*, 9. *Aavidha*, 10. *Udwrutha*, 11. *Vidyudbrantha*, 12. *Alaatha*, 13. *BhujAṅga Trasitha*, 14. *Harinnaplutha*, 15. *Danda Paada*, and 16. *Bramari*.

### **Bhūmī Cārī (movements on the ground):**

1. *Sama Paada*, 2. *Sthitha Vartha*, 3. *Shakatasya*, 4. *Adyarthika*, 5. *Chashagathi*, 6. *Vichyava*, 7. *Yedaka Kriditha*, 8. *Badha*, 9. *Urudwrutha*, 10. *Additha*, 11. *Utspandhitha*, 12. *Janita*, 13. *Syandita*, 14. *Apasyandhita*, 15. *Samotsarita Mathalli*, and 16. *Mathalli*. According to *Nandikeśvara's Abhinayadarpaṇa*, "The *Cārī* is forward movement. Gosh translated its gait", These *Cārī* are invariably connected to the *Sthānakas* (Standing Positions) *Āraimandi*, *Mandi* and *Sama Pada*. The same book describes the characteristics of various *CārīBhedas*. *Calana Cārī*, *Camkramana Cārī*, *Sarana Cārī*, *Vegini Cārī*, *Kuttana Cārī*, *Luthita Cārī*, *Lolita Cārī*, and *Vishama Samcara Cārī*.

### **Āraimandi**

*Āraimandi*, the half-sitting posture in Bharatanatyam, is the most fundamental stance that forms the very foundation of the dance form. It enhances the aesthetic appeal of movements by creating geometric precision, strengthens the body through grounded stability, and allows for expressive grace in both pure dance (*nritya*) and expressive dance (*abhinaya*). A dancer's ability to hold and perform in *Āraimandi* reflects discipline, strength, and deep commitment to the classical tradition.



### **B. Karaṇas:**

*Karaṇa* is a technical term, derived from its Sanskrit, *kr-* meaning 'to do', and it is a unit of dance. It is a combination of the three elements, *Cārī* (movement for the legs), *Nritya Hasta* (gesture of the hands) and *Sthānaka* (posture of the Body). *Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra* is the earliest treatise of 108 *Karaṇa*.

A sloka from *Sangita Muktaavali* states that, "these *Karaṇas* are called as '*adu*' by the artists of Andhra region and other provinces, who are experts in the triple arts of vocal, music, instrumental music and dancing.

#### **a. Aṅgahāra:**

*Aṅgahāra*, is the motion of the limbs from one place to another. *Sage Bharata* has enumerated 32 *Aṅgahāra* in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The 32 *Aṅgahāra* are: *Stira Hastham*, *Parya Hastham*, *Suchi Vidhamu*, *Apa*

*Vidhamu, Aakshipthamu, Udghatitamu, Vishkambhamu, Aparajitamu, Vishkambapasrutamu, Matha Kreedu, Swasthika Rechitamu, Parswa Swathikamu,*



Sculptures of Karanas, Chidambaram, Tamilnadu

*Vritsikapasruthamu, Bramaramu, Mathaskalithamu, Madavilasithamu, Gatimandalakamu, Parichinnamu, Parivrutha Rechitamu, Vaisaka Rechitamu, Paravruthamu, Alatham, Parswachedamu, Vidyudbrantamu, Udwruthakamu, Aalidamu, Rechitamu, Aachuritamu, Aakshiptarechitamu, Sambrantamu, Apasarpitamu, Ardhanikuttakamu.* In the 32 *Āṅgahāra*, a bunch of 4 to 5 *Āṅgahāra* makes *Mandala*.

#### **d. Mandala:**

According to *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *Mandala* are two types *Ākāśika Maṇḍala*, and *Bhūmi Maṇḍala*.

#### • **Ākāśika Maṇḍala:**

*Ākāśika Maṇḍala* are of ten types , 1. *Athikranta*, 2. *Vichitra*, 3. *Lalita Sancara*, 4. *Sucividha*, 5. *Dandapaada*, 6. *Vihruta*, 7. *Alataka*, 8. *Vamavidha*, 9. *Lalitha*, 10. *Kranta*.

#### • **Bhūmi Maṇḍala:**

*Bhūmi Maṇḍala* is of ten types, 1. *Brhamara*, 2. *Aaskandita*, 3. *Aavarta*, 4. *Sammotsarita*, 5. *Yedakakridita*, 6. *Addita*, 7. *Shakatasya*, 8. *Adyartika*, 9. *Pishtikusta*, 10. *Cashagati*.

#### **2. Abhinaya:**

Śloka

*Abhipūrvastu Nindhātu  
Rabhimukhyārtha Nirṇaye |G*

*Yasmāt Prayogaṁ Nayati Tasmād  
Abhinayaḥ Śmṛtaḥ ||*

*Vibhāvayati Yasmāc ca Nartakānām  
Prayogataḥ |*

*Śākha-Āṅgopāṅga-Samyuktaḥ  
Tasmād Abhinayaḥ Śmṛtaḥ ||*

The *Abhinaya* is an aspect of super-dramatic expression that leads to imaginative perfection. The Sanskrit term *Abhinaya* literally means “to carry towards” (abhi = towards, ni = to carry). Thus, carrying an idea towards the spectator, or in short, educating them, is *Abhinaya*. The *Abhinayadarpaṇa* mentions that actors educate the spectators by stimulating in them the latent possibility of aesthetic experience. *Abhinaya* is therefore representation, the ability to suggest or present the psychological states of characters in drama or dance.

As Susan Schwartz has noted, *Abhinaya* is the drama of dance. The artist projects this drama as *Bhava*, and the audience experiences *Rasa* as a result. *Rasa* is not a personal sentiment but an individual expression employed as a vehicle of

communication. Thus, *Abhinaya* is not merely the performance of actions but the presentation of gestures and expressions in such a way that spectators derive aesthetic pleasure and enjoyment. *Abhinaya* has also been defined as “movements for suggesting *Rasa* and *Bhava* (psychological states).” For this reason, the word *Abhinaya* may be said to disclose to spectators the manifold beauties and pleasures of a performance by means of words, gestures, and costumes. *Abhinaya* consists of three branches and four elements. The three branches are *Śākha*, *Āṅga*, and *Upāṅga*, which together fulfil thematic and dramatic expression. The four elements are:

- *Āṅgikābhinaya* – expression through the body, gestures, and movements.
- *Vācikābhinaya* – expression through speech, song, or dialogue.
- *Āhāryābhinaya* – expression through decoration, costume, ornaments, and stage properties.
- *Sāttvikābhinaya* – expression through inner emotion, the mental and psychological influence of the mind.

The artist expresses the essential elements of life — *Mano-Vāk-Kāya* (mind, speech, and body). All worldly existence is constituted of these three, and thus the artist learns *Trividhābhinaya* (*Āṅgika*, *Vācika*, and *Sāttvika*). When an artist comes on stage, they must express these along with *Āhārya*, which perfects the *Trividha*. Together, they form the *Caturvidhābhinaya*.

The first attraction, once the curtain

risks, is the appearance of the artist through *Āhāryābhinaya*. By this alone, the audience can guess which role — *Rama*, *Krishna*, etc. — is being portrayed. This makes *Āhārya* the first point of engagement for the audience. Later, body movements and physical expressions reveal the significance of the role. Speech or narrative then fulfils the communication. Yet, at the core of all *Abhinayas* lies *Sāttvikābhinaya*, which gives depth to the performance. The importance of *Sāttvika* has been beautifully illustrated by *Nandikeśvara* in his examples of dance performance.

Śloka:

“Yato hastas tato dr̥ṣṭiḥ, yato dr̥ṣṭis tato manah,  
Yato manas tato bhāvaḥ, yato bhāvas  
tato rasaḥ.”

Not only his vision, but also his mind must be concentrated on the hand, not only his hand vision and mind that his total body must be expressive. All the elements get impression of the audience to a message, which is of philosophical. Therefore, the artist should concentrate on all elements with following four *Abhinayas*, which are.

A. *Caturvidhābhinaya*:

Śloka:

Āṅgiko vācikaś cāhāryaḥ sāttvikaḥ smṛtaḥ |  
Caturdhābhinayaḥ proktaḥ śāstrair  
nātya-viśāradaḥ ||

*Abhinaya* is four-fold, *Āṅgika* (Physical), *Āhārya* (Dress, make-up), *Vācika* (Verbal), *Sāttvika* (Temperamental-inner feelings).

• **Āṅikābhinaya :**

*Āṅikābhinaya* is the expression and thematic representation of a performer through physical or bodily movements. Since it is based on the expression of the body, the organs are divided into three categories: *Aṅga*, *Pratyāṅga*, and *Upāṅga*. The *Abhinaya* expressed through these is classified into three types: *Śārīra*, *Mukhaja*, and *Ceṣṭākṛta*. Within these, the respective elements are *Śākhā*, *Aṅkura*, and *Nṛtta*.

- The body (*Śārīra*) consists of *Aṅga*, *Pratyāṅga*, and *Upāṅga*, and is referred to as *Śākhā* (branch or trunk).
- The face (*Mukhaja*) consists only *Upāṅga*.
- The *Ceṣṭākṛta* type includes activities such as walking, sitting, and standing. These postures are expressed through *Aṅkura*. *Sucha* deals with ongoing and future processes.
- *Nṛtta* consists of certain feats and activities (*Karaṇas*).

During expression, all parts of the body become active and communicative. In *Ceṣṭākṛta Abhinaya*, gestures like *Ṣṭhāna* (standing), *Āsana* (sitting), *Śayana* (lying down), and *Gamana* (walking) are essential. In *Śārīrābhinaya*, movements are clearly defined and determinable. Thus, *Āṅikābhinaya* is broadly divided into three types: *Mukhaja*, *Śārīra*, and *Ceṣṭākṛta*.

**Āhāryābhinaya :**

Decoration (*ālankaraṇa*) forms the foundation of *Āhāryābhinaya*. A

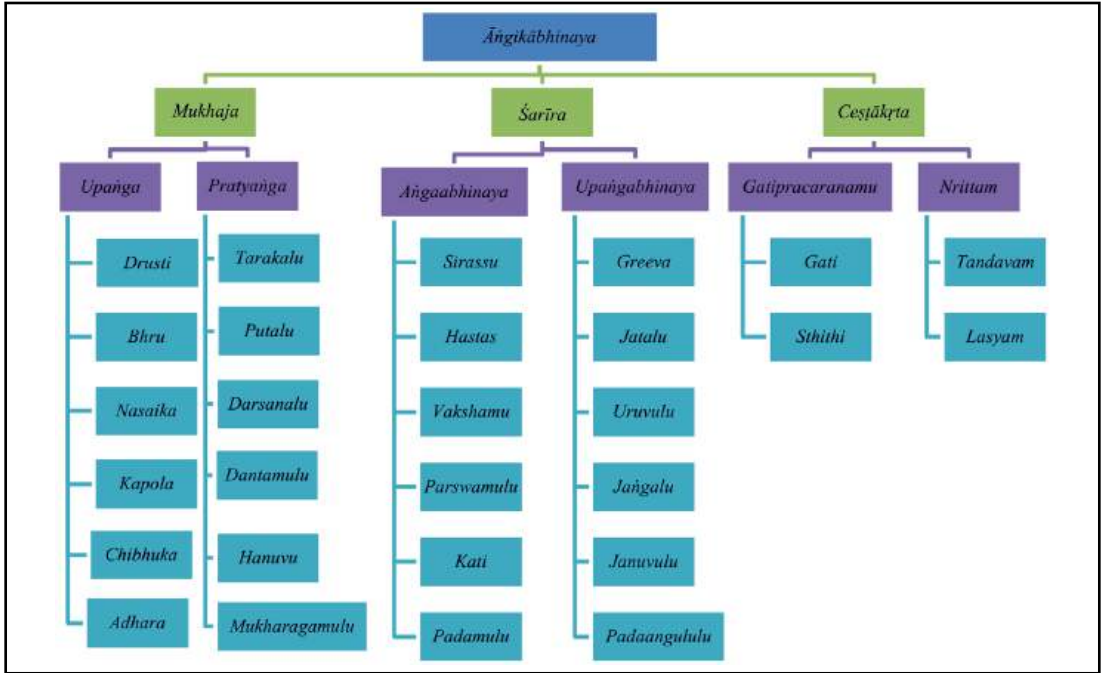
performance without special decoration, ornaments, costumes, hand props, or stage design would lack impression, since these elements give visual identity to the role portrayed by the artist. At times, even without the use of *āṅgika*, *vācika*, or *sāttvika abhinaya*, the *āhārya* itself can effectively communicate the mood, age, nationality, region, or cultural background of a character. It is also essential for explaining the situation and plot of a scene.

*Āhārya* is often regarded as the background of performance. Sometimes, even before the performer appears on stage, the stage decoration alone conveys the theme or situation of the play. For example, the presence of a burial prop may indicate that the drama is about to depict *Hariścandra*, or a scene following war or calamity. *Āhāryābhinaya* is natural and integral to the performance, and can even be considered the very life of the presentation. Another important aspect of *āhārya* is makeup, which varies according to the character appearing on stage. Costumes and makeup are the first elements that attract the audience's attention, establishing expectations before the performance begins. Traditionally, *Āhāryābhinaya* is considered to have fourfold divisions.

**Vācikābhinaya :**

*Vācikā* is the body of the dance. Sometimes *Vāc* (speech) gives the total impression of the dance. Thus, the *Vācikā* is the fundamental part of the performance; the other three *abhinayas* (*Āṅgika-Āhāryā-Sāttvika*) are explained through performer's body. The *Vācikā*



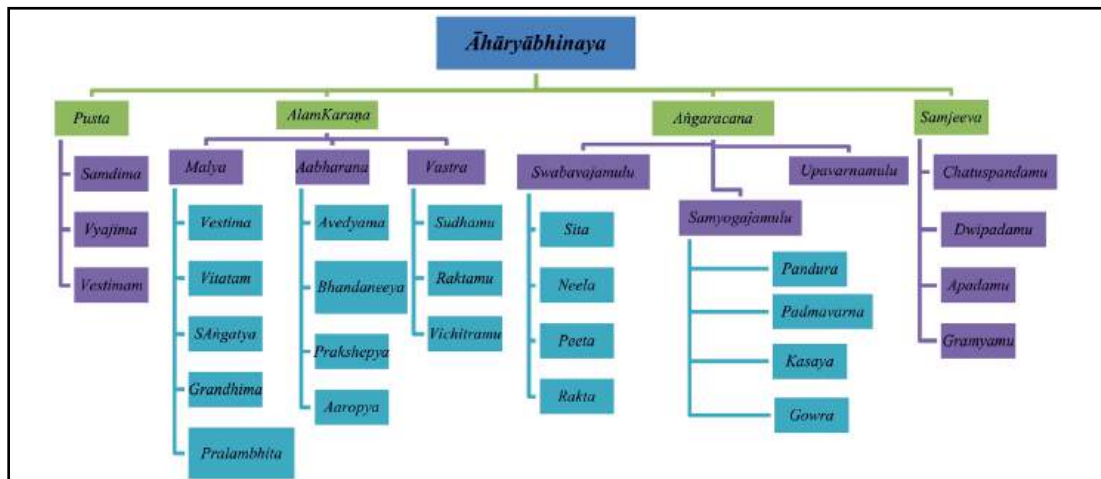


(Speech) comes from the vocalist, but the speech or *Vācikā* gives the total control and life to the performance. Also Sage Bharata mentioned in the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of his *Nāṭyaśāstra Ethivrutam* (*Vācikā*) is the body of *Natya*. *Vācikā* is the speech, that links the other abhinayas for example, a dance performance without song and speech, a drama without dialogue is unexplained. In some performance the loss of speech or infrastructure and other supporting things, like electricity the drama or dance are not watchable. *Vācikābhinaya* is of eleven types: *Bhāṣā-bheda* – varieties of language/dialect, *Vyākaraṇa* – grammar, *Chandas* – metre, *Lakṣaṇa* – definition, characteristics, *Alaṅkāra* – figures of speech, ornamentation, *Guṇa* –

qualities of expression, *Doṣa* – faults, errors in expression, *Sama-bhūmi-vidhāna* – modulation of pitch/intonation, *Nāma-vidhāna* – naming, proper use of terms, *Viramā* – pause, cessation and *Kāku-svara-vyañjana* – modulation of tone and voice inflection.

#### • Sāttvikābhinaya:

The word ‘*Sāttvikā*’ stems that is from the Sanskrit word “*Sāttv*” (purity), it is a synthesis of a man’s mental status of sorrow, joy, moody, arrogant, peace, grace, etc, to express all these feeling on stage, the required status is called *Sāttv* or *Sāttvikā*. As Sage Bharata defined in *Nāṭyaśāstra*, that activities of humans are either joy or sorrow, are the centre of the world. When they are



expressed in physical and mental moods (*Āṅgikābhinaya*), it is called as *Natyam*. When, *Sāttvikā* is in sleeping rather than rest condition or in a buried status it is called as '*Avyaktarūpa*'. Sometimes a man's mind may not be in his control, that stage is called '*Anyamanastha*'. When a man's mind is in his own control, he acquires control over all the senses, at that stage of '*Paripūrṇamanaskatā*' or *Śuci*. The man acts according to his mental control not to the mood or happenings around him. When the performer is in the *Avyaktasvabhāva*, he would bring *rasasiddhi* to the performance, so *Sāttv* is the linchpin to *natya*. The *abhinaya*, which is involve with *Sāttv*, is called *Sāttvikābhinaya*.

## B. Nava Rasas

The satisfaction of the senses and moods is vital for a dance performance. When a dancer performs with a particular theme, that theme must be reflected in their movements, so that the audience experiences and feels what is being

expressed. The audience, in turn, is expected to attain *rasasiddhi*, which indicates how deeply they have grasped and internalized the performance. Without this, the attention of the audience cannot be truly engaged.

*Rasasiddhi* may be compared to the enjoyment of a delicious meal, complete





with all its dishes and flavours. Just as a wholesome meal delights the body, the complete evocation of *rasa* nourishes the mind and heart of the audience. Therefore, a dancer's performance must evoke the *Navarasa* (nine sentiments) within the spectators' hearts.

The sixth chapter of *Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra* explains that the text is composed of elements such as *rasa*, *Bhāva*, *Abhinaya*, *Dharmī*, *Vṛtti*, *Pravṛtti*, *Siddhi*, *Svara*, *Ātodya*, *Gāna*, and *Rāga*. Among these, primary importance is given to *rasa*.

The term *rasa* literally means "essence, taste, or enjoyment." In Sanskrit usage, it can also denote "juice, fluid, flavour, fragrance, or even an intoxicating essence." In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *Bharata* propounded eight *rasas*, and later, *Śānta* (peace, tranquillity) was added, corresponding to the *sthāyibhāva* (permanent mood). Thus, there are nine *rasas* (*Navarasa*) *Śṛṅgāra* (erotic, love), *Hāsyā* (comic, laughter), *Karūṇā* (pathetic, compassion), *Raudra* (furious, anger), *Vīra* (heroic, valour), *Bhayānaka* (terrible, fear), *Bībhatsa* (odious, disgust), *Adbhuta* (marvellous, wonder), *Śānta* (peace, tranquillity)

#### • Śṛṅgāra :

The senses of *Śṛṅgārarasa* is derived from a *sthāyi* of *Rati*, sex or biological need, as it is the components of youth full male and female, it is always seen as the brightest of all *rasas*. A person, who appears with bright face, well-built personality, from wealthy background, dwells in magnificent castle, who hails from a good family background, obedient to elders with a good tradition and culture



is a man of attraction and produced when somebody has a good property name brightness of worldly things and sexual intercourse. This *Śṛṅgāra* is two types *Sambhoga Śṛṅgāra*, enjoyment, love in union. *Vipralamba Śṛṅgāra* love in separation, especially "the deceived heroine," one of the *Aṣṭa-nāyikās*.

#### • Sambhoga Śṛṅgāra:

In the season of spring the flowers, garlands, attractive fragrance etc. will attract the likeminded people. This *rasa* is produced when somebody moves in the company of their friends, gardens, bathing, good building, lessoning to music, flattery and imitating the great people, these are the *bhavas* of *Sambhoga Śṛṅgāra*. To look with an attractive eyes stare with the end of the eyebrow, lashing the eyes to move with delicacy to expose eroticism through their facial and body expression, to show eroticism with ornaments, dress and other things are *anubhava* of *Sambhoga Śṛṅgāra*. Except *Ālasya* (sloth, laziness, delay) *Ugratā*

(ferocity, harshness) *Jugupsā* (disgust, aversion) all the other 30 *Vyabichārībhavas* are produced in the *Sambhoga Śṛṅgāra*.

• **Vipralamba Śṛṅgāra:**

This is a negative eroticism like unethical, hurt, suspicious, jealous, sad, sleepy, dream, message, disease, psychotic, unconscious, desire, death etc. to express with all these feelings are *Vipralamba Śṛṅgāra*.

• **Hāsyā:**

*Hāsyā* *Rasa*  
originates from  
*Sthāyibhava* of  
*Hāsa*. *Hāsyā* *Rasa*  
arises from activities  
such as observing  
people with physical  
disabilities, mental  
oddities, peculiar or  
comical behaviour,  
exaggerated  
movements of  
the eyes, lips, and  
cheeks, descriptions

of humorous incidents, and  
situations of misfortune or  
frustration. These serve as the  
*Vibhāvas* (determinants) that  
generate *Hāsyā*. The *Anubhāvas*  
(consequents) through which *Hāsyā*  
is expressed include: movements of  
the lips, nose, and cheeks, darting  
of the eyes, facial perspiration,  
and placing the hands on the hips.  
The *Vyabichārībhāvas* (transitory  
states) associated with *Hāsyā* are:  
*Avahasta* (awkwardness), *Tandra*  
(drowsiness), *Nidrā* (sleep), *Svapna*  
(dream), *Prabodha* (awakening),



and *Asūyā* (jealousy).

There are two main types of *Hāsyā* *Rasa*: *Ātmastha* – laughter directed at oneself (self-smile). *Parasta* – laughter directed at others (making others laugh). The *Nāṭyaśāstra* further classifies *Hāsyā* into six gradations: *Smita* – a gentle smile, *Hasita* – a slight laugh with mild sound, *Vihāsita* – laughter accompanied by widening of the eyes and slight head movements, *Upahasita* – laughter expressed with sarcasm or ridicule, *Apahasita* – boisterous, uncontrolled laughter and *Atihasita* – excessive laughter with clapping, shaking of the body, and loud sounds.

• **Karuṇā:**

*Karuṇā* *Rasa* arises from the *Sthāyibhāva* of *Śoka* (sorrow, grief). when somebody feel sad, sorrow, calamity, sabotage, separation, destruction of property and closed, exiled, fire accident, the occurrence of death and problems are the *Vibhāvas*, produced in the *Karuṇā*

*Rasa* Weeping, crying, self-execution and other execution, change in the skin colour, clinging, trembling, shivering, uneven breath, loss of memory etc, are *Anubhāvas* of *Karuṇā*. *Karuṇā* depended on the



*Vyabhicārībhāvas* of *Nirveda* (detachment, self-disgust), *Glāni* (lassitude, weakness), *Cintā* (worry), *Autṣukya* (anxiety), *Āvega* (agitation), *Bhrama* (delusion), *Moha* (confusion), *Śrama* (fatigue), *Bhaya* (fear), *Viśāda* (despair), *Dainya* (wretchedness), *Vyādhi* (illness), *Jāḍya* (inactivity, dullness), *Unmāda* (insanity), *Apasmāra* (epilepsy/mental disorder), *Trāsa* (terror), *Ālasyam* (sloth, inertia), *Marāṇa* (thoughts of death), *Sthambha* (stupor), *Vepathu* (shivering), *Vaivarnya* (change of complexion), *Āśru* (tears) and *Svarabheda* (alteration of voice).

### • **Raudra:**

*Raudra Rasa* originates from the *Sthāyibhāva* of *Krodha* (anger). It is often associated with demons, evil persons, or characters driven by destructive emotions. *Vibhāvas* (Determinants), Circumstances that evoke *Raudra* include: Acts of war and battles, anger and rage, crossing divine, social, or moral limitations, national or political conflicts, educational disputes, ill-treatment or insults, beating, killing, and acts of violence and frightening or threatening situations. *Anubhāvas* (Consequents), The external manifestations of *Raudra* are: Chopping, beating, or throwing weapons/articles, fierce body movements and gestures, reddish eyes and fiery



gaze, twisting of the forehead, clenching and biting of teeth, shivering cheeks and rubbing or wringing of hands. *Vyabhicārībhāvas* (Transitory States), The supporting emotions and mental states of *Raudra* include: *Sammoham* (bewilderment), *Utsāha* (enthusiasm, Vigor), *Āvega* (agitation, excitement), *Amarṣa* (indignation, intolerance), *Capalatā* (restlessness, fickleness), *Ugrata* (ferocity), *Garva* (pride, arrogance), *Sveda* (sweating), *Vepathu* (trembling), *Romaṇca* (horripilation/goosebumps). *Raudra Rasa* portrays the intensity of anger and destructive power, making it one of the most dynamic and forceful rasas in performance.

### • **Vīra:**

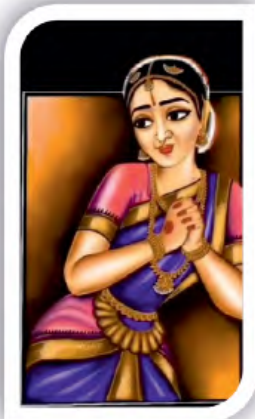
*Vīra Rasa* (The Sentiment of Heroism). *Vīra Rasa* is associated with the *Uttama Nāyaka*s (noble heroes and leaders). It embodies valour, courage, and determination. *Vibhāvas* circumstances and qualities that evoke *Vīra* include: Interest and determination, obedience and discipline, strength and energy, ferocity when required, power and influence. *Anubhāvas* *Sthairya* (steadfastness, composure), *Dhairya* (courage), *Śaurya* (heroism, bravery), *Tyāga* (sacrifice). *Vīra*



*abhicāribhāvas*. The supporting emotions of *Vīra* include: *Dṛti* (fortitude, perseverance), *Matī* (intelligence, wisdom), *Garva* (pride, confidence), *Ugrata* (intensity, seriousness), *Amarsa* (righteous indignation), *Smṛti* (memory, awareness of duty), *Romañca* (horripilation, thrill) and *Pratibodha* (alertness, awakening). *Vīra Rasa* celebrates courage, nobility, and strength, and is often seen in depictions of warriors, leaders, or individuals standing firm for righteousness (*dharma*).

• **Bhayānaka:**

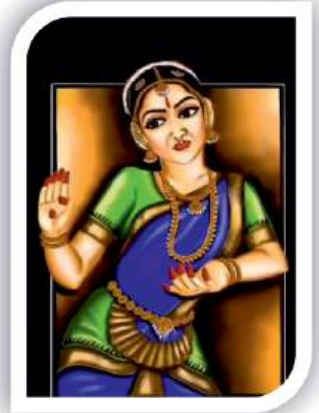
*Bhayānaka Rasa* originates from the *Sthāyibhāva* of *Bhaya* (fear). It is also referred to as *Vikṛta Rasa* (distorted or dreadful sentiment). *Vibhāvas*, the situations and experiences that evoke *Bhayānaka* include: Seeing ghosts (*Piśāca Darśana*), sounds of foxes, owls, or other ominous creatures, entering a forest or deserted/haunted house, hearing inauspicious or fearful stories, encountering terrifying or eerie environments. *Anubhāvas*, the outward expressions of fear are: Shivering and trembling, rapid or shifting eye movements, unstable hands and limbs, sudden body shakes, change of complexion, alteration of the voice. *Ābhicāribhāvas*, the supporting mental states of *Bhayānaka* include: *Stambha* (stupor, paralysis), *Sveda* (sweating),



*Gārgita* (throat sounds, murmuring), *Romañca* (horripilation/goosebumps), *Vepathu* (trembling), *Svarabheda* (alteration of voice), *Vaivarnya* (change of complexion), *Śaṅkā* (suspicion, doubt), *Moha* (confusion, delusion), *Dainya* (wretchedness, helplessness), *Āvega* (agitation), *Capalatā* (restlessness), *Jāḍya* (inactivity, dullness), *Trāsa* (terror, fright), *Apasmāra* (seizure, unconsciousness). *Bhayānaka Rasa* depicts terror, anxiety, and dread, often used in dramatic situations to captivate the audience with feelings of suspense and horror.

• **Bībhatsa:**

*Bībhatsa Rasa* originates from the *Sthāyibhāva* of *Jugupsā* (disgust, aversion, untidiness). *Vibhāvas*, situations that give rise to *Bībhatsa* include: Encountering unclean or untidy conditions, irritating or repulsive objects, foolish, stupid, or absurd behaviour, unlikely or offensive situations and hearing or speaking indecent or vulgar words. *Anubhāvas*, the physical expressions of disgust are: Squeezing or contracting the body, shortening or twisting the face, bouncing/shrugging shoulders, vomiting gestures and spitting. *Ābhicāribhāvas*, the supporting emotions of *Bībhatsa* include: *Apasmāra* (fainting, seizure), *Udvega* (anxiety, dis-

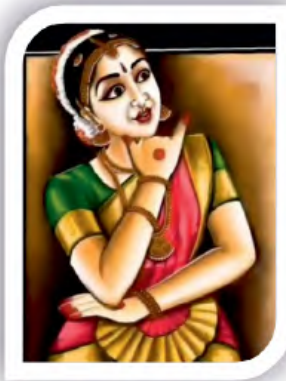




treess), *Āvega* (agitation), *Moha* (confusion, delusion), *Vyādhi* (illness), *Maraṇa* (thoughts of death, extreme aversion). *Bībhatsa Rasa* represents disgust and revulsion, portraying the human tendency to recoil from that which is foul, dirty, or offensive.

• **Adbhuta:**

*Adbhuta Rasa* originates from the *Sthāyibhāva* of *Vismaya* (astonishment, amazement). It expresses feelings of awe, curiosity, and admiration. *Vibhāvas*, circumstances that evoke *Adbhuta* include: Witnessing divine forms and miracles, extraordinary or supernatural events, unexpected phenomena in nature, grand and magnificent objects, exceptional deeds of bravery or skill and listening to wondrous stories or experiences. *Anubhāvas*, the outward expressions of wonder are: Widening of eyes and raising eyebrows, gazing intently at the object of wonder, exclamatory sounds (like “Ah!”), smiling or expressing joy, movement of hands and head in surprise and freezing momentarily in awe. *Vyabhicāribhāvas*, the supporting emotions of *Adbhuta* include: *Harṣa* (joy), *Romāñca* (thrill/goosebumps), *Srama* (fatigue after excitement), *Vismaya* (astonishment), *Cintā* (contemplation), *Utsāha* (enthusiasm), *Avega* (excitement/agitation), *Ānanda* (delight). *Adbhuta Rasa* inspires awe, curiosity, and admiration, elevating the audience to experi-



ence the beauty of the extraordinary.

• **Śānta:**

*Śānta Rasa* originates from the *Sthāyibhāva* of *Sama / Śama* (peace, equanimity). It embodies detachment, serenity, and realization of truth. *Vibhāvas*, Discourses of sages and saints, spiritual knowledge and detachment from worldly desires, renunciation of material pleasures, meditative environments, temples, sacred spaces and awareness of impermanence of life.

*Anubhāvas*, steady, composed posture, gentle, serene expression, slow and graceful speech/movement, detached attitude towards joy and sorrow and absence of restless actions. *Vyabhicāribhāvas*, *Nirveda* (detachment), *Dhairya* (patience), *Cintā* (philosophical thought), *Mati* (intellect, wisdom), *Smṛti* (remembrance of spiritual truths), *Samādhi* (absorption, meditation). *Śānta Rasa* is the culmination of all *Rasas*, representing inner balance and the ultimate spiritual goal of tranquillity.



**C. Bhāvas:**

*Bhāva* is nothing but the emotion which creates a sense of enjoyment. As *Rukmini Devi Arundale* has beautifully said, *Bhāva* is the outer mode of an inner expression. *Sage Bharata* has classified 49 *bhāvas* into

three main categories: *Sthāyibhāvas* – the static or permanent emotions. *Sañcārī* / *Vyabhicārī bhāvas* – the transitory or passing emotions which move along with the main sentiment. *Sāttvikabhāvas* – the responsive emotions which appear as natural reactions. In this process, *Vibhāvas* are the causes or reasons for an emotion to arise. *Anubhāvas* are the outward signs – the gestures, the facial changes, and the body language. *Sāttvikabhāvas* are the deep physical manifestations like tears, sweating, shivering, or change of colour, which show the intensity of the inner feeling. When all these come together, they bring out the *Sthāyibhāvas*, which finally blossom into *Rasa*. This shows how closely *Bharatanatyam* is connected with emotions. Every movement, every look, every expression is woven with *Bhāva*. Through this, the dance does not remain just physical but becomes a mirror of values, culture, and spirit. *Bharatanatyam* enriches our priceless principles and traditions. It must flourish and reach everyone, so that it, reflects our rich culture and spiritual depth. Brings discipline, coordination, grace, and charm into life. Cultivates patience and understanding of the world around us. Helps us connect with nature and higher truths. Carries valuable messages through

*Nāṭya*. Reveals emotions beautifully through fascinating expressions. In this way, *Bharatanatyam* not only entertains but also uplifts, guiding the dancer and the audience towards knowledge, beauty, and closeness to the supreme.

### **Conclusion**

*Abhinaya* is the very soul of *nāṭya*. The fourfold divisions *Āṅikābhinaya*, *Vācikābhinaya*, *Āhāryābhinaya*, and *Sāttvikābhinaya*, together form the complete framework of expression in Indian classical performance. Each has its unique significance: *Āṅika* conveys meaning through bodily movements, *Vācika* through speech and song, *Āhārya* through costume and visual presentation, and *Sāttvika* through the inner emotions of the mind. When harmoniously combined, these four aspects enable the performer to transform the stage into a living world of *rasa* and *bhāva*. The spectator, in turn, experiences *rasānubhūti* the aesthetic joy that is the ultimate aim of art as envisioned by *Bharata* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Thus, *Abhinaya* is not merely an external technique but the essence that bridges the artist and the audience, making performance a medium of cultural, spiritual, and emotional communication.

### ***ABOUT AUTHOR***

*Dr. Gowthami Kandrapeta is a Bharatanatyam exponent, educator, and cultural researcher with a Ph.D. in Performing Arts from the University of Hyderabad.*

*With over 25 years of experience in classical dance, she is the founder and director of Gowthami's Nrityalaya, a reputed institution with multiple branches across Hyderabad, dedicated to training students in Bharatanatyam, Carnatic music, and allied art forms. Passionate about preserving and promoting Indian cultural heritage, Dr. Gowthami actively engages in teaching, writing, curating performances, and mentoring students across all age groups and nationalities.*



## **“KUCHIPUDI: EVOLVING FROM ENSEMBLE DRAMA TO EXPRESSIVE SOLO – A LEGACY IN BALANCE” INDIAN DANCE: A CULTURAL MOSAIC**

Madhumathi Kulkarni

Dance is one of the most ancient and universal forms of human expression. It is both a physical and emotional language, used by individuals and communities across cultures to communicate stories, rituals, emotions, and social values. From the earliest tribal rituals to contemporary stage performances, dance has served multiple roles—spiritual, celebratory, theatrical, and recreational.

Broadly, dance can be categorized into various forms based on its function, style, and cultural context. Traditionally, it is often grouped as classical and folk. Classical dance is usually codified, with a structured grammar and a lineage of formal training, often associated with spiritual or courtly traditions. Folk dance, on the other hand, arises from the life and customs of ordinary people, reflecting regional identity, community spirit, and collective memory.

Beyond these, dance encompasses a wide range of expressions including tribal, ritual, social, theatrical, contemporary, and urban forms. Each of these evolves with time, influenced by geography, history, and society. Despite these differences, all forms of dance share a common thread—they embody rhythm, movement, and the profound human urge to connect, communicate, and celebrate life through the body.

India, with its vast geography and deep cultural diversity, is home to a rich tapestry of dance traditions. It is impossible to define Indian dance through a single style or expression. Each region of the country has developed its own distinctive dance form, shaped by its local language, music, instruments, and influenced by social, religious, and political contexts.

These dance traditions are not merely artistic expressions but are deeply woven into the cultural and spiritual fabric of the region they originate from. While some

---

*neelam\_madhu@yahoo.com*

forms have evolved as classical dance systems with codified techniques and spiritual underpinnings, others flourish as folk and community dances, celebrating seasonal cycles, rituals, and everyday life.

Indian dance, in all its forms, stands as a testament to the country's layered history and pluralistic ethos. It reflects the unity in diversity that defines the Indian subcontinent—where each movement, rhythm, and gesture carry the imprint of a specific cultural identity while contributing to the collective heritage of Indian art.

Within the wide spectrum of Indian dance, two broad streams can be observed: the Drama Tradition and the Solo Tradition. These streams differ in format, presentation, and purpose, yet both are rooted in the aesthetic and spiritual frameworks laid out in ancient texts like the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

### 1. Drama Tradition (Nāṭya Sampradāya):

The drama tradition refers to performances that are narrative in nature and include dialogue, character roles, music, and dance. These are often theatrical productions rooted in classical and usually depict devotional themes.

- This tradition draws heavily from **Nāṭaka** and **Nāṭya** concepts of Sanskrit theatre.
- The performers take on specific characters, with well-defined roles and emotional arcs.

- It includes speech, singing, instrumental music, and dance movements, offering a holistic performing art experience.

#### Examples include:

- **Kuchipudi Yakshagāna** (Andhra Pradesh) – a blend of dance, music, and spoken word.
- **Kathakali** (Kerala) – elaborate storytelling through facial expressions, mudras, and stylized gestures.
- **Melattur Bhagavata Mela** (Tamil Nadu) – Bhagavata Mela performances typically draw their stories from the Hindu Epics and Puranas, with *Prahlada Charitram* being one of the most frequently presented and widely cherished themes. They are traditionally staged during the Vasantotsav festival held in Melattur, coinciding with Narasimha Jayanti celebrations.

The drama tradition is collective, involving multiple artists including dancers, singers, musicians, and often a Sutradhara (narrator or conductor).

### 2. Solo Tradition (Ekāhārya Sampradāya):

The solo tradition focuses on individual expression, where a single dancer portrays



multiple characters, emotions, and themes through nuanced movement and abhinaya (expressive storytelling).

- The solo dancer assumes the responsibility of narration, using **mudras** (hand gestures), facial expressions, and body movements to convey complex narratives and emotions.
- These performances are often introspective, focusing on devotion (**bhakti**), love (**śṛṅgāra**), or philosophical themes.

#### Examples include:

- **Bharatanatyam** – known for its solo repertoire like *Varnam*, *Padam*, and *Abhinaya* items.
- **Odissi** – where the dancer expresses lyrical beauty and spiritual emotion through solo interpretation.
- **Mohiniyattam** – graceful solo performances focused on feminine expressiveness.
- **Kuchipudi solo presentations** – which evolved alongside the Yakshagana tradition, blending both drama and pure dance.

#### Kuchipudi: A Theatre of Storytelling and Spirituality

Together, the Drama Tradition and Solo Tradition form the two foundational pillars

of Indian dance. While the former thrives on collective storytelling and theatricality, the latter celebrates individual creativity and emotional subtlety. Kuchipudi, beautifully balance both traditions—offering group-based dance dramas and solo items with a vast repertoire.

Kuchipudi evolved through two parallel streams: **Nāṭyamēla** and **Naṭṭuvamēla**, each shaped by distinct social and artistic contexts.

The **Nāṭyamēla** represents the drama tradition, practiced exclusively by male performers from Bhagavata families in Kuchipudi village. Women were not permitted to perform in this tradition. The all-male troupes enacted elaborate based on traditional devotional themes, with each artist taking on a specific character. This tradition emphasized group storytelling through a combination of dialogue, music, and stylized movement.

In contrast, the **Naṭṭuvamēla** tradition was nurtured by the **devadāsīs**, women dedicated to temple service. They were highly trained in music, dance, and literature—both in Telugu and Sanskrit—and offered their art as part of daily rituals to the deity. Their performances were sacred, forming an integral part of temple worship and often confined to the inner sanctum of temple spaces. This tradition cultivated the solo expressive format, where the dancer

embodied various emotions and devotional themes with depth and grace.

With time, a third strand emerged—the tradition of court dancers, who also performed in the solo format. These dancers presented refined pieces before kings and royal courts. Their art served not only as entertainment but also as form of rejuvenation for the ruler, who carried the burdens of governance. These performances combined artistry with aesthetic pleasure, bringing emotional balance and mental relief to the patron.

Over the years, there was artistic exchange and dialogue between the male Nāṭyamēla performers and the devadāsīs of the Naṭṭuvamēla tradition. Despite differences in setting—temple, village, or court—the shared commitment to art, devotion, and expression unified these traditions. Together, they enriched the Kuchipudi repertoire and laid the foundation for its transformation into the dynamic classical form we recognize today.

With Nāṭyamēla as the central focus of the article, the discussion extends to its different forms and stylistic variants.

### **Siddhendra Yogi Era: The Spiritual Architect of Kuchipudi**

Siddhendra Yogi is regarded as the pioneer who shaped and systematized the

dance form now known as Kuchipudi. While dance traditions existed prior to him in the region, they were not identified by the name ‘Kuchipudi’ until his influence. The form takes its name from the village of Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh, located about 40 kilometers from Vijayawada. Art historians place Siddhendra Yogi between the 13th and 14th centuries and played a pivotal role in shaping the art into a structured theatrical form. His most celebrated contribution is the creation of **Bhāmakalāpam**, a dance-drama centered on the character of **Satyabhāma**, the proud and passionate consort of Lord Krishna. The drama typically features three characters: **Satyabhāma**, **Krishna**, and a **sakhi** named **Mādhavi**, who is usually portrayed by the **Sūtradhāra** (the narrator). Interestingly, the same performer playing Mādhavi transforms into **Mādhava** in the later scenes when the character is with Lord Krishna. Through this work, Siddhendra Yogi introduced a strong narrative structure, expressive abhinaya, and literary depth to Kuchipudi. Bhāmakalāpam combines devotional, poetic, and dramatic elements, making it a foundational piece in the Kuchipudi repertoire. Originally performed by male artists from the Bhagavata tradition, but its influence continues to shape the journey of every Kuchipudi student, even in the present generation. Even today, Bhāmakalāpam remains a benchmark

of expressive storytelling and classical aesthetics in the Kuchipudi tradition. The structural elements of Bhāmakalāpam—such as the *Pravesa Daruvu* (entrance verse), *Lekha* (the letter) and *Kandāṛtham* (a poetic meter), established a lexicon and format that became a model for many dance-dramas that followed.

Vedantam Satyanarayana Sharma portrayed the role of Satyabhama with unmatched brilliance, establishing himself as a legendary figure and an unparalleled icon in that portrayal. While Vedantam Satyanarayana Sharma's portrayal of Satyabhama was a remarkable feat of male impersonation, his performance set such a high benchmark that it became extremely challenging for any female dancer to take up the role and match his legacy. However, it was Shobha Naidu who rose—staging thousands of performances and establishing herself as a true icon in the role of Satyabhama, carrying forward the legacy with distinction and grace.

It is difficult to determine with certainty what existed before Siddhendra Yogi. However, a 12th-century poet Palkuri Somanatha, in his *Basava Purāṇam*, describes several **Mārgi** and **Deśi** dance forms performed during the Śivarātri celebrations at Śrīśailam. While he does not explicitly refer to Kuchipudi by name, dance scholars believe that these descriptions likely point to early forms

of Kuchipudi, indicating the presence of related performance traditions well before Siddhendra Yogi's time.

At the same time, though there are no written records, oral traditions affirm that the Kuchipudi Bhagavatas used to perform Sanskrit dramas like *Chanda Koushikam*, *Uttara Ramacharitam*, *Veni Samharam*, *Mrchchakatikam*, *Shakuntalam*, and *Vikramorvashiyam*.

### Kuchipudi and Social Responsibility

There is epigraphical evidence in the form of the Machupalli Kaiphiyattu inscription dated CE 1506, which records that a **Kelika** (a dramatic presentation) was performed before the Vijayanagara king Veera Narasimha Rayalu. This performance depicted the misgovernance of Sammeta Guravaraju, the then ruler of Siddhavatam. The Kuchipudi Bhagavatas who presented the incident in a powerful and compelling manner were instrumental in drawing the king's attention to the issue. Moved by the intensity of the portrayal and the alarming events, King Veera Narasimha Rayalu is said to have taken immediate corrective action, as documented in the inscription. **Kelika** is a short dance-drama format that presents contemporary themes, often created spontaneously in response to current situations. These performances are typically extempore, scripted, set to music, and choreographed within a very short

time, involving a limited number of artists. This reflects the deep awareness of the Kuchipudi Bhagavatas and their sensitivity to societal issues. Their ability to swiftly compose, structure, and present such impactful works shows their proficiency in multiple aspects of performance. The use of *Kelika* to highlight the misgovernance of a ruler and bring it directly to the king's notice also underscores their role in addressing social concerns and prompting corrective action through art.

### **Yakshagana Era: Musical Theatre and Literary Flourish**

The dance tradition evolved from *Sanskrita Natakas*, *Kalapas*, and *Kelikās*, eventually entering the Yakshagana era by the 15th–16th centuries. *Saurabha Charitamu* by Proluganti Chinnayya Souri is considered the earliest Yakshagana, though the work is no longer available. The earliest extant Yakshagana identified by scholars is *Sugriva Vijayam* by the 16th-century poet Kandukuri Rudrakavi, composed during the reign of Krishnadevaraya. Yakshagana initially began as a musical presentation and gradually developed into a full-length dramatic form, incorporating *desi* metres in both poetry and music.

The golden period of Yakshagana was during the rule of the Tanjavur Nayaka kings, with Vijaya Raghava Nayaka being the most prominent among them.

He extended patronage to numerous poets, including the renowned poetess Rangajamma.

The glory of the Yakshagana tradition continued under the Maratha rulers of Tanjavur until the mid-18th century. During the reign of King Sahaji, numerous Yakshaganas were composed and flourished under royal patronage. These are more of musical oriented than of dance or drama.

However, several Yakshaganas were presented in the style of Kuchipudi. Notable among them are *Prahlada Natakamu* by Tiruvalikkeni Ramanujayya Suri and Srimaan Vedala Tirunarayanacharyulu, followed by *Rama Natakamu* by Tirunagari Anantanadhuni. Subsequently, works like *Harischandra Natakamu*, *Aniruddha Natakamu*, *Sashirekha Parinayamu*, and *Mohini Rukmangada Natakamu* continued this tradition well into the 19th century.

### **Vempati Era: A Visionary's Refinement and Globalization**

From the 1940s onwards, women began entering the Kuchipudi dance tradition. Dance scholars and gurus recognized the need to train women both to uphold the aesthetic grace of the art form and to ensure its preservation for future generations. During this period, Significant emphasis was placed on the solo dance form, and a strong repertoire was developed, with contributions also coming from the Naṭṭuvamēla tradition. with the support of

Nattuvamēla devadasis and court dancers.

After a long period dominated by the Yakshagana tradition, the dance form transitioned into the *NrityaNataka* era. In this phase, the role of the *Sutradhara* was significantly reduced, and musical accompaniment shifted to background musicians rather than the performers themselves singing on stage. The *Nritya Nataka* tradition inevitably brings to mind the legendary Guru Vempati Chinna Satyam.

Padma Bhushan Dr. Vempati Chinna Satyam stands as a towering figure in the world of Indian classical dance — a visionary who refined Kuchipudi, giving it an aesthetically rich and globally appealing form that earned both critical acclaim and international recognition.

He remains the only guru who masterfully choreographed both dance-dramas and solo pieces with equal brilliance, blending popular appeal with technical sophistication.

Among his many celebrated ballets, **“Sri Krishna Parijatam”** holds a special place, having been staged numerous times.

By this time, Kuchipudi had gained international recognition. Many disciples of Guru Vempati Chinna Satyam moved to the United States for work or marriage and went on to establish Kuchipudi institutions abroad. Vempati Master along with dance

team travelled extensively to various countries, earning numerous accolades and bringing great honour to the art form. His choreographies are known for their complexity and are regarded as some of the most challenging ever created—demanding exceptional skill, rigorous practice, and unwavering dedication to perform. He also choreographed *Chandalika*, showcasing his ability to adapt classical technique to powerful social thematic content. Through such works, he not only expanded the scope of Kuchipudi but also demonstrated its potential to convey deep social message.

Long before the era of Guru Vempati Chinna Satyam, Vedantam Lakshminarayana Sastry garu made pioneering efforts to bring women into the Kuchipudi tradition—at a time when it was predominantly performed by male Bhagavatas. He not only encouraged female participation but also worked towards creating a structured solo repertoire suited for them. His contribution was instrumental in shaping the early foundations of solo Kuchipudi, laying the groundwork for its evolution into a widely practiced classical form. His vision and dedication opened new pathways for women dancers, helping Kuchipudi transition from an exclusive male-oriented tradition to a more inclusive and expansive art form.

## **Present Situation: Kuchipudi in the Contemporary World**

Kuchipudi eventually earned equal recognition alongside other classical solo dance forms. The transformation from a traditionally group-oriented, theatrical format to a refined solo performance was no easy feat. Achieving this shift while gaining critical acclaim highlights the resilience of the art form and the dedication of its exponents. Several dance teachers, both men and women, embraced Kuchipudi and carried out various experiments—exploring both traditional formats and contemporary themes. Their efforts contributed to the evolution of the art form, enriching its scope while staying rooted in its classical essence

Universities and government colleges were established, further promoting the growth of Kuchipudi. What once thrived primarily within the *guru–shishya parampara* gradually expanded into formal academic settings, gaining popularity and prestige. Today, the art form is studied at the university level, with opportunities for advanced research, including M.Phil. and Ph.D. programs.

## **Kuchipudi on the Silver Screen: Classical Grace Meets Popular Art**

Kuchipudi has made a lasting impact on Indian cinema, thanks to the efforts of

pioneering artists who brought classical dance to the silver screen. Among them, Vedantam Raghavayya played a crucial role in bridging Kuchipudi and cinema. A renowned Kuchipudi dancer, actor, and director, he introduced classical dance aesthetics into mainstream films, choreographing and directing several iconic movies where dance sequences held cultural and narrative significance.

Another major contributor was Vempati Pedda Satyam, who laid a strong foundation for Kuchipudi's presence in cinema through his refined choreography and training of dancers who later featured in films. His efforts helped maintain classical purity even in a commercial medium.

Following in their footsteps, Vempati Chinna Satyam further elevated Kuchipudi's cinematic visibility with his stylized choreographies and the training of dancers who appeared in notable films.

Telugu actresses and dancers like Manju Bhargavi, Bhanupriya, and Sabita Bhamidipati trained in Kuchipudi played a pivotal role in popularizing classical dance—through their impactful performances in cinema. Their graceful portrayals and dance sequences in films reached audiences across South India, creating a cultural imprint that no other medium could match at the time.

There was a time when aspiring film

heroines were encouraged to train in the Kuchipudi style, as its inherent grace, fluidity, and expressive ease were seen as essential qualities to enhance their dance on screen. This training not only brought classical refinement to their movements but also helped them connect with a wider audience through the commercial medium of cinema.

## Conclusion

Kuchipudi originally began as a drama tradition, where multiple artists come together to enact a narrative, each taking on a specific character. This group format allows the story to be conveyed more effectively and quickly to the audience, as each role was distinctly portrayed by a different performer, making it easier to understand. However, the drama tradition also posed certain challenges—most notably, the dependence on the availability of all performers. If even one artist was unavailable, it became necessary to train a replacement. Moreover, the substitute's personality and stage presence needed to align with the character being portrayed, which added another layer of complexity to the performance.

Over time, the drama format of Kuchipudi gradually transitioned into a solo tradition, primarily as a means of ensuring the form's survival and adaptability. This shift did not begin from scratch—there

already existed a loose repertoire of solo pieces that had evolved organically within the drama tradition itself. During all-night performances, breaks were needed between scenes, and it was during these intervals that young or new students were often given the opportunity to perform solo items. Similarly, before the main drama began, solo presentations would serve as introductions or preludes. Pieces such as Kauthvams, Jatiswarams, Shabdams and Ashtapadis, were commonly performed in these contexts. Over time, this practice led to the gradual development of a structured and rich solo repertoire, which eventually became a defining feature of Kuchipudi's evolution.

Although Kuchipudi has evolved into a solo performance tradition, it continues to remain deeply rooted in its dramatic origins. In solo presentations, the dancer embodies multiple characters, carrying forward the essence of the traditional drama format. The abhinaya (expressive aspect) in Kuchipudi is known for its naturalistic style, allowing the performer to truly inhabit the character, rather than merely imitating it. Even today, the **jathis** (rhythmic syllables) and musical elements in Kuchipudi retain a distinct flavor. Their rendition differs subtly from classical Carnatic music, adopting a more organic and expressive tone that complements the narrative and the characters, thereby preserving the form's theatrical soul.

With the presence of diverse forms such as *Kalapam*, *Kelika*, *Yakshaganam*, *Nritya Natakams*, and *solo performances*, the scope and repertoire of Kuchipudi have become incredibly vast. Although all these variants are often collectively referred to under the umbrella of “Kuchipudi,” each differs significantly in approach, technique, and presentation.

Mastering even one variant requires years of dedicated training, and learning multiple forms demands decades of rigorous practice and deep understanding. This complexity makes presenting Kuchipudi particularly challenging—it

is a fast-paced dance style that demands not only agility and precision but also the ability to preserve its inherent grace and classical beauty.

With a rich heritage spanning several centuries, Kuchipudi stands as one of the most graceful and dynamic classical dance forms of India. It is uniquely distinguished by its ability to strike a perfect balance between dramatic storytelling and solo performance, all while being supported by a distinctive musical tradition. Its blend of speed, grace, expression, and versatility makes Kuchipudi truly exceptional among the Indian classical dance styles.



### About the Author

“Madhumathi Kulkarni is a Kuchipudi dancer with an MPA from Telugu University and is currently pursuing her MPhil in Dance under the mentorship of Dr. Vedantam Ramalinga Sastry at Kuchipudi village. She is also an MCA graduate with over 15 years of experience in the IT industry. Passionate about the arts, she founded SuRasa Academy of Arts and Culture in Bangalore. Madhumathi has performed at prestigious festivals such as Mysore Dasara, Hampi Utsav, and Karnataka Rajyotsava.





## INDIA: WHERE EXPRESSION IS WORSHIP

Tripti Sanwal

India is not just a land of expression, but a land of devotion, philosophy, and tradition. In India, art is not merely created; it is lived. The soul of this nation resides in its cultural heritage, and at the heart of that heritage lies classical music.

Music in India is a harmonious blend of singing, instrumental performance, and dance — with dance holding a significant place. Dance likely originated when early humans sought to express their innermost emotions through movement — whether joy, grief, or devotion. Dance connects the body with emotion and gives tangible form to the intangible.

Human beings are innately creative, and they find mediums for their self-expression. The beautiful embodiment of imaginative expression is known as art, which is categorized into five types: architecture, poetry, music, sculpture, and literature.

Acharya Sharangadeva, in **Sangeet Ratnakar**, writes:

*“Geetam, vadyam tatha nrityam,*

*sanwal.tripti@gmail.com*

*trayam sangeetam uchyate”* — Singing, instrumental music, and dance together constitute music. Among these, we shall now explore the profound art of dance.

In Indian culture, dance holds a unique importance — its presence stretches from the excavations of the Harappan civilization to modern-day India. Dance in India has evolved in two branches: folk dance and classical dance. According to Indian tradition, the originator of dance is **Lord**



**Shiva.** We will include an explanation of **Nataraja**, the divine dancing form of Shiva, here.

The form of Lord Shiva as Nataraja is a powerful symbol of Indian classical dance. In the iconic statue of Nataraja, Lord Shiva is depicted in the dynamic Tandava dance pose. One of his hands holds a damaru (drum), symbolizing the creation of the universe; another holds fire, representing destruction. A third hand is in the abhaya mudra, offering protection and blessings, while the fourth points toward liberation from worldly illusions. He is shown dancing upon the demon

Apasmara, who represents ignorance, symbolizing the victory of knowledge over darkness.

The Nataraja image is not just a work of art—it is a profound expression of the cycle of creation, preservation, and destruction through dance. It is a fusion of art, philosophy, and spirituality, portraying the cosmic rhythm of the universe.

According to ancient treatises like the **Natyashastra**, dance was born from the divine will. Lord Brahma created it, Lord Shiva expressed it through his cosmic dance, and then taught it to Bharata Muni, who shared it with humankind.

Among these performing arts, **Kathak** is a dance form that is not just visual

beauty, but also stirs the soul with emotion. The history of Kathak traces back to the **Vedic era**, during the time of the *Rigveda*, *Mahabharata*, and *Ramayana*. Kathak is deeply rooted in **Uttar Pradesh**, and is often called a reflection of Indian culture. The word “Kathak” itself means “**one who tells a story**” — derived from “Katha”, meaning story. As the saying goes:

The word “Kathak” itself comes from “Katha,” meaning story. A popular saying reflects this origin: “Kathan kare so Kathak kahave” — one who tells a story is called a Kathak.

### **The Storyteller’s Origin: Roots of Kathak**

In ancient times, the word “Kathak” referred to individuals who presented mythological stories through expressive storytelling and dance in temples and spiritual gatherings. Today, it is recognized as a dance form where stories are expressed through movement and gesture, drawing deeply from sacred texts and epics.

References to ‘Kathak’ date back to ancient civilizations, including the Indus Valley.

According to literature, dancing figurines unearthed from Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa reflect poses reminiscent of Kathak.

References to the word “Kathak” and

the term “**Kadamb**” also appear in ancient scriptures like the *Natyashastra*, *Brahmapurana*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata*. “Kathak” is not a modern term — in earlier times, any person who conveyed spiritual or moral messages through expressive performance was considered a **Kathak**.

In Sanskrit dictionaries, the word “**Kushilava**” is found, referring to those involved in storytelling through performance.

The origin of Kathak is often attributed to **Valmiki Muni**, who first taught **Luv and Kush** the Ramayana through music and song. These storytellers came to be known as **Kushilavas**, and they were often appointed in temples where they would perform narratives through dance and rhythm.

Over time, this style came to be known as **Kathak**. Those who performed stories through song and dance were called **Kathakars**, and they developed a style called “**Natwari Nritya**” — known for its emphasis on expression, rhythm, and technique.

During the **13th century**, with the advent of Islamic rule in India, Indian art and culture experienced great changes — which deeply affected Kathak. Dance moved from temples to royal courts, and spiritual devotion gave way to ornamental artistry. Artists began performing for

nawabs and emperors, sometimes receiving patronage, other times facing suppression. The Kathak form absorbed Persian and Mughal aesthetics, and its journey from sacred to secular began.

### **Kathak: A Dialogue with Life**

Kathak is not just a dance — it is poetry in motion, composed with the feet, painted with the hands, and spoken through the eyes.

As India’s cultural expressions evolved, Kathak too changed with time. The spiritual fervor of the Bhakti era and the royal elegance of the Mughal era gave Kathak a new language. Words from **Urdu and Persian** began influencing its vocabulary.

Earlier, temple-based Kathak revolved around stories from the **Ramayana**, **Krishna Leela**, and other scriptures. With Mughal influence, elements like **Aamad** and **Salami** were introduced; **bhakti** made space for **ghazals and thumri**. The resonance of ghungroos and the poetic language of stories gave Kathak a unique identity.

Kathak is not just a dance — it is a fusion of music, devotion, and expression, touching the soul of the audience.

It is also among the most **free-flowing** classical forms. Each dancer brings their own style to the stage. Performances usually include two main aspects:

**Nritta (pure dance)**

**Nritya (expressive dance)**

**Kathak features a rich set of technical elements, such as:**

*Thaat, Vandana, Salami, Uthan, Aamad, Tukda, Toda, Paran, Tihai, Gat Nikas, Gat Bhav, Gat Ladi, Chakkar, Palta, Kavitt, Thumri, Bhajan, Pramelu, Stuti, Kasak, Masak, Kataksh, Tarana,* and many more.

These elements come together to make Kathak not merely an art form, but a living cultural and spiritual experience.

### **Kathak: A Wonderful Confluence of Rhythm, Expression, and Tradition**

In Kathak dance, the use of ghungroos (ankle bells) is most prominent. One of the special features of this dance form is the spins, also known as Bhramari. These spins are known by various names such as Chakkari, Ardha Chakkari, Vipreet Chakkari, Band Chakkari, etc.

In Kathak, the dancer first presents Thaata on stage, followed by Salaami, Aamad, Toda, Tukda, etc. After presenting these technical pieces, the dancer moves on to Premiyyu, Kavitt, and then enters the expressive aspect by performing Thumri and Bhajan.

In Kathak dance, Path Sanchalan (stage movement) holds great importance, where

the artist recites the syllables of the composition rhythmically and moves accordingly on stage.

Padhant is a beautiful aspect of Kathak. Padhant refers to presenting dance syllables in sync with the rhythm (taal). When a Kathak artist performs, they try to make the audience understand the composition easily through Padhant. This allows the viewers to grasp the piece well and enjoy it thoroughly.

Kathak dance presents an amalgamation of Nritta (pure dance), Nritya (expressive dance), and Natya (dramatic dance). It showcases a beautiful harmony between the intensity of Tandava (vigorous movement) and the softness of Lasya (graceful movement).

Instruments like the tabla, sitar, harmonium, and pakhawaj have been used in Kathak since ancient times. Nowadays, bansuri (flute) is also being used, which further enhances the beauty of the performance.

In India's classical dance tradition, "Gharanas" (schools/styles) are like the branches of a large banyan tree — all rooted in the same origin (tradition), yet developed in different hues.

Over centuries, distinct regional schools of Kathak evolved, known as 'Gharanas'. The three most prominent are:

## Lucknow Gharana: Elegance and Expression

✧ *Timeframe*: Early 18th century

📍 *Region*: Uttar Pradesh

🎭 *Specialty*: Graceful movements, Lasya, Bhava, Thumri

Brief:

The Lucknow Gharana originated under Nawabi patronage in Awadh. It emphasizes delicate expressions and storytelling. Key figures include Shri Ishwar Prasad Ji and Pt. Birju Maharaj.

## Jaipur Gharana: Power and Precision

✧ *Timeframe*: 18th–19th century

📍 *Region*: Rajasthan

🎭 *Specialty*: Complex footwork, Tandava, rhythmic brilliance

Brief:

Known for its robust technique, this Gharana developed under Rajput patronage. Famous artists include Narayan Prasad Ji and Pt. Rajendra Gangani.

## Banaras Gharana: Grace and Spirituality

✧ *Timeframe*: Late 18th century

📍 *Region*: Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)

🎭 *Specialty*: Use of heel, spiritual expression, Chakradhar compositions

Brief:

Also called Janaki Prasad Gharana, it reflects spiritual subtlety. It was popularized globally by Padma Shri Sitara Devi.

Here's a ready reference you can insert as needed:

Gharana	Approx. Emergence	Region
Lucknow	Early 1700s	Awadh(U.P.)
Jaipur	Mid to late 1700s	Rajasthan
Banaras	Late 1700s	Kashi (U.P.)

### 1. Lucknow Gharana:



Padma Vibhushan Pt. Birju Maharaj – Lucknow Gharana

The Lucknow Gharana is world-renowned for its grace, subtlety, and expression-oriented style. This gharana is not just limited to rhythms and movements;

it also reflects the elegance and flexibility of Lasya.

Thumris, compositions from Barsana, delicate body movements, and complete emotional expression are its main features.

The founder of this Gharana is believed to be Shri Ishwar Prasad Ji, a resident of Chulbula village in the Handia Tehsil of Allahabad district, Uttar Pradesh.

It is believed that Lord Krishna inspired him in a dream to create a treatise on dance. He taught this art to his three sons — Shri Adagu Ji, Shri Khadagu ji (Guruji), and Shri Tularam Ji.

This traditional style continued to evolve through generations, and eventually, Pandit Birju Maharaj Ji brought it international recognition.

## 2. Jaipur Gharana: Power and Precision

The **Jaipur Gharana** was first propagated by **Bhanuji**, who received training in **Tandava** (vigorous dance) from a saint. His son **Malooji** passed on the tradition to his own sons — **Kanhu ji and Laloo ji**. The legacy then continued to **Narayan Prasad Ji, Kundan Lal Ji, Ganga Ji, and eventually to Rajendra Gangani Ji**. Today, this gharana is celebrated across the world.

This style is known for its brilliance, powerful footwork, and complex rhythms. It emphasizes **chakkars (spins)** and is pre-



*Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee Pt. Rajendra Gangani – Jaipur Gharana*

dominantly **Tandava-based** — reflecting masculine energy and dynamism.

Jaipur Gharana is rooted in **Rajasthan's cultural ethos**. Apart from traditional rhythmic syllables, it incorporates **tabla and pakhawaj** compositions such as **Kavitt, Pakshi Paran, and Jati Paran**.

The memory and tradition of this gharana were preserved under the patronage of

**Rajput kings**, which infused it with a strong presence of **Veer Rasa** (heroic



*Padma Shri Sitara Devi – Banaras Gharana sentiment).*

### 3. Varanasi Gharana: Grace and Spirituality

The **Banaras Gharana** — also known as the **Janaki Prasad Gharana** — is the third major Kathak gharana. It was founded by **Janaki Prasad Ji**, a native of Varanasi, who taught **Chunni Lal Ji**, and the lineage continued through generations.

This gharana emphasizes the use of the **heel** in footwork, and **Chakradhar compositions** enhance its beauty. Special focus is given to the precision and grace of foot movements. Sitara Devi Ji, a legendary dancer, played a vital role in popularizing this gharana worldwide.

Some renowned artists of Kathak who have contributed to the dance world include: **Maharaj Bindadin Ji, Kalka Prasad Ji, Achhan Maharaj Ji, Lachhu Maharaj Ji, Shambhu Maharaj Ji, Harihar Prasad Ji, Pandit Sundar Prasad Ji, Pandit Jalal Ji, Pandit Sundarlal Ganga Ji, Pandit Narayan Prasad Ji, Pandit Durga Prasad Ji, Pandit Durgalal Ji, Pandit Rajendra Gangani Ji, Sitara Devi Ji, Pandit Jai Kishan Maharaj Ji** — all are considered stalwarts who made significant contributions to the art form.

### The Beauty of Taals – The Soul of Kathak

In Kathak dance, the use of **taals** (rhythmic cycles) is exceptionally beautiful. This art form is not merely about physical movement — it is a harmonious blend of rhythm, beat, and expression. The taals in Kathak do more than provide structure; they become the very soul of the performance.

**Teentaal, Chautaal, Pancham Sawari, Dhamar Taal, Matt Taal, Shikhar Taal, Roopak Taal, Ektal, Aada Chautaal, and Ashtamangal** — each taal infuses a unique pulse into the Kathak performance, bringing rhythm to life. Every taal has its own structure, depth, and character, which come alive through the dancer's intricate footwork and expressive movements.

Performances based on these taals offer audiences a harmonious blend of melody,



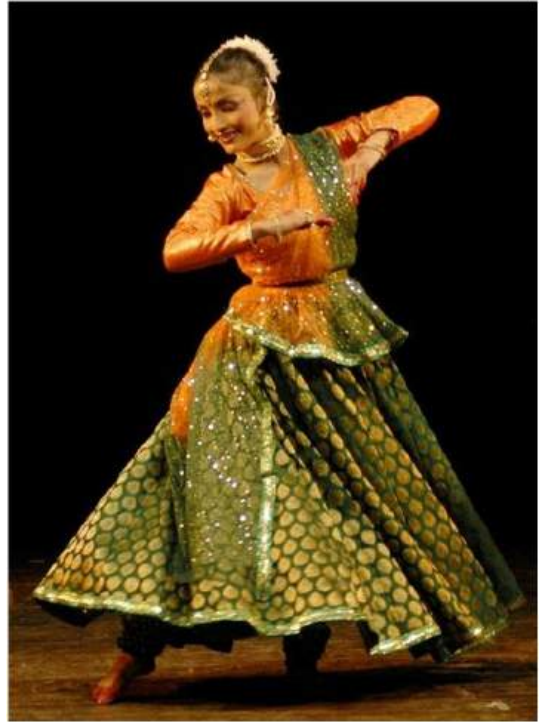
rhythm, and emotional resonance, while also reflecting the depth and beauty of India's classical tradition. This is why the use of taals in Kathak is not just a matter of technique — it becomes a spiritual dialogue between the artist and the audience.

### Costume, Presentation, and Global Reach



Guru Pt. Durga Lal in Kathak attire

Kathak's thematic range has expanded — moving from mythological tales to contemporary narratives, including women's empowerment, mental health, and social justice.



Tripti Sanwal – Kathak Performer in Traditional Costume

In Kathak, costumes are an essential element of visual aesthetics. Traditionally, female dancers wear a long, flared skirt (*ghaghra*) paired with a *choli* and *dupatta*, often decorated with sequins, borders, and traditional embellishments. Many performers also choose Anarkali-style outfits with a jacket and churidar, creating a flowing, elegant silhouette.

The attire of male Kathak dancers carries its own distinct charm. They typically wear garments such as *kurta*, *angrakha*, *churidar pajama*, *dhoti*, and *dupatta*. Cos-



tunes are adapted to suit the character or mood being portrayed in the performance. A *tilak* is often applied to the forehead to enhance the traditional and spiritual appeal.

To enhance feminine grace, female artists adorn themselves with jewelry like *maang tika*, earrings, necklaces, *kamar-bandh* (waistband), armlets, and bangles. A *tilak* on the forehead and the use of *alta* (red dye) on hands and feet are common practices — considered auspicious and visually impactful during performance.

In recent years, dancers have started experimenting with new costume styles to reflect modern themes and storytelling. These innovations in attire allow for both creative freedom and alignment with contemporary narratives, while still respecting classical roots.

The use of **ghungroos** (ankle bells) is one of the most iconic aspects of Kathak. Dancers, depending on their level of training and tradition, may wear between 150 to 200 bells.

Costumes also vary according to the character, theme, or emotion being conveyed through the performance.

Kathak has transcended borders and reached audiences across the globe. Interest in this classical dance form is steadily rising in many countries, with international artists embracing Indian culture and spirituality through Kathak.



The **themes in Kathak** have also evolved over time.

While traditional stories like Krishna Leela and royal court tales

remain central, modern narratives have emerged — addressing topics such as **human rights, women's empowerment, mental health**, and social movements like **Beti Bachao**.

Rhythmic intricacy remains one of the most celebrated features of Kathak. The dance showcases a wide array of complex and graceful *taals* (rhythmic cycles), which form the backbone of every performance.

Among the many *taals* used in Kathak are: **Teentaal, Chautaal, Pancham Sawari, Dhamar, Matt Taal, Shikhar, Roopak, Ektaal, Aada Chautaal**, and **Ashtamangal**. Each taal brings its own tempo, structure, and expressive capacity to the dance.

These rhythmic patterns are performed with precision, depth, and emotional sensitivity — striking a perfect balance between **laya** (rhythm) and **bhava** (emotion). Today, Kathak continues to carry forward the rich traditions of Indian aesthetics, literature, and spirituality — touching hearts across the world.

### About the Author

Tripti Sanwal is a celebrated Kathak dancer, choreographer, and Doordarshan-graded artist, known for her dynamic stage presence and depth of expression. She is the Founder–Director of Abhivyakti Cultural Dance Academy and an empanelled artist with the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. A former cultural officer with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), she has contributed to the global promotion of Indian classical arts.

Tripti is also an acclaimed scriptwriter, recognized for her ability to weave rich narratives into classical performances. Her collaborations with prestigious institutions such as Sahitya Kala Parishad and SPIC MACAY reflect her commitment to making classical dance accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences. With a unique ability to merge traditional vocabulary with modern sensibilities, she continues to inspire new generations of performers and art enthusiasts across India.



## ANDHRANATYAM THE LASYA DANCE TRADITION OF THE TELUGU REGION

*Satwika Penna*

*Research Scholar Dept. of Dance University of Hyderabad*

### KEY WORDS:

*Andhranatyam, Lasya, Nattuvamela, Nataraja Ramakrishna, Temples,  
Agama Nartanam, Asthana Nartanam, Prabandha Nartanam*

### Introduction:

Andhranatyam is an ancient temple dance tradition from Telugu-speaking regions with a fascinating history spanning over two thousand years. Historically, Andhranatyam was performed under various names such as Agama nartanam, Kelika, Karnatakam, Katcheri Ata, Mejuvani, Darbar Ata, etc., reflecting a blend of ritualistic and artistic presentations. It was traditionally performed by Devanartakis in the temples and Rajanartakis in the royal courts, symbolizing spiritual and refined cultural expression. These dancers dedicated their lives to the service of art and were held in high regard by society as cultural custodians.

However, the implementation of the Madras Devadasi Abolition Act of 1947

---

*satwikapenna93@gmail.com*

disrupted the continuity of temple dance traditions and altered the socio-cultural status of the dancers. The traditional dances of the Telugu land, in particular, were at a crucial crossroads. With the prohibition of ritual dance offerings and the dedication of women to temple service, the traditional female artistes faced social stigmatization and the abrupt discontinuation of their art. These artistes were apprehensive that their art might fade into oblivion.

A few scholars and art connoisseurs began advocating about the rich culture of the Telugu region that needs to be propagated. Through one such effort to recognize Kuchipudi at the national level, in 1958, a major conference was organized by Sangeet Natak Akademi, which initiated a discussion about the revival of Andhranatyam.

Induvadana and Vaidehi, known as Marampalli sisters, participated in this conference. They presented Gollakalapam, which included Sanskrit verses and dialogues. Nataraja Ramakrishna was one of the members at that conference, and the Marampalli sisters brought to his notice that they danced in this conference as per the Akademi's invitation. They asserted that their art belonged to the Lasya style of the Nattuvamela tradition and urged him to support and work towards reviving this style.

### **Revival of Andhranatyam:**

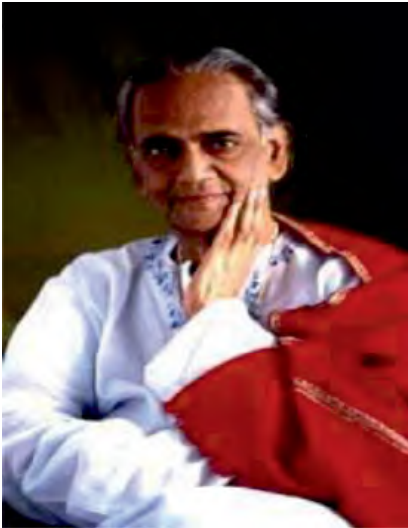
To revive and resurrect the Lasya tradition of the Telugu-speaking regions, Nataraja Ramakrishna researched about

the dancers who were still practicing this art. He came across Smt. Annabattula Buli Venkataratnamma from the Mummidivaram village and discussed the necessity to preserve this tradition, which was on the verge of being forgotten. She extended her support and gathered around 35 dancers willing to contribute to revive the Lasya tradition.

These dancers were invited to participate in a conference organized under the aegis of the then AP Sangeet Nataka Academy. The conference was named Abhinaya Sadassu, and it took place at Rajahmundry for two days on August 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> in the year 1970. It was chaired by Sri Pasala Surya Chandra Rao and convened by Nataraja Ramakrishna, and served as a forum to

discuss several aspects of the Lasya tradition.

The key topics discussed were - the characteristics of the Lasya tradition, the imperative need for choreographic reconstruction, and the performative distinction between the Katcheri and



*DR. NATARAJA RAMAKRISHNA*



*SMT. ANNABATTULA BULI  
VENKATARATNAMMA*

Bhagavata traditions. The conference also witnessed elaborate performances and demonstrations of the prominent dancers, providing practical insights into the topics that were in discussion.



*CONFERENCE - 1994 AT VIJAYAWADA*

The conference concluded with unanimous acceptance to bring these varied styles of Lasya tradition under the name of “Andhranatyam”, which was proposed by Annabattula Buli Venkataratnamma. The term “Andhra” signifies the Telugu-speaking regions as a whole race with a rich cultural identity. This conference was a significant milestone in the history of Andhranatyam.

Following the success of this conference, training sessions, seminars and workshops were conducted across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana regions in the following years. A structured syllabus for Andhranatyam was developed with the Agama, Asthana and Prabandha techniques, ensuring systematized training of this dance to future generations.

### **Repertoire of Andhranatyam:**

Andhranatyam has a well-defined repertoire uniquely representing the age-old dance tradition on a modern stage. It is a beautiful amalgamation of the three techniques, i.e., Agama, Asthana, and Prabandha, with graceful gestures and the elegance of Kaisiki Vritti, which are performed by the female artistes.

### **Agama Nartanam:**

The ritualistic dances performed inside the sanctum sanctorum of the



*AGAMA NARTANAM - KUMBHAHARATHI*





*ASTHANA NARTANAM*

temples, as prescribed in the Agama sastras, come under Agama Nartanam. It is known to be in the Marga tradition with traditional compositions set in unique Ragas and Talas. Agama Nartanam includes Kumbaharathi, Pushpanjali, Alarippu, Kautham, Kaivarams, Sabda/Swara pallavi, Ashtadikpalaka Aradhana/Navasandhi Nritya, etc, which are primarily Nritta-based dance pieces.

### **Asthana Nartanam:**

Dances performed by Devanartaki in

the temple Kalyanamandapas are classified under Alayaasthana Nartanam, while those presented in the royal courts by Rajanartaki fall under Asthana Nartanam. The latter incorporates a tinge of Desi element for creative experimentation. Asthananartanam features Sabdams, Varnams, Adhyatma Ramayana Keerthanas, Padams, Javalis, Ashtapadis, Slokabhinayam, Tarangams, Thillanas, Keerthanas, etc.

### **Prabandha Nartanam:**

The story-based dances performed to educate and entertain the common public come under Prabandha Nartanam. This technique is performed within the classical context, blending the aspects of Lokadharmi. Navajanardana Parijatham, Gollakalapam, Radhamadhavam, etc, are part of Prabandha Nartanam. Navajanardana Parijatham is a unique presentation, which was previously performed for nine consecutive nights by a dancer named Pendyala Satyabhama. Nataraja Ramakrishna collected about ten manuscripts and added his creative aesthetics in the presentation of Daruvus, which makes it a visual treat for the viewer.

### **Aharyam in Andhranatyam:**

Previously, a saree was draped in the traditional Madikattu manner to dance in the temples. White Banaras sarees were often used. Today, readymade dresses are



*NAVAJANARDANA PARIJATHAM*



*GOLLAKALAPAM*

**PRABANDHA NARTANAM**

being used, which consist of a Pallu, Blouse, and a Pant with a saree frill. The ornaments include hair and head accessories, bangles, neck pieces, waist belt, anklets and gajjelu.

**Seminal developments:**

In 1994, Nataraja Ramakrishna organized two national seminars, one at Vijayawada and the other at Hyderabad. These seminars were attended by many eminent scholars and members of Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi, for a coherent discussion to propagate Andhranatyam. Later that year, as part of institutionalizing Andhranatyam, certificate and diploma courses were introduced at the Government music and dance colleges, affiliated to <sup>1</sup>Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University.

In 2002, Andhranatyam was included at the post-graduate level at Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University, which ensured a systematic academic integration for this traditional dance form. Since then, around 150 students have graduated and are working towards the propagation of Andhranatyam.

Dr Suvarchala Devi holds the first doctoral degree from the University of Hyderabad for her extensive research on Andhranatyam.

**Conclusion:**

Andhranatyam stands as a testament to the rich cultural heritage of the Telugu-speaking regions. This traditional dance form, which became inert at one point

in time, has been revived despite the socio-political changes and cultural shifts. Andhranatyam represents the manifestation of Nataraja Ramakrishna and other yesteryear dancers in preserving and giving this age-old tradition to future generations.

Awaiting its official recognition at the national level, Andhranatyam is a legacy that needs to be recognized, embraced and safeguarded by the younger generations.

<sup>1</sup> now Suravaram Pratapa Reddy Telugu University

\*\*\*\*\*

### **About the Author**

Satwika Penna is one of the foremost young, accomplished talents in the field of Andhranatyam – The Temple dance tradition of the Telugu region, and Perini. An aeronautical engineer by education, she is currently doing a PhD at Hyderabad Central University. She holds a Master's in Dance from PSTU, Hyderabad. Satwika works as a UGC fellow/visiting faculty to teach Andhranatyam for post-graduate students in the Department of Dance at PSTU.

Satwika is the first female solo performer of Perini and is the first Andhranatyam artiste to be selected as the recipient of “Young Artiste Award” by the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India. She is a "B-Grade" artiste from Doordarshan Kendra and has also co-authored the Andhranatyam certificate course material prepared for Sampada - Silicon Andhra, USA.





Triveni Journal  
July-Sep 2025  
Pg. 65-82

## KATHAKALI AND OTHER FORMS OF BHARATA NATYA

*V. Raghavan, B. A., (Hons.)*

It is sometime now since the Kathakali of Malabar began to attract the attention of 'art-lovers,' and the Kerala Kalamandalam of Vallathol is being sought by artists who are eager to become exponents of Indian Dance. We are interested at present in the English literature that has recently grown up on this subject. Four articles have appeared in this part of the country: two in the *Triveni*, one in the *Hindu Illustrated Weekly*, and one in the *Journal of the Annamalai University*. Besides these stray articles there is the small publication of the Archeological Department of the Travancore Government which gives a short treatment of the Kathakali by Mr. R. V. Poduval, Superintendent of the Department. The pamphlet describes Kathakali and adds two short supplementary sections on 'rasa' and 'tala' both of which are scrappy. The speciality of the booklet, however, consists in the three plates it contains; one giving us a group of Kathakali actors dressed in various *roles*, another giving

some 'mudras' or gesture-symbols of the hand as employed in Kathakali, and the third and the most important plate giving us a comparative study of the 'mudras' as described by the Sanskrit texts of Bharata and Nandikeswara, by the Tamil text, the commentary on the *Silappadikaram*,<sup>1</sup> and as used in the Kathakali. A short article on the 'Kathakali of Malabar' by Mr. N. K. Venkateswaran giving us a few details about the art appeared in the 1931 Nov-Dec. issue of the *Triveni*. In the *Hindu Illustrated Weekly* for June 5, 1932, appeared an article entitled 'The Kathakali; or, Ancient Malabar Drama,' by Mr. G. Ramanatha Aiyar, B.A., with three pictures. The account was brief but clear and bereft of any rhetorical flourish. The main characteristics of the form of drama called Kathakali were given there, attention being drawn to the Kathakali literature, make-up, training in 'abhinaya,' 'dumb-show!' and stage effects. The three pictures giving three typical scenes show us the costume as well as the facial 'abhinaya' of the artists. Then appeared in the first part of the first volume of the

---

*Reprinted from Triveni Journal Vol VI  
Issue 2, Sep Oct issue of 1933*

*Annamalai University Journal* a rather long article on 'Kerala Theatre' by Mr. K. R. Pisharoti, M. A., Head of the Sanskrit Department of the University. This article devoted a section to this most noteworthy form of theatre-art in Kerala, namely, the Kathakali. The latest contribution is an article by 'Art-lover' in the 1933 May-June issue of the *Triveni* which has been responsible for provoking me to contribute this paper on the subject.

It appears to me that the greatest danger awaiting the future of art in India is provincial superiority complex. It seems that even in the realm of art there is little possibility of all provinces federating into one unity of Indian Art. It has become very common now for one province to abuse another, each trying to show up to the Western world that, in respect of cultural advancement, art, literature, etc., it alone stands supreme in the whole of India. Each province says, as the Upanishadic seer said of the *Brahman*: 'It alone existed at first; nought else winked': *Nanyat kinchanamishat*. This kind of feeling permeates the writings of those who write about the forms of art flourishing in their own provinces. For instance, Mr. Pisharoti says in his article on 'Kerala Theatre' that it is the unique feature of the Kerala stage, as distinguished from not only the vernacular stages of India but also the English stage, that it gives prominence to

'actual acting and dancing' and that such terms as 'nataka' and 'natya' lend weight and authoritativeness to their stage (P. 3). He adds that their theatre in Kerala keeps 'truer and nearer to the ideals of the ancient Hindu stage tradition.' He concludes his paper with the statement that in the Kathakali 'may be seen almost the highest perfection of the arts of acting and dancing, the perfect realisation as yet known of the technique so scientifically elaborated and described by Bharata in his *Natya Sastra*.' Such vanity results from a vicious provincial patriotism. It is a pity that writers do not care to do sufficient research and compare the forms of art of their provinces with those available in their neighbourhood and all over India. If one is not writing about one's own province's art he is an 'Art-lover' who has just come suddenly upon one provincial variety of the vast Indian Theatre and, having adopted that new-found form as his pet-child, he begins to write of it as the only truly classic Indian art. Writers harp upon Ajanta till suddenly they discover Kanchi and Tanjore. Till newer things are discovered, they write upon the same thing without end, giving us all the time few facts but indulging in effusive rhetoric.

It now seems to have happened that a few art-lovers have come to know a little of Kathakali. At once they have begun to

write that this is the most hoary, ancient, and only genuine art of India. Mr. N. K. Venkateswaran opines that Kathakali is 'hoary' and that its technique is 'original'. It is not so old as it is supposed to be, nor is its technique original. 'Art-lover' says that Kathakali is based on traditions more ancient than that of *Bharata Natya*! To this audacious statement is added the discovery of the fact that its real beginnings can be traced to a race and civilisation much anterior to the Aryan and that its antiquity must indeed be very remote. It is affirmed that it is Kathakali that walked over to Java.

All this is unsupported dogmatic assertion, and the whole article proceeds in a spirit of propagandic pamphleteering. Kerala scholars accept the date of Kathakali as the latter half of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> There is being carried on a controversy in the pages of the *Kairali* on the date of the origin of the Kathakali by Mr. Ullur Parameswara Iyer and Mr. Krishnan Nair of the Malayalam Section in the Madras University Oriental Research Department. The latter wants to push back the date and hold that the Kathakali is four hundred years old. Even Mr. Krishnan Nair's four hundred years does not make the art 'hoary' or much anterior to Bharata. The story of how it arose is also known to everybody, that Kathakali or Attakkatha or its first specimen in the

form of the Ramanattam devised by a chief of Kottarakkara Swarupam arose out of Krishna Attam which was pure Sanskrit drama. Pure Sanskrit drama was being staged everywhere in India. We had it in the Tamil country as 'Ariyam'. An inscription in a temple at Tiruvavaduturai, Mayavaram taluq, Tanjore district, says that the manging assembly of the village of Sattanur decided to have enacted the seven parts (Acts) of Ariyakkoothu, Sanskrit drama, during the festival. Besides, such Sanskrit compositions as the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva were rendered in 'abhinaya' in the Tamil country and we have in the Tanjore library a commentary on the *Gita Govinda* which gives the 'abhinaya,' word by word. Similarly the Chakyars staged Sanskrit dramas by parts in Kerala (Prabandham, Krishnattam, Koodiyattam), and all this acting was based upon Bharata's system as found in his treatise on *Natya Sastra*. Says R. V. Poduval: 'But the greatest influence on the Kathakali was from the Chakyar Koottu and Koodiyattam, two older dramatic representations .....'(Page 16). But lapses and provincial deviations there were and must have been, and I have with me a manuscript from the Madras Government Oriental Manuscripts Library called *Natankusa* in which an author, very well-versed in the Sanskrit Natya Sastra, criticizes 'the haughty and erring' Chakyars of Malabar and

their enacting of the Sanskrit dramas like *Ascharyachoodamani*, *Nagananda*, etc. This apart, it is sufficiently clear that the technique of *Bharata Natya* was widespread, and like the banyan tree, its pan-Hindu branchings sent provincial shoots which developed into the provincial varieties of Bharata's art! The Sanskrit, the classic language, produced the Prakrits, and one 'marga' produced many 'desis'. It is as foolish to assert that the Malayalam language as it is now is an original language with nothing to do with Sanskrit as to claim for the Kathakali an origin independent of the classic Sanskrit theatre of Bharata. Surely primitive folk-dances there were all over the country, and forms of these might have been remoulded with the aid of the Sanskrit Bharata Natya, thus evolving new forms. But to call Kathakali as more ancient than Bharata and as based on pre-Aryan traditions smacks of what in the Tamil districts one is acquainted with as the 'veerattamil' and 'self-respect' spirit which holds everything as non-Aryan or pre-Aryan, non-Sanskrit or at least pre-Sanskrit.

'Art-lover' asserts that the Kathakali is 'the only genuine hundred-percent classical dance-art of ancient India'! One can as well identify the strip of land called Kerala with the whole of India. Mr. Pisharoti seems to think that it is

only the Kerala theatre which uses the words 'nataka' and 'natya' and that there alone Bharata's system lives. He says that Kathakali is the highest perfection of Bharata, as yet known. Possibly it is the only form as yet known to the writer. Just as Sanskrit is the classical language of India, the language of its culture; just as Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, and Sudraka are the classical poets of ancient India, so also the system of Bharata Muni as laid down in his *Natya Sastra* in 36 chapters and on the basis of which Sanskrit dramas were enacted and dances were performed in ancient India, is the classical dance-art of ancient India. With the dethronement of Sanskrit and the development of provincial vernaculars, provincial forms of drama and dance retained the science of Sanskrit *Natya Sastra*, but the literature of the stage, the dramas and the songs that were danced, became vernacular. Anyway genuine classic Indian dance is that whose technique is what Bharata and a host of other Sanskrit writers have laid down in numerous Sanskrit treatises. What is the characteristic that forms the differentia of this Bharata Natya, the genuine classic Indian dance? Bharata Natya is the imitation of men in moods-*Avasthanukritih natyam*, through a medium which is a marvel of achievement at once in 'bhava,' 'raga,' and 'tala' emotion, melody, and rhythm. Natya is

of two kinds, 'rupaka' and 'uparupaka,' 'vakyarthabhinaya' or 'rasabhinaya' and 'padarthabhinaya' or 'bhavabhinaya'. That is, it is either drama or dance. The former presents a 'rasa': it resembles an epic poem; the latter presents only a 'bhava': it resembles a minor poem. There is thematic unity of one 'rasa' all through a drama; the dance is a mere bit. The former has all the four kinds of 'abhinaya' or means of representation, namely, 'vachika' (speech), 'sattvika' (action of sattvika bhavas, tear, horipilation etc.), 'angika' (physical action), and 'aharya' (make-up). In the minor dramatic varieties and dance one or more of these four cannot be seen.<sup>3</sup> As for instance, the Kathakali is an 'uparupaka' which is bhavabhinaya in which vachika or speech is absent, it being a dumb show. All these form Bharata's Natya and that which characterises them as such is the one element called 'abhinaya,' the language of gesture. In drama most action is natural. ('lokadharmi'), whereas in varieties of dance and incomplete drama there is a super-abundance of idealized action, ('natyadharmi') which necessitates the presence of maximum 'abhinaya'.<sup>456</sup> Thus the absence of speech in Kathakali secures in it a larger amount of 'abhinaya'. In Kathakali we have various persons to take the part of various characters (' anekaharya') which quality classes it as a drama, but in the

Prabandham Koottu and Nautch done by one individual ('ekaharya') there is a maximum of 'natyadharmi' and consequently maximum of 'abhinaya'. Besides this 'abhinaya' or conveying the emotion by gesture, there is the pure dance called 'nritta' and this is 'tandava' with all its 'angaharas,' 'sthanas,' and 'karanas' elaborated in the fourth chapter of Bharata and carved in the tower of the Chidambaram temple. 'Nritta' is pure rhythmic dance and does not interpret any emotion through gesture. It depicts pure joy and is sheer rhythm, beauty of motion, the manifestation of 'laya'<sup>5</sup> It is not so useful in drama as such, but in minor dramatic varieties and dances its place is definite. In 'abhinaya,' we have above all the 'hastabhinaya' which deserves the greatest attention of one who wants to train himself. By 'hastabhinaya' called popularly as 'mudra,'<sup>6</sup> 'artha,' (things, objects, and ideas) are suggested or shown. By the eye and other parts of the face as the brows, lip, nose, the cheeks, etc., 'bhava' or emotion is shown. The eye is the soul as it were. Says Bharata, (*Natya Sastra*, XIV. 34.): "It is in the eye that feelings and emotions are: the feeling first indicated by the eye is then known by its physical action." The eye shows the thirty-three minor moods called 'vyabhichari bhavas' and the nine major sentiments called 'thayi bhavas'

which develop into the relishable state in the tasteful spectator's heart as the 'rasa'. Besides these, there are the movements, 'rechaka' (of neck, bust etc.). Says Bharata: "Angikabhinaya is threefold, action of the body, action of the face, and such natural action in the dramas as going, sitting, etc., ('cheshta'). In dance done by one, only the first two count. The first has six parts, there being the actions of six parts of the body,—head, hand, hip or waist, bust, flanks, and feet. These are the six 'angas', and six are the 'upangas' which constitute the realm of facial 'abhinaya',—eye, brow, nose, lip, cheek, and chin." It is in that part of the first department of physical action ('sarirabhinaya') called 'hastabhinaya' that the 'mudras' come up. When an emotional theme is set to a tune and sung as in Kathakali or as in any old Nataka of the Tamil country or as in Nautch, the scheme works thus: the artist keeps the rhythm or 'tala' by the feet and along with this we have the 'nritya'; the song is sustained by the throat of the artist or by a set of musicians at the back; 'artha,' objects, and ideas are shown by gesture-symbols of the hand, and Bhava or emotion by the eye, the chief of the six upangas.

*Kanthena alambayet geetam  
Padabhyatn talam achart!  
Chakshurbhyam darsayet Bhavam  
Hastena artham pradarsayet.!!*

## II

A rather long analysis of Bharata has been given above to enable critics to realise what constitutes the evidence to identify a form of art they come upon as faithful to Bharata. And when an 'Art-lover' tries to travel into nooks and corners and visit each province with a view to impartially gather the forms of dance and drama available allover India, he will find a number of forms which are as faithful, if not more, to the technique of Bharata as the Malabar Kathakali, forms which are provincial varieties, vernacular species of the one classical Sanskrit Natya of Bharata. The Kathakali is not 'the only genuine hundred-per-cent classical dance-art of ancient India,' nor is it the only form in which the tradition of Bharata lives or has reached perfection. The Nautch or the Bharata Natya or the Sadir done by the courtesan-danse- use in the Tamil country, which is the most widespread religious as well as secular form of dance as far as the Tamil Kannada and Telugu provinces are concerned, is as much, if not more, genuine cent-per-cent classical Bharata dance. In it can be seen the whole world of 'hastabhinaya' or 'mudras,' the 'abhinaya' of the rest of the 'angas' and 'upangas,' etc., 'nritya' as well as 'Nritya'. Its history goes back far into ancient India, and who can fail to see the courtesan-danseuse in every page of Sanskrit

literature from the Rig Vedic hymns and from Valmiki and Vyasa? This dance was spread all over India as the evidence of all Sanskrit literature shows. In the Tamil dramatic literature it is referred to by the name Avinayakoottu which means Abhinaya Dance. (Refer Adiyarkkunallar on the *Silappadikaram*). In old times it was known as Mohiniyattam in Kerala and this is almost a dead variety there now. (Page 13, Mr. Pisharoti's 'Kerala Theatre'; Page 105, *Madras Christian College Magazine* 1921, 'The Malabar Drama' by Mr. R. V. Poduval). This is the dance which Parvati originated as 'lasya'; this is the classic dance which Malavika presented for the rapture of Agnimitra's heart in the *Malavikagnimitra* of Kalidasa; this is the dance which the courtezans offered to Lord Siva every evening in the temple of Maha Kala at Ujjain in the *Meghaduta* of Kalidasa.

The Bharata Natya of courtezans is, however, pure dance. There are varieties of drama that flourished and continue to be enacted even now in the Tamil land which are faithful forms of Bharata's art. The Kathakali of Malabar is, to give the fact of history, the mute brother of the Terukkoottu of the Tamil land. It can disclaim its relationship, but it can do so only to the extent old Malayalam language can disclaim its Tamil origin. The Terukkoottu as it is now done in the streets

of the Tamil villages may have fallen from Bharata's system, but till recently it was full of 'abhinaya.' There is no doubt that the Tamil Terukkoottu is the Veethinataka of Andhra, the Yakshagana of Karnataka, and the Kathakali of Malabar. All these are identical except for sundry unimportant local differences. There is a vast Tamil Terukkoottu literature and when one takes one drama and sees how it is constructed in the form of 'padas' (songs), 'padyas' (verses), both sung, and occasional brief prose, one can see the identity between the two forms as far as literature goes. One finds at the beginning an item called 'todayam' which is an invocation to God and announcement of the names of the author and the play. It is this same 'todayam' that figures in Kathakali. Let us notice how the Kathakali proceeds. There is first the announcement, long before the show, by beat of 'suddha maddala,' 'chendai,' etc., called 'kelikkottu' and this corresponds somewhat to what in Bharata's *Natya Sastra* we find as 'nirgitavadya' or 'asuravadya' or external instrumental music forming part of the 'purvaranga'—the preliminary. The Tamil Terukkoottu was announced in the morning by the village 'vettryan' by beat of the 'tamukku'. Then comes 'todayam' which can be seen in the Tamil drama also. The 'todayam' appears also in a number of songs called 'todaya mangala' in the traditional 'bhajana' of the Tamil

country. It is part of the 'purva ranga' and as seen in the Tamil drama it is the 'nandi' (benediction) and 'prarochana' (inducement) of the Sanskrit 'prastavana' (prelude) rolled into one. In Kathakali this item comes at about 8-30 P.M. Some boys come and dance in 'sukumara' (graceful) style after which there is 'nandi' in the form of 'vandana slokas.' Then there is the 'purappadu,' procession, if one can call it so. In this the divine or semi-divine character who figures in the drama as the hero is brought out in divine paraphernalia. Kathakali scholars suggest various explanations of this. This appears occasionally in the middle of the performance also, as in *Kimmiravadha* and *Kalyanasougandhika* though it is not called so. The song sung in these extra and middle 'purappadus' is the same as sung in the first prelude—'purappadu'. The purpose of the 'purappadu' of the hero with all his paraphernalia is evidently for creating and preserving in the minds of the spectators the reverence and the epic atmosphere. Personally I think that it is a development of what in a later stage of Sanskrit drama, when the 'purva ranga' underwent a change, is called the entry of a Sthapana Sutradhara. This Sutradhara, the Sanskrit works on Drama say, appears in divine make-up if the hero is divine or human make-up if the hero be a man and begins the show. The 'purappadu,'

as it is at present, may differ very much but it might have originally developed out of the Sthapana Sutradhara. After 'purappadu,' we have a musical item called 'melappada' when we have only 'vadya' and this is also an item of 'nirgitavadya' of Bharata. About this time is sung what is called 'Manjutara' which gets this name from the practice of singing at this juncture the song 'Manjutara', etc., the seventeenth composition in the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva. This shows the influence of Sanskrit 'abhinaya' forms on the Kerala variety. As pointed out above the *Gita Govinda* was very popular and was rendered in 'abhinaya' all over India. Some later writers have substituted their own new songs for the old piece 'Manjutara' from Jayadeva. The portion up to this can be said to correspond to what the *Silappadikaram* calls as 'antarakkottu,'—'music within.' Then at about nine the play begins. Two musicians, one chief and another following him, called respectively as Ponnann and Sangudi, sing the theme and the mute actors render the whole drama in 'abhinaya'. In between the 'abhinaya' of each foot of the song there is a course of mere dance which is 'nritta' and is called as 'kalasam.'<sup>7</sup> It is the same process as can be seen in the Nautch. Every foot of the song sung and gestured is variegated by a course of 'nritta' in the shape of



rhythmic dance called 'tirmanas' in a variety of 'gatis' of the same 'tala.' The Terukkoottu also, as a true representative of Indian dance, had both 'nritta' and 'nritya.' All the actors entered dancing and till recently 'abhinaya' was living. Maybe there are yet Terukkoottu actors who preserve 'nritta' and 'nritya.'

Since Kathakali is devoid of speech ('vachikabhinaya') it is a 'nritya' and not a 'natya,' a 'bhavabhinaya' or a 'padarthabhinaya', not a 'rasabhinaya.' Further a 'natya,' like any classic Sanskrit drama, requires unity of one 'rasa' reaching a climax at the end, but in Kathakali any part of any Purana is played beginning somewhere and ending somewhere else. The theme is always renowned ('prakhyata') being puranic but has slight innovations by the poet ('utpadya'). As pointed out before, the 'sahitya' of the Kathakali which resembles that of the Tamil Terukkoottu, is in the form of song, verse, and prose, or sometimes devoid of the last. The verses and the less frequent prose are what the poet says 'Kavivakya'; the expression relating to what the characters speak between themselves is always song. The song is the same form, as anybody knowing Karnatic music and Karnatic music composition knows, in 'pallavi,' 'anupallavi,' and 'charana.' This will clearly indicate the date of Kathakali, for the definite names

of 'pallavi,' 'anupallavi,' and 'charana' date only after the time of the Kannada composer Purandara Das, though long before him we had corresponding parts being called 'dhruvapada,' etc., in Sanskrit. In Yakshagana of the Kannada country, the Veethinataka of the Telugu country, and in the Terukkoottu of the Tamil land we see that the music is called Yakshagana.<sup>8</sup> In Tamil Terukkoottu plays we find the songs called by the names 'Taru,' 'Oradikkirithana,' 'Kanni,' etc. I do not know if these names are current in Kathakali also. Thus all these forms of South Indian drama are of operatic nature.

### III

Besides these there are some other aspects of the Kathakali to be noted. It had undergone some changes at the hands which fashioned it with the help of Bharata. As pointed out by Mr. Pisharoti in his article, the Kathakali does not discountenance actual death, lying, etc., on the stage though Bharata prohibited them. The MS work *Natankusa* referred to above criticises also this practice of the Kerala actors going against Bharata. Mr. Pisharoti however praises the Kerala stage for this improvement (?) upon Bharata. When one breaks into a rhyme of praise upon one's province's art one cannot break the rhyme by a discordant note. Even flaws must be praised. Says Nilakantha Dikshita, the great Sanskrit

satirist, that a panegyrist came upon a *black* man whom he had to praise and at once he praised him as the black cloud that rains plenty. 'Sringara' or love is overdone in Kathakali and 'gramyatva' or vulgarity is not absent. Such signs of popular and low handling are evident. Even as regards literature, Mr. Pisharoti says that at least one specimen of Kathakali drama, namely, the earliest Ramanattam 'does not possess a high order of literary merit.' (Page 16). The Tamil Terukkoottu dramas also, except stray works like Arunachalakaviraya's *Ramanataka*, were of poor literary quality and were full of low comedy. There is no comparison between Kathakali or Terukkoottu and the masterpieces of Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, and Sudraka and the refined technique as seen in Bharata's text.

Sometime ago I drew the attention of Bharata-art-lovers to a certain form of old drama which still continues to be staged each year in certain villages of the Tanjore district. I gave the information in the second installment of my article on 'Theatre-Architecture in Ancient India' in *Triveni*, Vol. V, No. 4, 1933. In the month of *Vaisakha* both at Sulamangalam and Oottukkadu, two villages in the Tanjore district, every year the Brahmins of the village enact about eight traditional dramas as part of the annual festival of the local temples. In these 'natakams' lives every

bit of Bharata,—the 'charis', the 'karanas', the 'nyayas', the complete language of gesture ('hastabhinaya') and 'abhinaya' of other 'angas' and 'pratyangas'. Mask and other parts of traditional make-up ('aharya') can be seen here. Here also speech is least, and song gives an operative character to the drama. Crowds gather at these shows from all neighbouring villages. A Brahmin 'bhagavatar' taking part in it is a master of 'abhinaya' and can give the gesture-symbol of any idea. His feet can keep the rhythm of any 'gati' of any 'tala' and if he is a boy he portrays women's *roles* exquisitely. This is as much, if not more, cent-per-cent genuine classical Bharata art of ancient India.

These dramas, however, are in Telugu, which continues to be the language of Karnatic music in the Tamil land. This fact links it up with a variety of the Andhradesa. I pointed out above that it is a variety of the lower strata of society, called Terukkoottu. This Terukkoottu is in Andhra the Veethinataka, both words, Tamil and Sanskrit, meaning street drama. The Yakshagana of Karnataka is likewise called Bayalattam, meaning open-air play. The songs of these varieties are called Yakshagana. If one turns over the catalogue of the Mss in the Tanjore Saraswati Mahal Library or the Madras Govt. Oriental Mss Library, one will find that the Tamil drama, is called

by one of the three names 'natakam,' 'yakshaganam,' or 'vilasam', The second name is very common. Similar is the case with Telugu dramatic compositions some of which are called 'yakshaganam'. This name of the song in the drama has been applied to the drama itself in Karnataka. We had recently in the city of Madras a series of performances by two Yakshagana Dramatic Companies of South Kanara, and art-lovers could have got an idea of it.

<sup>9</sup> To these has the Kathakali to be linked as also to what I was describing as the Brahmins' 'natakams' of the villages of Oottukkadu and Sulamangalam in the Tanjore district. Corresponding to the Brahmin 'bhagavatars' who are masters of the Bharata-art in these Tamil villages, we have the 'kuchipudi bhagavatars' of the Andhradesa. Besides these many other varieties of cent per-cent genuine Bharata Natya existed and some do exist even now in the Tamil land. For instance, there was the class of Brahmin artists called 'arayars' attached to some of the important Vaishnavite shrines in South India. These Vaishnava 'arayars' were masters of 'abhinaya' who interpreted, through Bharata's 'abhinaya', the Vaishnavite lyrics which are all set to music. If an art-lover takes trouble to visit the temple at Srirangam in the month of *Margasirsha* he can still find this art living. So Kathakali is not the only form

of genuine ancient Indian Bharata Natya. If one cares to know more, he can discover forms which every province is rich in. Menaka, writing in the *Young Theosophist* for July 1933, informs us of a form called 'kathaka' existing in the north. When an art-lover who harps upon one variety is told of these various forms, he gets into a most pitiable feeling of anger against the informer. A rabid provincialist flies at one who says that similar forms of dance exist in other parts of India. Or the other hand, a true lover of Indian art and its rejuvenation as the national entertainment, ought to feel glad over the discovery of the fact that Bharata's system lives profusely. One must thank God when he knows that so many sources are now discovered. Let modern renaissance-dancers take to one form or another, try to learn its technique, and be sincere and loyal exponents of Bharata's classic Indian dance and not deal in spurious stuff.

'Art-lover' says on page 584: 'Much of the so-called Indian classical dances are preposterous impostures.' I entirely agree. Let dancers of modern India resort to some traditional master of 'abhinaya', learn the whole foundation and science of the thing, steep themselves in the tradition of Indian art, culture, legend, and literature, and then try to devise new forms. In this connection 'Art-lover' has a remark on Indian painting. He

says that Ajanta dances are preposterous impostures, for there is nothing in the whole series of Ajanta paintings except a single dance-scene in Cave No.2. This statement and the ideas that follow it disclose how fragmentary the writer's knowledge of the three allied arts of Indian dance, sculpture, and painting is. Let me digress a little. The art of sculpture is also called 'chitra' in the classic Sanskrit Silpa treatises. As a matter of fact, it is only sculpture that is called 'chitra' for a half-visible relief on a wall is only 'ardhachitra' or half-sculpture, and painting, a species of the same in colour and line, is only a semblance of sculpture, 'chitra-abhasa'. These two arts of sculpture and painting, if one peruses the biggest and the most valuable Sanskrit text on painting and allied arts, the *Vishnu-dharmottara*, are based on the *Natya* of Bharata. The 'sthanas,' the 'karanas,' the 'hastas,' the eye etc., of *Bharata Sastra* are all utilised by the sculptor and the painter:

Yatha nritte tatha chitre trailokyanukritis  
smrita !

Drishtayascha tatha bhavah angopangani  
sarvasah!!

Karascha ye mahanritte purvokta  
nripasattama!

Ta eva chitre vijneya nrittam chitram  
param matam!!

'As in *Natya*, so in painting (and

in sculpture), it is the imitation of the universe, that is, representation of men and other beings in their states of emotion; as in *Natya*, so in painting and sculpture, those eyes, those 'bhavas,' those 'abhinayas' of 'anga' and 'upanga' and those hands which were described in a previous section on *Natya* are to be present; for *Natya* is supreme picture, *param chitram*.' The statue or picture shows us a moment of dance, and dance is a succession of pictures. The sculptor and the painter choose one powerful moment in a vast movement of feeling and express it in such a manner that one vital moment can suggest to us the previous and the succeeding ones. It is thus that stones, walls, planks, and papers are said to have 'jiva' and seem to speak. The *Vishnudharmottara* says that a good picture is so sweet that it seems to smile; it has life:

Hasativa cha madhuryam (yat) sajiva  
iva drisyate.

One realises the perfection of such art when one stands in the presence of some of the beautiful bronze icons in the temples in South India; as for instance, before such a figure as the Rajagopala at Mannargudi, Tanjore district. This being the way in which sculpture and painting are not merely related to but are actually based upon Bharata's dance, how can one be not profited by a study of Indian

sculpture and painting? It does not matter if special dance

pictures are rare. Every picture and every sculpture has a 'hasta abhinaya', a 'bhava' of the eye, a pose, and these can be studied with great profit for 'abhinaya' itself, and not merely for the very external part of dance, namely, dress and ornament. And, dance themes themselves are not rare in our sculpture and painting. If 'Art-lover' can find only a single instance in the Ajanta Cave he can find that again and again, the frescoes in the Brihadiswara temple at Tanjore, albeit the small extent of the whole series, show us pictures of Bharata Natya. Again we have such temples as at Chidambaram, Belur, and Halebedu, and sculptures at Mount Abu where infinite are the representations in stone directly giving us specific poses, hands, etc. Of course one who studies these must not think that 'statuesque' is dance, and 'still' is movement. He must not show us mere tableau but utilise the one moment found in a figure of stone or of colour and line in perfecting the grace of one 'abhinaya' on his face, hand, and feet. He must knit it in a continuous fabric of an emotional theme.

#### IV

The Kathakali is said to be 'tandava'. Now artists and art-lovers speak of Siva's dance, Parvati's dance, 'tandava,' 'lasya',

etc., with little or no knowledge of what exactly these names mean. The 'karanas' described in Chapter IV of Bharata constitute 'tandava', the 'nritta' which Siva passed on to Bharata and his sons through one of his 'ganas' named Tandu. Generally, all robust and masculine dance, all movements having vigour are said to be the 'tandava' mode. The 'vritti' called 'arabhati' and the 'guna' called 'ojas' characterise 'tandava'. It is an 'uddhata' or forceful type. As contrasted with this, Parvati is said to have inaugurated the 'lasya', the 'sukumara' type which is graceful in its movements and is marked by the 'kaisiki vritti' and the 'madhurya guna'. This does not mean that males cannot do the graceful 'lasya' also, or that women cannot do the vigorous 'tandava' also. There cannot be any dance which is purely of the nature of one of these two. One can predominate. Both 'tandava' and 'lasya' are present in the Nautch but Kathakali tackles the 'uddhata' or weird and vigorous themes of the killing of Rakshasas, as in the *Kimmiravadha*, *Bakavadha*, etc., and so is mainly 'tandava', even as the Kannada Yakshagana is. But even here there are places where 'sringara' is even over-done and we then have 'lasya'. The 'kamaladala' is a classic instance of the 'lasya' in Kathakali. In the same manner, though 'tandava' and 'lasya' are both present in the Nautch, the Nautch is mainly

‘lasya’ because of its exponents who are women, and because of the themes which are mostly ‘sringara’. Menaka seems to suppose that at present ‘lasya’ can be found only in the ‘kathaka’ which she has come upon in the North! <sup>10</sup> The ‘kathaka’ of the North is our South Indian ‘katha kalakshepa’, with much dance (‘nritta’) and with a little of ‘abhinaya’.

Mr. Venkateswaran gives a few emotions and a few ideas, and remarks that the Kathakali has gestures for all these! Trying to be more thorough and more informed, ‘Art-lover’ gives a paragraph of objects and ideas and says that all these have ‘mudras’! What wonder is there in this? The whole dictionary of the Sanskrit language has its corresponding gesture-dictionary in Bharata. A hundred Sanskrit treatises there are, as far as I have been able to go through, which give us pages after pages of ‘mudras’, and these live as much in the Tanjore district and elsewhere in the Tamil, Kannada, and Telugu countries, in the ‘bhagavatars’, the ‘nattuvanars’, and the ‘devadasis’ all over the Tamil country and elsewhere, as much as in the actors of Kathakali in Kerala. When I was thus speaking of ‘abhinaya’ as living elsewhere also, a Kerala Kathakali scholar got into a bad mood and put me a crushing question whether ‘abhinaya’ in either Nautch, elsewhere, or even in Bharata’s system is as perfect

as in Kathakali which has symbols even for cases (‘vibhaktis’)! Limitation of space prevents me from going into the matter in greater detail. Some criticism of ‘abhinaya’, even as given by the Sanskrit texts, has to be offered, for, there has been after the time of Bharata, an overdoing of it. ‘Verbalism’ has resulted in certain aspects of it becoming arbitrary convention, not having their meaning in Nature upon which Bharata, in a significant text (Chapter IX, Slokas 151-152) bases the whole system of his ‘abhinaya’. This is, however, work one has to do when he re-creates the art of Bharata for the present age. There are other essential things in respect of these ‘mudras’ which one has to know before he employs them, but these cannot be here dealt with. The Kathakali-advocate need not suppose that Kerala artists originated symbols for caseendings. Old Sanskrit texts have them. (See Nandikeswara’s *Abhinayadarpana*—the list of objects denoted there by the ‘pataka’ hand.) It is in use and I have seen it employed in ‘abhinaya’ in Tamil land.

Further the Kathakali ‘abhinaya’ not only differs from Bharata’s text and of those Sanskrit texts which follow him, but shows distinct deterioration. When one sees the chart of ‘mudras’ published in Mr. Poduval’s booklet one sees clearly that Bharata, Nandin, and the Tamil text

# KATHAKALI AND BHARATA NATYA



BHARATA'S  
ARDHACHANDRA



KATHAKALI  
ARDHA CHANDRA



KATHAKALI  
MUSHTI



BHARATA'S  
MUSHTI



BHARATA'S  
SIKHARA



KATHAKALI  
SIKHARA



BHARATA'S  
SUCHI MUKHA



BHARATA'S SIKHARA =  
PITR TARPANA OR  
OFFERING OF WATER  
TO MANES



BHARATA'S SIKHARA = DRINKING



BHARATA'S SIKHARA  
HOLDING THE BOW

agree, whereas the Kathakali stands apart, with many differences. The list of ideas denoted by various hands follow the Sanskrit texts, but the corresponding hands differ. An examination of the Kathakali 'mudras' shows us the influence of incompetent or popular or rather lower artists' handling. Many hands are incorrect and do not denote the objects intended to be suggested by them on Bharata's principle of symbolic suggestion. (Page 78)

Firstly, the 'pataka' is wrongly called 'tripataka' and *vice versa*. One can see, on going through the list of objects given as denoted by 'pataka', how that hand, as given there, is incorrect. Taking the 'ardhachapdra' hand, everyone knows it as one of the hands in the Nataraja icon. Any layman must know its Correct shape, for the Sanskrit idiom means 'necking out' and the 'ardhachandra' hand is employed in that action. Sculpture, Icon, Bharata, Nandin, the Tamil text, and above all Nature give the correct 'ardhachandra' but the Kathakali counterpart has no resemblance to the shape of the sickle moon. The difference and deterioration can be seen with respect to the 'mushti' hand also. The Kathakali passes the thumb in between the four closed fingers. The 'fist' which every man shows in his anger, and in his action of fisting another, does not have the thumb like that. The

'mushti' is given as the symbol of old age, because it is the hand which holds the supporting staff which is a symbol of old age. One does not have the thumb as in Kathakali 'mushti' when he holds the staff. Similarly, in the double fist which is used to suggest loveliness, the two closed palms are pressed in a way at the two temples, which is what our old women-folk do on seeing a young lovely lass. Here also the thumb does not come in. Thus the Kathakali 'mushti' is not correct according to Bharata and hence according to Nature.

The 'sikhara' hand can likewise be examined. The symbol given by *Bharata*, *Nandin*, and *Silappadikaram* is correct. The hand indicates hero, leader or chief; holding of a bow; drinking, if the upraised thumb is taken towards the mouth; the manes ('pitris'), if we turn the hand horizontal, etc. All these are based upon Nature. We do that correct hand while speaking, whenever we have to refer to importance, leadership, and when we do 'pitri tarpana', etc. But these can never be shown by the 'sikhara' hand as Kathakali gives it with the thumb closed and the next 'pointing finger' raised. The 'sikhara' hand of Kathakali is the 'suchimukha' of the Sanskrit texts. The difference therefore between the 'sikhara' and the 'suchimukha' is shown by Kathakali, by a very insignificant change in the position



of the thumb. The 'suchimukha' is a very common hand which any layman knows as the hand which we show while 'pointing out,' for showing 'one', etc. Instances can be multiplied and the deviation and the deterioration can be seen in 'sukatunda', 'arala', 'mukula', 'kataka', etc. Every 'hasta' should be firstly correct as based upon Nature and secondly, must have 'soushtava'—beauty and grace. What has been said above is about the very basis of 'abhinaya' and it does not get nullified by local peculiarities and provincial adaptations which are bound to be. Nor is it contended here that there are not parts of Nautch-abhinaya in the Tamil land which show deterioration. To the modern re-creator of Hindu classic dance, Kathakali, Nautch, the Bhagavatars, Kathaka, nay, every small surviving thing is of Importance.

I have mentioned above other forms of Bharata art still living in other provinces and have examined the Kathakali itself rather critically and have attempted to place it. But if Kathakali alone is claimed to be the only genuine Bhartha Natya or its peak, the spirit is one of pure advertisement. It is simply preposterous to say that Kathakali belongs to 'an age anterior to B.harata Natya or Ajanta Chitra or Sanchi Silpa,' ('Art-lover') or that 'it has improved upon and refined even Bharata.' (Mr. poduval). If anyone

insists on identifying the Kathakali as 'the only genuine hundred-per-cent classical dance-art of Ancient India' he can be likened only to one of those men who identified the elephant with the rope-like tail of that huge animal. When one thus goes somewhat deep, the facile writer on Indian art today accuses him of suffering from the pandit's mentality; it is only a confession that the facile writer is a 'pamara'.

<sup>1</sup> The booklet supposes wrongly that *Silappadikuram* itself gives these gestures. The fact is that they are given in one of the commentaries on it, viz, that of Adiyarkkunallar.

<sup>2</sup> P. 16, Mr. Pisharoti on 'Kerala Theatre'.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide journal of Oriental Research*, Madras, Vol. VII. Part 3, my article on 'Dasarupa'

<sup>4</sup> In Vol. VII. Part 4 and in Vol. VIII. Part 1 of the *J. O. R*, Madras, will appear two papers of mine on this subject of Natyadharmi and Lokadharmi.

<sup>5</sup> Bharata's *Natya Sastra*, IV. 260.

<sup>6</sup> The word 'mudra' does not occur anywhere in *Natya Sastra*. It is of iconographic and sculptural origin and its use by modern writers on Indian dance is due to the fact that very much earlier than classic Indian dance, Indian sculpture and Iconography

became subjects of modern research. The word used in the Sanskrit Natya texts is simply 'hasta.'

- <sup>7</sup> 'Kalasa' occurs in Sarngadeva's *Sangeeta Ratnakara* (VII, 1302-3). It means 'end of a course of dance.'
- <sup>8</sup> The type of song called 'Yakshagana' is referred to in the music work, *Sangita Sudha* of Govinda Dikshita. (1614. A. D)., minister of the Tanjore Telugu Kings. He says that he took 'Yakshagana' also into account and studied it for writing his work. In the Kannada Yakshagana as done now, songs of the type of 'Kirtana,' also are added occasionally.
- <sup>9</sup> The Kannada Yakshagana is nothing but the Tamil Terukkoottu. Originally the drama had 'nrita' and 'nritya' to a

very large extent. Each actor entered dancing to a song which introduced him. The theme is written in songs and verses which are both sung by a supporting musician. When these are sung, the actor danced and did 'abhinaya,' word by word. It differs from Kathakali in having prose speech by the actors. Themes are 'tandava'. Though impoverished is 'nritya' it is yet rich in 'nritta.' For a full account of Yakshagana, *vide* my article on the same in *Sound & Shadow*, Madras, Vol. II, Nov., 1933.

- <sup>10</sup> Mr. R. V. Poduval in his booklet on 'Kathakali' (p. 46) gives us 'original' information that 'tandava' is upward and downward movement and 'lasya', sideways movement!



*Padma Shri Yamini Krishnamurthy, Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi exponent*



*Sun Temple, Konark*

