

AHARYA ABHINAYA IN TEXT AND PRACTICE: A STUDY OF THE BHARATANATYAM AHARYA PRE AND POST-REVIVAL PERIOD

A dissertation submitted to the **University of Hyderabad** in partial fulfillment of the
award of a **Ph.D. degree** in the **Department of Dance**

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2023

Declaration

I, Niyanthri. M, hereby declare that this thesis entitled "Aharya Abhinaya in Text and Practice: A Study of the Bharatanatyam Aharya Pre and Post-revival Period" submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Prof. Aruna Bhikshu., is a bonafide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any other degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodganga/INFLIBNET.

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3.	FS803	Folklore and Field Methods	4.00	Pass

Supervisor

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Dean

Dedicated To

My 'Me'

&

Ours

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Chapter – 1

PRELUDE

A typical household in Tamil Nadu, especially its cultural capital Chennai, is incomplete without the element of Carnatic music, Bharatanatyam, or sometimes both. You either get to learn it firsthand or, at the least, experience it in one form or the other. In the hundreds of temples that bless the cities, towns, and villages of Tamil Nadu, one can witness these art forms being performed for God and the Bhakta to relish. Bharatanatyam is the dance form of Tamil Nadu, and a unique culture of ‘Sabha’¹ exists in Chennai, essentially a performing space of the fine arts. Come December, these Sabhas are filled with the fragrance of Jasmine and Kanchi silk², a vibrant setting that is almost a trademark of the Chennai Margazhi season³. As a little girl who grew up in Chennai, the core memory that I possess of witnessing one of my very first Bharatanatyam performances was how God-like the dancers looked draped in the lustrous silk saree, the sparkling kemp jewellery and the subtle yet striking makeup. One has no choice but to halt and take in the dancer as they mark their presence on the proscenium in all their glory. Right before the performance starts, the lights are dimmed, the stage curtains are closed, and anticipation fills the air. Once the curtain opens and the lights fade in, and the dancer enters the stage, the first element that strikes a chord with the audience is the *Aharya Abhinaya*⁴ while the other three Abhinayas⁵, *Angika*⁶, *Vachika*⁷ and *Satvika*⁸, take a backseat for a brief yet crucial moment. This critical window in a performance proves as the one essential element that abridges the gap between the realities of the performer and the audience. Through Aharya, the audience gets teleported to a different time and space. A parallel universe that is mythological, historical or even spiritual. The basic premise of a dance performance is laid out through the makeup, costume, jewellery, hair-do, stage props and stage lighting, i.e., Aharya, without the artists having to establish the performance through any physical means.

¹ Theatre spaces that focus on staging of classical dance, drama or music performance in Chennai, Tamilnadu.

² Native silk of Tamilnadu. Woven by the large weaver community settlement in Kanchipuram, Tamilnadu.

³ The art festival conducted all over Chennai during the December month of every year.

⁴ Expression through visual means such as costumes, ornaments, stage props, hair-do and the like.

⁵ A total of 4 Abhinaya, Chaturvidha Abhinaya, has been mentioned by Bharata Muni in Natya Shastra.

⁶ Expression through bodily movement.

⁷ Expression through modes of speech such as dialogues and lyrics.

⁸ Expression through psycho-somatic means.

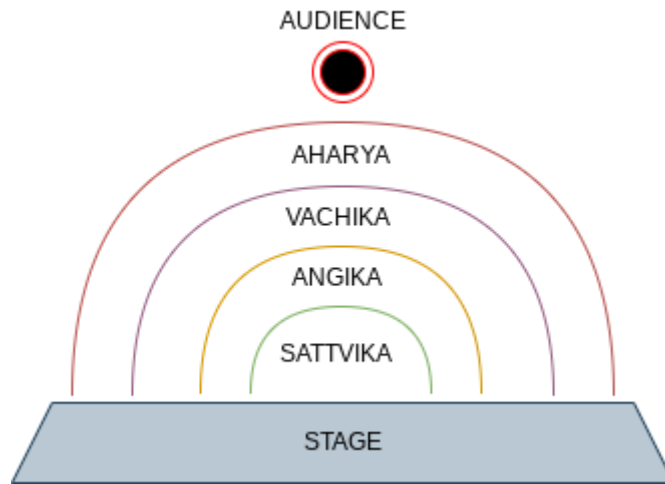


Fig. 1.1: Impact of Chaturvidah Abhinaya on the Audience

As a performer hailing from a pedagogical background known for its intensity of body movement and emphasis on Nritta⁹ and linearity of the movement vocabulary, I took Aharya for granted for most of my performing career. Looking back at a period of mindless performances consecutively during the Margazhi season, I realised how monotonous the greenroom shenanigans had been. This thought led me into the rabbit hole of pondering over how such a mundane and ‘taken-for-granted’ task such as getting ready for a performance, costume, jewellery, makeup and the like, in the greenroom, was, in fact, one of the most crucial and only physical marker of the art form that I practised. The result of this stream of thoughts and readings eventually guided me into choosing Aharya Abhinaya as the core area of my research.

Before venturing further, it is imperative to understand what Aharya Abhinaya is. Aharya, according to Bharata, is any extraneous representation that deals with the rule of costumes and makeup, i.e., *Nepathya* (Ghosh, 410). He further describes that Aharya is four-fold and ‘anyone who wishes for success should pay attention to these’ (Ghosh 410). The four divisions of Aharya are *Pusta* (model work), *Alankara* (decoration), *Anga-racana* (painting the limbs), and *Sanjiva* (living creatures). Natyashastra and later texts proclaim Aharya as one of the principal modes of representation through which the artist of dance or drama can successfully convey the appropriate aesthetic experience to the audience. The initial thought was to utilise the parameters set in Natyashastra as a scale to analyse the Aharya of Bharatanatyam. Use the text to understand what was in practice. But what I did not realise was how deep and connected this one area was. Sometime into my research, I discovered that the

⁹ Pure rhythmic dance without any dramatic element.

Aharya of Bharatanatyam is more than just skin-deep. Bharatanatyam's kaleidoscopic history had an equally colourful evolution of costuming, and this evolution was deeply connected to the socio-cultural and often political sentiments and practices of the people of the region. Therefore, it became clear that a mere descriptive study of the Bharatanatyam costuming would not do justice to the area of study. A comprehensive analysis of Bharatanatyam Aharya can be achieved only by looking at the intertwined spaces of history, politics, society, economy and culture that have cumulatively shaped the art form. In doing so, we can see the bigger picture that spans beyond texts and treatises and extends into each region's sartorial practices, socio-economic differences, cultural history and cultural practices.

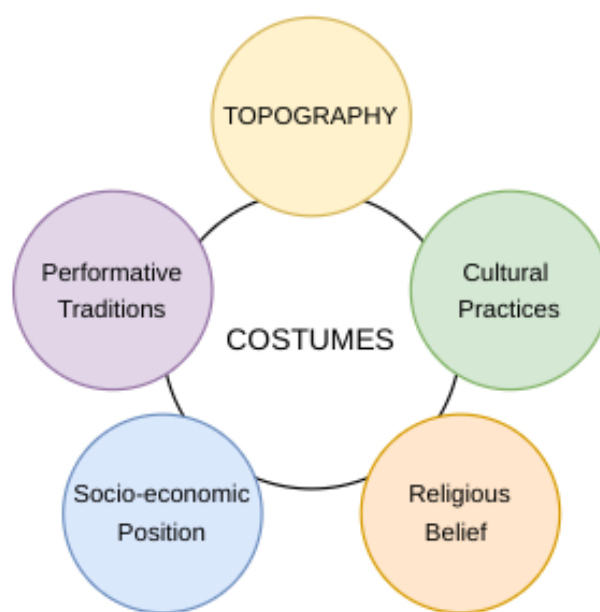


Fig. 1.2.: Elements that Shape the Sartorial Practices

1.1. Elements that Shape the Sartorial Practices:

1.1.1. Textile and Topography:

Covering oneself is a basic necessity. The extent of the coverage depends on the climatic conditions of the person's landscape. Though dressing is a basic necessity, dressing up is a personal form of expression. And this form of expression, in the ancient days, lay solely upon the availability of resources. In a sense, the Aharya of every region was just a fashionable showcasing of the natural resources that the respective area boasts of. India, nestled between Himalayan ranges on the North and the ocean on the South, has no resource scarcity. But, every region's Aharya is shaped by the ecosystem, which determines the availability of raw materials such as plants for natural dyes and fibres and the climate for animal rearing. While the textile-

making communities make creative use of the available resources in each part of the country, the kind of material is determined by the climate. The colder regions use a higher amount of wool, obtained from the sheep and yaks, while the tropical south uses cotton. Apart from the material of the fabric, yet another vital part played by nature in the textile designs of each region is to serve as the inspiration for the variety of motifs used in each region. The motifs used in the textiles of every part of the country are the immediate result of the artisan drawing inspiration from the natural imagery they were surrounded by. Though technological and trade advancements have led to the availability of raw materials throughout the country regardless of the region's ability to produce the same, the local artisans work to incorporate trademark designs, motifs and patterns inspired from their immediate surroundings into even the borrowed materials.



Img. 1.1.: Sartorial Practice of Women from Rajasthan (Left) and Women from Kashmir (Right) (Courtesy: Pinterest)

1.1.2. Culture and Couture:

In our culture, sartorial practices play a crucial role in carving a niche for oneself in society to create their identity as an individual and a part of a community. We see that clothing, textiles, ornaments and makeup (external applications to alter or enhance one's appearance) have been part and parcel of our lives from time immemorial. The archaeological remains of the Harappan civilisation and the Keezhadi (Tamilnadu) excavation sites tell us the story of the importance we gave to appearance. From the illustrious priest of the Indus Valley to the recent unearthing of the female figurine in Keezhadi, Aharya has served the purpose of helping us

identify the social background of the person depicted. In a country as diverse as ours, the Aharya of each region becomes the fundamental marker of their identities. Even within a community, clothing is seen as a representation of an individual's class and societal status. Almost every region of the country has specific textile traditions that have trickled into the deepest crevices of the community's social, cultural, religious, and even political layers. When these closed communities engage with other communities through connections established via trade or politics, the preliminary signs of cultural exchange are reflected in both regions' textile practices. Such cultural exchanges have been enabled through the various dynasties that have ruled over us and through trade routes such as the Silk Route and the Coromandel maritime trade routes that existed from the early centuries of the Christian era.

One of the primary purposes of costumes (including hair-do, ornaments and makeup) have since become establishing the social standing, religious affiliation and political positions of an individual or a community. The very practice of exclusivity of few fabrics (such as silk) and even the luxury of cover-up, being the sole custody of the higher society, proves the prominence of sartorial practices as a tool to establish power. The Paithani silk of Maharashtra, the Kasavu Mundu of Kerala, and the Kodali Karuppur¹⁰ sarees of Tamilnadu were once the power symbols of the royal families and aristocrats. The practice in Kerala, where the lower caste women were not allowed to cover their breasts, is a weighty example of how costuming was manipulated to reflect positions of power and social standing. Eventually, over the years, as the power pools shifted, the practice of imitating the elite and their way of dressing affected the general public's clothing culture and has come to a time where the fabric of one's clothing now reflects their socio-economic position and a community-based aesthetics that one nurtures. The silk fabric, which was once accessible only to the royals and priests, is now worn by anyone who can afford the gold and silver fabric. Yet, the communities that are the descendants of the privileged are the ones who are most commonly associated with such textiles.

India's matrix of multi-culturalism has enabled us to adapt the textile practices of every other region. However, the common public still views few ornaments and fabrics as only fitting for particular extravagant ceremonies such as weddings and festivals. As Indians, we are trained to decipher social cues based on appearance. We wear cotton for everyday wear while we reserve our revered silks and gold for ceremonies. Therefore, even though we don't realise

¹⁰ A fine muslin or silk saree with interwoven zari pattern woven in the Jamdani technique. Native to Ariyalur district, Tamilnadu.

it, the concept of dressing has been deeply seeded into our subconscious as the prime representative of our gauging system of another to calculate the other's social, cultural, psychological and economic status.



Img. 1.2.: Kodali Karupur Saree (Courtesy: Egmore Museum, Chennai)

In our everyday lives, even for the most natural process of life, we intuitively imbibe costumes and ornaments. For example, in a few communities, the maternal uncle gifts clothes to the newborn baby. For the naming ceremony of the same, the maternal grandparents or the uncle gives a gold jewel to the baby. Ear piercing rituals are a huge part of the list of Hindu ceremonies of a lifetime, and for the same, earrings and clothes are to be gifted by the maternal side grandparents. A saree ceremony is conducted when a girl child comes of age. Here, a piece of clothing, a saree, defines maturity and becomes synonymous with womanhood. We do not need any introduction to the role clothing and ornaments play in a wedding. And at the end of the life's journey, the mortal remains are again wrapped in white fabric. Therefore, the role of Aharya becomes one that is intertwined with the fabric of our lives. In every ceremony from birth to death, the notion of gifting fabric makes it the symbol of a blessing and best wishes. The practice of the maternal uncle offering a new piece of cloth to the one who lit the funeral pyre thus becomes a metaphor for a new beginning after a loss. Though the concept of clothing must have started as a bare necessity to withstand the natural forces, it did not remain to serve the same purpose. The evolution of costumes and the beauty it adds to a being has inspired many literary works, sculptures and paintings. Over the centuries, Aharya has become a marker to distinguish between different classes, castes, trades, stages of life and state of mind. Even if

there is a similarity in the weaving processes, simply the drape style can distinguish between marital status, caste and especially region. The omnipresence of Aharya in our daily lives can only serve as a representation of how indispensable this aspect of our culture is to us, and it is only natural for the dancers of each region to have displayed the very best of all the elements of Aharya that each region had to offer.

1.1.3. Threading Together through Faith:

The role of textiles and ornamentation comes into prominence in the spiritual aspect of our lives. Several communities in our country co-relate the beginning of the Universe with the origin of fibres, the fundamental element of textiles, and vice versa. Such connections have been established in our scriptures and even in folktales, eventually penetrating the people's belief system. The thread ceremony (Upanayanam) conducted by many upper-class communities proves the sacredness/religiosity that a mere thread possesses in the Hindu tradition. Other than the sacred thread, the red and black thread on the wrist for protection again symbolises spirituality. The red thread tied by the sisters to their brothers on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan¹¹ represents the protection the brother offers the sister throughout her life. The spirituality associated with the textiles can be ascribed to the repetitive interlacing of the warp and weft of the loom, which many weaving communities believe to symbolise the very concept of 'Prana', and hence the textile, through its process, transcends mortality.

Texts as early as Rig Veda (1500 – 1000 B.C.E.) utilise the process of weaving in metaphors pertaining to the Supreme.

“The radiant dawns weave lovely garments with wondrous threads (beams), multi-coloured newly twisted threads for Vayu (1-134- 4).”

(Marshall. J, 1931)

Later works of Saint poet Kabir¹², born into a weaving community, uses rich textile-related metaphors in his poetry addressing the Supreme. His work, linking the textile to cosmic power, has been spiritually embedded in our memory.

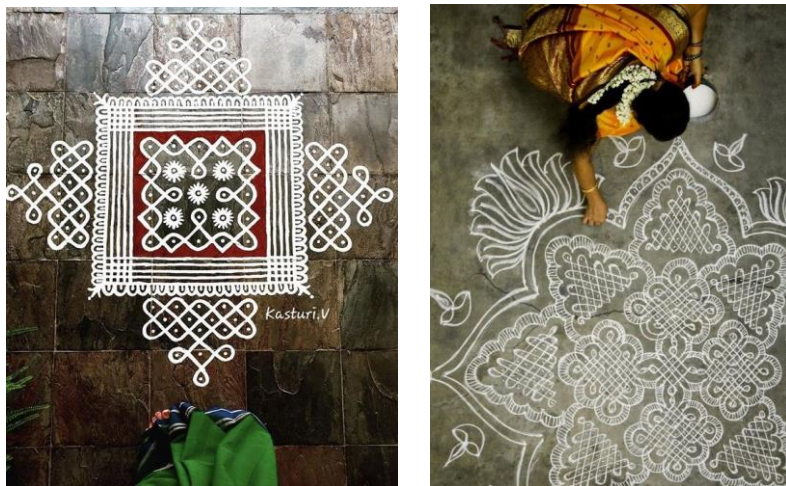
¹¹ A popular Hindu ritual/ ceremony that symbolizes the relationship between a brother and a sister.

¹² Kabir Das was a 15th century mystic poet.

*“I weave your name on the loom of my mind,
To make my garment when you come to me.
My loom has ten thousand threads,
To make my garment when you come to me.
The sun and moon watch while I weave your name;
The sun and moon hear while I count your name.
These are the wages I get by day and night
To deposit in the lotus bank of my heart.”¹³*

(Tagore, 1915)

Many weaving communities, both Hindu and Muslim, consider the geometric patterns of the weaving to be a symbol of the Universe. Repetitive geometric designs like the Kolam/ Muggu of South India and the geometric patterns found on Islamic prayer mats also form a part of this geometric exploration of spirituality. In both of these cases, religious symbolism plays a crucial role.



Img. 1.3.: Kolam/ Muggu (Courtesy: Pinterest)

In Hinduism, textiles play an essential role in the worship. In many religious rituals, textiles are either presented to the deity or the ancestors as a form of paying respect. In a few practices like the Chandi Homam, a freshly woven saree is dipped in ghee and thrown into the

¹³ Tagore, Rabindranath. 1915 (republished as an ebook in 2012 by Lulu.com) (SONGS OF KABIR)

sacrificial fire as an offering to the Goddess. In the Southern part of the country, the main idol in the sanctum sanctorum is dressed in silk and adorned with gold ornaments. Here, the fabric is fresh off the loom and, in most cases, explicitly woven for the deities by the weaving community settled around the temple complex. The very act of washing, dressing and decorating the idol is a part of the *Shodasa Upacharam*¹⁴, practiced in temples as a part of the daily ritual to God, even today. The act of bathing (Snanam), offering a dress (Vastram), sacred thread (Yagyopaveetam), ornaments (Abharanam), and external application of Sandalwood paste for enhancing appearance (Gandham) as an integral part of the Hindu religious ritual brings to our notice, the dominance of Aharya in the path of spirituality. The image of the deity being woven into the Pallu of sarees and the image of God etched on temple jewellery worn by the brides and the dancers alike of Tamilnadu highlights the linkage between society and spirituality brought in through the tradition and practice of Aharya. Yet another exciting transaction between textile traditions and spirituality becomes evident in using religious symbols as motifs in woven textiles. From our tribal past, symbolism in the form of religious motifs, be it the image of a totem or a symbol to ward away evil spirits, has been incorporated into the textiles as a metaphorical veil that offers protection from natural and spiritual danger. In many temple towns of the South, weaving communities were established close to the temple to provide fresh-off-the-loom fabric for the God of the temple. From such weaving communities of Madurai and Kanchipuram, we see motifs such as ‘Rudraksham’ (Shaivite prayer beads) of Lord Shiva and the ‘Kili’ (Parrot) of Goddess Meenakshi becoming an integral part of the community’s motif vocabulary. Other religious motifs such as the ‘Swastika’, the mystical creature ‘Yali’ found in temples, and the ‘Mayil’ (Peacock) of Lord Muruga are widely used in the South Indian textile tradition. Thus motifs, either in the form of religious symbols or metaphysical Kolam/Muggu, have been incorporated into our sartorial practice from the times of animistic worship to the times of Agamistic worship. Here, the fabric that holds these motifs becomes a microcosm of spirituality. The aspect of makeup comes into play in many temples where the deities’ features are drawn on using collyrium or using religious materials like Vibhooti, Kumkum, turmeric and Sandalwood paste.

¹⁴ The Sixteen-fold offering offered to the presiding deity of the temple according to the Upanishad. The 16 Upacharas are: Avahana (welcomin), Asanam (Offering a seta), Padyam (Washing the feet), Aarghyam (Washing the hands), Achamanam (Offering water), Snanam (Bathing), Vastram (Offering Clothes), Yagyopaveetam (Offering the sacred thread), Aabharanam (Offering Ornaments), Gandham (Offering Sandalwood Paste), Pushpam (Offering flowers), Dhoopam (Offering incense), Deepam (Offering a lamp), Naivedyam (Offering Food), Taamboolam (Offering beetel leaves with beetel nut) and Pradakshina Namaskaram (Circumambulatory salutation of the deity).

1.1.4. Threads that Dance:

Costumes and makeup are important in many folk and ritualistic performative traditions. Many folk forms believe that the very evolution of dance is inspired by the movement pattern of the weft and the warp. One prominent dance form that is a representation of this belief is Lai Haraoba of Manipur. This ritualistic dance is believed to represent the formation of the Universe and depicts life from birth. This ritualistic part also describes the very act of spinning and weaving as a critical stage of a man's life. In addition, the Lai Haraoba performance is full of detailed depictions of the region's material culture. Here, barring the purpose of decorating the dancing body, the activities of material life manifest as the dance itself. Apart from this, many folk forms such as Oyilattam (Tamilnadu), Bhangra (Punjab), and Bagurumba (Assam) incorporate a woven piece of fabric to accentuate their movement vocabulary. More intense forms of ritualistic dances like Teyyam (Kerala) and Buta Kola (Karnataka and parts of Kerala) depend on their Aharya to invoke a primitive reaction in the spectators that demands fear and reverence.



Img. 1.4.: Bhuta Kola, Karnataka (Left) and Teyyam, Kerala (Right) (Courtesy: Pinterest)

1.1.5. Home and More:

In a diverse community like ours, it is no wonder that Aharya also plays a vital role outside the sole purpose of decorating our bodies. As Bharata proposed, like the textile-based

props used in a dramatic production, textiles are also used to decorate a space and transform it from a house to a home. In our lives, textiles are also used as a part of living spaces. From rugs and carpets to blankets and quilts, textiles serve the purpose of seating, dividing space for privacy, curtains, and more. We see textiles all around us, as floor warmers, as beautiful curtains and in some communities, even as wall hangings and as a decorative door hanging called Toranam¹⁵. Apart from decorating our homes and our bodies, Textiles can also be seen in use as decorative pieces and functional tools for household animals.



Img. 1.5.: Carpets, Curtains and other Upholsteries (Courtesy: Pinterest)

1.2. Aharya Abhinaya and Bharatanatyam:

The art of costuming can be traced back through the literary corpus of our country. Natyashastra, a treatise on dramaturgy written by Bharata Muni (2nd B.C.E. – 2nd C.E), classifies modes of expression into four – Angika, Vachika, Satvika and Aharya (Chaturvidah Abhinaya) and the art of costuming is one among the four. Termed ‘Aharya’, it consists of costumes, ornaments, makeup, hair-do, and stage props. Henceforth, the term ‘Aharya’ in this work shall denote all the above-mentioned factors. Another treatise, Kamasutra by Vatsyayana (1st – 6th C.E.), lists the art of clothing and jewellery making as one of the 64 royal arts (Vatsyayana, 13). The development of a signature draping and ornamentation style for each region of the country has been reflected in the costume practices of the dance form of the respective region. Bharata divides the country into four *Pravrittis* or regions based on their

¹⁵ Decorative hangings, commonly used to decorate the main door of a house.

appearance, behaviour and customs. And interestingly, even after centuries, we still can see the stark difference in the Aharya of the dance forms of these different regions. It may not be wrong to say that the costumes of each dance form have evolved according to the existing sartorial practices of its people and patrons. The same must have also had a hand in shaping the movement vocabulary and vice versa since it will be practically difficult to perform any given classical dance of India in the costume of a different one.

Bharatanatyam, one of the classical dances of India, originated in the state of Tamilnadu. Though it is difficult to pinpoint a time period, literary evidence helps us trace it back to the Sangam Period (5th B.C. – 4th A.D. approx.)¹⁶. The dance form, known as ‘Sadir’ or ‘Dasiattam’, is the predecessor of the modern-day Bharatanatyam. Sadir¹⁷ started as a ceremonial dance performed in temples and was solely performed by the Devadasis (the traditional practitioners). Bharatanatyam has journeyed through centuries of being performed in different social settings under different patronages, all of which have significantly contributed to the Chaturvidah Abhinaya of the present-day Bharatanatyam. From the sanctum sanctorum to the proscenium stage, Bharatanatyam has seamlessly adapted to the changing needs and practices, all of which have contributed to forming the dance form’s present persona, albeit in small parts. The Bharatanatyam Aharya is a complicated yet classic affair. The details of the Aharya of Sadir and the society, in general, can be acquired from Tamil texts such as *Silapadikaram*¹⁸, *Ettuthogai* (100 B.C.E. – 250 C.E.), *Pathupaattu* (2nd – 3rd C.E.)¹⁹ apart from literary works written under the patronage of rulers (Abhyudhayamus, Yakshaganas, Kuravanji Natakams) and other fictional works of various periods including poems and novels. Apart from published literary works, the inscriptional, sculptural, mural and other pictorial references provided insight into the metamorphosis of Aharya of Bharatanatyam. We must note that this evolution is not linear in any way.

1.3. Angles of Perception:

Through this work, I have attempted to perceive Aharya of Bharatanatyam as an independent entity in itself and a strong reinforcement of performance. Before venturing into

¹⁶ Period during which the annual gatherings of poets and literates happened where exchange of tamil literary works took place.

¹⁷ Though the dance form has been referred to by many terms such as Dasiyattam, Chinamelam etc., henceforth, in this work, Bharatanatyam before the 1930’s will be referred to as Sadir.

¹⁸ Written by Ilango Adigal in the 2nd C.E. Tamilnadu.

¹⁹ A collection of eight and ten anthologies respectively, *Ettuthogai* and *Pathupaattu* form one of the earliest works in Tamil literature.

the perceptions through which I view this work, it is imperative to note the timeline that this work focuses on. The chosen timeframe for this work is from the 16th century to 1970. This is owing to the fact that it is during the 16th century Nayaka period that the closest format to the contemporary Margam format of Bharatanatyam can be seen. The work stops at 1970 due to the fact that any change to Aharya post 1970, was not vastly incorporated into the accepted varieties of Bhartanatyam Ahrya that had sprouted up until then and was attributed to personal preferences. Now I shall swiftly point out the different viewpoints that I have regarded in this work to provide a holistic view of Bharatanatyam's Aharya as a singular entity of study. Firstly, the hereditary community of performers, the Devadasis and their aesthetic practices. The costuming of Bharatanatyam is closely linked to the social standing of its practitioners at various junctures of history. Devadasis (servants of God), the girls dedicated to temple services, were the traditional practitioners of Sadir.

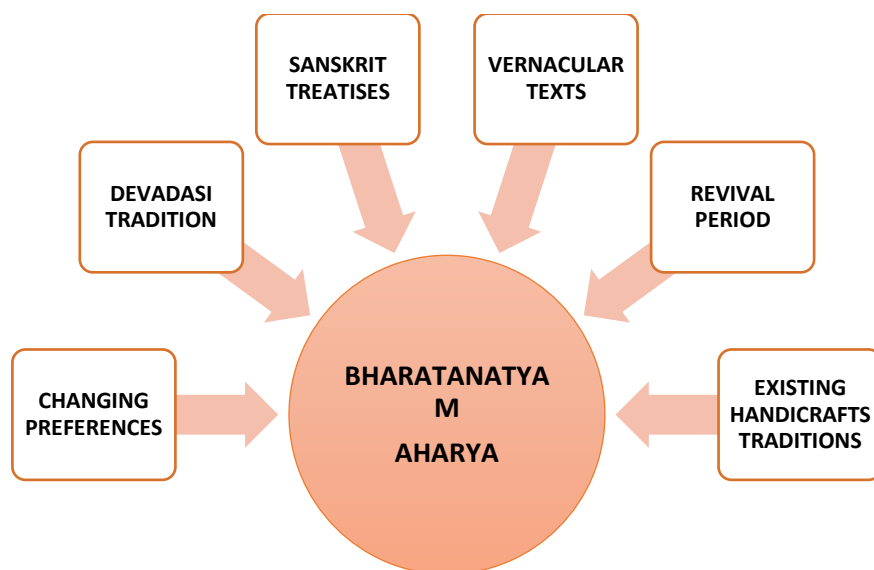


Fig. 1.3.: Angles of Perception

The beginning of the Devadasi system in Tamilnadu has been a subject of speculation. Though there has not been solid evidence of the dedication of girls to temples in the Sangam literary corpus, we can be definitive about the existence of a dancing community of women. The duty of these women dedicated to temple services was to be part of the temple rituals, including cleaning and decorating the temple premises and performing *Natya*, which was a part of the *Shodasha Upacharam*. Through the ages, the dance form was adopted to the courts of the rulers where the dancers were now of service to the Kings, symbolising the King's status

as akin to that of God. Though their premises varied, the Devadasis of the temple and the Rajadasis of the court were regarded with immense respect in the community, as evident in many literary sources. The social stature that the Dasis held was equivalent to that of the women of high society. This was because the Dasis were the only women in the society who were educated in the Shastras. The rulers and society changed, but the Dasis held their position through the 17th century, up until the Christian ideas of the colonisers brought the downfall of the system and its practitioners. The notion of taboo attached to this community of performers resulted in the abolishment of the system and the eventual revival by elite revivalists as a part of the country's nationalist movement. This summary of the graph of the Devdasi system is intended to create an understanding of the once glorious past of the Devadasi community and the eventual tarnish they were subjected to. An in-depth analysis of their social standing and its effect on the dance form's Aharya will be undertaken in the upcoming chapters of the thesis. The social status of a Devadasi at any given point in history also reflects the political power of her patron, the King. This part of the analysis also aims to look at the stature of a Devadasi from the viewpoint of how economically and politically powerful the state's ruler was.

This analysis proves essential to the study since the materials used for the costumes and makeup would have been determined by the mercantile connections that a kingdom maintained and the kind of material wealth that a King possessed. Furthermore, the political and trade relations that the rulers of Tamilnadu maintained with other Kingdoms within India and across the Western and South East Asian countries would have resulted in cross-cultural assimilation that culminated in an exchange of fashion ideas from across the globe. I have tried to analyse the effect of other cultures on Bharatanatyam Aharya through this channel. Moving on, the indispensable aspect of the study has been the texts and treatises. As mentioned earlier, Aharya has been considered a crucial part of dramaturgy. Natyashastra, the quintessential treatise on dramaturgy, has a dedicated chapter for Aharya. Following Natyashastra are various other Sanskrit texts and treatises, including *Vishnudharmottara Purana*²⁰, *Nrityaratnavali*²¹,

²⁰ Written during the 6th to 7th C.E., this work comes under the Upapurana category and is divided into three Khandas. The third Khanda, canto, deals with dance among other fields such as sculpture, music and painting.

²¹ Written by Jaya Senapati in the 13th Century, the whole text is divided into eight chapters, all of which discuss facets of dance. Aharya is dealt with in the 7th chapter.

*Sangitaratnakara*²², *Nrittaratnakosha*²³, *Rasakaumudi*²⁴, and *Sangitanarayana*²⁵ (17th C.E.). By studying the Sanskrit texts and treatises, I have attempted to piece together a pan-Indian idea on Aharya before moving on to the regional texts. Though there have not been any treatises akin to *Natyashastra* that describe the Aharya of Bharatanatyam in Tamil, an array of texts such as *Silapadikaram*, poems of *Aganaanooru*, *Puranaanooru*²⁶ and *Alwar*²⁷ and *Nayanmar*²⁸'s Bhakti poetry have been referred to gain an idea of the sartorial preferences of the society and also the costume and ornamentation of the courtesan of the respective periods. Other texts such as court literature (Nayaka and Maratha period) and fictional works of literature have also been referred for the same. This effort to analyse the textual traditions was undertaken to obtain a clear picture of the society of the respective periods.

Thirdly, the revival of Sadir following the prevention of the dedication act²⁹ and the rebranding of the same as Bharatanatyam has been viewed in this thesis as a pivotal point in the evolution of Bharatanatyam Aharya. This is in consideration of the fact that the nationalists who were also the revivalists, such as E. Krishna Iyer and Rukmini Devi Arundale, treated the dance form and its revival as a representative of the deep-rooted cultural heritage of the country. The efforts taken by Rukmini Devi to revive Sadir through her establishment, the Kalakshetra Foundation, were undertaken to rebrand Sadir as a respectable art form and to erase the taboo attached to it due to the blasphemous practices of few Devadasis towards the far end of the Devadasi system. As a part of my thesis, I have proposed that this effort was fundamentally possible through the reformations that the Aharya of the 'proscribed' Sadir went through to morph into the 'respectable' Bharatanatyam. In continuation with the revival, the contribution of Rukmini Devi to the Aharya of Bharatanatyam has been further implored through a study of her dance dramas and the role of Aharya in setting the stage for the success of her productions, quite literally.

²² Written by Sarangadeva in the 13th century, this text revolves around music primarily but also provides substantial information on dance in its 7th chapter.

²³ Part of a larger work called *Sangitaraja*, *Nrityaratnakosa* is ascribed to Maharana Kumbha of 14th century. The entire part is on dance and Aharya is discussed in its 4th chapter.

²⁴ This 16th-17th century text is ascribed to Srikanta is a Sanskrit work on music that deals with dance and Aharya in its 9th chapter.

²⁵ Written by Purushotama Mishra in the 17th century, the 3rd chapter of this text deals with dance and its Aharya.

²⁶ *Aganaanooru* and *Puranaanooru*, also known as *Agam* and *Puram* poetry, are the classification under which the Sangam literary corpus falls. While *Agam* deals with personal themes such as love interest, eroticism and the like, *Puram* poetry deals with the valor and administration themes of a King.

²⁷ Vaishnavite Saints of Tamilnadu who lived between 5th and 10th C.E., they were 12 in number.

²⁸ Saivite saints of Tamilnadu who lived between 6th and 8th C.E., they were 63 in number.

²⁹ The Act was first passed in Madras Legislative Council in the year 1924.

Rukmini Devi and her contributions becomes a decisive phase in the history of Bharatanatyam and its Aharya. Apart from her efforts at giving Sadir a new lease, she and her team of fellow theosophists undertook one of the very first attempts to re-design the Sadir costume for her solo performance way back in 1935. Beyond the costumes and jewellery she had in her personal collection, Rukmini Devi becomes a crucial part of this study due to her gargantuan contribution to Bharatanatyam Aharya through her Dance Dramas. Her dance drama productions have a varied list of characters, and the themes are from different regions of the country. This proves to be a massive fountain of data that is available from a single source. Her costuming and creative process also had an impact of other art forms, such as Kathakali³⁰. In the fifty-plus years of the conception and staging of these productions, the Aharya has not undergone any drastic changes. A disheartening part of this aspect is that after the passing away of Rukmini Devi, her contributions to Aharya have not been documented even by the Foundation itself. These records have been orally passed down from generation to generation and can be lost if efforts to document are not taken seriously. Therefore, this work can be considered a part of the documentation process of the invaluable contributions of Rukmini Devi before we lose it all to time. This documentation is incomplete due to the constraints laid by the Kalakshetra Foundation. The foundation denied permission to all means of documentation or entry into backstage for observation. The vision of Rukmini Devi was to offer and share both the process and product of her reconstruction with all the seekers. The above decision of the concerned authorities stands as an antithesis to her very vision. Hence, this facet of the study is only a peek into one of the monumental shifts in the course of the Aharya of Bharatanatyam.

The next facet of Aharya that I have comprehended is Tamilnadu's textile and jewellery tradition. The traditional handlooms of the state and the traditional jewellery preferred and worn by the women of Tamilnadu provide us with an insight into every little aspect of the present-day Bharatanatyam costume and ornaments based on the preferences of Tamil society, hence assisting us in understanding the symbiotic relationship shared by the society and the art. In the Devadasi tradition, the Devadasi is treated as 'Nityasumangali', the ever-auspicious bride of the almighty. This guides us to the connection between the Bharatanatyam jewellery tradition and the bridal jewellery tradition of Tamil Nadu. Therefore, understanding the state's long-standing textile and jewellery traditions became a solid connection to probe into. Along with the textiles and jewellery, a substantial amount of work has gone into the area of stage

³⁰ One of the classical dance forms of Kerala

props, stage lighting design, makeup and hair-do. These aspects have been considered from the view of pre and post-advent of technology and the shift in performing space.

Lastly, in a bid to connect the post-revival period to contemporary times, I have analysed the contributions of the cinema industry to the changing preferences of society. I have also tried to examine the contributions of successors and contemporaries of Rukmini Devi to comprehend the various ways that Aharya of Bharatanatyam has been tweaked and personalised in the formative years of post-revival. In continuation to this, an attempt has been made to analyse the effects of Bharatanatyam's journey to the global stage on its Aharya, and for this purpose, performances, news coverage, magazines, and social media content have been reviewed.

1.4. Hypothesis:

The construct of the Bharatanatyam Aharya, both in the pre- and post-revival period, is a synergetic evolution of various socio-political, socio-cultural, socio-economic, and religious dynamics of the history of the Tamil region. The synergy also reflects a matrix of texts and allied arts.

1.5. Aims and Objectives:

Through this work, I aim to:

- i.) Examine the evolution of decorative practices in Bharatanatyam through literary sources such as Sanskrit treatises, texts, vernacular texts, and Western writings.
- ii.) Look into the connection between the political and economic power of the patron and the reflection of the same in the Aharya of the court dancer.
- iii.) Analyse the change in Bharatanatyam Aharya pre- and post-revival period as a tool to propagate the nationalist movement in pre-independent India.
- iv.) Study long-standing textile and jewellery traditions of Tamilnadu and its impact on Bharatanatyam Aharya.
- v.) Document the contributions of Rukmini Devi Arundale to the Bharatanatyam Aharya through her Dance Dramas.

- vi.) Shine a light on the ancillary fields of art that together form the Aharya of Bharatanatyam.

1.6. Review of Literature:

The pool of literature was filtered in a way that effectively answered the research problems I sought to solve. With the varied areas and timelines intersecting in this work, the literature review was focused on the following areas that were necessary to expand on the research statement:

1. Sanskrit texts and treatises
2. Vernacular texts and literature
3. Western writings
4. Political and social history of the Tamil region
5. History of the Devadasi system
6. Trade relations
7. Works of stalwarts in rebuilding Bharatanatyam
8. Nationalist Movement
9. Cinema, other media and their role
10. Post-colonialism, post-colonial feminism and the concept of 'Male-Gaze'.
11. Costume Designing and Textile History in India
12. Costume, jewellery, and decorative traditions

The “Backward Snowball” method and the “Citation Mining” method were used to compile the necessary literature for the study. These two methods go hand in hand in systematically identifying every last source of literature that would fall under our desired criteria. While the backward snowball method works by scanning a primary source of literature and through the elimination of irrelevant sources results in the literature that suits our requirements, the citation mining method looks for literary works that have cited our primary source material, thereby resulting in books and articles that are relevant to the area of study. The keywords used to narrow down the search results on digital archives and internet sources of articles, journals, and manuscripts were Sadir, Bayadere, Bharatanatyam, revival, costuming, socio-cultural history, trade relations, post-colonial politics, Aharya, post-colonial India, nationalism and arts,

cultural history, social history, stage lighting design, makeup, handloom, Devadasi, patronage, textiles and any offshoot of these terms were considered into the body of the literature reviewed. These terms were not used strictly, and variations of the same were also included. These keywords assisted in the endeavour to answer the research problem and guided me closer to the areas of interest.

Works by authors such as John W. Creswell (2013), Robert E. Stake (2005), Jerome Kagan (2009), and Terry Eagleton (1991), among others, considerably strengthened my initial understanding of research, the application of quality research in performing arts, and the various schools of critical thoughts in arts and literature. Mandakranta Bose's work on Sanskrit literature (1989) dealing with dance, provided the necessary insight into the existing treasure cove of Sanskrit literature that deals with Indian classical dance. This work also helped in identifying the treatises that spoke of Aharya exclusively. Yet another monumental work on dance in Indian literature is by Kapila Vatsyayan (1968). Other works of authors such as Raghuraman (2006), M. R. Kavi (1983), and Dikshitar (1930), aided in arriving at select texts, treatises and other literary works in both Sanskrit and vernacular languages. Donovan Roebert's pathbreaking work on Western writings published in 2022, has been a major source that led to the discovery of many western writings regarding Indian dance, especially ones that commented on the Aharya of the dancers. Similarly, works of Sascha (2013) and Scobie (2013) helped in identifying the textual sources for this study.

To understand the evolution of aesthetic practices in the Tamil region, it was necessary to understand the wealth of the region and the way it grew under different patronage. Works of Sanjay Subrahmaniam, Chitra Madhavan, R. Nagaswamy (1986), Bes, Kaniseeti (2022), Narayana Rao and Shulman are sources that provided concrete tracing of the history of the Southern India from a social and archaeological point. Ramaswamy (1985), Kanakalatha Mukund (1999), Verma (2006), Mathew (2007), and Washbrook (2009) added to the social history with their insight into the trade relations that existed in the southern region from the Sangam Period, thus shining light on the transaction and availability of materials in the region. With the help of this, I could decipher what material the dancers would have preferred and what would have been available to them through different reigns and periods of the past.

In tracing the history of the development of the Devadasi system and its eventual downfall, it was Daves Soneji, and Saskia Kersenboom's writings that unbiasedly approached a sensitive topic. Their approach to unveiling the history of Devadasi system nudged me to

view the eventual downfall of the system as a collateral damage to the building of the nation. Works of Seetha (1981), Sreenivas (2008), and Morcom (2013) proved essential in understanding the system as both a local and national level phenomenon. Works by Lakshmi Vishwanathan, Hari Krishnan and Daves Soneji provided invaluable input into the social lives of the Devadasis and how they were perceived at different periods.

Coming to recent history, it was the understanding of Rukmini Devi and her contributions that proved to be the most complicated areas of all. There seems to be two strong perspectives on her life's works and reading, analysing, and understanding both the sides was imperative in deciphering her thought process and creative process. Even though many of her associates are alive, academic writings of Shakuntala Ramani, S. Sarada, C. Nachiappan, Ramnarayan and Leela Samson were sources from inside the circle that illuminated the personal side of Rukmini Devi. Attempts to analyse her many facets was made easy by the books written and edited by Avanti Meduri, Uttara Asha Coorlawala, Janet O'Shea, among others. At a point when I could not access the photo archives of Rukmini Devi, it was the Khokkar archives, Kothari archives, and Nachiappan archives that allowed me to visually breakdown and analyse Rukmini Devi's contributions to Bharatanatyam Aharya. The doctoral thesis of Srividya Natarajan (2009) deserves a special mention here since it made me look into the decorative traditions of the Devadasis and the ultimate reform of the same as an elitist, post-structural, and post-colonial version that was designed to suit the modern woman of the 20th century. In a continuation to placing Rukmini Devi's revival as the crux of the study, the concepts of cultural nationalism, post-colonialism, feminism and aspects such as taste preference, and male-gaze, were explored through the works of Indira Vishwanathan Peterson, Kannabiran (1945), Whitehead (1947), Bourdieu (1984), Johar (2016), and Thobani (2017).

For this work, I needed to gain knowledge regarding the existing textile and jewellery traditions of Tamilnadu and the rest of the country. For this, I referred to the writings of G. S. Ghurye, the founder of Indian Sociology, who had written broadly on the Indian costume traditions. Though this was a small work, it gave me an idea of how the fashion of different regions existed before the cross-cultural influx caused by merchant and courtly transactions took place. This idea was furthered by writings of Gupta (1973), Bhavnani (1984), Alkazi (1996), and Chisti (2007). In the works titled 'Costumes, Textiles, Cosmetics, and Coiffure in Ancient and Mediaeval India', edited by S. P. Gupta, and Kay Ambrose's 'Classical Dances and Costumes of India' (1950) detailed descriptive analysis of each style of costume and its region and the costumes of each dance form, respectively, was illustrated. Through their

research, Nandita Krishna (1992), Bahl (2005), Dahejia (2009), and Bhoopathi (2020) helped in viewing the allied arts as separate entities of the societal decorative practices that through ages became indispensable part of the dance Aharya.

Tamil and Sanskrit lexicons were referred to gain insight into the technical terms mentioned in vernacular works and Treatises. A plethora of theses was referred from Shodhganga, Cambridge, and other online repositories that were related to my research area or were works done on Costumes, cosmetics and such through the use of keyword search. Few works that helped me exponentially are the theses of Jeevanandam (2014), Swarnamalya Ganesh (2012) and Radhika.V. S. (1996) that provided a linear understanding of the development of Devadasi system in Tamilnadu. Works of Manamalar (1995), and Mahalingam (2006) aided in learning about the Tamil Society under various rule. Rudisill's (2007) thesis on taste in Chennai's Sabha was a work that helped in furthering Bourdieu's argument on 'good taste' as seen in the Tamil urban milieu. Harischandra's (2000) thesis on analysing the Aharya of the Cindu Madiga's, served as a basis on which the documentation of Rukmini Devi's dance drama costumes were framed. Finally, theses of Mitra (2014), Ranavaade (2017), and Chatterjee (1974) shone light on the evolution of costumes, cosmetics and such in Indian texts and sculptures. Online repositories such as archive.org, Jstor, Academia, Researchgate, websites of Ministry of Culture, digitalpresentation.gov, all provided access to archived manuscripts and footages of past performances of stalwarts.

1.7. Need for the study:

Being one of the popularly known and widely practised classical dances of India³¹, Bharatanatyam as an area of study has been extensively worked on. Having a deep interest in the study of Bharatanatyam from a social and cultural perspective, my initial readings on Bharatanatyam and its history were always overpowered by an overwhelming focus on the Angika and Satvika Abhinaya of the dance form. This was followed by the Vachika Abhinaya, the music and literature contributing to the Sahitya – the literary aspect. On the very bottom of the hierarchy was the Aharya Abhinaya, perpetually an honorary mention in many academic works. The art of costuming and the lack of substantial research in Bharatanatyam Aharya makes it a crucial topic that must be researched. In the abundance of research work

³¹ Bharatanatyam is one out of the eight classical dances recognized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi. The other seven being Mohinattam, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Kathak, Odissi, Manipuri and Sattriya in no particular order.

conducted on Bharatanatyam, we find a staggering number of findings on almost all aspects of the dance form except the Aharya, which is dishearteningly superficial or infinitesimal. This seems to be a curious point since Aharya is one of the, or rather, the only tangible aspects that would help us trace the course of a dance form. Aharya is always considered a necessity, but we often forget that it is the face of the form. At the outset, costuming may seem like a superficial element that is insignificant and cosmetic. Still, Aharya denotes the aesthetics of a culture, a dance form and thus mirrors the aesthetic preferences of the society in which it was/is performed. The Aharya of Bharatanatyam has endured equally, or rather more challenges as much as the dance form itself, with various factors such as patronage, performance space, and politics playing a pivotal role. In the late 19th and early 20th century, when the form and its practitioners were seen as a degenerated element of society, well-learned, high-class members of the community strived to reconstruct the art form and attach a sense of history, culture and authenticity to the form. The dance form, which was then perceived to be unclassical and unpalatable by the anglicised urban audience, was to be made the icon of the cultural lineage of the country by making changes to its form, especially its presentability. It is this point of presentation, as a critical factor in the revival of Bharatanatyam, that I try to levitate through this work. Hence, to trace the history of Bharatanatyam, research work on Aharya from a socio-political and cultural perspective might prove to be the missing part of the puzzle that is the tracing of an art form's history.

1.8. Scope of Study:

It would be outrageous to state that no literature is available or no research has been done on Bharatanatyam's Aharya. Still, it is one-dimensional and lacks a comprehensive approach. Early Tamil texts like *Ettuthogai*, *Silapadikaram*, *Manimeghalai* (2nd C.E)³² and *Paththupaatu* do mention the costumes of the court dancers and folk dancers and the innumerable temples of Tamilnadu bear sculptures that provide us with an insight into the costumes of the performers of that era. Court transcripts, literary pieces authored by the rulers or court poets and travelogues of British officials, and official records of Portuguese, French, and Dutch mention the attire of the royal court but in a fleeting manner. Theses and other academic research materials on this area are either focused solely on Sanskrit texts and therefore lack vernacular perspective or are fragmented and do not provide a complete picture.

³² A 2nd century work from Tamilnadu, ascribed to Seethalai Saathanar, that is often considered as the continuation of *Silapadikaram*.

It is this lacuna in the body of research that this work aims to fill, if not wholly, at best to an extent.

Multitudinous research has been conducted on the milestones of the dance form's transition from the royal courts of the Nayaka rulers (The present-day format of Bharatanatyam can be traced back to the Nirupana format of the Nayaka period) to the proscenium stage. Innumerable literary sources are available on the patronage of Nayakas, and Marathas, the dance movement vocabulary, the addition of new repertory items, the effect of the colonial rule on the practitioner's economic status, the Devadasi Abolishment Act and its consequences, the reformation of the art form by Rukmini Devi and the addition of the Dance drama format. But what seems to be widely ignored by historians and dance academicians alike is the area of Aharya Abhinaya and its vital role in being the aesthetic representative of the revival of the dance form of the Devadasis.

With the three other branches of Abhinaya abundantly analysed by scholars, through this work, I intend to bridge the hiatus in the study of Bharatanatyam's history by looking into the costumes, makeup, stage properties and other external aids that provide the dance form with its unique physical persona. This work will probe into Bharatanatyam's costuming, makeup, ornamentation and stage props (post-revival), thus providing an insight into its Aharya through the various milestones of its historical course. Doing so will provide a small but significant groundwork for future research in this area through this thesis. This work attempts to understand the role of Aharya as a tool in reviving the art form. It will further look into the contributions of Rukmini Devi Arundale to the adaptation of Bharatanatyam to the proscenium stage, the institutionalisation of the art form and the effects of her costuming for Kalakshetra Foundation's trademark dance dramas on the Aharya of what we know as Bharatanatyam today. Therefore, by the way of deciphering textual, pictorial and historical evidences to understand the evolution of Aharya, I place this work in the lines of intertextual readings.

Apart from being a work on the costuming of Bharatanatyam, this work also focuses on textiles, jewellery making, the art of decoration, the religious significance of it, makeup and makeup artists, costume makers, stage-prop makers, the role of stage lighting and lighting technicians as components of what makes the Bharatanatyam Aharya. This makes the study an interdisciplinary take on analysing the various ancillary arts related to Aharya and thus paves the way for research in other disciplines besides performing arts. Due to the fact that this work was conducted during a global pandemic, access to many institutes and the opportunity to physically meet older resource people (who would have significantly

contributed but were not technically equipped) were constrained. This has proven to be a setback in the research, essentially curbing it from reaching its full potential. But on the brighter side, this also serves as a stepping stone that will open doors for further studies and shows this area has scope as a field worthy of research.

1.9. Methodology:

The chosen area of study involves many contributory fields, so sticking to one data collection method would not have been fruitful. In order to extract as much information as possible, I have employed a few different methods to reach the optimum level of data collection. The primary area of research being the history of Bharatanatyam Aharya; the primary method used was **Archival Research Method**³³, wherein I visited Government libraries, Government museums, private libraries, private museums and archives owned by N.G.O. to access manuscripts, records, paintings and bronze sculptures. Furthermore, books, theses, journals, periodicals and newspapers were referred to distil relevant data. Additionally, through fieldwork to Tanjore, Trichy, Ramanathapuram, Madurai, Kanchipuram and Theni³⁴, I was able to study the sculptures, murals, frescoes and make an observational note of the Aharya of the period that they were created in. this proved as a valuable source for this research work. The above-mentioned places in Tamilnadu were selected based on their serving as a centre for arts under various rulers. I then approached the digital archives of the Ministry of Culture, India, the British Museum and the National Cultural Audiovisual Archives to access the digitised manuscripts, archived publications, company paintings and yesteryear interviews and performances.

By employing the **observation method**, I observed the greenrooms of solo artists and thematic performances, intending to gain an insight into the current trends of costume draping, makeup, jewellery and hair-do. Through **participant observation**, I had the opportunity to assist and be a part of the backend of productions by Athma Academy of Dance (Chennai). I was able to gain insight into the process of designing and procuring costumes and jewellery and the process of putting together a dance production which included assisting in makeup, light design and stage props. This gave me the necessary acumen on contemporary ideas regarding extraneous representations. I also spent one month in the Costume Department of the Kalakshetra Foundation during their December Festival of 2021, thereby gaining an insider's

³³ Method that involves extraction of data from historical records, documents and such other sources which provide information of person or events of the past.

³⁴ Districts of Tamilnadu.

perspective of all the factors that go into their productions and also enabling me to understand the original design of Rukmini Devi and compare it to the variations that I was able to observe in Kalakshetra's current rendition of the same.

In-Person interviews and **Telephonic interviews** of scholars, performers, artists, costume designers, jewellery makers, makeup artists, business owners, and members of the Nattuvanar community were conducted to gain a comprehensive perception of the world of Aharya, including all its minute components. The interviews were conducted with experts like Sandhya Raman (Costume Designer), C. Jayachandran (Dance, temple architecture, temple rituals), Raghuraman (Art history in Tamilnadu, Tamil literature), Rukmini Vijaykumar (Choreographer, performer), Swarnamalya Ganesh (Dancer, Reconstruction of Nayaka period Sadir), Aiyyelu Sivakumar (Proprietor – Aiyyelu Dance Costume Designer, Chennai), Sivakumar (Shanti Dance Needs, Chennai), Herambanadan (Hereditary Nattuvanar, Bhagavata Mela practitioner) and Jayakumar Bharadwaj (History, Epigraphy, Temple architecture, Textiles) amongst others. Using the **Phenomenological method** proved exceedingly beneficial in that it facilitated the ability to suspend my personal perceptions and understand individual's subjective experiences and interpretations of the aspects they were interviewed about. This method also allowed me to modify the questions as the interview progressed solely based on their responses.

To obtain potent information on the current trends in Aharya preferred by the young dancers and to understand the level to which the Gurus are passing on the knowledge of Aharya, I resorted to the **survey method** to create a focus group for whom a specific questionnaire³⁵ was tailored. The groups were divided into three: Young male artists, Young female artists, and Senior Gurus (Female and Male). The questionnaire had questions regarding their training background, their cultural and socio-economic background, the what's and why's of their preferences, and the extent of their knowledge of Aharya. The participants were also asked about their taste in costume and makeup in various performance spaces such as a temple, proscenium stage, black box, and open arena. The **Top-Down and Bottom-up** approach was employed to identify the areas of research that needed to be focused on to fulfil the lacuna, thus ensuring that none of the smaller yet crucial research areas was overshadowed or ignored. This thesis has been formatted according to the M.L.A. Stylesheet – 9th Edition. Throughout the

³⁵ Refer to appendix.

work, the quotes have been Italicised, and within the quote, information that needs more emphasis/attention by the reader has been highlighted in bold.

1.10. Theoretical Framework:

It is imperative to acknowledge the field of research we are treading in and the framework I would like to place my work in if I have to. Cultural history is a study that generally ventures into multidisciplinary approaches to understand a given area of study. In this pursuit to recognise Aharya as an individual entity, I have had to inquire into not just the history of the art form as a linear source in the timeframe but an amalgamation of the political history, cultural history, economic prospect of the state, textile and jewellery, business prospects and global trades and religious practices of the time. All of which form an interconnected mass network that includes the body of the study. A few of the theories that have helped me shape my perspective and, subsequently, this thesis are the theories of culture, post-colonialism, modernism, nationalism, post-colonial feminism and male gaze as factors that shaped the Aharya of Bharatanatyam in the early 20th century.

Culture Theory: Culture theory is a branch of comparative anthropology and semiotics (not to be confused with cultural sociology or cultural studies) that seeks to define the heuristic concept of culture in operational and scientific terms.

Post-Colonialism: A common form of colonisation is also the cultural, political and technical impact that more or less erases the indigenous culture. This process of erasure of culture in favour of another dominant culture can also be defined through the expression of cultural imperialism.

Modernism: Modernism, in the fine arts, is a break from the past and the concurrent search for new forms of expression. Modernism fostered experimentation in the arts from the late 19th to the mid-20th century, particularly in the years following World War I.

Post-colonial Feminism: Post-colonial feminist academic writing seeks to understand and interpret everyday lived experiences through a post-colonial perspective, de-centring the white, Western, and Eurocentric experience.

Male Gaze Theory: Propagated by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay, the theory argues that women in the media (public platform) are viewed from the eyes of a heterosexual man and treated as passive objects catering to male desires and preferences.

1.11. CHAPTERS:

CHAPTER 1:

This chapter sets the stage for the thesis and attempts to provide the necessary background on the area of research. It discusses the different definitions and understandings of Aharya through the ages and also establishes how Aharya is perceived through various chapters of this monograph. Apart from this, the chapter expounds on the scope of the study, articulates the research problem and lists the aims and objectives. The chapter further points out the methodology used for data collection and the theoretical framework it fits into. It also points out the body of existing knowledge that has nurtured this work. The chapter gives a quick view of the contents of the chapters in this work.

CHAPTER 2:

This chapter aims to understand Aharya Abhinaya and its place in the dance and dramaturgical treatises in Sanskrit and find a similar description in the regional texts in Tamil and Telugu. The goal is to understand the Aharya primarily mentioned by Bharata Muni in Natyashastra and trace the evolution of the same in later period texts. On a similar note, Tamil Sangam period literature, which can vaguely be dated to the same period as that of Natyashastra, was Silapadikaram, an epic that deals extensively with dance and its characteristics, especially while discussing Madhavi³⁶. Apart from these two, this chapter also throws light on the concept of Aharya as expounded in texts such as Vishnudharmottara Purana (6th – 7th C.E.), Nrittaratnavali (13th C.E.), Sangitaratnakara (13th C.E.), Nrittaratnakosha (14th C.E.), Rasakaumudi (16th - 17th C.E.) and Sangitanarayana (17th C.E.). The same has been undertaken in regional texts such as Agam poems Kuravanji Natakams, Pallaki Seva Prabandh and similar literary works that were either written in praise of Gods or the Kings. Later period texts such as fictional novels in Tamil and the description of dancers in these works have also been documented in this chapter. This chapter also focuses on inscriptions, royal documents,

³⁶ The Courtesan in Silapadikaram.

Portugal, French, Dutch, and British travelogues, and official court documents for a literary understanding of costume practices.

CHAPTER 3:

A compiled history of Aharya of the dance traditions of Tamilnadu, as inferred from various sources, has been presented in this chapter. Like the history of Bharatanatyam itself, the history of its Aharya is equally fragmented. Therefore, in this chapter, a comprehensive account of the costuming of Sadir has been archived. Various sources such as temple sculptures, murals, frescoes, company paintings, later year photographs and similar sources have been referred to stitch the pieces of distorted history together in this chapter. The timeframe of this chapter will be from the period of Nayaka until the Anti-Nautch movement. This chapter aims to analyse the external components that have affected the Aharya of the dance form, such as the availability of resources, the social standing of a Devadasi under the patronage of each ruler and the cross-cultural impact on the sartorial choices of the society has been considered.

CHAPTER 4:

This chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter but has been separated from the latter because the area is a pivotal point of the study. The chapter begins with a brief biography of Rukmini Devi Arundale and her theosophical and essentially nationalistic ideologies that led to the revival of Sadir as Bharatanatyam. The chapter aims to look at the country's political climate during the 1930s and the state of the traditional practitioners of Sadir, who were, at this point, resorting to various other avenues of livelihood. The chapter expounds on Rukmini Devi's contribution to the changes in Bharatanatyam costume that she achieved for her solo performances in collaboration with her fellow theosophists. The change in the performance space, the change in the outlook towards the art form and the alienation of the art and the artist has been discussed in detail as compelling factor in the transformation of Sadir to Bharatanatyam. The chapter also deliberates on the influx of technology, the first of its kind as experimented with by Rukmini Devi, into Bharatanatyam performance. This chapter aims to look at the contributions of Rukmini Devi, not unilaterally but in a panoramic view, understanding the various sources of influence that resulted in the birth of the new face of India's cultural nationalism, Bharatanatyam. The analysis aims to illuminate not only the 'Who' of revival but also the 'What' and the 'Why'. An offshoot of the discussion about Rukmini Devi in this chapter is female rights and the male gaze during the period right before

and after the independence of India. Rukmini Devi Arundale restructured Bharatanatyam to eliminate its projected immorality and ultimately add a sense of respectability, divinity and modesty through its Aharya. Through this chapter, I explore how the redesigned Aharya and ‘modesty’ is a juxtaposing phenomenon. The latter part of the chapter also includes the contribution of an array of select contemporaries, predecessors and successors of Rukmini Devi, who also played a crucial role in planting the seed for the change in the presentation of Bharatanatyam and also took forward the changes to the next generation.

CHAPTER 5:

Though the dance drama format was not new to the Sadir performative history, it was not practised widely during the 1940s since the cessation of the bond between Devadasi and her art had already been firmly established at this point. Rukmini Devi re-introduced the Dance drama format into Bharatanatyam’s mainstream repertoire by spinning her take on the traditional Kuravanji Natakam. In this chapter, select dance dramas of Rukmini Devi Arundale will be analysed to understand her design of Aharya based on the different themes, regions and periods. We will attempt to understand the different weaves, draping styles, makeup, hair-do and props used in these dance dramas based on the period and region they are set in. This chapter, apart from being an attempt to understand the creative process of Rukmini Devi and her style of using Aharya as a bedrock to establish themes of these dramas, is also a humble attempt to document the costume designing done by her for the select productions.

CHAPTER 6:

Bharatanatyam Aharya is a reflection of the various decorative traditions followed in Tamilnadu. Therefore, it would not be legitimate if we did not look into the ancillary fields that together make the Aharya of Bharatanatyam. Hence, this chapter explores the areas of textiles, prop-makers, costume designers and tailors, jewellery makers, makeup artists and light design technicians to understand Aharya as a holistic entity.

CHAPTER 7:

This chapter reflects upon the proceedings of the entire monograph. The information analysed in each chapter is summarised, and a holistic understanding of the work’s core arguments is revisited. The chapter also discusses the current trends in the Bharatanatyam Aharya. It provides insight into the further scope of study in the field while also contemplating the shortcomings of the present study.

CHAPTER – 2

TRACING THROUGH TEXTS

2.1. Introduction:

The lineage of textual documentation, especially texts and treatises that concern dance and its practice, can be traced back to the beginning of the Christian Era in the Indian subcontinent. With an array of texts, beginning with the *Natyashastra* in Sanskrit and *Silapadikaram* in Tamil, it is imperative to analyse, correlate and conjoin the details available regarding the Aharya of dancers in these texts through the centuries to form a vivid picture of the evolution of the sartorial practices primarily in the realm of dance. An analysis of the textual documentation is imperative to understand Aharya as an element of any dance form that provides us with details of the common practices of the respective era. The term ‘text’, per se, in connection with this work is inclusive of all the documented literature. It is seen in three categories, one, the treatises in Sanskrit and similar texts in Tamil that prescribe a particular way of dressing for the dancer/actor; two, texts such as stories, *Kuravanjis*, novels and other fictional literature that describe the social practices of the period; and three, Western documentation of Indian aesthetic practices. Analyzing both the prescription and the description of Aharya helps recognise the text-vs-practice narrative in the sartorial history of Bharatanatyam. The texts are in Sanskrit, Tamil and a few in Telugu. Sanskrit texts are treatises on dance, Tamil texts are from different genres of literature used for performing arts and Telugu texts are chosen since Telugu has been the courtly language in Tamilnadu for centuries. The Sanskrit treatises mentioned in this chapter are mainly from the Classic period³⁷; the vernacular texts were chosen to be authored between the 16th and early 20th centuries. The reason for this is that the present form of Bharatanatyam, the Margam format to be specific, can only be traced back to the Nayaka period, and therefore, the vernacular texts are chosen from the Nayaka period to the revival period (the 1930s) to gain a better understanding of Aharya of dancers during the said time and also their position in the society.

³⁷ Aiyar, R.T. (2011, 1-3) divides the works of Sanskrit literature into three based on the period of authorship: Vedic period (3000 BC- 600 BC), Sutra Period (800-200 BC), and the classical period (600 BC to modern times). It is in the classic period that the literature of epics (*Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Puranas*), the *Mahakavyas* of great poets like Kalidasa, and the scientific and philosophical literature, has seen the light. The treatises of performing arts also become a significant part of this period.

2.2. Sanskrit Treatises:

Sanskrit treatises provide a great understanding of the artistic practices of our predecessors and draw a clear picture of the growth of the art forms, on a regional level, through the centuries. Treatises provide the prescription of how the Aharya of a dance form is to be approached. Mandakranta Bose, in her doctoral thesis (1989), later published as a book under the title ‘Movement and Mimesis: The Idea of Dance in the Sanskrit Tradition’ (2007), comments on how a systematic compiling of the information in these texts yield a first-hand view of dance in our society. She says, “(...) In their detailed descriptions and careful commentaries, these treatises offer us the fullest range of materials to reconstruct the body of dance theory and technique from the earliest times. Further, because these works span at least fifteen hundred years, they also mark the stages in the growth of the art-form. They thus form the primary source of the view presented here of classical Indian dancing” (Bose, 2). Following the crux of her statement, an attempt has been made to compile the details of Aharya, as mentioned in these treatises, in a similar fashion to gain a comprehensive visual of the practices as they evolved through various socio-political conditions. Also, in the case of Bharatanatyam, it is a fact that the Sanskrit treatises and work of Bharata profoundly influenced the early dance practice of the Tamil region. Some scholars like R. Nagaswamy (2012) and Padma Subrahmanyam (1980) believe that the terms in Silapadikaram, such as Pindi and Mandala, are borrowed from Bharata’s work. This conclusion, though not substantially proved with evidence, has been widely accepted. But a conclusive proof of the existence or even acceptance of Sanskrit literature in the Tamil region comes in the form of an inscription from the 8th Century Pallava reign, in Mamallapuram near Chennai, that praises the Pallava King Rajasimha Pallava as:

*Yadi na vidhata Bharato yadi na Harih Narado na va Skandah|
Bodum ka ivah Samartartah Sangitam Kalakalasya||*³⁸

Meaning:

One who understands the music of Kalakala, Shiva, if it were not Vidhatri (Brahma), or Bharata (Bharata muni), Hari, Narada or Skanda.

³⁸ Inscription and translation provided by archeologist Chitra Madhavan in her lecture titled ‘Exploring the Pan-Indian Epigraphical History of Dance through Lecture, Illustrations, and Performance’, as a part of the Natyakala Conference, held in Chennai, 2022.

The above inscription proves that the Pallavas had positioned Bharata, and in turn, his work Natyashastra, as one among the Gods. Chitra Madhavan (2022) also notes that the Pallava and the Pandyas laid the foundation for Sanskrit to be accepted in Tamilnadu way before the Cholas did through their incorporation of Karanas in temple structures. The Sanskrit treatises, therefore, must have had a significant effect on the dance practices of the Tamil region.

The Sanskrit treatises, which form this chapter's basis, are divided into three sections based on the period it was authored. This classification is based on Bose's (6-9) classification of the Sanskrit dramaturgic treatises. The classification is as follows:



Fig. 2.1.: Chronological Classification of Treatises According to Mandakranta Bose.

1. The First Period (2nd B.C.E./2nd C.E. – 10th C.E.): Works from this period saw dance as an independent art but only to the extent of lending beauty to dramatic performances.
2. The Second Period (11th C.E. – 15th C.E.): In works of this period, dance is discussed in its own rights apart from drama. A rise in the Margi-Desi classification can also be observed. This period marks the appearance of Dance Drama as an entirely separate form.
3. The Third Period (16th C.E. – 19th C.E.): not only is there a raise in regional styles, but this period also marks the advent of regional languages used to write treatises.

TABLE 2.1.: LIST OF SANSKRIT TREATISES

S.No.	Text	Author	Date
1	Natyashastra	Bharata	2 nd C.E.
2	Vishnudharmottara Purana		5 th C.E.
3	Sangita Ratnakara	Saranga Deva	13 th C.E.
4	Nrtta Ratnavali	Jaya Senapati	13 th C.E.
5	Nrtyaratnakosha	Maharana Kumbha	15 th C.E.
6	Rasakaumudi	Srikanta	16 th C.E.
7	Sangita Narayana	Purushottama Misra	17 th C.E.

2.2.1. First Period (2nd B.C.E./2nd C.E. – 10th C.E.):**1. Natyashastra of Bharata Muni – 2nd B.C.E – 2nd C.E.:**

The treatise on dance that is paramount in setting the framework for the later works on dance is Natyashastra by Bharatamuni. The date of the authorship has been a subject of debate, with scholars dating it as early as 500 B.C.E. (Kavi, ii) but not later than 2nd C.E. (Bose, 9). This work on dramaturgy consists of 36 chapters³⁹ containing 6000 verses on various topics related to drama, dance, and music. Over the 6000 verses, Bharata illuminates essential aspects of a dramatic production such as Rasa, Bhava, Abhinaya, Dharmi Vritti, Pravritti, music, elements of dance, and stage setting, among others. As the earliest surviving treatise on dance and dramaturgy, ample research has gone into the structure and content of Natyashastra.

This study focuses on the chapter about Aharya - costumes and the like. While few manuscripts list the chapter dealing with Aharya Abhinaya as 21, some list it as the 23rd⁴⁰. The chapter begins with a declaration that

āharyābhinayo nāma jñeyo nepathyajo vidhiḥ |

³⁹ Some manuscripts do contain 37 chapters.

⁴⁰ While Manmohan Ghosh's translation of Natyashastra lists Aharya Abhinaya as the 23rd chapter, Manadkranta Bose (1989) mentions it as the 21st chapter.

tatra kāryaḥ prayatnastu nāṭyasya śubhamicchatā ||

Which translates to

The Extraneous Representation (Aharya Abhinaya) deals with the rules of the costumes and make-up (nepathya) anyone who wishes for success of a dramatic production should pay attention to these.

(Ghosh, 410)

He further states that

[tasminyatnastu kartavyo naipathye siddhimicchatā |
nāṭyasyeha tvalaṅkāro naipathyam yatprakīrtitam ||]

Meaning,

The *dramatis personae* are of different types. **Indicated first by their costume and make-up they accomplish the representation without much effort** by the means of Gestures and the likes.

(Ghosh, 410)

This section of the study begins with a systematic view of Bharata's discussion on and approach towards Aharya. The classifications and sub-divisions Bharata makes of the extraneous representation required for a dramatic production⁴¹ are given in the figure below (Fig 2.2.).

⁴¹ Manmohan Ghosh's translation of Natyashastra (1951) has been referred to for this analysis of Bharata's Natyashastra.

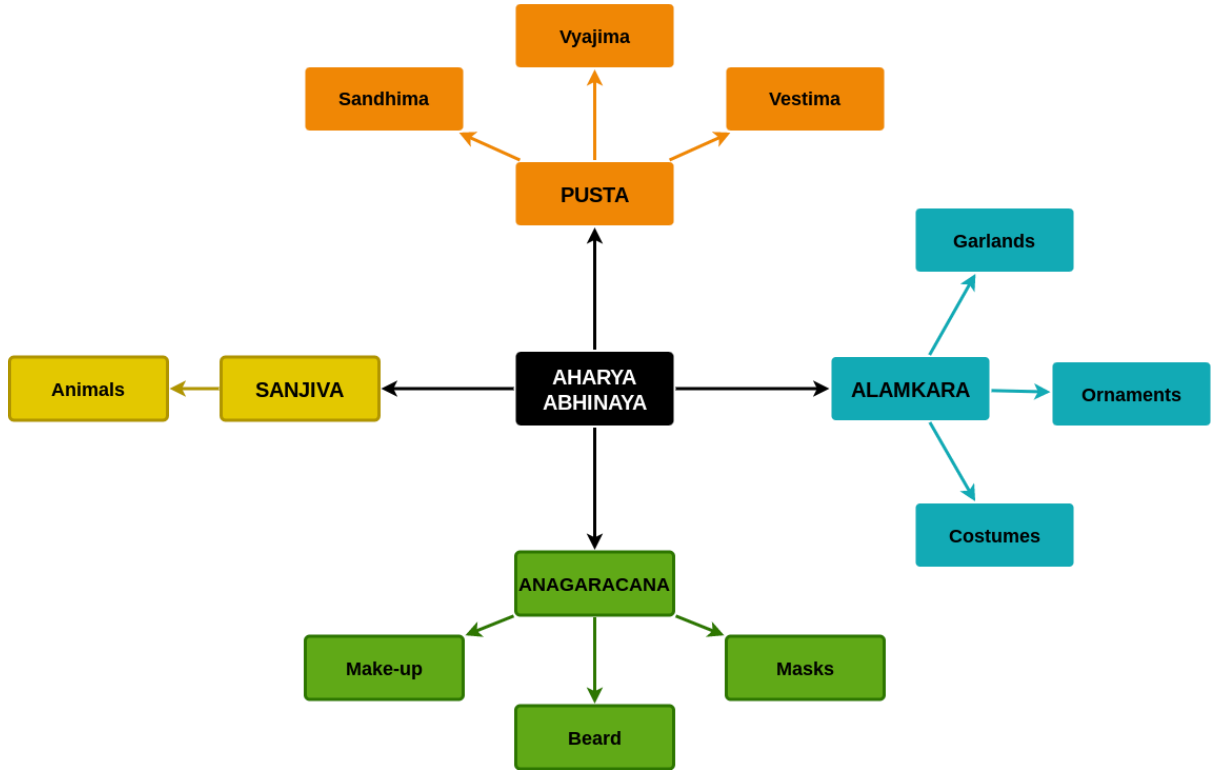


Fig. 2.2.: Aharya Abhinaya and its Components as Expounded by Bharata

The primary division of Aharya is into four, namely, Pusta (Modelwork), Alamkara (Decoration), Angaracana (Painting of limbs) and Sanjiva (Living creatures). Although he begins by giving an orderly description of Pusta and its classification, Alankara and Angaracana seem to have been of the most importance. The description of these two kinds consists of 136 Slokas of the 211 Slokas in the chapter.

Pusta:

Pusta or model work has three types: Sandhima, Vyajima and Vestima.

śailayānavimānāni carmavarmadhvajā nagāḥ |

ye kriyante hi nāṭye tu sa pusta iti saṃjñitaḥ ||

“Hills, carriages, lofty palaces, shields, armours, banner-staffs and elephants which are constructed for use in a dramatic performance is called Pusta.”

(Ghosh, 411)

In the making of these model works, or what is now referred to as stage props, Sandhima is props made of mat, cloth or skin. The use of mechanical devices makes Vyajima, and Vestima is props created using wrapping objects.

Alamkara:

alaṅkāraṣṭu vijñeyo mālyābharaṇavāsaśāṁ |

nānāvidhaḥ samāyogo'pyaṅgopāṅgavidhiḥ smṛtaḥ ||

“Alankara (Decorations) are known to consist of flower garlands, ornaments and drapery which are differently used on different parts of the [human] body.”

(Ghosh, 411)

In the first section, Garlands are divided into five kinds, namely

1. Vestita (encircling)	-	Garland made of flowers and leaves
2. Vitata (Spread-up)	-	Garland made of flowers
3. Samghaya (Grouped)	-	Garlands made of flowers and stems
4. Granthima (Tied-around)	-	Garland made of flowers
5. Pralambita (Hung around)	-	Long garlands whose ends are not tied.

He then moves on to the second section, Ornaments. He divides ornaments in two ways, one based on how they are worn on the body, and secondly on who wears them (men, women, and according to their tribal origin and habitation). Fig. 2.3. below shows the first classification.

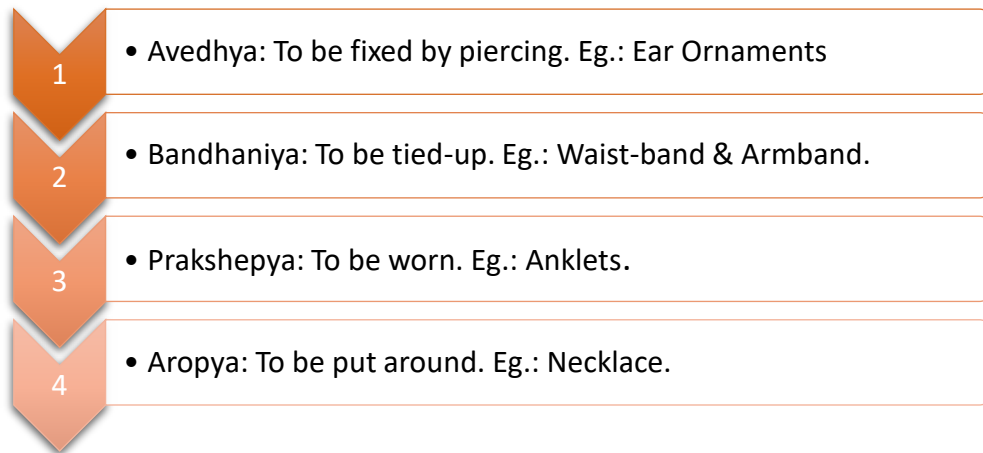


Fig. 2.3.: Categorisation of Ornaments Based on the Way it is to be Worn

The second categorisation of ornaments based on gender and habitation is seen in Table 2.1. and 2.2.⁴². The ornaments based on the parts of the body it is worn are systematically listed in line with Bharata.

Once the listing of ornaments for both men and women is over, he adds Alta to be a part of the ornamentation. He says, “an additional decoration to the feet will be the lac-dye applied on them in various patterns to impart to them the natural colour of Asoka blossoms” (Ghosh, 417). He says, though these are the ornaments of men and women, in a dramatic presentation, the creator is not of his free will to decorate the limbs freely. There should not be too many ornaments, and the ornaments used on stage should not be made of heavy metals and pure gold since it will easily tire the artist. He suggests using ornaments made of lac and inlaid with light jewels. He then moves on to the third section of Alankara, the drapery or costumes. He lists the drapery varieties suited for women from different regions, tribes and classes (refer to Table 2.3., 2.4., 2.5.). Interestingly, he also emphasises the importance of wearing the ornaments in the right place at this juncture. He says, “Wearing a Mekhala on the breast will create laughter” (Ghosh, 421)

After listing women’s costumes, he mentions that he will list the drapery suited for men but begins the section on Angaracana (painting of limbs). He justifies this by stating:

puruṣāṇāṃ punaścaiva veṣānvakṣyāmi tattvataḥ |
tatrāṅkaracanā pūrvam kartavyā nāṭyayoktṛbhiḥ ||

“But in their (i.e., men’s) case the producers of plays should first paint the limbs, and then costumes according to their habitation should be provided.”

(Ghosh, 421)

Even though Bharata elaborates on women’s clothing, he only gives a single line of information on Men’s. Bharata divides Men’s costumes into three: white, variegated and soiled.

⁴² Considering the magnanimity of data in Natyashastra, and the resulting number of tables in this chapter, only tables containing the essential data of the categories of Aharya have been retained within the main body of the chapter. Tables containing details of the sub-text of the classification of Aharya have been shifted to the appendix to ensure an unfragmented flow of discussion in this chapter.

Angaracana:

Bharata does not mention what comes under the Anagaracana category of Aharya through the aspects he lists under this part. Other than the small segue he takes to touch back on the Men's costumes, it is safe to conclude that modification of the various parts of the actor, including painting of the limbs, beards, crowns, headgear, and masks, can be considered under Angaracana. He starts by giving a detailed analysis of the primary, secondary and (the process to make) tertiary colours (refer to Table 2.6.).

In this section, Bharata makes an important argument in support of why Aharya, mainly the colouring of limbs and costumes, are essential to establishing character. He says:

ākṛtistasya kartavyā yasya prakṛtirāsthītā |
yathā jantuḥ svabhāvaṃ svaṃ parityajyānyadaihi kam
tatsvabhāvaṃ hi bhajate dehāntaramupāsṛitaḥ |
veṣeṇa varṇakaiścaiva cchāditāḥ puruṣastathā ||

Meaning,

“Just as [the soul of] a man on entering the body of another being, renounces his own nature connected with a different body and assumes another character, so a person having [a different colour] and costume adopts the behaviour connected with the clothes he will wear.”

(Ghosh, 422)

He then lists the colours suitable for different gods, demi-gods, dwarfs, and men of different regions of the country (Table 2.7.).

He discusses the types of beards, which he says are to be provided ‘after painting the face and other limbs’ (Ghosh, 426). He classifies beards into four kinds:

- i. **Suddha** (Clean Shaven) – Applicable to ministers, religious mendicants, priests, and others indifferent to sensual pleasure.
- ii. **Vicitra** (Smartly Done) – Applicable to celestial males, Kings, princes, officers of kings and other youth.

- iii. Syama (Black) – Applicable to those who are miserable, could not fulfil a promise or who have gone through calamities at that point.
- iv. Romasa (Bushy/hairy) – Applicable to sages, ascetics, those who have taken a vow and those bent on revenge.

Proceeding to the next part, Bharata expounds on using masks under which he brings in crowns and hairstyles. He divides crowns into three:

- i. Parsvagata – For (general) Gods, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Nagas, and Rakshasas.
- ii. Kiriti – For superior and middling Gods.
- iii. Mastaki – For Kings.

Apart from these three, he also talks of '*Kesa-mukuta*' (Crown made of hair locks) for Siddhas and the learned. Turbans are prescribed for guards, ministers, and priests. The heads of sages are to be adorned with crowns resembling matted hair. A half-crown is suggested for army leaders, and he leaves it to the producers of the play to decide the crowns of others based on their habitation, birth, and age. Brown hair and tawny beards for Rakshasas, Dhanavas and Yakshas, and extremely long hair for lunatics, spirits and spiritual aspirants are recommended.

He ends the Angaracana section with rules of different hairs. A clean-shaven head for Buddhist monks, experts in Vedic studies, Jain monks, and ascetics are recommended. He suggests that married women, King's officers and men of 'Foppish' nature are to have curly hair. He also recommends a bald head for the jester.

Sanjiva:

sajīva iti yaḥ proktastasya vakṣyāmi lakṣaṇam ||

yaḥ prāṇināṃ praveśo vai sajīva iti saṃjñītaḥ |

“Now, I shall speak of the characteristics of what is known as Sanjiva. The entrance of animals [on the stage] is called Sanjiva.”

(Ghosh, 432)

Bharata classifies Sanjiva into three, namely, four-footed (animals of the forest), two-footed (humans and birds), and creatures with no feet (serpents). He does not delve deep into the way these living beings are to enter the stage.

Even though the Sanjiva category of Aharya regards living beings, the chapter, without any indication of a topic shift, proceeds to describe the use of weapons, the making of masks and the making of ornaments and other accessories. This part, also the concluding part of Bharata's dialogue on Aharya, describes the measurements needed to make weapons such as javelins, spikes, swords, discs, arrows, and shields. He also gives the details of material and measurement for making other objects such as Jarjara, Indra's Banner-staff, umbrellas, Chowris and the like. The chapter ends with Bharata declaring that "Any [relevant] instruction which I may have omitted regarding the present topic is to be gathered from the popular passage (people)." (Ghosh, 439).

This chapter on Aharya Abhinaya in Natyashastra is undoubtedly a balanced serving of observation of the society and what is suitable for the stage. The description of Aharya in Natyashastra has been referred to as the superlative for aesthetic practices throughout centuries. Although intricate in detail, Natyashastra's take on Aharya serves as the prescription for dance as a part of a dramatic presentation, not as an entity by itself. Nevertheless, the very declaration at the end of every section, which urges the reader to make changes based on 'age, birth, and habitation', makes this text reliable and applicable throughout the centuries.

2. Vishnudharmottara Purana – 5th C.E.

Variously placed between the 5th to 7th C.E., the Vishnudharmottara Purana (VDP) is divided into three sections⁴³. This text elucidates on dance in its third section, in chapters twenty to thirty-four. The chapter that is of interest to this study is chapter number twenty-seven. A small chapter with only forty-seven slokas, VDP is an abridged version of Bharata's take on Aharya. The classification of Aharya is the same as Bharata: Pusta, Alamkara, Angaracana, and Sanjiva. VDP gives a single-line definition of both Pusta and Alamkara (definitions are the same as Natyashastra) before moving on to the prime focus of the text, Angaracana. It says,

"The dressing up of the different parts of the body is called Angaracana. O King! It should be done in accordance with the caste, position, superiority, and the character of the country to be presented.

O King! That is why I shall tell you about the Angaracana arising out of the body colour."

⁴³ Definitions and translation taken from Priyabala Shah's (2002) english translation of the same.

The texts deeply delve into the colour aspect of Aharya. After discussing the different colours for other species, races, castes, and classes, it moves on to details of *Smasru* (Beard and moustache). The only difference between the details furnished in VDP as opposed to the details given in *Natyashastra* is that the beard is described as also being white (ascetics, ministers, and judges) and long (instead of being ‘bushy’ [for sages and prisoners]). A small description of dresses is given next. Dresses of those in religious tasks, merchants, arms bearers and Brahmins are to be white. And the clothing of the Kings and courtesans is to be variegated. These texts must be understood as not just texts on performance and their related theories. Still, when seen deeper, they are, in fact, ethnographic studies of the performance in various socio-cultural milieus.

The text then moves on to types of crowns which are of three types. The seven-crested for Gods, five-crested for Kings and three-crested for principal-queen and the crown prince. Unlike *Natyashastra*, a turban is prescribed for Danavas, Rakshasas and Nagas. Interestingly, the hair and beards of Rakshasas, Nagas, Pisacas, Yakshas, and Dhanavas are recommended to be coloured green. The heads of ministers to be covered in turbans, ascetics to have long hair, children to have tufts of hair, Munis to have matted hair, and jesters to have bald heads are a few other recommendations. Coming to Sanjiva, in line with *Natyashastra*, VDP defines this as the entrance of the animals on the stage. After advising that masks and weapons are to be used to represent various animals and symbols, the discussion on Aharya ends there.

The few changes seen between *Natyashastra* and VDP are small yet crucial in setting the standard that, within a few centuries, there seems to be a gradual change in the recommendations for extraneous representation for a dramatic presentation, indicating the changing societal trends. However, as seen in the period-based classification at the beginning of this chapter, dance and its Aharya have still not been dealt with as a separate entity, even in VDP.

2.2.2. The Second Period (11th C.E. – 15th C.E.):

1. Sangita Ratnakara of Sarangadeva – 13th C.E.

Written by Sarangadeva in 1230 C.E., *Sangita Ratnakara* is a massive treatise on dance and music, setting a systematic framework that was followed and quoted extensively by later

authors. The work is in seven parts dealing with Nada⁴⁴, Raga⁴⁵, Prakirna⁴⁶, Prabandha⁴⁷, Tala⁴⁸, Vadhya⁴⁹ and Nrtya⁵⁰, respectively. M.R. Kavi (vi) comments that the work is crucial since it was written: “at a time when *Gita*, *Vadhya*, and *Nrtta* were undergoing great changes like the royal fortunes of the day”. Being the contemporary of Jaya Senapati of Nrtta Ratnavali fame, Sarangadeva served under the Yadavas of Devagiri, Maharashtra. In the 7th chapter, Sarangadeva gives a short yet precise account of various aspects of dance compiled in 1678 verses. It is also crucial to note that Sangita Ratnakara is one of the first texts that deal with the dancer’s Aharya as an individual entity and not as part of a dramatic presentation. After touching on topics such as Anga, Upanga, Karanas, Lasyanagas and the like, Sarangadeva elucidates on the qualities of a dancer, wherein he comments on the required decorations of a good dancer.

He says:

sunīlasnigdhavistūrṇakeśapāśaniveśitaḥ ||
 granthirvilulitaḥ prṣṭhe lasatpuṣpāvatasaka |
 beṇī vā saralā dīrghā muktājālavirājitai ||
 kalita kuntalairmāla kastūrīcandanādinā |
 racita citraka māle netre tanvañjanāścite ||
 ullasatkāntivalaye tālapatre ca karṇayo |
 dantapaṅkti prabhājālamojjvalīkṛtarahabhū ||
 kastūrīpatrabhaṅgāṅkau kapaulau kaṇṭhalambitā |
 tārāhārāvalī sthūlamauktikā svanamāṇḍanā ||
 prakoṣṭhau nyastasadrannasauvarṇavalayānvitau |
 aṅgulyo dhṛtamāṇikyanīlavajrādimudrikā ||
 candanairdhūsara gātra yadvā kuṅkumarañjitam |
 kṣīrodaka dukūlādi vastra kūrṇpāsakastanuḥ ||
 sakaṅcuka vā calana tattadeśānusārataḥ |

⁴⁴ Sound

⁴⁵ Musical mode

⁴⁶ Miscellaneous topics related to music

⁴⁷ Composition

⁴⁸ Rhythm

⁴⁹ Musical instruments

⁵⁰ Dance

etanmaṇḍanamanyadvā pātrayoḥ śyāmagaurayoḥ ||
yathocita vidhātavyamityāha śivavallabhah |

(Sastri, 369)

A translation of the same, as expounded by Sarangadeva in verses 1239-1247, is as follows:

“At the back, a waving [loose] knot of very black, glossy, and abundant hair with bright strings of flowers on it; or a straight and long braid [of hair] decorated with a string of pearls; the forehead having curly locks of hair arranged on it; a beauty-spot made on the forehead with musk, sandal-paste, etc.; the eyes decorated with collyrium; on the ears, Talapattra (cylindrical ear-ornaments) of brilliant beauty; the two rows of teeth lighting up the stage with their radiance; the cheeks marked with streaks of musk; a garland of pearls round the neck; strings of large pearls decorating the breasts; the forearm having golden bangles studded with fine gems; the fingers having rings set with rubies, sapphires, diamonds, etc.; the body smeared with sandal-paste or with saffron; garments of white silk, etc.; a fine jacket or a short petticoat with a tight-fitting bodice, depending on the customs of various places these or other things should be suitably used as decorations for the dancer who may be dark or fair in colour. So says [Sārṅgadeva], the devotee of Siva.”

(Raja and Burnier, 187)

Albeit short in nature, the above description of a dancer's decoration draws a precise image of a dancer of his times. The fact that a contemporary blouse has been described leads to the conclusion that a blouse as a part of attire was a part of the century's practice. Additionally, descriptions such as the above are a perfect example of how significant Aharya is in bringing the visual beauty of the dancers' anatomy. Sarangadeva has executed this through the usage of appropriate fabric, colour, and accessories, such as pearls and flowers. This description also reflects a holistic approach to integrating Aharya in an art form dominated by the visual.

2. Nrtta Ratnavali of Jaya Senapati – 13th C.E.:

The second period presents us with the treatise that gives extensive information on the contemporary practices of Aharya, and dance in general, authored by Jaya Senapati – Nrtta Ratnavali. Jayana was the master of the elephant forces under the Kakatiya King, Ganapati Deva of Warangal. He was a contemporary of Sarangadeva, and both these authors belonged

to neighbouring states of present-day Telangana and Maharashtra. Written in 1249, Nrtta Ratnavali is divided into eight chapters. The Nrtta Ratnavali differs from other texts of this period in its approach to keeping dance as the central aspect and in its attempts to view music and the like from the perspective of being accompaniments to dance.

At the end of his treatise, Jayana devotes a significant part of an entire chapter to the qualities of the president, the audience and the main danseuse. The section of interest to this present study is in the eighth chapter under the section termed '*pradhāna nartakīnepadhyam*', which translates to 'The make-up of the chief danseuse'. Interestingly, this is the only treatise in the second period that devotes a section entirely to the Aharya of the dancer. It is also interesting to note that the description is very narrative in fashion. Consisting of 15 *slokas*, this section describes the entire process of make-over of a dancer in that era. An abridged version of the sequence of events as narrated by Jayana⁵¹ from sloka 33 to 47 of the eighth chapter is as follows:

“Having received orders from the King to perform the next day, the dancer must wake up in the early hours, bathe, perform sacred sacrifices and appease the Brahmins, her teacher and the learned. She then combs her hair and set with Sauvarna flowers tucked in. The hair is to be tied in a knot shaped like the Vakula flower⁵², bound with Ketaka flower⁵³. Depending on the season, the dancer applies sandalwood paste or saffron paste as the base on the skin on her body. She wears the anklets, waistbelt, bracelets, and other ornaments studded with precious stones, predominantly pearls and diamonds. The ornaments should enhance her appearance and sound melodious. She wears a nose stud and a Kasturi mark on the forehead. She wears a net made of pearls covering the hair bun. She checks her appearance in the mirror. She wears golden garments, adorned with ornaments and flowers, she ascends the golden palanquin with umbrella and fly-whisks. She reaches the King’s palace with her group and quickly dresses up and reaches the theatre for performance enthusiastically. The dancer wears an inner garment discreetly, that reaches just above her knees, for the ease in performing Caris and Karanas. Over this, she wears a thin cotton, jute or silk cloth with embroidered borders, with splashes of gold, embedded with diamonds. It is

⁵¹ The translation of the text by Pappu Venugopala Rao and Yashoda Thakore (2013) has been referred for this purpose.

⁵² Star-shaped flower of the Mimosa Elengi tree.

⁵³ Flower of the Pandanus Odorifer plant.

specified that the dancer should not wear any sort of pearl chain that clings to her body.”

(Rao and Thakore, 464-468)

The precision of the details mentioned above makes one believe that he was documenting the highest standards displayed by the dancers of the times who performed in royal events. The description of innerwear to ensure ease of movement is a sign of the development in sartorial practices by the 13th century. The use of innerwear suggests starting the evolution of a movement-friendly costume design. The line where he says that the dancer ‘quickly dresses up’ upon reaching the King’s palace indicates that the Aharya of the performance was specifically designed for performance.

3. Nrtyaratnakosha of Maharana Kumbha – 15th C.E.

Maharana Kumbha has been widely attributed as the author of the Nrtyaratnakosha. Nrtyaratnakosha is part of a larger text, namely, Sangitaraja, that contains over 80 chapters. The author, Maharana Kumbha (sometimes referred to as Kumbhakarna), was a Rajput king who penned this treatise in 1449 C.E., making this the last treatise of the second period. The more extensive work, Sangitaraja, consists of five books, each divided into four parts, which in turn is each divided into four sections/chapters. The fourth book is of interest to this study and is termed Nrtyaratnakosha. Both M. R. Kavi and Mandakranta Bose attribute this work to Maharana Kumbha while noting that a king named Kalasena also contests the authorship of the exact text.

In the totality of this work, Kumbha follows the framework set by Sarangadeva. In the fourth book on dance, Kumbha deals with Aharya Abhinaya in the fourth section of the first part. A total of 21 slokas describe the extraneous representation in dance. Curiously, Kumbha does not add anything new to the already existing four-way classification of Aharya framed by Bharata. Kumbha, similar to Bharata, divides Aharya into 4: Pustah, Alankara, Angaracana and Sajiva. The further division of these sections is also a rerendering of Bharata’s writing. He concludes the section by attributing the information provided by him in this section to Bharata and further comments that he allows for a brief account of Aharya since Bharata has already discussed the same extensively.

evamāhāryavidhayo gaveṣyā bharatādiha |
aprastutatvātte neha vistareṇa prapañcitāḥ ||

2.2.3. The Third Period (16th C.E. – 19th C.E.):

1. Rasa Kaumudi of Srikantha – 16th C.E. – 17th C.E.:

Rasa Kaumudi is attributed to Srikantha, who served in the court of the Jain king Satrusalya who ruled over Jamnagar, Gujarat (Kavi, xxiii). Bose comments that, like his teacher, Pundarika Vittala, Srikantha is believed to be of South Indian origin, who moved to Western India and was patronised by the Jain ruler (Bose, 86). Written in 1583, Rasakaumudi consists of ten chapters and touches upon Aharya in its fifth chapter. Although it does not go into classified details, Rasakaumudi provides a very crisp definition of the decorations of a dancer as thus:

kastūrītilakaṃ ca mugdhakabarī netrānjanam ranjanam
nāsāmauktika-hārakaṅkaṇaraṇanmañjīramudrādikam |
śrīkhaṇḍādivilepanam pravilasañjīnāmbaram cāturī nartakyāḥ
kila maṇḍanāni dadhate śobhāṃ parāṃ nānyathā ||

(Rasakaumudi, 108)

Which translates to:

The dancer gets ready beautifully through the application of Kasturi Tilakam (Musk mark on the forehead), collyrium, nose pin, long necklaces, bangles, rings and sandalwood paste on the body. The dancer must be an expert in draping fabric of many kinds.⁵⁴

Within these two lines, Srikantha brilliantly lists the factors that go into the decoration of a dancer. It is also noteworthy that he mentions that the dancer drapes the fabric in ‘many kinds’, leading to the inference that there was more than one way of wearing a costume at this period and region.

One must not be deceived into believing that the above was the only point of interest in Srikantha’s work. Apart from the description of the decoration, Srikantha provides a detailed description of how a woman has to get ready to be beautiful. In the eighth chapter of the same

⁵⁴ Translated by Ganesh, Research Scholar and lecturer, Department of Sanskrit, University of Delhi.

treatise, Srikantha includes a list of sixteen-fold procedures for the make-over process, which he calls *Sringaravarnana*. A brief look into the sixteen steps is given in the table below:

Table 2.8.: Sringaravarnana of Rasakaumudi

S.NO.	TERM	MEANING	DEFINITION
1	Snana	Bath	Mix flowers, essential oils, milk and other fragrant paste into water and add a washcloth to it. Use this water to take a bath. After the bath, dry with a beautiful cloth and apply sandalwood paste, camphor, musk and peppermint paste.
2	Cheeram	Clothes	The fabric has to be silk, and the body has to be gold with a red border. The material has to be draped so that the loose end should start at the side of the stomach, go across the torso to the shoulder and be brought back to the starting point where it is tied in a knot. The drape should be so that the navel should be visible. The fabric can also be in white, blue or yellow with motifs of flowers and creepers on it, adding to its beauty.
3	Haar	Necklace	It has to be strung in gold or silver thread. The central pendant has to be in the shape of a lotus and encrusted with various gems and diamonds.
4	Tilak	Forehead Mark	A forehead mark must first be made with saffron, and on top of that, the design should be made with sandal paste. The centre dot is made of Kumkum/vermillion, on top of which musk will be applied.

5	Kundal	Earring	A gem-studded ear stud with gold hanging that ends with a shiny pearl. The beauty of the earring should illuminate the face.
6	Pushpmaal	Garland	A flower garland in a circle should be made with no gaps.
7	Angaraag	Paste	Sandal paste is to be applied on the face, while musk can be applied to the rest of the body. Saffron paste for the breasts and cedar paste on the back.
8	Aanjan	Collyrium	Apply collyrium on both the eyes
9	Ratnarochi	Earstud	It has to be made of gold with a gem embedded. It has to shine like a star.
10	Nasamukta	Nosering	The best ornament of all is the nosering. It has to be in the shape of a lotus or an oval. This enhances the look of both the woman's eyes and lips.
11	Kaanchi	Hip Belt	Hip belt made with either gold, silver, pearls, diamonds or any gems. It should be shaped like a Toran, meant to elevate the beauty of slender-waist maidens.
12	Valayam	Bangles	It should be circular with a latch at the top. The bangle can be made in gold with the latch studded with gems.
13	Nupur	Anklets	It can be in gold or silver. It has to be worn on foot decorated with alta.
14	Kanchuki	Breastband	It can be in white, black, gold, yellow or variegated colours. The sleeves of this have to have gems hanging which make a melodious sound when she moves. The thread used should be gold and have a flower motif in the middle. This band has to be tied at the back.

15	Tamboolam	Betel Leaves	After chewing this, the lips turn red while the smell of camphor entices others.
16	Chaturi	Brilliance	The eyebrow is the primary tool through which emotions are carried. If this is not used beautifully, all fifteen other aspects are invalid. Even homemakers can use this cleverly to show various emotions, especially with lovers.

This detailed description of the costuming process stands out in Rasakaumudi as a treatise that reflects the practices of society. Even though he does not mention that these Sringaravarnana are specifically for dancers, the Devadasi community's cultural ecosystem and lifestyle become the core of this description. The fact that he adds eyebrows/brilliance as an aspect of the varnana and as a prime medium of conveying emotions is convincing that this process applied to dancers. Other authors, including Vallabdev (15th C.E.) and Roopa Goswami (16th C.E.), talk about this 16-fold process, also called Shodasha Sringar or Sholah Sringar, with minor variations.

2. Sangita Narayana of Purusottama Mishra – 17th C.E.:

Sangitanarayana is a seventeenth-century text written by Purushottama Mishra of Orissa. He was a court musician in the court of King Gajapati Jagannatha Narayana Deva of Paralakhemundi, a district bordering Andhra Pradesh. A prolific work on music and dance, this treatise is divided into four chapters, and he deals with dance in the third chapter. Sangita Narayana is particularly interesting to this study due to its approach to Aharya, which Mishra expounds on from Slokas 90 - 170⁵⁵. Unlike any of the texts seen above, Sangitanarayana's classification of the extraneous representation makes one assume that he could observe dancers, especially court dancers, from proximity. The text divides Aharya into seven categories (Fig. 2.3.), unlike any of its predecessors.

masīveśaśmaśruheti- rekhā - pratimukhādīkam ||

nepathyam ceti tadbhedā nātyavidbhīḥ prakīrtitāḥ |

⁵⁵ Reference for this treatise has been taken from the manuscript published by Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1966.

“Masi, Vesha, Smashru, Heti, Rekha, Pratimukha, and Nepathya are the kinds of Aharya in dance.”⁵⁶



Fig. 2.4.: Purushottama Misra's Classification of Aharya Abhinaya

Masi (Sloka 92-114):

The text starts with discussing Masi – the primary colours used for make-up. He begins by listing white, blue, yellow and red as the primary colours for make-up. Mishra elucidates on the making of colours and their combinations, including how many parts of each colour to take for creating specific shades, and comments that Nagas and Kinnaras can use any colour, but for dancers, yellow is the primary colour. It should be ground into a smooth paste before being applied as the base on the face and hands.

Vesha (Sloka 115-124):

Under Vesha, Mishra discusses the categories of people and how they should dress. Vesha is of three kinds:

- i. Shudha: Righteous people (both men and women), noblemen, courtiers, merchants, saints and the like are of pure nature. They should wear clothes of white, red, and variegated colours.
- ii. Vichitra: Deva, Dhanava, Yaksha, and Gandharva come under the Vichitra category and should dress in red, white and variegated colours.
- iii. Malina: Demented, drunk, culprits, low-level workers, thieves, and guards (Dvarapalakas) are all of the low character and, therefore, should be dressed in torn clothes.

⁵⁶ Translated by Ganesh Tiwari, Research Scholar and lecturer, Department of Sanskrit, University of Delhi.

Other than these three classifications, he also furthers that ascetic, travellers, and Brahmachari should wear ash and Rudraksha Mala. And all the others should dress according to their age, country and origin.

Smashru (Sloka 125-129):

Smashru, beards, are categorised by Mishra in two ways, one by their colour and secondly, based on the length. Based on colour, the beards are of four kinds:

- i. Shudha: White
- ii. Shyama: Black
- iii. Vichitra: Black mixed with spots of white.
- iv. Pingal: Coloured.

Based on the length, Smashru is of three kinds:

- i. Samshrulam: Very long
- ii. Madhyamam: Normal/medium
- iii. Lipitam: Very short.

He goes on to say that Tapasvi, Yogi, noblemen, sages, and men who have been imprisoned should have a long white beard. While intoxicated and sad men are to have medium-length beards, divine beings, courageous men, Gandharva, princes, kings, dancers, and adolescents have black and very short beard.

Heti (Sloka 130-131):

In a small two-sloka passage, Mishra briefly explains the measurements for standard weapons like swords, bows, arrows, and other accessories like umbrellas and the like.

Rekha (Sloka 132-135):

A very interesting category is Rekha or lines. In this section, Mishra details the kind of lines to be drawn on the face of the dancer to enhance beauty. He talks of brush strokes that highlight facial expressions, especially Sringara's. He recommends lines on the cheeks, eyes, forehead, eyebrows, and throat that can accentuate facial features and expressions. He suggests that these lines be drawn with either black, red or yellow lines. He makes an exception for Vidhushaka, a jester who can create multiple lines on the face with various colours to invoke a sense of humour.

Pratimukha (Sloka 136-141):

The following section focuses on crowns. He specifies that only men can wear crowns, which should be designed based on age, country and caste. He suggests that Deva, Dhanava, Gandharva, and Yaksha can wear these, and so can Kings and princes. He recommends a maximum of 12 inches high with nine peaks and a lowest of eight inches tall with five peaks. He notes explicitly that people who are miserable, travellers, ascetics, Nagas, and women, cannot wear crowns.

Nepathya (Sloka 142-170):

At the beginning of this section, he classifies Nepathya into four kinds: Pusta, Malya, Vibhooshangi and Parivartan. As the text proceeds, Pusta, Malya, Alankara, and Vibhooshanam are discussed by the author. Very similar to Natyashastra, Pusta is divided into three kinds:

- i. Sandhit: Mentioned as Sandhima in Natyashastra, this category refers to props made of skin, cloth, and the like.
- ii. Vyajith: Props made of wood.
- iii. Chestith: Mentioned as Vestima in Natyashastra, these are props made by wrapping.

The following kind of Nepathya, Malya, refers to garlands/chains and are of four kinds:

- i. Garbith: Worn close to the neck.
- ii. Gumbith: Flower strings on hair.
- iii. Veshtith: Chain/garland on the hair knot.
- iv. Lambith: Chain that connects from neck to hair.

Under Alamkara, he first provides with four kinds of ornaments:

- i. Avedhya: Worn by piercing.
- ii. Bandhaniya: Needs to be tied.
- iii. Prakshepya: That which has to be worn.
- iv. Aropya: that which needs to be put around.

Under Vibhooshanam, he lists out the names of jewellery/accessories and parts of the body that it needs to be worn on while also mentioning that Men cannot wear these pieces of jewellery:

- i. Haar (Garland) : Chest
- ii. Tilak (Forehead mark): Forehead
- iii. Kaanchi (Waistband) : Hip
- iv. Kankan (Bangle) : Wrist
- v. Nikunjaka (Bracelet) : Wrist
- vi. Anguleeyakam (Ring): Finger

While he lists these, he also refers to the works of Kohala and Dhamodhara, who have already listed these ornaments in their work. He ends the section on Aharya by giving details of Kanchuka and costumes. A small section suggests that the upper garment has to have gems stitched on it and that Brahmins, learned, and women of good families wear yellow or gold costumes while courtesans and demons wear blue.

This work is one of the only texts that differ from Bharata's classification of Aharya and also pays importance to make-up. The close proximity to the state of Andhra Pradesh also makes this text more relevant to the Tamil region, where these traditions must have merged by the 17th century due to the Vijayanagara rule over Tamilnadu.

2.2.4. Miscellaneous Texts and Authors:

The above treatises have been considered due to their input, information volume, authorship region, and material availability. Nevertheless, M. Ramakrishna Kavi's monumental work, Bharatakosa (1951), provides the reader with various terms related to Aharya, written by multiple authors. Many of these texts mention articles of jewellery. Still, most of these texts were unprocurable or did not have substantial information to be added to the above list. Few noteworthy texts and authors that have been consolidated after a thorough analysis of Kavi's work is given in the table (Table 2.9.) below. These authors' works were cited multiple times in Bharatakosa.

Table 2.9.: Texts and Authors Listed in Bharatakosa

S.No.	Author	Period (C.E.)	Text
1	Someshwara	12 th	Manasollasa

2	Sharadatanaya	12 th -13 th	Bhavaprakasha
3	Ashokamalla	14 th	Nrttyadhyaya
4	Vemabhupala	15 th	Sangitacintamani

The following text has been added here because they are not treatises on dance or dramaturgy but do deal with the aspect.

Kautilya's Arthashastra:

Arthashastra of Kautilya was a text on economy, statecraft, and politics. Written in the 3rd C.E., this text is filled with information on women in different professions and how they earned their livelihoods. Kautilya discusses various prostitutes, especially dedicating a chapter to royal courtesans/ Ganikas. He mentions that the selection of a Ganika and the proximity and priority given to her is purely based on their looks and the splendour of the jewellery they wear. In the 27th Chapter of Book II, which he dedicates entirely to the rules to be followed by the 'Ganikadhyaksha' (superintendent of courtesans/prostitutes), he says:

*“With a view to add to the splendour of prostitutes holding the royal umbrella, golden pitcher, and fan, and attending upon the king seated on his royal litter, throne, or chariot, **prostitutes shall be classified as of first, middle and highest rank according to their beauty and splendid jewellery**; likewise their salary shall be fixed by thousands.”*

(Shamasastri, R. 175)

He further gives a glimpse of how vital the jewellery of the Ganika was by saying:

“When a prostitute puts her jewellery in the hands of any person but her mother, she shall be fined 4¼ panas.”

(Shamasastri, R. 176)

Although minuscule in quantity, the above information from Arthashastra proves that the duties of the courtesan were given paramount importance. The chapter on the Courtesans also provides strict information on their revenues and the need to document their profession

regularly with the superintendent. This proves that this profession was not considered ordinary in the times of Kautilya but rather was a “state-appointed institutionalised position” (Jaiswal, S. 2001. 53)

Kamasutra of Vatsyayan:

Written by Sage Vatsyayana Mallanaga, Kamasutra is a treatise on the erotic arts and the general social conduct of the century. Written in the 3rd C.E.⁵⁷, the widely acknowledged work on the science of love is a work contained in seven books and 36 parts. Apart from the details on the erotic arts, Kamasutra contains details on plenty of topics that provide a chance to view the society of the early centuries of the Christian era. An essential part of the work of interest to this study is listing the sixty-four arts necessary to be mastered by the courtesans and part on beautifying the body in Book 1 and Book 7, respectively. Although the 6th chapter (or book) paints a clear picture of a courtesan's social life, it does not provide any vivid description of their Aharya, except that they were expected to be well-dressed and decked with jewels to attract men.

The 1st book provides a list of 64 arts, a part of the list that piques the interest of the study is given in the table below⁵⁸:

S.No.	Name	Description
1	nṛtyam	Dance
2	viśeṣekacchedyam	Cutting leaves into patterns for adorning the forehead.
3	daśanavaśanāṃgarāga:	Colouring and painting with herbal extracts of the nails, palms, and other parts of the body. Staining the teeth, hair, and feet.
4	nepathyaprayogā:	Usage of make-up and costume
5	bhūṣaṇayojanam	Usage/wearing of Jewellery
6	sūcīvānakarmāṇi	Knitting and weaving
7	maṇirāgākarajñānam	Colouring jewels and beads
8	utsādane saṃvāhane keśamardane ca kauśalam	Applying paste, massaging, and hairdressing

⁵⁷ A debated topic, the period of the authoring of Kamasutra has been capped between 4th B.C.E. to 3rd C.E.. refer to Anand, Mulk Raj, and Dane, Lance (1982) and Doninger (2016) for further information.

⁵⁸ Referred from Kamasutra of Vatsyayana, ed. Anand, Mulk Raj, and Dane, Lance (1982).

Despite the fact that garments and ornaments are not spoken of extensively, it is evident that the make-up aspect of Aharya was practised even in 3rd C.E... The practice of Bindi, and colouring of the different body parts, much like the practice of wearing Alta, proves the historical continuum of such practices. The fact that the courtesans were required to weave, knit and fashion their garments and string their ornaments points to the practice of varied fashion trends that must have existed due to the scope for personal preferences and capabilities.

After listing the arts, Vatsyayana comments:

“A Veshya, public woman, endowed with a good disposition, beauty and other winning qualities, and also versed in the above arts, obtains the name of a Ganika, courtesan of high quality, and receives a seat of honour in an assemblage of men. She is, moreover, always respected by the King, and praised by learned men, her favour being sought for by all, she becomes an object of universal regard. The daughter of a king too, as well as the daughter of a minister, being learned in the above arts, can make their husbands favourable to them even though these may have thousands of other wives besides themselves.”

(Anand, Mulk Raj, and Dane, Lance. 74)

This is an evident testament to the equal social standing of the courtesan, Ganika, and the women of the royal household, especially daughters of Kings and Ministers, hints at the similarities that must have existed in the way they carried themselves, especially their sense of aesthetics and presentability.

The 7th book begins with the part where Vatsyayana mentions the ways to beautify one's body, again a discussion on practices of make-up. He says,

“Now, good looks, good qualities, youth and liberality are the chief and most natural means of making a person agreeable in the eyes of others. But, in the absence of these a man or a woman must have resort to secret recipes, charms, aphrodisiacs, artificial members and the artful application of cosmetics; some recipes are given which may be found useful.”

(Anand, Mulk Raj, and Dane, Lance. 247)

He further suggests the below formula for application as a paste or foundation to amplify beauty:

“A salve made up of Tagara, Kashtha and Talisapatra, the paste concocted from these leaves smeared all over the body increases physical beauty.”

(Anand, Mulk Raj, and Dane, Lance. 247)

Interestingly, a formula for eyeliner and mascara is prescribed as follows:

“To make the eyes lovely, If a fine powder made of these same plants is made up into a wick mixed with Bibhitaka oil and ignited, Kohl, eye black, resulting therefrom, when applied to the eye-lashes, has the effect of enlarging the appearance of the eyes, making the face lovely and most attractive.”

(Anand, Mulk Raj, and Dane, Lance. 247)

Even though these suggestions are not specially made for the dancers, throughout the text, the courtesan, especially those who danced for the royals, are mentioned as one of the primary recipients of the instructions given by the author. And the work proves to be one of the earliest works available to us that reflect upon the practices of society.

Aharya in Sanskrit Literature:

Literature, especially plays and poems, provides a much more realistic application of the qualities prescribed by the treatises. Starting from the 2nd to 8th century, the peak of Sanskrit poetic and dramatic literature, the social practices of the period have been keenly observed and reflected in the works of poets like Asvaghosa⁵⁹, Sudraka⁶⁰, and Kalidasa⁶¹. Asvaghosa, in his work Buddhacaritram, notes in a scene where a lady points to a mango tree entangled with a Tilaka tree to Siddharta, she describes the Tilaka tree as a woman with a yellow ointment applied on her body (Buddhacaritram, Chapter 4, Sloka 46). It is noted here that adorning ointments on the body was a common practice. However, he also mentions that this practice was common for dancers and not women of decent families - ‘Kulastri’. Another instance

⁵⁹ A Buddhist poet who was the first Sanskrit poet of the country. He hailed from Ayodhya and lived between 80-150 C.E. and authored Buddhacaritra, and Saunadarana.ana.

⁶⁰ Indian playwright known for his work Mrchchakatikam. The period of this playwright is uncertain but close to 5th C.E.

⁶¹ One of India’s greatest playwright, Kalidasa belonged to the 5th C.E. and has been attributed as the author of many well-known Sanskrit plays and poems including Abijnana Shakuntalam, Kumarasambhavam, Meghadootam and many more.

corroborates this in the same play where when Buddha meets Amrapali, the court dancer, she is said to have gone to meet Buddha as a Kulastri, without any of the ointments that adorn her body (Buddhacaritram, Chapter 22, Sloka 17).

pūjāgatakulastrī va saumyaveṇā sitāṃśukā |

tyaktāṅgarāgabhūṣāgī tadāsītprāyānvitā ||

(Buddhacarita, Ch 22, Sloka 17)

In the work of Sudraka, Mrchchakatikam, many references are made to the social life of the period. It is discerned from this work that many luxuries like gold and pearl were not accessible to the poor but were abundantly available to dancing girls. When Maitreya enters Vasantasena's house, he is taken in by the maid, who takes him around the house. When he reaches the sixth court, he describes how it is filled with rubies, lapis lazuli, pearls, coral, and topaz. He further explains how jewellers are making gold ornaments with rubies set in them. He notes that saffron, sandal and other perfumeries are abundantly available, and betel leaves and camphor are being passed on to lovers by courtesans (Ryder, Arthur William. 70). This serves as a perfect example of how the courtesans of the period led a luxurious life decked in the finest of materials.

Kalidasa, in most of his work, describes the attire of women. In Kumarasambhavam, he notes that young women redden their lips using lac. And in colder regions, women reddened their lips with honey, wax and vermillion (Kumarasambhavam, Sloka 58 (7)) to soften the lips. In Vikramorvashiyam, act 3, Kalidasa describes Urvashi as wearing a blue silk veil while visiting the king (act 3, 150). Many of his characters, including queens and even Shakuntala, wear the Kancuka, breast band, tied at the back as the upper garment. In his work, Ritusamhara, Kalidasa makes beautiful documentation of how women dress up in different seasons. In acts 2 and 3 of the same work, he describes how women wore jewelled waistbands and garlands made of various flowers in the rainy season. In the autumn, they decorated their hair with various colourful flowers and wore necklaces soaked in sandalwood paste and decked up in waistbands, bangles and anklets. In Spring, they wore long chains soaked in white sandalwood paste, bracelets, and anklets (Ritusamhara, acts 2, 3, and 6).

Albeit many texts fleetingly mention costumes of the courtesan or women of the period, it is not in a substantial manner, as required for this study. From the Rig Veda to Ramayana and Mahabharata, the role of the dancing girl has been an inevitable part. Still, their physical attributes are not described in similar abundance. The texts mentioned above and the treatises

of Sanskrit play an essential role, of all the available texts, in painting a picture of how the dancers were expected to be and how they were. With an abundance of gold, silk, and other luxuries at their disposal, the courtesans of the past seem to have been on a level with the aristocrats, being the only women who were educated and were socially present in the gatherings of men. Hence, their attire reflected the grandeur of the period. The above literature is but a select few of a larger body of Sanskrit literary works that can become a separate study in itself.

2.3. Vernacular Texts:

In the Tamil-speaking region, Tamil texts on dance have existed from as early as the Sangam Period. Although specific treatises are unavailable in the Tamil language, references to the Aharya of the dancer are gleaned from early-period texts such as Silapadikaram. A socio-cultural analysis of the regional decorative practices will undoubtedly enhance the reading of the Devadasi Aharya. The literature available from the time of Silapadikaram is considered for this exercise. To study the practice of a long-standing tradition, the dressing style before our study period is also referred to.

Table 2.10.: List of vernacular texts:

S.No	Text	Author	Date (C.E.)	Language
1	Tyagesar Kuravanji	Maharajah Shahaji II	17	Tamil
2	Shankara Pallakki Seva Prabandham	Maharajah Shahaji II	17	Telugu
3	Mahabharata Choodamani	Unknown	17	Tamil
4	Tiru Kutrala Kuravanji	Tirikuda Rasappa Kavirayar	18	Tamil
5	Radhika Santwanamu	Muddupalani	18	Telugu
6	Koolappa Nayakan Virali Vitut Tutu	Supradeepa Kavi	18	Tamil

7	Sankaramurthy Virali Vitu Tutu	Subbaiyar	18/19	Tamil
8	Modi Records		19	Modi Script (Marathi)
9	Dasigal Mosavalai	Moovalur Ramamritammal	20	Tamil

2.3.1. Early Period Texts in Tamil:

Silapadikaram:

Silapadikaram, written by Ilango Adigal in the 2nd C.E.⁶², is one of the five great epics of the Tamil literary corpus. This work is in three books (based on three cities the story revolves around – Puhar, Madurai, and present-day Kerala), each containing ten, thirteen, and seven cantos, respectively. It is a fictional story set in the city of Puhar⁶³ that focuses on the lives of a merchant prince Kovalan, his wife, Kannaki, and his extra-marital affair with a courtesan, Madhavi. The text is widely accepted to be a source of information on the society of that period. Within the story's framework, the text manages to provide information on various trades, the wealth and the lifestyle of the people of the time. Puhar being a port city of the Cholas, this text helps us understand the details of materials used in the decorative practices of 2nd C.E. Tamilnadu, along with a detailed account of the various jewellery worn by Madhavai – the dancer. The text also provides invaluable details of the bustling markets of Madurai and Puhar, pointing to the existence of strong maritime trade relations that was maintained at this point.

Even though the text revolves around the dancer, Madhavi, and her initial performance, the detailing of the way she dressed up is given in the 6th canto (Kadalaadukkaadai) of the first book (Puhar Kandam) in verses 76-117. To please Kovalan, Madhavi is said to have adorned herself and met him on the seashore. The description says thus:

“To please him (so that his dejection might not gall him further), she (Mādhavi) bathed her fragrant black hair, soft as flowers, till it shone, in the perfumed oil prepared by mixing up ten kinds of astringents, five spices, and thirty- two herbs soaked in water;

⁶² The exact date of Silpadikaram has been debated over by many scholars. Dikshitar. R (1939) places it in 2nd C.E.

⁶³ Present day Poompuhar, in Mayiladudurai District, Tamilnadu.

she dried it in fuming incense, and perfumed the different plaits,' with the thick paste of the musk-deer.' ”

(Dikshitar, R. 126)

It further gives a very detailed account of the jewellery she wore, as listed in the table (Table 2.11.) below.

Table 2.11. Details of Madhavi's Aharya

S.No.	Body Part	Name of Jewellery & Details	
1	Head, Hair & Forehead	Daivavutti	Head ornament
		Pullaham	A centipede-like ornament that wraps around the forehead on either side of the central parting. Similar to the Thalai Saaman.
		Thenpalli - Vadapalli	Curled centipede-like two circular medallions worn on either side of the central partition of the hair.
		Toyyaham	The front pendant of the Pullaham. Dangling with pearl ends rests at the top of the hairline and forehead.
		Valampuri	An imitation of the spiral Valampuri conch, made of gold.
		Sadaivalli	Small circular ornaments are worn on the plaited hair.
		Tirugupillai	Embellished hair screws used to hold the bun in place.
2	Ears	Earrings with inlaid emerald and diamond	
3	Neck and Torso	Nunotar	Thin gold chain
		Sarapalli	Gemstone Necklace held by a clasp
4	Waist & Hip	Mekalai	A girdle made of 32 strands of bog pearls worn over a blue cloth embroidered with figures of flowers
5	Thigh	Kurangucheri	An ornament worn around the thigh
6	Arms, Wrists, & Fingers		Pearl armlets
		Pariyakam	Navaratna Bangles
		Seedagam	Gold bangles with inlaid diamonds
		Kudagam	Diamond Bracelet
			Bangles made of gold, coral, gemstones, and conch.
			Rings made of rubies and diamonds curved like a fish's open mouth.
7	Feet	Pariyakam	A tight anklet made of gemstones
		Nupuram, Padagam,	Different types of anklets

The above account is one of the finest documentations of the importance of jewellery in the Tamil tradition. This part of Silapadikaram enables us to understand the jewellery worn by a dancer, the socio-economic position of the dancer and the kind of craftsmanship that existed at that period to produce such a variety of ornaments.

In another part of the text, when Kovalan and Kannagi move to Madurai (Book 2, Canto 14), Kovalan walks through the bustling streets of Madurai, and here the courtesans of Madurai are described as wearing jasmine and water-lily in their hair which was already decorated with other flowers and tied together with pearl strings. They are told as anointed in luxurious sandal paste. The text further describes the various dressing style of women based on the seasons (Dikshitar, R. 202-203):

Rainy Season: Red silk with flower work on their waist. They adorned their hair with flowers, especially Kurinji (*Strobilanthes Kunthiana*) and olives. They applied red sandalwood paste on their breasts and wore garlands made of coral and flowers.

Winter Season: painted their breasts with fragrant pastes and stayed indoors with their lovers.

In the verses above and from other parts of the canto, it is evident that the courtesans were dressed in the finest materials available in both the Chola region of Puhar and the Pandya region of Madurai.

Texts such as Aga Nanooru, Kamba Ramayanam, and Seevaga Sinthamani do provide valuable information on jewellery and clothing of ancient times, which can be seen in the tables (table 2.12. and 2.13. below)

Table No. 2.12. Details of Dress and Fabric as Gleaned from Agananooru, Paripadal, Narrinai, Kamba Ramayanam, and Seevaga Sinthamani.

S. No.	Term	Details
1	Pattaadai	Silk fabric dyed in various colours
2	Ponnaadai	Fabric either made of gold thread or has Zari work.

3	Thazhaiyaadai	Dress made from knitting leaves and flowers together. Earlier worn by men and women before the advent of weaving. Later worn by forest dwellers
4	Meypai	Shirts made of different fabrics such as cotton, silk and rat wool
5	Kacchu	Article of dressing used to cover the breast, made of either silk or gold. It also refers to a skirt-like article.
6	Vattudai	A pyjama reaching to the thigh worn by warriors under their silk dhoti.
7	Naarudai	Clothes made from plant fibre, such as the fibre from plantain stalk
8	Venthugil	White fabric as light and translucent as the shed snake skin
9	Vannathugil	White cloth dyed in colours such as blue, green, and red. Sometimes a combination of two or more colours was used.
10	Manamootal	The process of drying the clothes in fragrant smoke to imbibe perfume and a pleasant smell into the fabric

Table No. 2.13. Details of Ornaments as Gleaned from Kurunthogai, Narrinai, Kalithogai, Perungathai, Pattinapaalai, Silapadikaram, Manimeghalai, Seevagasinthamani and Thirumurugaatruppadai.

S. No.	Body Part	Name & Description
1	Head & Hair	Arasilai A gold ornament in the shape of the leaf of a Pipal tree
		Ilambagam Similar to today's Nethichutti. The pendant hanging on the forehead had gold beads hanging from it.
		Kondaitirugu A hairpin with a silver brooch on top inlaid with gemstones and had flower motifs. Used to pin the hair knot

		Surithagam	Small gold circular brooches with inlaid precious stones. Worn through the length of the braided hair
		Valampuri	An imitation of the spiral Valampuri conch, made of gold.
2	Forehead	Tilakam	Either a bindi or a single ornamental drop that rests on the forehead
		Netrichutti	Nethichutti that covers the centre partition of the hair and hangs as a spear-shaped pendant at the top of the forehead
		Magara Paguvaai	A different variety of Nethichutti
		Netripattam	A flat gold sheet worn as an ornament on the forehead
3	Ear	Olai	An earring that was made to resemble a rolled palm leaf.
		Kuzhai	A circular gold earring seen in many Chola period bronze
		Magara Kundalam	Earring in the shape of a fish
		Chinnapoo	A flower-shaped ear-stud
		Kudambai	A gold earring studded with various precious stones such as diamond, sapphire and emerald.
		Madal	A kind of ear-stud
4	Neck	Addigai	A choker. It can be in the form of a flat sheet or as a chain worn close to the neck.
		Kandigai	A gold necklace, usually tied together with the ornaments worn on the shoulder.
		Panmani Malai	A necklace that has gold, and other precious stones strung together
		Ponnarimalai	A simple gold chain
5	Shoulder & Upper Arm	Keyuram	A Vanki
		Tholvalaiyam	A chain worn on both shoulders, made of gold, silver, emerald, ruby, or conch beads.
6	Chest	Idhaya Vaasanai	A gold shield-like ornament worn across the chest
		Poon	A broad leaf-shaped gold ornament that covered the breasts of women.
7	Hand	Kadagam	A bangle that had two fish facing each other.
		Thodi	A bangle with designs of leaves and buds.

		Pariyagam	-
		Valampurivalai	Bangle made of conch.
8	Fingers	Yenathi Mothiram	A gem-studded gold ring usually gifted to warriors by kings
		Magara Thalcheri	A ring with a huge emerald in the centre with the band embedded with small diamonds
		Mudakku Mothiram	A ring-shaped like a Vanki. Worn even today in both Tamil and Telugu-speaking regions.
		Mosaic	A ring that has small strings that attach to the frontmost bangles.
		Pon Mothiram	A ring made of sold gold.
9	Hip & Waist	Potrorai	A gold ornament worn on the lower abdomen
		Mekalai	A hip chain made by stringing any precious stone together. Emerald was the most popular choice. There are four kinds: Kanchi (8 stringed), Kalapam (16 stringed), Parumam (18 stringed), Thoorigai (32 stringed)
		Pandali	A stiff hip belt that is often worn along with Mekalai. This has gold beads hanging on the lower edge.
10	Thighs	Kurangucheri/ Kavaancheri	A Ring around the thigh, often embellished with different motifs.
11	Feet	Kinkini	An ankle jewel in the shape of a toad's mouth. It is stiff. This has metal beads inside it, making the sound of 'Kinkini'.
		Silambu	A stiff elliptical feet ornament. It is filled with various precious stones.
		Pariyakam/ Kaalchavadi	An anklet made of gold. One side has a thread that is tied to the toe. Similar to the anklet worn by present-day Kandyan dancers of Sri Lanka, worn below the Silambu.
		Paadagam	A stiff circular ornament made of gold and worn above the Silambu

Table No. 2.14. Details of Make-up and haircare in these texts:

S. No.	Item	Description
1	Sandanam	Women used a paste of Sandalwood to apply on their bodies, and the smoke from burning the wood was used to perfume their clothes and dry their hair.
2	Akil	A Tree. The paste and smoke from this tree were used similarly to that of Sandalwood.
3	Sunnam	A scented powder used for both face and body. Made from powdering camphor, sandal, gold and gemstone, the powder added glow and shine to the skin. The powder was also sprinkled on clothes to add lustre.
4	Kunkumam	Vermillion or red powder. Used to mark the forehead and applied as a paste on the breasts
5	Anjanam	Collyrium
6	Puzhugu	A secretion from the civet cat used as a perfume and as a hair serum
7	Thoyyil	The act of drawing patterns on the body, especially the breast, using a paste made of Sunnam, Kunkumam, Sandanam, or Puzhugu.

In Seevaga Sinthamani (Chapter 1), there is a reference to the woman's description as having beautiful eyebrows drawn with black liquid as if a talented artist had drawn it on her face. From these texts, it is inferred that there was a separate profession of women who were experts in hair and make-up. They were referred to as “*Vanna Magalir*” (lit. Colour – Women) and helped their Lady get ready from top to toe. It is inferable that the period from as early as Sangam to 15th C.E. was filled with decorative practices for women. This includes varieties of clothing, elaborately designed jewellery and make-up traditions practised by women irrespective of their professional background.

2.3.2. Select Vernacular Texts:

The works listed here are a select few that contained descriptions of dancing girls of the period. Though texts like the Kuravanji and Pallaki Seva Prabandham do not describe a dancer as such, Kuravanji provides the textual reference to Rukmini Devi’s Kuravanji, documented in Chapter 4 of this thesis, and Pallaki Seva Prabandham provides information on the dressing of women from higher strata of the community thus providing a peak into the high fashion of the time. Radhika Santwanamu puts into perspective the decorative practices familiar with the

courtesans of the time since this work is penned by Muddupalani, a courtesan of the court of Maharaja Pratapasimha (ruled between 1739-1763) of the Tanjore Marathas.

1. Tyagesar Kuravanji, Maharajah Shahaji II, 17th C.E., Tamil:

Written by Maharaja Shahaji II of Tanjore, this Kuravanji, or excerpts from this Kuravanji, have been performed in the Temple of Tiruvarur and the court of the Marathas. This is of interest to this study due to the description of the heroine, Rajamohini, of the Sakhi Mohanaregai and the soothsayer – Kurathi. In Keertanam no. 9, the heroine is described as wearing gold ornaments and having flowers in her hair. Keertanam no. 11, Sakhi Mohanaregai's description is surprisingly more elaborate than the heroine's. The Keertanam, in its 1st and 2nd Charanam, elaborates on the ornamentation that adds beauty to the Sakhi:

Charanam 1

Konthala charampunaindhu chandhiranukkisaindhamuga

Sindhura chirunudhalum vindhai vindhaiyāi

Sundhara chentiru mangai sandhana sugandham vīsa

Indhamei churupangkondhu vandhu nicḥhayamena

Charanam 2

Pangayang kōngalarennā pongamikka tangavalai

Sengaiyil tuylanguraṭṭhina Kaṇḡana minna

Iṇḡitak kiṇarikondū saṇḡitak kuyilaipōlum

Kuṇḡumak kurumbaik koṇḡa maṇḡaiyark karasiṇa

(Premalatha, V. 31)

Through this, it is consolidated that she had strings of beads as hair ornamentation and a vermillion mark on her forehead. She smelled of sandalwood paste and wore gold bangles and other bangles embedded with gems.

In the same text, in Keertanam 20, a description of the Kurathi (soothsayer) is written with poetic vigour. The Kurathi is described as adorned with flowers in her hair, a vermillion

mark on her forehead, and her eyes beautified by collyrium. She is described as wearing a Nethichutti (hair ornament that reaches the top of the forehead), earrings, a short necklace similar to a choker, a gold chain with precious stones inlaid (especially diamonds), a necklace made with beads of conch, coral studded gold bangles, multi-gem studded bangles, bracelet, diamond bangles. On her feet, she wears gold Silambu, Tandai, and Salangai. She is described as having red sandalwood paste applied to her body. These descriptions prove the wealth at the disposal of these women. Given that ample information is provided on the jewellery, the lack of description of clothing is noteworthy here.

2. Shankara Pallakki Seva Prabandham, Maharajah Shahaji II, 17th C.E., Telugu

The earliest opera of South Indian music, Shankara Pallakki Seva Prabandham, was penned in the 17th C.E. by Maharaja Shahaji II, whose literary contribution had laid the foundation for the flourishing of the arts in the region and serves as a window into the past for scholars of the present. Pallakki Seva Prabandham is a literary genre which speaks of a lovelorn heroine who pines for the Lord. The Sakhis convince the Lord to come and unite with the heroine. The genre describes the descent of the Lord from the heavenly abodes to the heroine and his procession in a Pallakki or palanquin. This work details how the palanquin was embellished, giving a glimpse of the material wealth the region boasted of. In the 9th Dharu, the palanquin is described as made with emerald, ruby, and kemp encrusted panels. Painting a picture of the kind of textiles that existed, the upholstery of the palanquin is described as made of silk and having gold Zari. Entertaining the thought that fabric and textile practices of people and upholstery went hand-in-hand, the Marathas did pay a lot of attention to zari work on silk fabric.

Alongside the description of the palanquin, at the end of the work, the author describes how the heroine, Goddess Parvathy in this work, gets ready and decorates herself in anticipation of the arrival of the Lord. The 14th Dharu (Sambamoorthy, P. 51-52) beautifully draws a picture of the process of women's beautification. Parvathi takes a bath and wears a silk Saree with Zari work. Her braided hair has pearl strings entwined around the length of it. With a shining Tilakam (ornamental mark on the forehead), she holds a parrot in hand. She wears a gold plate-like ornament on her forehead, an emerald-embedded upper-ear ornament, a beautiful Nethichutti, and diamond earrings. The beautiful Parvathi wears a pearl Nathu (Nose ring), a shining necklace, a long gold chain on her chest, a kemp inlaid choker, a pearl and a

coral chain. She is further described as wearing gold and coral bangles, gold finger rings, Bajuband and Vanki (both are ornaments of the upper arm). With an Oddiyanam having small golden beads hanging, she wears a golden anklet, ruby-encrusted Gajjai (ankle bells), Tandai, and a toe ring on her feet.

A beautiful description that draws attention to the widespread usage and preference given to rubies, pearls and kemp is seen here. A clear picture of the fabric and ornaments as worn by the goddess can also be seen as akin to what the queen or the wealthy courtesans would have worn.

3. Mahabharata Choodamani, Unknown, 17th C.E., Tamil

A 17th C.E. text in Tamil that talks about dance and its facets similarly to that of Natyashastra. Though the author is unknown, few scholars opine that one Somanathan might be the author. This treatise is seen by scholars like Raghuraman. S (2006), as a part of a series of texts that cropped up during the 17th C.E. to make knowledge of dance and textual traditions on the same more accessible to the locals by expounding on complex theories in more straightforward terms (Raghuraman, S. 211). Nevertheless, the text borrows a lot from Sanskrit to define various aspects of dance, namely Abhinaya, Vritti, Anga, Upanga, Pratyanga, etc.

In the section on Abhinaya, the author follows the four-fold classification of Abhinaya – Angika, Vachika, Aharya, and Satvika. He divides Aharya into three:

1. Nijagāriya Abhinayam:

The proper usage of bracelets, hair-do, scarf for the torso/chest, pants, chest girdle, and other ornaments that make sound is called Nijagariya Abhinaya.

2. Abisāri Agāriyam:

The usage of costumes and make-up to suit thematic productions such as Ramayana is called Abisaari Agariyam.

3. Viyabisāri Agāriyam:

The usage of costumes and ornaments is in line with the acceptable norms of different regions, according to caste. This type of Aharya is used in stage thematic productions.

Though the details in this text are meagre, this is the only treatise in Tamil in the third period (Mandakranta Bose's chronology). The one striking piece of information provided here is the dancers' usage of a pyjama. This also proves a widespread practice of thematic productions in the Tamil region.

4. Tiru Kutrala Kuravanji, Tirikuda Rasappa Kavirayar, 18th C.E., Tamil

One of the well-known works of the Kuravanji genre is the Tiru Kutrala Kuravanji, penned by Tirikuda Rasappa Kavirayar in 1711. Following the typical Kuravanji genre plot, the work follows the pining of the heroine Vasanthavalli for the hero Lord Shiva of Kutralam (Tenkasi District, Tamilnadu). The soothsayer, Kurathi, calms the anxious heroine, who foretells the heroine's union with her Lord. As discussed earlier, the description of the heroine provides information on the dressing style of the society's elite, and the description of the Kurathi aids in textually rooting the costuming of the Kurathi in Rukmini Devi's rendering of the same work.

In chapter 3, Songs 1-7 (Kesigan, P. 27-39), the image of the heroine is expounded through the physical description of her external beauty. The author describes her as wearing a Pottu (ornamental mark on the forehead) and adorned with flowers in her hair. Vasanthavalli is portrayed as wearing a lot of gold ornaments, gold bangles, bangles encrusted with precious stone and conch bangles in her hands. She wore both Silambu and Tandai on her feet. On her ears were big earrings, an ornament on her shoulders called *Tholvalai*, and anklets on her feet.

In Chapter 4, Songs 3-4 (Kesigan, P. 76), a crisp description of the Kurathi awaits us. Kurathi is described as sporting a forehead mark, Pottu, with musk and flowers in her luscious hair. Her eyes are lined with collyrium; she holds the magic stick (*Maathiraikkol*) used for fortune telling in her hand. She wears chains made of red beads around her neck. She is described as wearing a pearl *Bullaku* (septum piercing), and earrings, which might be a *Jhumki* since the author describes it as moving as she moves.

5. Radhika Santwanamu of Muddupalani, 18th C.E., Telugu

Radhika Santwanamu is a revolutionary work by the courtesan of the Maratha court named Muddupalani. Known for her literary prowess, Muddupalani writes this work under the

patronage of Maharaja Pratapasimha. Written between 1757-1763, the story revolves around the theme of Radha and Krishna and Krishna's marriage to a young Iladevi⁶⁴, who Radha raised. The theme is how initially, Ila, as a baby, is always around Radha and Krishna, and when she comes of age, Radha takes on the responsibility of the aunt and gets her married to Radha's own soulmate, Krishna. The subsequent love between Ila and Krishna, Radha's jealousy and how Krishna appeases Radha, who he realises is his destiny, form the rest of the plot. This work is best known for its erotic content, which was banned by the British government until it was republished by another Devadasi, Bangalore Nagaratnammal (1872-1952) centuries later.

In the discourse on young Ila reaching the age of puberty, a tour of the rituals of puberty conducted in 18th-century Tanjore is provided. This part also contains information on the Aharya of Ila, pre and post-ritual. In the onset of the event of her coming of age, verses 30-37 of the 1st chapter (Mulchandani, 22)⁶⁵ describes how:

“The Sakhis brushed Ila’s hair and piled it into a coiffure. They marked her forehead with a vermillion mark and sprinkled her with perfume. One Sakhi knotted her silk skirt in the waist while another tied her blouse. She wore sparkling jewel on her neck and ears. They seated her on a stool surrounded by girls and women and applied sandalwood paste on her body and bathed her in perfumed water. They plaited her hair and decorated it with jasmine flower. The Sakhis helped her wear a silk petticoat on top of which she wore an orange colour gossamer saree. After the five-day-long ceremony, the Sakhis bathed Ila in fragrant oils. They dried her hair after applying fragrant oil on it and plaited it. They applied the musk dot on her forehead and dusted scented powder on her body. While one Sakhi tied a red silk skirt, another helped her put on her blouse and draped her in a shimmering gold saree and decked her with gold ornaments.”

(Mulchandani, 23)

Further in the same chapter, when Iladevi enters the nuptial chambers post-wedding, she is described as wearing orange jewellery (deciphered as gold) and draped in a red saree with sandalwood paste applied on her body. She has her hair plaited and sports a forehead mark

⁶⁴ Radha here is considered as Krishna's aunt, her being Nanda's sister. Nanda's brother-in-law Kumbhaka's daughter is Iladevi

⁶⁵ The author follows the English translation of Radhika Santwanamu by Sandhya Mulchandani (2010)

made of musk paste. She is further described as having jasmine flowers in her hair, smelling of Javvadu (a perfume paste) and having collyrium-lined eyes, as dressed up by Radha herself. It is curious to see that Ila is said to have worn a gossamer saree, a translucent material widely seen in Maratha court and later Devadasi's portrayal. The text also talks of a “(...) *embroidered blouse heavily embellished with pearls and precious stones* (...)” (Mulchandani, 151) as she describes Radha's blouse. This also goes to show that the practice of embroidery on blouses was prevalent during the period that this work was written.

6. Koolappa Nayakan Virali Vitut Tutu, Supradeepa Kavi, 18th C.E., Tamil

Virali Vidu Tutu is a sub-genre under the Tutu literature of Tamilnadu. This genre was popularised under the patronage of the Nayaka and is the seed that later sprouted as the reform of the Devadasi system due to the portrayal of Devadasi as a money-hungry seductress, whose victim usually was the ‘pious and naïve hero, mainly from the upper-caste. Koolappa Nayakan Virali Vidu Tutu is attributed to Supradeepa Kavirayar, who dedicates this work to his Nayaka overlord – Nakama Koolappa Nayakan of Nilakottai, Trichy. The plot revolves around the hero, Ashtavadani, who is married and lives in Srirangam. He has an affair with a temple dancer named Inbarasavalli, due to which a quarrel sprouts between him and his wife. Vexed, he leaves to go on a spiritual voyage. This takes him to Madurai, wherein, in the thousand-pillared hall of the Madurai temple, he chances upon the dancer Madhanabhishekam. The rest of the story is about the events that follow this meeting and how he loses all his wealth to the cunning Devadasi, who, skilfully trained by her mother Manikkamalai, strips him of his wealth and makes him a cook in her kitchen. He persuades Virali, the female bard messenger, to convey his situation to his pious and loyal wife and help them reunite.

Three sections of this text draw the attention of this study. The first section is titled ‘Madhanabhishegathin Valarpu’ and ‘Madhanabhishegathin Paruvakkuri’. In this section (Sokkalingam, R. 26-32), an exciting metaphor is drawn between the external embellishments of a Dasi and her evil intention. Here, the description of the mother of Madhanabhishekam nurtured her from birth as an expert in looting wealthy men. An abridged version of the description is given below⁶⁶:

⁶⁶ Translated by this researcher from the original Tamil work edited by R. Sokkalingam (Unknown date).

“She (Manikkamalai) applied the sacred ash on Madhanabhishekam’s forehead, hoping that one day a silver Pattam (forehead jewel) would replace it. She put a bangle in her daughter’s hand, wishing that men will stay bound to her hand in a similar way. She puts the Pottu (ornamental forehead mark) on her daughter wishing for rich men to stick to her, akin to the gum used in the Pottu. Similar to the black salve (used in magic to find the coffers of merchants), she applied the black collyrium in Madhanabhishekam’s eyes.”

(Sokkalingam, 26-32)

It further describes how the baby Mahanabhishekam, grew up into a beautiful adolescent girl equipped with her mother’s advice in the business.

“She wore beautiful attires. In her lotus-like hands, her mother put bangles and bracelets with coral embedded in it. She wore earrings and wore her hair in a knot right next to her ears (indicating a side knot). In the centre of the knot, she wore a Rakodi (circular pendant with precious stones inlaid). She had an earring on top of her earlobe. On her feet, she wore silver Tandai and gold Salangai. She wore a white pearl necklace and a two-rowed hipchain. She wore a Nethichutti with the ‘Vel’⁶⁷ emblem on it. Madhanabhishekam wore various necklaces named Sindhakku and Thaazhavadamwas with corals in them. She wore a diamond nose pin. Manikkamalai made her daughter wear a beautiful blouse and applied fragrant turmeric paste all over her body. She had jasmine flower in her hair.”

(Sokkalingam 26-32)

In this section, it is further said that Manikkamalai made her daughter learn Sanskrit, Kannada, Telugu, and Tamil. Madhanabhishekam learnt Bharatam and had her Arangetram. This section also describes how the mother taught her daughter to seduce men.

In this study's next section of interest, Ashtavadani meets Madhanabhishekam and describes her beauty. Dancing Pushpanjali in the thousand-pillared hall of the Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple, Madhanabhishekam, is described thus by Ashtavadani:

“Madhanabhishekam had her hair in a bun and wore a pearl Nethichutti (called Turai here). She wore a saree with a contrast border (Selai Mugappil - Karutthazhagum), and golden bangles jingled in her hands. Had earrings and wore a diamond necklace that

⁶⁷ Spear held by Lord Muruga.

rested on her blouse-covered bosom. On her feet were Tandai, and her face was beautified by a Pottu.”

(Sokkalingam. 61-62)

In the third section of interest to this study, the hero describes how Madhanabhishekam whined that she did not have enough sarees to wear to the temple, making him buy jewellery and sarees for her. Though it only has one line on how he ‘gifted gold ornaments’ to her, the description of the number of sarees he got her shows how many varieties of sarees were in vogue during the 18th century in Madurai. The following is a list of sarees and other apparel that he gifted her:

• Golden blouse and skirt	-	16
• Hibiscus-coloured saree	-	1
• Sarees similar to that worn by Apsaras	-	3
• Pearl-coloured saree	-	3
• Burnt Orange colour saree	-	4 to 5
• Sarees with beads on the ends	-	5
• Silver coloured Blouse that is to be tied	-	5
• Silver-coloured sarees	-	2
• Yellow-coloured saree	-	4
• Saree with blue stripes.		

Within this list of sarees, he also describes Madhanabhishekam as a beautiful woman wearing many ornaments like a chain in her hair, Pottu on her forehead, and Nethichutti. This provides details on the economic position of the patron, Ashtavadani here, and the wealth that the Devadasi acquired through her work. In the section leading to the above purchase by Ashtavadani (Sokkalingam, 97-99), Manikkamalai also whines about how they have lost all the different jewellery such as diamond necklaces gifted by different customers, thus making Ashtavadani sympathise towards Madhanabhishekam. The fact that she was performing a Pushpanjali while the hero draws this imagery of her strengthens the description of a Sadir performer. The same reinforces the position of the text in this study as a description of a Dasi during a performance and how society viewed the Sadir performer.

7. Sankaramurthy Virali Vitu Tutu, Subbaiyar, 19th C.E., Tamil

This work by Subbaiyar has been difficult to date. It is either in the 18th or 19th century, based on the language. Following the previous Virali Vitu Tutu format, this work is also about a hero who, due to a misunderstanding, goes away from his wife on a pilgrimage. He meets, falls in love, and spends his money and valuables on a Devadasi in the Tiruchendur Murugan temple. The hero requests the female bard, Virali, to act as a messenger and reunite him with his wife. The hero, Sankaramurthy, describes the messenger and the dancer during the course of this text.

Verses 4-20 describe the female bard messenger, Virali.

“She wore ornament made of a combination of five metals called Aimpon⁶⁸ on her feet and different ornaments suited for different fingers. On her feet, she wore the Tandai, anklet, and Salangai. She wore a golden dress, golden string at the waist, gold bracelets and shiny bangles. She also wore a nose pin, ear stud, and hangings. She sported the sacred ash and vermillion marks on her forehead. She wore a complete Talaisaman, including the Nethichutti and the Chandra Pirai-Soorya Pirai.”⁶⁹

(Projectmadurai.org, 12-14)

Verses 185-210 describe the danseuse:

“Her hair was tied in a knot, and she had an ornamental mark on her forehead. She wore gem-studded earrings, and her beautiful midriff was shown. She sported a multi-gem studded Oddiyanam (hip chain) and was draped in a saree with bright Zari work.”

(Projectmadurai.org, 24-26)

Further in the work, when the hero has fallen in love with her, and she invites him to her house, the author describes the danseuse as she steps into their private chamber in verses 375-380.

“Her Tandai and Salangai made a tinkling sound. She wore her hair in a knot and walked in with jingling bangles and a thick pendant that rested on her chest. She was dressed in silk attire.”

⁶⁸ An alloy of gold, silver, zin, copper, and iron.

⁶⁹ The Tamil text provided by Projectmadurai.org has been translated into English by the researcher.

This work paints a picture of the attire of the 19th-century dancer. Throughout the work, the author refers to the wealth that these courtesans possessed and how they were trained from a very young age to loot the money of wealthy men. Through this, it is possible to deduce that though the Devadasis, at this point, still enjoyed economic autonomy and financial superiority, the downfall of the image of Devadasi in the mind of the commoner had begun during the later 18th and early 19th C.E.

8. Tanjore Maratha Modi Records, 19th C.E., Modi (Marathi)

During the rule of the Maratha king Serfoji II (1777-1832), the temple management laid down a series of regulations for the court performers that restricted the use of a few ornaments and dresses. This has been gleaned from the official Modi records of the Maratha rule⁷⁰. The dancers were denied permission to wear the following ornaments (Radhika, V.S. 1996, Jeevanandam, S. 2014):

- Chandrama - crescent-shaped ornament is worn as a part of the Talaisaman
- Nethichutti - A head ornament that covers the central hair partition and ends with a pendant on the forehead.
- Krishna Kondai – an ornamental attachment that resembles a bun. The dancers were restricted from wearing one with pearl embellishments. Diamond Rakodi - Brooch pinned to the back of the head with diamond inlaid.
- Tirukuppu - A round flower-shaped hair ornament pinned onto the braid or the hair knot. The dancers were not allowed to wear one with either parrot or lamp motif.
- Pattukunjalām - A hair ornament at the end of the braid that has three balls. The dancers were not allowed to wear one in silk. They were, however, free to wear one in gold.
- Makara Kanti - A gem-studded pendant.
- Hansmore - Swan or peacock-shaped pendant.
- Besari - Nose stud with three or five stone hangings.
- Addigai- A necklace worn close to the collarbone.

⁷⁰ The researcher could not access the original records due to pandemic regulations. However, Radhika, V. S. (1996) and Jeevandam, S. (2014) in their unpublished dissertation mention the Modi records bundle details as Modi manuscripts Bundle 2(C), Sub bundle 17; Section 2 (A); A.D. 1820.

- Bugadi – clip-on ear studs.
- Kamarapatti - Metal waist belt.
- Biradi or Metti - Toe-ring

The records also show restrictions on dresses as follows:

- Cannot wear sarees with elaborate Zari work or gold and silver embellishments.
- Cannot wear sarees with artistic lacework except on special occasions.
- They were denied permission to wear plain white shawls to cover their shoulders pre- or post-performance.
- Cannot own a kerchief.

A similar set of rules can be seen as established as ground rules in the court of the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III (1863-1939) of Baroda. This set of rules for the artists was published in 1899 and was called the *Kalavant Khatyache Niyam* (Bhakle, J. 2005). This shows the ruling class's intention to hold a tight reign over the artists of the court, who were on the receiving end of many luxuries. I see this as a way to sartorially distinguish the performing class from the ruling class by branding a set of ornaments and clothing to be accessible only to the royals, no matter the affordability of the performers.

9. Dasigal Mosavalai, Moovalur Ramamritam, 20th C.E., Tamil

Written in 1936 by Moovalur Ramamritam, this novel is a prime example of how the Devadasi community was seen as deceitful at the outset of the anti-nautch movement. Ramamritam was dedicated as a Devadasi but later spent her life as a member of the Congress Party working against the Devadasi system. The story revolves around the hero Somasekaran who falls for two Dasi sisters, namely Kantha and Ganavati, from Tanjore. Somasekaran, the son of a Zamindar, in his lust for the Dasis, fails his education and is married to Gnanasundari, the daughter of a reformist Zamindar and a reformer herself. The story goes about how Somasekaran is deceived by the expert plotting of the sisters and their mother and how Gnanasundari, pretending to be a Dasi, brings her husband back to his senses.

Although the work has very many references to jewellery, especially ones gifted by many wealthy men to the sisters, the part that is of interest to this study is the one where Somasekaran goes in search of the sisters and is pointed to a street by an old lady as the street that they reside in. The wandering Somasekaran comes across a woman standing on her

doorstep and is described as “(...) a girl dressed in fashionable clothes and ornaments chatting merrily with her neighbour. (...) Her gait and manner indicate that she is the dasi Kantha.” (Kannabiran, K. and Kannabiran, V., 82). When he approaches the girl and asks if she is the Dasi Kantha, the girl's husband slaps Somasekaran for alleging such dishonour on his wife. The next chapter shows a quarrel between the wife and the husband where the husband blames the wife for causing this dishonour by ‘dressing like a Dasi’. He says:

“I beat up a good man because of you. When women desire modern clothes and ornaments, they are bound to get a bad reputation. Do you realize the effects of neglecting natural beauty and turning instead to artificial beauty aids? Because you decked yourself so grandly and stood at the door, I beat: up a stranger. If this news spreads, is it not bad for our reputation? If your dressing up was decent, then these problems would not arise. If I say anything, you get angry immediately.”

(Kannabiran, K. and Kannabiran, V., 84)

When the wife, in response, cries about how other women get to wear what they want and it is her ill fate that she has a husband like this, the husband responds thus:

*“After all, the whole world believes that a dasi practices prostitution and is bad in character. Is it not important to gain a good name? **Rid your mind of those women who are dressed in silver laced silks and heavy jewellery who visit all festivals. Look at the countless women who are sensible. Do they go around wearing jewellery like beasts of burden? Like bullocks whose noses are pierced to rope them?** Women pierce their noses and ears and parts of their faces mutilating and ruining their faces. Then thieves cut these parts to steal the jewels. This is unbearable cruelty. Why don't you understand that these women are being treated worse than animals? **Do you think that English women do not have property? Do they disfigure themselves with ornaments like the women of this country?** Have you not seen families suffer intensely because they have borrowed money at high interest to buy jewellery and deck themselves? **It is only when this practice of the meaningless ornamentation of women goes that the poverty and backwardness of this country will go.** Women will stop competing with each other to buy more and more useless ornaments. Quarrels in the family will vanish like smoke, and life will become more meaningful. You cannot even carry a pot of water. You need a servant for every task. How you are able to carry such heavy jewellery is beyond me!”*

The husband's response paints a picture of what heavy sarees and ornamentation had come to mean by this time. This response also draws our attention to the high pedestal that the image of the Westerners sat in the minds of the "educated Indians" and how deeply rooted Victorian morality was in the Indian psyche. When the wife of Somasekaran, Gnanasundari, decides to teach her husband a lesson by pretending to be a Dasi, she is said to have "donned the garb of a dasi" (ibid. 147), hinting that she wore heavy sarees and jewellery as worn by the Dasis.

Miscellaneous Texts:

Other than the above-discussed texts, many other textual sources can extract fleeting references to Aharya. In official documents, one comes across a source called *Kovil Ozhugu*. Kovil Ozhugu is a chronicle of the Sri Rangam temple (Trichy) till 1622 that lists out duties to be performed by various groups of workers who contribute to the temple along with historical documentation of the narratives related to the temple. A single line from this text pertaining to the dancer says, "The girls would bath at dawn, adorn themselves and come to the temple and stand in the sight of Ranganatahar" (Kovil Ozhugu, 96). This statement can be perceived as a sign that the dancer had no specific dress code in this region of Tamilnadu. They had to dress at their finest capacities. And that is all that was expected of the temple dancer.

Yet another small but crucial text is the *Ruddiraganikayar Kathasara Thirattu* penned by Ancukam, a Devadasi dedicated to one *Ponnambalavanesaperuman* Temple in Colombo, Sri Lanka. A Devadasi from Ceylon, Ancukam writes this work as a documentation of her family's lineage along with the history of notable Devadasis of the past. Written at the dawn of the 20th Century, the text conveys an interesting suggestion for the reformation of Sadir and to rescind the image of the Devadasis. In her work, she urges the Devadasis to resort to a spiritual path, as was originally intended for this community. This, she suggests, can be reflected in the Aharya of the performers as,

*"We should aim to attain eternal bliss (nittyānanta) by performing actions that will purify our three karanas - mind (manam), speech (moli), and body (mey). Ganikās become the servants of God through heredity. Therefore, we must practice devotion which is the seed of Mukti. **Sacred ash, rudrāksa beads, and the pancāksara mantra should be our ornaments.** We should dedicate our minds, speech and body to God, and*

this will grant us immeasurable pleasure in all the lives to come... To meditate upon Paramesvara with our mind, to sing his praises with our speech, and to dance with our body is to acquire great merit."

(Anchukam, 236).

Davesh Soneji (Siva's, 2010) compares Dasigal Mosavalai (discussed earlier in the chapter) and Ruddirakannikaiyar Kadasarathirattu. He comments,

"(...) Uruttirakanikaiyar and Tāsikal Mōcavalai are two radically different texts. While Ramamirttammars novel advocates the abolition of the devadasī system, Añcukam advocates reform. But Añcukam's vision of reform (...) rests on a return to an idealized Tamil Saiva past. Indeed, for Añcukam, "reformed" devadāsīs would wear rudrākṣa beads instead of jewels and sacred ash (vibhūti) instead of make-up."

(Soneji, 47)

This religious rhetoric in Anchukam's work favoured the bubbling reform discourse and reflected the growing anxiety inside the Devadasi community in anticipation of a total wipeout of their community and its history. Suggestions such as that of Anchukam echo the need for a visual change in the art form that was felt even within the community. If Dasigal Mosavali is an example of an outsider equating jewellery to sin, Ruddirakannikaiyar Kadasarathirattu is the same suggestion voiced from inside the community at the onset of the Abolishment Act.

2.4. Western Writings on Aharya of the Danseuse:

A plethora of writings on South Indian dance by non-natives, especially travellers and officials from European countries, are available to us. The Portuguese East India Company, Dutch East India Company, the Danish East India Company, and the English East India Company ensured the constant inflow of Europeans in South India, who witnessed the Sadir performances, either as a part of their reception, a temple procession, a temple performance, or a private nautch performance. India has witnessed foreign travellers since the 5th C.E. However, the travellers during the Nayaka periods, and the related writings, are taken for substantial consideration here. European travel accounts often reflect their perceptions, pre-conceived notions, or deeply rooted morals. Hence, the description should be approached cautiously since this was a period of evangelicalism, a search for curious ethnography. The period between the

19th and 20th centuries was also a period of heightened morality in both imperial and native minds that sought reform of the ‘downtrodden’. The thoughts put forward by these accounts can also be situated in a post-renaissance mindset that sought reform.

I) Jon Oafsson (1620):

An Icelandic-Danish soldier landed in Tranquebar in the 1620s. He talks about the Devadasis/harlots who dance in processions and are rented out to Danish soldiers by the Nattuvanar. The following is his description of the costume:

“Their costume is as follows. They have, like others, drawers of gold brocade studded with precious stones and pearls and with much money. And a splendid kerchief costing a very great sum over their breast, with other rings and precious stones of surpassing value, placed about their body and taken off as is convenient.”

(qtd. In Scobie, 90)

He also specifies that while the temple harlots dance in their finery, the costumes are hung up in the temple between performances.

II) Innes Munro (1789):

A Scottish Soldier who published a compilation of his writings in the form of memoirs. He describes the dancing girls’ Aharya as:

“They are very gaudily dressed and ornamented with jewels and other precious stones set in rings that are worn in the nostrils, round the neck and arms, and also upon the ankles and toes; having small tinkling bells fixed to their ankles and elbows, which I think have rather an unpleasing effect.”

(Qtd. In Roebert, D. 31)

III) Elizabeth Gwillim (1802):

The wife of a judge of the Supreme Court of Madras, Gwillim, gives a very detailed and precise description of the jewellery worn by the dancers of the Mylapore temple in a procession.

“(…) the best dancing girls who are very richly dressed, their hair is combed smooth, parted in front & sweeping round the corners of the forehead with a fringe of fine work in gold and small jewels edging this sweep of hair & lying on the forehead. They wear a conspicuous piece of jewellery on the middle of the forehead & various ornaments in the nature of clasps. One piece of gold, like a small saucer, finishes the back of the head & between that and the front ornament, wreathes of coloured natural flowers were twisted several times around. The back hair is plaited & hangs down to a great length intermixed with gold & pearl & flowers. Their ears are covered with ornaments; as many as possible are hung in the ears, and others suspended from bands in the hair. The necklaces & chains they wear are very fine & cover their necks. Their arms have bands around the middle of the upper part of the arms & bracelets on the wrist are innumerable. Their jewels are sometimes false but, tho' very heavy, are not of the value they may be supposed to be as they are only of table diamonds & so thin as not fit for cutting. These women wear no shoes or stockings, but an immense weight of gold round their ankles in rings of small bells which sound as they dance.”

(qtd. In Jeffrey, Spears. 142-149)

A splendid account of the Aharya and a very apt description of the Talaisaman is seen in this account. It is also interesting to see that she mentions that sometimes the dancers are wearing ‘table diamonds’, which are not to be mistaken for real diamonds. This might be a reference to kemp jewellery.

IV) Lydia Maria Child (1835):

The author of the book “The History of the Condition of Women in Various Ages and Nations” Child, writes about the dancers of South India, where she mentions details on the Aharya.

“The tips of their nails are stained red. The long braided hair, the neck, the naked arms, and the feet are covered with jewels; rings on the hand, rings on the feet, rings in the ears, and sometimes rings in the side of the nose. The silver chains and bells with which they decorate their ankles and feet, make a monotonous but agreeable sound as they dance (...). When they become old, or the Brahmins, for any other reason, wish them to leave, they are dismissed from the pagoda. The temple where they serve

furnishes them with food, clothing, and pay, but when they leave, they are obliged to relinquish all articles of ornament. (...)”

On the common dancer, she says:

“Wealthy men hire them at entertainments, and some grandees keep a whole company constantly in their service. They, too, are loaded with jewels, bracelets, armlets, carcanets, coronals, rings, earrings, nose-rings, bells and chains. The dress of a distinguished dancer often costs from fifteen to twenty- thousand rupees. They surround their eyes with a black circle made with the head of a pin dipped in powder of antimony. Those who are accustomed to it think it increases the beauty of expression.

To preserve the comeliness of their forms, they cover the bosom with hollow cases of wood, linked together and buckled at the back. These cases are made so very thin and pliable that they move freely with the slightest motion of the body; they are plated with gold or silver and sometimes set with gems. There is nothing loud or bold in the manners of these degraded women. They are all softness, gentleness, and coquetry, but their dances, and the songs that accompany them, in which the Orientals take unbounded delight, are voluptuous beyond description.”

(Child, Lydia Maria. 1835)

We are not sure which temple she is talking of in this passage. But it is fascinating to ponder that the Devadasis were expected to relinquish the jewellery when they left the service, even though the authenticity of this information is questionable. The detail that she provides on the wooden cup used as an undergarment is also cited in the review of the 1838 European tour of the 5 Devadasis⁷¹.

V) J. B. Reitstap (1860s):

A Genealogist by profession, Reitstap was the author of multiple travel journals. In a pragmatic account of a performance that he witnesses in Nellore, he describes the Aharya as:

“They had a length of gold-fringed red muslin wrapped several times around their hips, with the remainder draped over the shoulder and hanging down over the breasts. They also wore a sort of gold-embroidered jacket and gauzy violet pantaloons,

⁷¹ Detailed description along with pictures discussed in the next chapter

wide at the top and narrowing to the bottom. Jewels sparkled on their hands, arms, necks, and even on their noses, and they wore metal rings around their ankles that made a not unpleasant sound as they moved.”

(qtd. In Roebert, D. 173)

VI) John Shortt (1867-1869):

A Surgeon General in Madras, he published papers in the London Anthropological Society’s memoirs between 1867-1869. Here, he says that the temple Devadasis is much richer than her common counterpart. He further describes her attire:

“Dancing girls attached to pagodas are generally wealthy, and when they appear before the public, are well covered with the usual gold ornaments-if poor, tinsel is used, or golden ones are borrowed from others. Their toilettes are costly and tawdry, whilst their heads, ears, nose, neck, arms, wrists, fingers, ankles, and toes are over-decked with jewels, and their hair frequently with flowers. The hair is divided in front along the centre, combed back and plaited into a single plait, resting loose on the back like a tail, averaging from two to two and a half feet in length, of course, ornamented with jewels and flowers. Their dancing dress comprises usually the short jacket or choolee, a pair of string drawers tied at the waist, termed pyjamas - both of these are generally of silk and a white or coloured muslin wrapper or saree one end of the saree is wound around the waist, and two, three, or more feet, according to the length, is gathered and inserted into the portion encircling the waist, and permitting of a folding fringe or gathering of the cloth in front, and the other end taken after the usual native fashion over the left shoulder, and descends towards the waist, when the end, or moonthane, is opened out and allowed to drop in front, one end of it being inserted in the waist on the side, and the other left free. This portion of the saree is usually highly ornamented with golden thread, tinsel, etc. - the free end descends to the middle or lower part of the thighs, the other free end of the saree hanging down towards the legs is now got hold of, passed between the legs and fastened to the tie around the waist at the back, and the whole encircled by a gold or silver waist belt. By this mode of dress, a fold of the muslin saree forms a loop around each leg and descends nearly down to the ankles whilst the gathering hangs in front between the legs free. At home, they wear the choolee and saree, with a petticoat or pavaday - this, in fact, is their usual dress, except when about performing, they exchange the pavaday for the pyjama or sherai-the pavaday is made

of chintz or silk. According to the means of the individual. A string of small brass bells, known by the name of shullungay or gedjum is tied around each leg immediately beneath the ankles.”

(Shortt, John. 185)

One of the very few thorough descriptions of the Aharya. This account clearly shows that there was a specific drape for the dancer and that it was worn by tucking the saree through their legs to the back. The same way of draping was followed as late as the 1950s in Tanjore, as corroborated by Herambanathan Nattuvanar, who called it the ‘Cycle Kattu’ (Kattu meaning ‘to tie’). He describes the cycle kattu as “A meter of the inner part of the saree is left and, the remaining part of the saree is draped as per usual. The pallu part is then taken and tightly wound around the waist and a measured amount of the end is left as the side fan, tucked into the waist. Finally, the meter left in the beginning is pleated and tucked between the legs at the back into the string of the Nijar [pyjama]. My aunt and mother followed this method, and I teach this to the men playing female role in Bhagavata mela”⁷².

VII) Louis Jacolliot (1873):

A colonial judge, Jacolliot was interested in the customs related to women around the world. In his work *Voyage au pays des bayaderes*, he describes the condition of the Devadasis as sex objects. In this serious discourse, he provides a rather lusty description of the Aharya of the dancers:

"Four women, barely twenty years old, beautiful as are the races of the Himalayas, lascivious by temperament, of which all the gestures and attitudes are formed in childhood by a master skilled in the art of moving the senses. Four women, with black eyes open wide, with long, damp eyelashes, long, scattered hair, naked throats, the remainder of their bodies barely covered by a gauzy silk vestment fringed with gold ... four fantastic apparitions descended to reveal among men the lost secret of the purest of forms and the most exquisite beauty... they become incandescent in the dance...”

⁷² Nattuvanar of the Tanjore lineage, also a performer of Bhagavata Mela Natakam of Melattur. He was married to the daughter of a Devadasi. Data collected through a personal interview conducted by the researcher at his residence in Tanjore on 02/02/2022.

(qtd. In Roebert, D. 175)

Quite contrary to his argument of objectifying women, Jacolliot joins many other writers of the century in objectifying the dancing girl in a sensual manner. Though few were genuinely confused by the Dasi's clothing, many describe these women's sensuality through their attire. This indicates how the nature of Dasi's work added sensuality to her Aharya, while the Aharya, in turn, played a role in emphasising her sensuality.

VIII) Review of the 1875 tour of Prince of Wales:

In an unexpected turn of events, a newspaper in Madras wrote a letter of sorts to the Prince of Wales regarding his recent attendance at the Nautch performance in Royapuram. In this performance which the elites and officials of Madras attended, the nautch performance was arranged for the Prince (a description and illustration can be found in Chapter 3). Post the performance, the Prince is described to have sent for the lead dancer Tanjore Gnyanam and thanked her while all the ladies who accompanied His Royal Highness examined and gushed over Gnyanam's jewellery. The review says thus about the incident:

“Allow us to say the prominent attention which His Royal Highness is said to have paid to the Nautch girls of Madras by examining their clothes and jewels would be hardly consistent even with Hindu ideas of propriety. This involved a complement to their personal appearance and adornment, which in the case of women of their character, was not calculated to produce a very wholesome impression upon the mind of the Native community in general. We hope His Royal Highness will be better advised in Calcutta.”

(Indian Mirror, 1876)

It is clear from the rhetoric used above that even looking at their adornment was now considered immoral. This justifies the gradual increase in aversion to the Aharya of the Devadasis, which ultimately led to the refashioning of Bharatanatyam Aharya.

IX) Charles Reynolds Williams (1876):

A Sanskrit Professor at Oxford University, he speaks of the Nautch party that he was invited to at the residence of one Mr. Thomas. He describes their attire as:

“The girls were dressed in sparkling bodices, with gold-tissue skirts gathered up between the legs and falling full in front, brilliant satin trousers, and covered with real jewellery; head, neck, ears, nose and fingers were a mass of gold and precious stones. They danced set figures in Oriental fashion with great precision and effect, and good time was kept by bells fastened round their ankles. (...) The dances over, we descended the steps of the portico and examined the girls and their jewellery. The jewels bore the examination better than the girls. Apart from their ornaments they would not pass muster; but the jewels were lovely and so Eastern. I longed to pocket them. The value of each girl's jewels was stated to be 700/. or 800/. (...)”

(Williams, C. R. 1877)

Yet another account of the practice of examining their jewels can be seen here. In addition to describing their draping as tucked between their legs and falling in front, as the costume draping of this period has been understood so far in this study, he also mentions how the value of this jewellery indicated that the dancers were rich. It is a noteworthy commentary on the economic position of the Devadasis at a crucial moment as this when royal patronage had been replaced by Imperial patronage, as evidently seen above.

X) “Two Blue Brahmins” (1892):

When this work was penned at the fair end of the century, the decline of royal patronage pushed the Devadasis into giving private performances for the affluent, including Englishmen, Zamindars, Officials, and Brahmins. This article is a documentation of one such private performance where a dance called “Bee Dance” was performed by the Devadasis for a few Brahmins and their friends ‘only’. This Bee dance was apparently popular, and it dealt with three Devadasis clad in their Sadir costume, depicting how Krishna takes the form of a bee and stings them. The author first speaks of a regular nautch (assuming he has witnessed the same before) by saying that “with repoussé gold plates on her head and no end of nose-rings, earrings, bracelets, neck-chains, etc., etc.; clad in a wilderness of garments (...)”. The part where the narration takes a turn is when he explains how the Aharya in the Bee dance was used in a provocative way, much akin to a performance of ‘The Black Crook’⁷³. He says:

⁷³ A musical entertainment that was famous in New York for its scandalous, and scanty costumes.

“The bee dance begins with plenty of clothes (...) and then the clothes come off one by one, like the garments of a circus rider (...) the girls busily helping each other in very close and particular investigation, and so on till there are very scanty garments left, and then none at all.”

(Home and Country. 1892)

A clear indication of the attitude of the European viewer and the degeneration of the performance and of Aharya was used in an erotic sense.

XI) Pierre Loti (1899-1900):

At the turn of the century, Loti, a French naval officer and a novelist, gives a romantic description of the Aharya of a South Indian dancer.

“The young painted face, with eyes of excessive length, draws near. (...) The young, bronze-coloured face is wreathed in precious stones, and a band of gold and diamonds surrounds the forehead and descends over the temples, concealing the hair, and in the ears and nose, many diamonds sparkle. It is night, and everything is lit up, but in all this crowd, I can only see the woman with the helmeted head whose shining point seems to exercise a fascination over me. (...) The jewels of her head-dress and the gems in her ears and nose shine so brilliantly, and the golden band forms such a brightly defined framing that the face underneath, with its soft features and its dull and dusky skin, seems to have a nameless and far-off indefiniteness, even when it is quite close to me. (...) Between the gauze of gold that enwraps her loins and the corset in which her bust is held a close prisoner, one sees, as usual, a little of her pale bronze body, a little of her vigorous and sinewy flesh; and the play of the lower part of her breasts and of her waist is exposed to our gaze. (...) with features that seemed too delicate and eyes that were too long already, without their unnatural lengthening of paint; blue-black hair, stretched in tight bands across the cheeks; drapery that was wholly black, a black girdle and a black veil with the slightest silver edging. Her ornaments consisted of nothing but rubies, rubies that covered hands and arms, and in her nose, a bunch of rubies that fell over her mouth so that the ghoulis lips looked as if a spot of blood had yet remained on them. But I forgot them all as soon as I saw that one, that queen, that star, make her sudden appearance between the musicians who

stood aside to let her pass, that creature all decked in gold who had been kept for the last.”

(Loti, Pierre. 138)

Firstly, amongst the voices of disgust and criticism commonly seen in this period, Loti's account is a breath of fresh air. But it also points to how the Aharya was seen to elevate the physical features of the dancer sensually. I see this as a way that Aharya was perceived to draw attention to one's body, here for monetary benefits, a move that a 'respectable family woman' of the time would have avoided at any cost. Therefore, the later arguments of reformists to redesign the costume of the dancer in order to save the dance makes sense in a way that they wanted to erase this very attraction that men seemed to associate the jewellery and saree of the Dasi with.

Through the array of Western texts cited above, from 1670-1900, it is plausible to concede that over the period of two centuries, the voice of the West has gone from one that is fascinated by this 'mysteriously decked creature' to one that is disgusted by it, mostly due to the immorality of the profession that seems to have gripped the lives of the Devadasi. The disgust and offence taken by the Christian morality of these writers later form the basis of the anti-naught argument, which, by the turn of the century, was well on its way to being fruitful. The first element that doesn't sit well with the Westerners and the modern Indian of the 20th Century is the way these Bayaderes dressed in a covered yet provocative manner. As for the Aharya of the Devadasi, the jewellery has stayed intact throughout the chosen period. Especially the 'Devadasi's helmet', which is the Talaisaman. The tight-fitting bodice, with the under part of the bosom exposed, seems to be a staple in the Aharya of the Maratha period. While muslin has been stated as the most used material for draping, satin pants, embroidered velvet for a blouse, and thick silk sarees, as pointed out by Jean de Ponteres – Sabran (1851-1912), are not unusual. This points to a region-based variation in materials even within the state. But a riveting observation is the usage of the wooden cups buckled at the back, an influence of the White women perhaps, on the Aharya of the Devadasis of this period, before the commercial availability and acceptance of a brassiere in the Indian market.

Apart from the texts mentioned here, other authors fleetingly talk of Aharya but in connection with their own opinion of the art form or the practice of the Devadasi. In Karl Ritter's work (1836) *East Asia*, he comments on how the way South Indian dancer dresses indecently as compared to their North Indian counterparts. However, in a contrasting statement,

Alfred Grandidier⁷⁴ (1870) mentions that the costumes of dancers are much more decent than others, akin to Abbe Dubois's⁷⁵ description of the same in his work of 1906. William Crooke⁷⁶ (1906), in a single line, describes the Maratha style Kaccham costume worn by Madurai dancers as something that 'baffled the comprehension of Lord Dufferin: the front part hangs in petticoats, but the back is only trousers'. This comment firstly emphasises that the Maratha period costume was widely prevalent even in the city of Madurai by this time. And secondly, how the costume was draped in the Kaccham fashion with the Pallu part hanging in front like a fan.

2.5. Consolidation:

In the texts considered so far in this chapter, there has been a myriad of depictions of the dancing body through various centuries. Considering the proportion of data documented in this chapter, a consolidation of data on the evolution of costumes as seen in both Sanskrit texts and Vernacular and Western texts is due at this juncture.

Table 2.15. Data on the Evolution of Bharatanatyam Aharya in Sanskrit Treatises and Texts:

PERIOD	JEWELLERY		COSTUME	MAKE-UP	HAIRDO
	Body Part	Name of Article			
2 nd –10 th C.E.	Head	Chudamani, Sikajala, Pindapatra.	Different colours for different species, regions, and castes.	Decorative drawings on the forehead, cheeks, and flower designs over the forehead. Sandalwood paste over the body. Lac pattern on feet.	Hairstyle according to the origin of characters.
	Ears	Kundala, Karnika, etc.,			
	Neck	Necklaces, garlands, stringed-chain.			
	Hands	Arm-band, bangles, finger rings, etc.,			
	Hip	Kanci (Hip belt), Mekhala (Hip Chain)			

74 naturalist and explorer who travelled to China and India

75 A French Catholic Missionary who compiled a work called Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies (1906).

76 Irish Orientalist and author of Things Indian

	Feet	Nupura, Kinkini.			
11th – 15th C.E.	Head	Pearl strings	Garment made of white and gold silk, cotton, or jute. Tight- fitting bodice. Petticoat and a discreet inner garment.	Bindi is made of Musk & Sandalwood paste. Kajal/Collyrium. Decorative drawing on cheeks. Sandalwood/Saff ron paste on the body.	Hair in a knot or braid with flowers.
	Ears & Nose	Cylindrical Earrings. Nose stud.			
	Neck	Pearl and large-beaded garlands. Necklaces.			
	Hands	Gold bangles, bracelets, and rings			
	Hip	Hip belt			
	Feet	Anklets			
16th – 19th C.E.	Head		Silk costumes in white, blue, or yellow. Draped in many styles. Gem studded bodices or breast bands in any colour.	Kasturi mark on the forehead. Accentuated eyes and eyebrows. Sandalwood paste on the body. Saffron paste on breasts. Chewing betel leaves.	
	Ears & Nose	Nose pin. Earrings.			
	Neck	Garlands. Pearl Necklaces, long necklaces.			
	Hands	Bangles, rings, and bracelets.			
	Hip	Hip belt.			
	Feet	Anklets.			

In the Sanskrit treatises and texts studied, a stark difference in description is noted, especially during the second period, in treatises like Sangita Ratnakara and Nr̥tta Ratnavali. Early-period dancers seemed to have a variety of earrings, necklaces, and head ornaments to choose from. This can also be owed to the treatises not dealing with the dancer but an assortment of characters. From the second period text onwards, costumes in silk, bodices, and inner garments, all of which point to a development of movement-based costuming, are observed. This corroborates with the fact that during this period, a focus on the Margi-Desi duality and technical brilliance of region-based dance techniques can be observed on a pan-Indian level. Therefore, the evolution of a description style during this period that draws attention to the minute details of a dancer's Aharya is un baffling. By the third period, the jewellery remained the same. Still, a new addition is the mentioning of the elongated eyes and eyebrows, indicating a gradual increase in the importance of make-up. The article Nose-pin is seen from the 13th century, which Altekar (303) considers an Arab influence through the

Malabar trade routes, indicating that the fashion trends of the dancer were a result of intercultural exchanges not just within the country but also from regions beyond our borders.

Table 2.16. Data on the Evolution of Bharatanatyam Aharya in Tamil Region as Consolidated from Vernacular and Western Texts:

PERIOD	JEWELLERY		COSTUME	MAKE-UP	HAIRDO
2 nd – 16 th C.E.	Head	Talaisaman, Rakodi, Tirugupoo, Valampuri	Silk or gold thread fabric. In many colours. Breast band in the later periods.	Vermillion Bindi. Red sandalwood or other fragrant paste on the body. Anjanam/Collyrium. Perfume. Drawing patterns on the body using various fragrant pastes.	Five-legged braids. Hair-knot. Adorned with various flowers.
	Forehead	Nethichutti, Pattam.			
	Ears & Nose	Ear stud, Jhumki			
	Neck	Choker, necklace, gold chain			
	Hands	Armband, shoulder chain, bangles of different kinds, finger rings.			
	Hip	Lower Abdomen chain, layered hip chain, waist belt.			
	Legs/Feet	Thigh cuffs, Kinkini, Silambu, Salangai etc.			
17 th C.E.	Head	Pearl strings on hair.	Silk saree with Zari work. Breast band or bodice.	Tilakam/Bindi.	Hair in a braid, entwined with pearl strings.
	Forehead	Nethichutti			
	Ears & Nose	Diamond earrings or gold earrings. Koppu/upper-ear piercing. Nose ring.			
	Neck	Kemp Choker, gold chain,			

		necklace, pearl chains.			
	Hands	Bangles, bracelets. Vanki/Arm band.			
	Hip	Oddiyanam/waist belt.			
	Feet	Salangai, Tandai, anklet & toe rings.			
18th C.E.	Head	Rakodi.	Silk saree. Gossamer sarees. A variety of silk and embroidered blouses.	Vermillion Pottu/Bindi. Anjanam/Collyrium. Sandalwood and Turmeric paste on the body. Javvadhuparfüme.	Hair in a bun, a side-bun, or Plait. Adorned with flowers.
	Forehead	Nethichutti.			
	Ears & Nose	Earrings, Jhumki. Koppu. Diamond nose ring.			
	Neck	Gold and pearl necklaces			
	Hands	Shoulder chain, Bangles.			
	Hip	Waistband/Oddiyanam.			
	Feet	Tandai, Silambu, Salangai.			
19th C.E.	Head	Rakodi	Silk, or Muslin, Organza saree in gold or Gossamer saree. Satin or velvet pants. Embroidered blouses. Saree tied in Kaccham style.	Nails stained red (probably Alta), Kajal/Collyrium.	Hair plaited with flower wound around Rakodi. Also adorned with gold and pearl.
	Forehead	Complete Talaisaman.			
	Ears & Nose	Earrings with Maatal. Nose pin.			
	Neck	Addigai/Choker. Necklaces			
	Hands	Bangles, bracelets, Vanki.			
	Hip	Oddiyanam/Waist belt.			
	Feet	Salangai, Anklet, toe rings.			

Through the study of the evolution of costumes as deciphered from vernacular and Western textual sources, we discern that the dancer's Aharya has gradually decreased in

number over the centuries and as the grammar of Sadir began the process of standardisation post-16th century, so did the standardisation of the Aharya of the performer. The extravagance seen in the Aharya prior to the Nayaka period, such as the variety of head ornaments, the low-hanging hip chains, the multi-layered hip chains and waist belts starts to taper out of fashion as early as the 17th-18th century in the Tamil region. Though an exact graph of evolution is unknown concerning the draping style, the material of the costumes mainly consisted of silk, cotton, and a gradual increase in materials borrowed from various regions such as muslin and organza. By the 19th century, the jewellery had been standardised to what we see on the contemporary Bharatanatyam dancer. At the same time, the draping style seems to have been the Kaccham style over a pyjama. A continuation of this discussion, from a sociological perspective, has been dealt with in Chapter 3 of this work.

2.6. To Summarise:

From the 2nd Century until the 20th Century, the texts that form the crux of this chapter serve as a window into the decorative practices and preferences of women through the ages. The texts that have been considered here reveal information on women and fashion trends in general, an overlaying of this image onto that of the Devadasi proves the fact that the Devadasi proved to be a symbol of prosperity and status of the kings, and hence they must have dressed in the best fashion that was in vogue in any given period. A commonality observed between both the Sanskrit and vernacular texts is the description of a dancer as wearing the *Kasturi Tilakam*, which is a reflection of their knowledge of the indigenous medicinal properties of the deer musk (Sahoo, K. N. et al. 2004). It is also interesting to note that the first mention of the Kasturi Tilakam that is seen in the selected Sanskrit treatises of this study is the *Nr̥tta Ratnavali*, which belongs to the same period as *Krishnakarnamrutam* (13th C.E.) by Lilasukha in which Krishna is described as adorning the Kasturi Tilaka. This indicates that either one of the texts influenced the other or that the musk mark on the forehead gained traction as a trend during this period.

Through an understanding of the different information from both the prescriptive texts like the Sanskrit treatises and descriptive texts like the vernacular and Western documents, it is evident that the Aharya in practice was very similar between the prescription and the description, barring a few elements. While the Sanskrit treatises began by treating dance as a part of dramatic production and provided information from the same perspective, vernacular

texts, from the very beginning, treated dance as a separate entity. Therefore, through the vernacular texts, we get a complete picture of the sartorial trends in the dance field. However, in Sanskrit texts, starting from the second period around 13th C.E., information on dancers is abundant, and Sanskrit literature cannot be ignored in serving as a source of information for regional practices. When consolidated, vernacular texts, Sanskrit texts, and Western writings provide a straightforward graph of the evolution of Aharya in the Southern part of the peninsular, mainly the Tamil-speaking regions (refer to Table 2.16. above). Pertaining to only textual references, the Aharya prescribed in later period texts were, in fact, an authentic reflection of societal practices. By how the seasonal change of Aharya is mentioned by both Ilango Adigal of the South and Kalidas of the North, it is safe to consider Aharya as a significant integral of the cultural ecosystem. Towards the later period, through the vernacular texts, it is inferred that Aharya was used as a tool to identify and, in many instances, as seen above, vilify the Devadasi of the period, progressively solidifying towards the early part of the 20th century. This identifying of a Dasi through her Aharya and equating it to an immoral act, in both regional and Western sources, clearly reflects how the Aharya itself had come to be associated with the tainted image that the Devadasis carried by late 19th and early 20th century, thus leading to an inevitable move to re-fashion the art form. However, the very fact that the jewellery was used as a medium to describe the beauty of the upper-class heroine such as Vasantavalli in Kuravanji the same was used to denigrate the image of Devadasis in texts like the Virali Vitu Tutu and Dasigal Mosavalai, is a sign of caste/class-based discrimination that had seeped into the society. Interestingly, while the profession faced backlash on the carnal front, during this very period, the art form reached its pinnacle under the patronage of Nayakas and Marathas.

Although many vernacular texts do not specify the way that the costume was worn, the researcher sees it as an indication that local authors did not pay particular focus to the attire since they were accustomed to the Aharya of the womenfolk since it resembled the common sartorial practices of the period. On the same nerve, European writings provide information on the costume from European sources since the way these dancers dressed was outlandish to them and therefore demanded documentation. These documentations imply that a Devadasi could be easily publicly identified just through their Aharya. A growing discomfort and an undercurrent of social reform can be sensed from the second half of the 19th century. By 1890, when the anti-nautch took shape, there was a decline in the descriptions of Aharya in Western texts and an increase in the critical discourse of the immorality of the Devadasi system, as resonated by

both Christian and Hindu reformists alike. The information gleaned from these texts will prove to be the undercurrent or subtext in a holistic understanding of the Aharya of the 16th – 20th C.E. when corroborated with the pictorial data becomes the focus of the argument of this thesis.

Chapter – 3

Sought, Shaped, and Shunned by Society

The Devadasi system has been in existence in some shape or form in all the ancient civilisations of the world. Yet, the Devadasi, shaped by society, has always borne the burn in case a question of morality is ever raised. Morality, like every other aspect of human perception, has constantly changed with time. Women's decorative practices have been a staple of the Tamil region since the beginning of time. This chapter aims to look at the period between the 16th century (the rise of Nayaka reign) to the early 20th century (The Madras Devadasis Act of 1947) to paint a cohesive and chronological picture of the changes in the patronage and position of the Devadasi that led to the changes in her Aharya. Interspersed with pictorial references, this chapter aims to provide a visual stance to the textual understanding of the previous chapter (Tracing through Texts). As a prelude to the next chapter, this chapter also discusses the historical developments of early 20th century India, and Tamilnadu, in shaping the Taste preferences of the public.

3.1. The Beginning:

The exact origin of the Devadasi system and its practice in the Tamil region is unknown. Subrahmanian. N (337) opines that a similar system might have existed even though the exact details are unknown. Arudra comments on the transition of a tribal mother, who was 'uninhabited by kinship in sexual relations', into a separate class of temple servants that later became the Devadasi community (17-18). A community of women who were in the public performance sphere is mentioned in the Akam poetry corpus and is understood to have been experts in dance, music, and drama. These women, termed as *Ceriparattai* or *kamakannigai*, were expected to "follow the king's entourage to the battlefield, accompany kings and queens in ceremonies as their bodyguards, and gave both public and court performances" (Subrahmanian 337). The *Manimekalai* (2nd – 6th C.E.) talks of courtesans whose role was to perform in both public and in courts, learn to make garlands, jewellery, and the art of make-up. The earliest evidence of what might be the beginning of the temple dancing tradition can be seen from the beginning of the Pallava rule as early as the 6th C.E. This is the period where the rulers encouraged mass migration of Vedic Brahmins from the Northern regions to the

Tamil region to secure their political supremacy. The Pallava rule followed the rule of the Kalabhras⁷⁷, and therefore high regard was paid to reinstating religious and cultural values. The Pallavas used religion and temple building as a tool to acquire and exercise power over the tribal groups who were mobilised and mass conditioned to follow the Agamic rituals (with the help of the Brahmins placed in every village) and eventually equate the king to the God (Sharma, R. S. 19). The Bhakti movement in Tamilnadu only propelled this thought into the minds of the common public.

Starting from the Chola period, the religious yoke was strengthened further. The Cholas used temple construction to spread the idea of cooperation, discipline, and devotion among their subjects since the temples were constructed in a way that was central to the village, provided job opportunities and avenues of revenue to the villagers, and physically towered over everything. For the Cholas, the temples were also meant to reflect their grandiosity and, in turn, their position as akin to God in the eyes of the public. In the hierarchy of the medieval king's administration that resembled that of the Gods, the Dasis played the role of the Dasis of the God himself. Similar to the description of the classes and functions of women attached to the harem as described by Bharata (Natyashastra, Chapter 34), the "temple establishment was modelled on the lines of that of the royal palace; and the personnel and servants of the temple were divided just as in the royal palace into 72 classes or *niyogas*" (Arudra 27). Hence the starting of the Devadasis dedicated to temples, which has been elaborately recorded in the Brihadeeswara Temple inscription of Raja Raja Chola (947-1014 C.E.), must have been to complete the process of equating the image of the king to that of the God, along with the borrowing of religious symbolisms such as the palanquin, the umbrella and Chamaram (Flywhisk). Arjun Appadurai views this as an "elegant and symbiotic division of the sovereignty" (51). In a loop of associating God to King and King to God, the Devadasi was dedicated to God, making her 'Nityasumangali', while the king had an Antahpura Parivara⁷⁸. Through his actual and symbolic association with the Devadasis of God, the king justified his position as akin to God. The Devadasi was married to God, making her the human embodiment of God's consort. Therefore, the courtly presence of the Devadasi (or a dancing girl) and her association with the kingship symbolised the king's sovereignty. The mass recruitment of

⁷⁷ A dynasty that ruled over Tamilnadu from 3rd to 6th C.E., who erased the religious and cultural practices of the region.

⁷⁸ A group of women who were devoted to the harem of the King. This group was dominated by artists, dancers and actresses along with the Queen and consorts. Refer to Natyashastra (Chapter 34), and Kamasutra (Book 4) for the details of their duties.

Devadasis to every temple built in the Chola reign proves the socio-political importance that these women held.

Major historical references do not give space to the agency of women in society. The women in historical references and epigraphical sources place women in three spheres of society: the royal household, temple/other sacred centres and prostitution. Many sources trace Devadasi back to the celestial nymphs, including Silapadikaram. Lakshmi Vishwanathan groups Devadasis into three main streams: Part of the king's entourage with a set of duties and an artistic repertoire suitable for court; as a ritual dancer in a temple; and a Kutcheri Dasi who served neither the king nor temple but possessed a repertoire more extensive than the other two. Before the decline of the Cholas and the overtake of the Later Pandyas, the dancing girl was categorised based on the sphere of performance ("Women" 8). Kapila Vatsyayan comments on how society had different spaces for the dancer who danced as an art and for the dancer who danced as a pretext for solicitation (162). Whatever the space of performance was, one lucid fact is that the Devadasis enjoyed a social status like no other in the Chola period and later. The Devadasis were often taken as concubines by the kings, and in one such instance, the image of the Devadasi, Nankai Paravai (also called Paravai Nachiyar), was kept inside the temple alongside the image of Rajendra Chola and rituals that are conducted for the God was conducted to the image of the Devadasi as well (Jeevanandam, S. 74). As early as the 11th century, it is gleaned from inscriptions that the favourite Devadasis also enjoyed special rights to use the royal paraphernalia such as the palanquin and umbrella, along with the privilege to open an evening of performance with their performance (Pudukottai State Inscription, No. 152).

The Devadasis held a special place in society with their association with temple rituals and their image as an ever-auspicious woman. This demanded their presence in all public and courtly events, where they were believed to create an air of auspiciousness. Post the Cholas, the role of Devadasi in a temple was fixed. She was expected to perform a plethora of responsibilities apart from just dancing. She took part in dancing, singing, cleaning, decorating, helping in clearing husks off rice, and in a few instances, even conducting the daily worship itself (ARIE 1938-1939, No. 338). In the court, they were responsible for inviting royal guests, their hospitality, and entertainment. The work of Lessie Orr (2000) deciphers the role of Devadasi to be more than just the above. She held such a position of respect in society that she was not only a devotee but also a donor, which meant that she had the economic affordability to help the temple when needed.

From the Bhakti poems of Tamilnadu, the role of Devadasi as women attached to the temple is first observed. The system that evidently sprouted in the Pallava period, was strengthened in the Chola period. This was weakened post-13th century due to internal conflicts in the Pandya rule and, ultimately, the invasion of Malik Kafur, the army general of Ala-ud-din Khilji. Much before the British, it was Khilji who was the first ‘outsider’ to be appalled by the dancing women in the public sphere. He ordered the “forced marriage of the dancing girls” (Jaffer, S.M. 184). As K. K. Pillai (1953) and K. Sadasivan (1993) point out, this invasion between 1310 C.E. - 1378 C.E. shook the very foundation of the temple as an institution of arts and culture and, with it, the Devadasi system. The rise of the Vijayanagara empire into prominence enabled the temples and the arts associated with it to replenish. The Vijayanagara rulers brought back the Devadasi system to life with their immense patronage, which their feudal, the Nayakas, took care of in the Tamil-speaking region. But post the Muslim invasion, the moral sense of the public started to sway. Later medieval inscriptions mention that the very association with Devadasi was immoral, while the same was considered auspicious enough even for the king in the pre-invasion times. With shifting patronages, the dancer changed to match her patron. While the court dancer dressed to impress the king, the courtiers, and guests of the royal household, the Devadasi confined to the temple, in all possibilities, did not have to dress to impress. It is believed that she wore the normal saree and had to only look presentable⁷⁹. Through the texts seen in the previous chapter, it is understood that the women, be it courtesan, or any women of the upper strata of the society, dressed in either cotton or silk and wore an array of jewellery. But the extent to which they dressed up is not clear. However, texts as early as the Periplus⁸⁰ describe the Tamil region to be exporters of soft cotton, silk, wool, and extremely transparent cotton with flower design, indicating the heights of craftsmanship in the region (Mukund, 18).

3.2. Nayaka Dynasty (1565-1675):

The Nayaka period is a period of importance to this study since, till then, the Devadasis dedicated to the temple had a clear demarcation from the dancing women associated with the court. It is during this period that the mingling of the duties of the court dancer and temple

⁷⁹ One of the last surviving Devadasis and Padma Shri Awardee, Viralimalai Muthukannammal in an interactive session titled ‘Get Real with Muthukannammal’ conducted by the Rangamandira trust on 06/08/2021, point to how she was dedicated to the temple of Viralimalai and was expected to dance every morning and evening. She wore only a normal saree and just wore Bindi, Tali, bangles, Salangai, and her hair neatly combed. But she also owned two silk costumes to wear, if she was invited to perform for any functions. Indicating a difference in the Aharya practices in the sacred and secular spaces even by 20th century.

⁸⁰ Periplus of the Erythraean Sea is a Roman period navigation guide to the Indian Ocean. Written in the 1st C.E.

dancer is witnessed. Lesslie C. Orr (1972) clearly states that the Devadasis of the early medieval period were starkly unlike their successors of the later medieval and early 20th century. The role that the Devadasis played in the Vijayanagar court and later the Nayaka court was interchangeable with that of the temple dancer. The Vijayanagara, as the Hindu saviours, took over the entirety of South India. By 1336, the Vijayanagara King Harihara I had taken his throne in their capital at the banks of river Tungabhadra. His representatives, the military chiefs (the Nayakas), were sent to Tamilnadu to govern on their behalf. Serving under their feudal lords, the Nayakas of Madurai, Tanjore, and Gingee maintained a rigid government where, to re-establish the integrity of the Hindu religion, culture, and practices, a strict class system was put into place. The class hierarchy set during this time had the Brahmins at the very top. Sanskrit and Telugu were widely used as the court language, and the Vijayanagara took the place of the Cholas in the South and took over their trade connections through the Indian Ocean. With the end of Vijayanagara rule with the Talakota war of 1565, the Nayakas sealed their territory around the Tamil region and declared themselves a free Kingdom.

The Devadasis, under the Nayaka rule, enjoyed a position of luxury. With the diminishing lines between the different spaces of performances, the form and the practitioner moved towards the “culture of Bhoga – of erotic longing and fulfilment” (Narayana Rao et al. 89). They lived a flamboyant lifestyle and were treated as women of the higher life, with them being eligible to even become queens. They were well-educated and well-dressed, as seen in the Western description of the dancing girls of Vijayanagara in the previous chapter. The dancing girls of the Tanjore Nayaka court even had the privilege to be poets and were often gifted with valuables as appreciation by the king. Many literary works penned by the Kings themselves, such as Raghunadhabhyudhayamu, have dancing girls playing prominent roles in society. Saskia C. Kersenboom notes two main roles of Devadasis during this period: one is to protect the ruler from evil eyes, and the second role is to add beauty to the courts of the already flamboyantly extravagant courts of the Nayakas. They were also to fulfil their ritual purpose by showing the Kumbhaarati⁸¹ for God, which was considered to be the highest of honours (38).

Sadasivan. K opines that this sudden shift in the performing spheres meant that the dancers had to imitate the dressing of other women in the court, including the queens (143). This must have led to the beginning of the dressing that is associated with the later-day

⁸¹ Waving of the pot-lamp to ward off evil eye

Devadasis. The Nayakas also saw the constant influx of Islam (from their association with the Deccan Sultanate) and Christianity (through traders who were interested in the coromandel coast). It was Sevappa Nayaka (1532 to 1560) who first let the Portuguese merchants settle down in Nagapattinam. This becomes the first settlement of a European company on the Coromandel Coast. They also allowed the Dutch East India Company to set up factories in Nagapattinam⁸² and Pulicat⁸³. Both Portugal and the Dutch started off as spice traders and “eyed the textile export trade eventually” (Manoranjithamoni, C. 290). Eventually, under the reign of Raghunatha Nayaka (1600–1634), the Danish East India Company was also granted permission to set up a trade for spice and cotton in the port of Tarangambadi⁸⁴ in 1610. Compared to the patronage by Pallavas, and Cholas, the patronage provided by the Nayakas, although encouraged the art form highly, could not sustain the Devadasi system due to the loss of a distinction between the different categories of Dasis. The Dasis, who were now faced with a situation where there were no prerequisites, except the knowledge of arts, to be a Devadasi, were forced to go in search of patrons even in the homes of the wealthy and were not bound to the court or temple. The new dressing style, therefore, followed no Agamic or textual rules since the aim was only livelihood and patronage.

The Tamil region has always been famous for its cotton and silk, and by this period, it was famous for its calico cotton and chintz⁸⁵ work on cotton. Through the Arab trade routes, materials like organza had started gaining traction in the region. Through the works of Vijaya Ramaswamy (1985) and David Washbrook (2009), it is inferred that it was during the Nayaka rule of Tamilnadu that the weaving and harvest centres of cloth and other related textile works were shifted from near the temple towns to the coast in order to enable the coastal trade that was flourishing by this time. Kanakalatha Mukund documents one such incident where weavers were given special incentives, such as tax evasion for grains, to migrate to Madras (121). Albeit being difficult to exactly point out the articles of clothing or materials that this change in the political climate of Tamilnadu, which was now being ruled by Non-native Rulers, and the subsequent disorientation of the Devadasi system caused in the Aharya of the Devadasi, it is certain that the Nayaka rulers changed the dress code of the courtiers to match the Islamic/Persian dressing style followed in the courts of the Deccan Sultanate. This change was further tweaked to match the Maratha style of clothing, which was still a variation of the Persian

⁸² A district in Tamilnadu

⁸³ Also called Pazhaverkadu, is a town in Tiruvallur district of Tamilnadu

⁸⁴ Tranquebar, a port town in Mayiladudurai district in Tamilnadu

⁸⁵ Similar to Kalamkari technique

style. Lennart Bes comments that “Under the influence of conventions in the Islamic world, these rulers are thought to have appeared in such dress on occasions of a ‘public’ nature, whereas in situations of a more ‘domestic’ character, they would wear traditional clothing associated with Hindus” (1795). This meant that the Devadasis, who were by now courtesans, had to dress to impress in public appearances since even the kings resorted to such tactics of sartorial impressions.

Along with the textual references of the previous chapter, an analysis of the pictorial evidence of the Devadasis dressing style during the Nayaka period (1535 – 1675) using mural paintings, Western depictions, and sculptures would prove important to the current study.



Img. 3.1.a. & b.: Nataraja Temple complex; Shivakamasundari shrine; Chidambaram 17th century
(Courtesy: southindianpaintings.art, enhanced by Karthik Jirra)

The mural seen here is a 17th-century creation of the Nayaka period in Tamilnadu. Both the dancers sport a bodice on top, under which the first dancer seems to be in a pyjama costume, while the second dancer is wearing a saree draped under which she wears the Nijar⁸⁶. With an array of jewellery very similar to that of the previous centuries, they are seen having their hair tied in a knot. While the first dancer (3.1.a) has a long cross garland, the second dancer (3.1.b.) seems to be missing this. Yet another aspect seen in the second dancer is the translucent saree that is draped around her, the border of which is seen near her shank. Both their bodices reach elbow length. Both wear the Talaisaman, rows of necklaces and hip chains; the hip chain of the first dancer seems more elaborate. This leads to the understanding that the first dancer was more prominent than the second.

⁸⁶ “The term nijaar has its origins in the English word ‘knickers’ which is etymologically derived from the Dutch language, and denotes inner pants.” (Ganesh Swarnamalya. 2021)



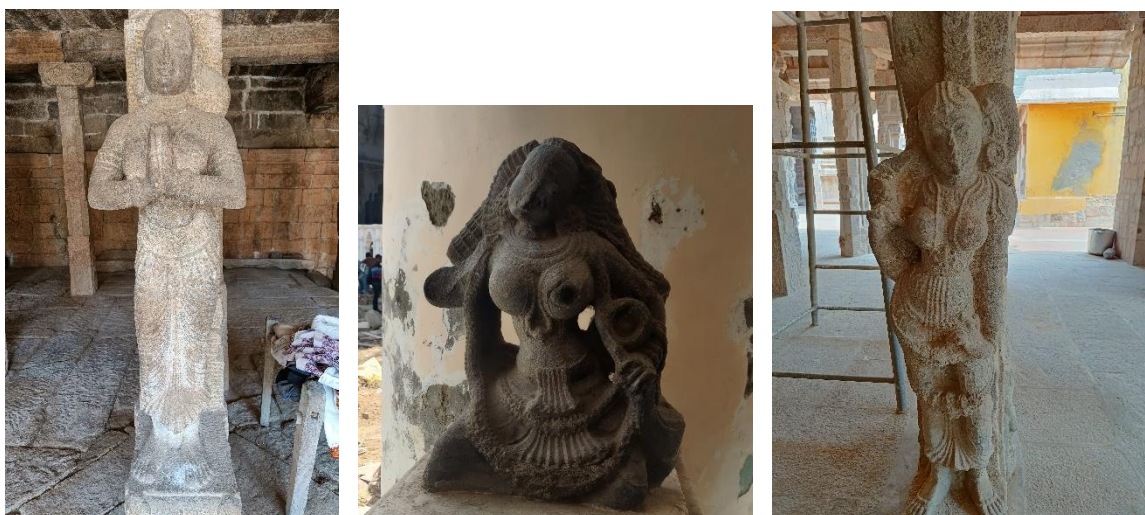
Img. 3.2.a. & b.: Tyagaraja Temple; Devasiriyam mandapa; Tiruvarur. 17th century
(Courtesy: southindianpaintings.art, enhanced by Karthik Jirra)

A similar costume style is seen in the mural of Tiruvarur, where all three dancers depicted in both murals wear the cross garland seen in Img. 3.1.a. here, the pyjama costume is more prominent, with the pyjama and the centre fan flared visibly.



Img. 3.3.a. & b.: Tyagaraja Temple; Devasiriyam mandapa; Tiruvarur
(Courtesy: southindianpaintings.org)

Another set of murals that provides a distinct view of the costume is shown in Img. 3.3.a. & b. above. The dancers are seen wearing a translucent saree pleated and draped under which they wear a Nijar. Along with the hair in a top knot, the head ornaments are elaborate. They are seen here wearing the Talaisaman, the Tirugupoo on the knot and a few unknown ornaments that are seen on the hair knot. Three rows of hip chains are visible here, and seen on the upper arm is the arm-band, which is tied on their bodice, as deciphered from the tassels that are shown hanging from their hands.



Img. 3.4.a.: Kudumiyam Malai, Trichy – 16th Century (Courtesy: Author)

Img. 3.4.b.: Tanjore Palace Museum - 16th Century (Courtesy: Author)

Img. 3.4.c.: Patteeswaram, Kumbakonam – 15th Century (Courtesy: Author)

Sculptures of the period provide us with details of the ornaments that were less visible in the murals. All three sculptures above depict the dancer in a pyjama costume with elaborate central pleats, seen fanned between their legs in Img. 3.4. a. and 3.4.c. The cross garland seen in the murals is much more elaborate in Img 3.4. b. and show immense details of craftsmanship. While Img 3.4. a. shows an elaborate and ornate hip chain, almost resembling the present-day Odissi hip chain and two chunky thigh belts are seen in Img 3.4.c. All three sculptures depict three rows of necklaces, the third one descending between their bosom. The Flywhisk bearer in Img. 3.4.c. is seen sporting a shoulder ornament, and her pyjama seems to have embroidery of creepers on it.

As gleaned from the texts of the given period of the Nayaka reign (discussed in Chapter 2 of this study), it is inferred that the dancers wore either a pyjama costume or a Saree draped under which they wore a pyjama called Nijar, which Swarnamalya Ganesh (Through, 10) opines, is a direct influence of the Dutch who were already conducting trade in Nagapattinam. The ornaments, including the cross garlands, are made of pearls, emeralds and other precious gems. The hair was either done up in a chignon or a top knot and, sometimes, a plait (Img.3.5.b.). The hair was decorated with Rakodi, Tirugupoo, Pearls, Talaisaman, and Chandra and Surya Pirai. On their neck, they wore rows of different necklaces, and on their waist was a tight Oddiyanam and two rows of hip chains. On their feet were anklets, ankle rings, and salangai. On their hands are arm bands, various bangles, and rings. The costume is made of either silk (as seen in Img. 3.2.) or translucent material such as muslin (as seen in Img. 3.1. and 3.3.). Ornaments such as the shoulder chain, the thigh belt, and the ornate necklaces all

corroborate with the details seen in Table 2.13. of Chapter 2. While the murals show bodices, the erosion of sculptures denies one the opportunity to read these finer details. The bodices must have been short since the lower part of the breasts is visible in the murals and stucco sculptures such as the one below (Img. 3.5.a and 3.5.b.).



Img. 3.5.a.: Nataraja Temple complex; Shivakamasundari shrine; Chidambaram – 17th century.
(Courtesy: southindianpaintings.art)

Img. 3.5.b.: Darbar Hall, Tanjore Palace. 16th century. (Courtesy: Author)

3.3. Sethupathis of Ramnad (1605 – 1794):

Even though they were a subordinate of the Madurai Nayakas, the Sethupathis of Ramnad (Ramanathapuram) deserve to be included in this study of the Aharya. As Leslie C. Orr puts it, the practices of the Devadasis changed greatly even within Tamilnadu, with multiple rulers ruling at the same time (192). The Sethupathis of Ramanathapuram, also known as the Maravar Kingdom, were appointed by Muthu Krishnappa Nayak (1564-1572) of Madurai in 1604 to protect the fringe area of the Nayak rule, the present-day Ramnad district, from dacoits - both of land and water since the area lies on the seashore very close to the Ram Sethu⁸⁷. Along with established trade routes in the Bay of Bengal, the Sethupathis were also very amicable with the Muslim traders of the region, piquing the interest in a look for inter-cultural exchanges. The Setupati clan peaked during the rule of Kilavan Setupati⁸⁸ (1673-1708), who, for all intents and purposes, declared the Ramnad Kingdom as a free region that is ruled by the Setupatis and is no longer a subordinate of the Nayakas of Madurai. The Ramnad palace is attributed to him, and his rule is considered by historians as the most defining in Setupati history. Though the palace was built by Kilavan Setupati, the Ramalinga Vilasam, essentially a two-storeyed

⁸⁷ Hence the name Sethupathi – Lord of the Sethu

⁸⁸ Referred to as Kilavan Setupati, his official name was Raghunatha Setupati.

Durbar Hall within the Palace compound, was built by Kilavan Setupati's successor Muthu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati (1713-1725).

The first fresco (Img. 3.6) is a scene depicting two dancers, accompanied by one male percussionist, one female musician playing a string instrument and a Nattuvanar wielding the cymbals. There are also three female onlookers, two on the right and one on the left. The dancer on the right has her hair up in a bun with flower strands flowing from it. The bun has a hair pin of sorts on it painted in a way to suggest that it was either made of diamonds or pearls. On her head, she has a pearl string Nethichutti. A new kind of ornament, a single strand of pearl string, adorns the head on either side of the nethichutti, where the trained eye is used to seeing the traditional Chandran and Surya Pirai. She is wearing a large stud on her ear with a Maatal connecting it to the Koppu on top. A Nathu Bullacku on her nose and an array of pearl and possibly ruby-embedded short Haarams and addigai around her neck. She is seen wearing a two-stranded pearl (or diamond?) long Haaram with a Rakodi-like brooch on her right side that reaches her abdomen. At the top of her lower garment is a thin Oddiyanam, followed by a flowing hip chain that seems to be made of three to four layers of pearls and gems strung together to form a flowing band that goes from one side of the waist, reaching mid-thigh level, and to the other side of the waist. The Salangai are not visible. Across her torso is a semblance of an ornament, much like the sacred thread (often seen in sculptures from this period and prior) that is knotted on her right shoulder. She wears a Bajuband that is clearly tied on top of her sleeves and an array of thin red bangles with a pearl Kada on both ends. Rings adorn almost all of her fingers. As a costume, she wears a red blouse with embellishment around her bosom. The lower half of the costume is a red Nijaar⁸⁹, on top of which she has a translucent saree-like fabric draped to form the long centre fan and also the Pallu seen tucked and flowing near her hip.



⁸⁹ An inner pants worn under the costume for comfort, derived from the Dutch 'Knickers'. Here it seems to serve aesthetic purpose also. See Swarnamalya Ganesh, 2021, 10.

Img. 3.6. Dancers and Musicians, Ramalinga Vilasam, Ramnad, 18th century.

(Courtesy: southindianpaintings.art)

The dancer to the left is almost similarly dressed except that her hair is in a braid with a Jadai Nagam adorning the length of it. Her sacred thread is tied on the left shoulder, and the brooch on her long Haaram is to her left. Her Addiagi is more accurately visible and seems to have a Ruby stone in the centre. She wears a similar red blouse and Nijaar, but her translucent saree has black horizontal lines along the length of it and gives a clear picture of the drape and flow.



Img. 3.7. Court Dancers, Ramalinga Vilasam, Ramnad. 18th century.

(Courtesy: southindianpaintings.art)

The second dance fresco is in the King's Bedroom on the first floor on top of the third room. The dance fresco in question is on the west wall of the room. The scene depicted is the king watching a dance performance flanked by his consort and a toddler (probably the Prince), and other women of the court (Img. 3.7.). It is worth noting that every character in this painting except the king is female since this part of the palace was considered as the interior and the personal space, the Antahpuram as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. There are four dancers and a female Nattuvanar, a female singer and a female percussionist. All four dancers wear jewellery similar to that portrayed in the previously discussed fresco (Img. 3.6.). Few of the differences seen is that two of the dancers have their hair braided but seem to have a strand of white flower twirled around the length of the braid. All four of them have an additional ornament to their head apart from the extra strand of pearl. They all have the Chandran and Surya Pirai along with a side Nethichutti that looks very similar to the sideways Tikka worn by Kathak dancers. This is a sign of the Islamic influence that had seeped into the Vijayanagar courtly practices, which were mimicked by their feudal kingdoms like that of Ramnad. What sets this one apart from the previous one is the details that are much more prominently visible in this fresco, including the colours of the jewellery. In this, it is understood that the brooch in

the haaram that was previously discussed is, in fact, a separate necklace with a circular pendant and the long haaram is a separate jewel on its own. It is seen that the blouse is buttoned in front, and where it is buttoned, there is a separate pendant in a diamond shape attached to the blouse. The details in colour enable the study of the stones in the jewellery are emerald (green), ruby (red) and diamond (white) and all the hangings from the ornaments must have been pearls. The flowing hip chain is a beautiful piece of stringed white, green and red stones with the same drops on the lower end. The ear stud is not a stud but a large ring much similar to the Chola period sculptures. The costumes, as mentioned, are almost the same except for the lack of a Melakku and Pallu. They also do not have embellishments over their bosom, but their blouses do leave the lower half of their bosom bare, as seen in Maratha period murals of early 20th C.E.⁹⁰ which is more than a century after this fresco, indicating the carrying forward of this fashion. The lower half of the costume looks like a pyjama, over which a translucent cloth, most probably a saree, has been draped to form the long centre fan. The fabric in this painting has different motifs, such as flowers and dotted borders, which can be block printed and hand-dyed cotton from areas such as Machilipattnam.

The use of translucent cloth, which can either be muslin or organza, shows the development of the trend that started in the Nayaka period. A study of the other murals of the Ramalinga Vilasam shows that the manner in which the dancers dressed was not entirely different from how the royal women dressed. The abundance of pearls, rubies, and other precious gems, is a reflection of the thriving sea trade that the Setupathis had established through their stronghold over the Ram Sethu canal.

3.4. Maratha Period (1676 – 1855):

The Nayaka reign fell when local turbulence between the Tanjore Nayakas and the Madurai Nayakas resulted in the Madurai Nayakas overtaking the Tanjore province. One of the sons of the Tanjore Nayak Vijaya Raghava sought the help of the Bijapur Sultanate to get the throne back, and this was done with the help of the Sultanate's Maratha general Venkoji (1676-1683 C.E.). In an unexpected turn of events, the Maratha general decided to keep the Tanjore province to himself and established the Tanjore Maratha rule. It is to be noted that Venkoji (Alias Ekoji) was Chatrapati Shivaji's younger brother. The Tanjore Maratha kingdom

⁹⁰ Early 20th C.E. murals, Periyannayaki Shrine, Tiruvalanjuli.

held a strong connection with their mother state, Maharashtra and added Marathi into the multi-lingual milieu that Tanjore already was. He and his successors ruled over the Tanjore province for the next century and a half by acculturating themselves to the existent cultural practices of the region instead of forcing their Maratha culture entirely upon their subjects. The dance practice that was already brought into the courtly lives of the Nayakas was further encouraged and developed during the period of the Marathas. Unlike the kings before them, the Marathas did not strive to geographically expand the kingdom but rather focused on maintaining their territory within which they patronised and developed a highly advanced form of literature, arts, and other sciences. Artists from all over the country travelled to the Tanjore Maratha's court and were received with open arms. This mingling of various artists from various regions also resulted in many cultural transactions between the artists, which was especially reflected in the repertoire of the art form.

The Devadasis of this period were encouraged to be experts in literature, music and dance. With the constant inflow of both musicians and Nattuvanars, the dancers constantly learnt new repertoire to impress the king, who were artists and scholars themselves and also were generous in their appreciation of the art through various gifts. They patronised various literary formats that were suitable for dance, including forms like Kuravanji and Bhagavata Mela Natakam, that was patronised during the Nayaka period. As proof of the Maratha period being the pinnacle of Sadir development, the Tanjore Quartets⁹¹ were patronised by the Maratha kings, especially the period of Tulaja II (1763-1787). Hari Krishnan points to the fact that the Devadasis' courtly performances were codified into "structured and systemised forms called Sadir Kutcheri" during the reign of the Marathas (74). Shahaji II, also called the Abhinaya Bhoja, composed many works for dance. It was during this period that the Devadasis were completely involved in the courtly performances where they were expected to perform for every full moon, rituals, Marathi festivals, the arrival of guests, public appearance of Kings, and many other occasions, indicating their importance in the curated creation of the public image of the king solely based on the dancer's presence and grandeur.

But the Devadasi of the Maratha period was also not of a good image with the public, as seen from textual evidence in Chapter 2 of this work. The role of the Devadasi was now entirely dependent on her patron, the king and the wealthy men of the town, and her wealth came from the lands, gold, and other gifts that she received from the king. In order to keep the

⁹¹ Chinnayya, Ponnaiyah, Shivanandam, and Vadivelu who codified the modern Bharatanatyam

wealth within her reach, the eldest of the Devadasi house⁹² often adopted a girl child with the permission of the temple authority since only a “girl child was permitted to relish her mother’s property after her lifetime” (Jeevanandam, S. 139). In the peak of the Devadasi patronage, the overtly public life of the Devadasi in the public eye “overshadowed her ritualistic purpose” (Kersenboom, 47), which might have pushed her deep into the dependency on material emphasis in order to sustain. The British, who had already well established their hold on the Coromandel Coast, were not far from usurping the Tanjore throne and therefore, the Devadasi system was patronised by the Marathas in a highly volatile political climate where the Kings could materialistically protect the system but could not do so politically. Eventually, in 1855, by implementing the Doctrine of Lapse⁹³, the Tanjore province was finally felled.

It was during the very beginning of the Maratha rule, under the reign of Ekoji, that the Dutch East India Company was allowed to settle down in Nagapattinam (1674). The Maratha king Shahaji II also let the French East Indian Company acquire Karaikal and Pondicherry in 1739. The Maratha rule saw a stable import and export of materials, including silk, from China. Other articles that were imported include sandalwood, rosewater, and saffron from other parts of India (Gough, 85). It was also during this period Nagapattinam was famous for woven cotton cloth (called calico) and silk cloth. Yet another interesting part of this period is the development of a systematically tested beauty regime, as prepared, experimented with, and documented by Raja Serfoji (1788 – 1832). This document, called Anubhoga Vaidya Bhaga, contains recipes for skin care and other make-up regimen. A few of the make-up referred to were lip balm, skin scrub, hair removal, and mouth freshener, among others. The existence of such documentation is proof of the beautification process that the court dancers must’ve gone through, given their proximity to the king. Yet another proof of their make-up routine can be gleaned from the European writings seen in Chapter 2, which mentions the usage of eyeliner and nail polish and a widespread acknowledgement of how these dancers always left a trail of the fragrance.

The pictorial evidence is abundant during the Maratha period, owing to the number of foreign travellers during this timeframe. Among both Native and Western artists, a large number of pictorial data is at our disposal for a study.

⁹² Referred to as Taaikizhavi

⁹³ Sivaji II did not have any male heir and therefore after his death in 1855, the throne was annexed to British Government



Img 3.8.: Brihannayaki Shrine. 19th century. (Courtesy: The Hindu, Newspaper)

This mural seen in Img. 3.8. is remarkable for its depiction of a dancer, followed by the Tanjore Quartet. This places this image at the end of the 18th or early 19th century. This depiction is important not because it portrays a distinctly different style of Aharya but since it serves as proof that traditions of one rule flowed easily into the practices of the next until the public acclimated themselves to the aesthetic and decorative practices of the new ruler, which eventually reflected in their sartorial practice. The dancer here is seen in a costume similar to that seen in the Nayaka period, albeit with minor variations, indicating the continuation of preferences.



Img. 3.9.a.: Maratha Period Dancer, Subrahmanya Shrine, Brihadeeswara Temple, Tanjore. 19th century.

(Courtesy: Jayakumar Sundararaman's Instagram Handle. @jayakumarbharadwaj)



Img. 3.9.b.: Maratha Queen Kamakshi Bai (1855-1885), Tanjore. (Courtesy: serfojimemorialhall.com)

Img. 3.9.a. is a perfect example of a dancer during the peak of Maratha's patronage. She is seen wearing a saree draped in the Kaccham fashion, wherein the saree is tied normally over a pyjama and the loose end is taken between the legs and tucked at the back. The pallu is seen hanging to one side of her waist. The blouse, continuing in the Nayaka style, reveals the under part of her bosom, while the material itself, of both the saree and the blouse, is

embroidered. The saree has a gold border, indicating Zari work, which suggests that the costume was made of silk or cotton with gold Zari stitched on it, which seems to have been common practice. On her head, she wears a single Nethichutti, with Chandra Pirai and Surya Pirai. To her left is a brooch-like ornament that has tassels of pearls hanging, and to the right, she has an extra top knot-like ornament which again has pearl hangings on it. On her nose is the bullakku, and her ears carry a variety of ear ornaments, including a large gold Jhumki with pearl hangings, a fan-like upper earlobe piercing and a few inner ear rings (tragus piercings). This stiff necklace is also seen even today in regions of Maharashtra such as Kohlapur. She wears an Addigai, three layers of necklaces and a large metal ring-like stiff neck-wear that is observed in other depictions of the period. She wears the upper arm band and a few bangles and rings on her finger. On her feet is the Tandai. Her hair is in a plait, which is rarely seen in earlier depictions, and it is adorned with a traditional Jadai Nagam and ends with the ornamental balls, Kunjalam. The ornamental cross garland that has been a staple from the Nayaka period is also seen here.

The Maratha period being the peak of patronage, is reflected here since her attire, including the unique hair ornaments seen on her, is also seen on the portrait of Queen Kamakshi Bai (1855-1885), the last queen of Tanjore Marathas (Img. 3.9.b.). A very strong depiction of the practice of the Devadasi imitating the decorative practices of the upper class of the society. Another fact observed here is that she is seen wearing much of the jewellery that was mentioned as banned by the Maratha rulers for the use of a courtesan. The list provided in Chapter 2 mentions that the Devadasi was not allowed to wear the Krishna Kondai, the side-to-knot-like ornament seen in the above mural. They were also restricted from wearing Bullaku, the septum ring, which the dancer here is sporting. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the list of regulations, the dancer here is not wearing the complete Thalaisaman, the horizontal Kumkum mark on the forehead, and the Salangai. It is either that the regulations were sometimes not adhered to or that the dancer depicted here must have been of a special proximity to the king in order for her to receive special privileges.

European-commissioned murals of the same period depict the dancer in a different manner. The murals below (Img. 3.10.) are different depictions of the same period and are a part of the company paintings of the British period (before the annexation of the Tanjore region). They depict dancers in a Kaccham-style costume without the pyjama underneath. The

saree itself, in a Madisaar fashion⁹⁴, is draped to reveal the calf muscle and the midriff. The blouse, embroidered, is very short and exposes the lower part of the breast. Their sarees seem to be made of diaphanous material like muslin or organza, but the blouse might be velvet-like or silk. The dancer in Img 3.10.c. wears the Kaccham with the extra fabric tucked between her legs and the Mundhanai/Pallu part tucked on her waist. While two of them have their hair in a knot, the third dancer has her hair in a plait with the ornamental Jadai Nagam and Kunjalam. The first two dancers do not sport a Nethichutti or Chandra Pirai and Surya Pirai but do wear the Rakodi and Tirugupoo. The third dance wears a full Talaisaman, with pearl details on it and wears a Rakodi. All three wear a crescent-shaped ornament right below the Rakodi, which might be the top part of a traditional Jadai Nagam. They are seen sporting the Koppu, Jhumki, and pearl Maatal. They wear a Nathu and Bullaku on their nose and a huge red Bindi on their forehead. They wear the Addigai, two layers of beaded necklaces, a long chain and a Tali. A single-layer Oddiyanam is seen on their waist. They are seen with the arm band and bangles. On their feet are the tight ankle ring, Tandai, and heavy toe rings.



Img. 3.10.a, b., & c.: Dancing Girls, 1780 Madras or Tanjore. (Courtesy: Victoria & Alebert Museum)

As mentioned in the discourse of Chapter 2, a few European illustrations that are accompanied by texts describing the Devadasi are discussed below.

Jacob Haafner (1754-1809), the famous Dutch lover of the Devadasi named Mamia, notes down the difference in the different classes of the dancing girls. He divides them into two, the Devadasis who are attached to the temple and those who are called to perform in

⁹⁴ Madisaar is a Brahmin way of draping the nine-yard saree in a way that each side is taken between the legs and tucked at the back, while one end is taken over the left shoulder, the other free end is pleated and tucked in the front, forming the centre pleats

“Natches (festivals) and on other occasions to entertain the guests” (qtd in Scobie 83). He also describes the dancer as wearing “simple headdress, and moderate exposure of her beautiful bosom, her rounded arms with the tight-fitting bodice” (qtd. in Scobie 73). This description is a part of his work *Reize in eenen Palanquin* (1808). The picture that accompanies this text is quite peculiar in the sense of how soft and European the dancer is depicted here.



Img. 3.11.: Illustration by Jacob Haafner. (Courtesy: Francis Prichett Collection)

The depiction here seems to be a romanticised version of reality, given Haafner’s love interest being a Devadasi. Though the jewellery does not seem accurate, the draping looks similar to that of the dancer portrayed in Img. 3.10.c.

Following this is a description by Eugene Burnouf (1801-1852), a Philologist, whose text *L’Inde Francaise* (1828) contains a beautiful description and an illustration of a dancer named Kamalatchi (Cammalatchi) whose performance he saw in Pondicherry.

“Among the various jewels with which the dancers decorate their hair, ears and noses, one notices, suspended from their neck, the little ornament called a tali, which, in common with married women, they have the right to wear. (...) Like all the rich women of India, they coddle themselves greatly to guarantee for themselves the ardours of the sun itself, rubbing all visible parts of their bodies with saffron for lightening their tone of their skins.”

(L’Inde Francaise, 75)

Two things stand out in this description; one is the way he places the Devadasi with “all the rich women”, showing their economic position in the society. Second, the mentioning of saffron applied to their body, much akin to the practice deciphered in Chapter 2 from Sanskrit and vernacular texts and treatises. Below is the image of Kamatchi. The intrinsic detail of the jewel resembles what the dancers of today wear. The translucency of the saree with the golden

border indicates that the material must have been muslin. And finally, the way the blouse is stitched, as seen in many other renditions of the blouse in both the Maratha and Post-Maratha periods, shows that the exposure of the bosom was a common practice during this period. But what stands out here is the complete exposure of the breast. This is the only illustration in this study that portrays this complete nudity of the breasts. If this was not practised at this period, this depiction might be credited to the illustrator letting his imagination take the lead by depicting the Devadasi true to the perceived sensuality that the society, especially the Westerners associated the dancing girls with, indicating a total disassociation from the spirituality that was initially intended of the community.



Img. 3.12. Kamalatchi, Pondicherry. (Courtesy: gallica.bnf.fr)

It was during this period that a group of five dancers from the Vishnu temple of Thiruvendhipuram⁹⁵ travelled on an eighteen-month contract to Europe for a series of performances in London, Germany, and France. The following are a few descriptions of the dancers, along with the illustrations.

L'Entracte, Merseilles, 1838:

“Their arms entwined by bracelets of a bizarre shape and by blue tattoos... rings of gold hang from their ears, their nostrils, and their lips... they wear at their necks an ornament in the shape of a heart that signifies marriage.”

⁹⁵ A town in Cuddalore district, Tamilnadu

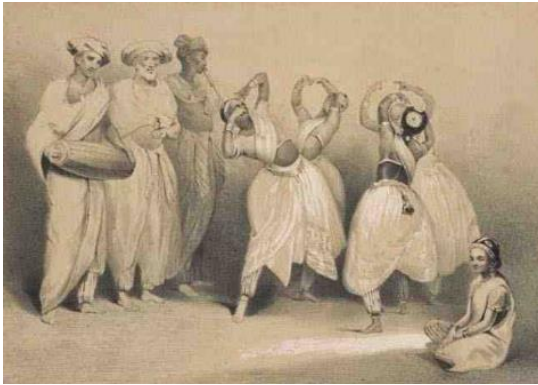
The Fly, Princeton University, 1838:

*“Their costume is lighter and more elegant than that of the Nautch dancers, and their general appearance is far from immodest (...). The dress of these females is the most gorgeous and picturesque imaginable. They are sometimes loaded with jewels from head to foot, for they occasionally wear rings on their toes. Their necks are adorned with carcanets, their arms with bracelets, and their ankles with chains of gold and silver enriched with precious stones. They also wear nose jewels that have at first an odd appearance but to which the eye soon becomes reconciled. **They have a peculiar way of preserving the shape of their breasts, which they enclose in a pair of hollow cups or cases made of very light wood, exactly fitted to them and buckled at the back. These at once prevent the breasts from becoming too large, and yet, by their pliancy, play so freely with every motion of the body that they occasion no inconvenience to the wearer.** The outside of this curious stay is overlaid with thin gold or silver plate, set with gems &c. They form a black circle round their eyelids by drawing a bodkin between them while closed, in order that both lids may receive the tint of the powder of antimony which is placed on the bodkin. This powder is called Sturma; it refreshes the eye, excites its lustre, and increases its darkness.*

By way of petticoat, they wear the Lungee; a long piece of silk or cotton stuff, which is girdled round the loins, and comes down to the middle of the leg. The upper part, fitting closely, marks with great accuracy the roundness and swell of the figure; and tapering away to the legs gives that loose flow to the lower part of the Lungee, which the Greek statuaries were so fond of expressing in the drapery of their nymphs, whilst the jewels and chains with which their ankles are adorned have somewhat the appearance of the tragic buskin. Loose silk or cotton trousers are attached to the waist by a rich girdle; they also wear an open vest, which leaves the arms exposed nearly to the shoulder and descends halfway down the breast. The space between the girdle and the border of the vest is uncovered, and nothing can be more beautiful than this partial view of their bronzed and polished bosom-so smooth and shining that it might be taken for a satin corset. The chemise is a luxury perfectly unknown to the Bayadères. A scarf of fine muslin, ornamented with flowers and gold embroidery, surrounds the girdle and

falls gracefully before and behind over the left shoulder. These scarfs are of various colours, according to the fancy of the wearer.”

(The Fly, 1938)



Img. 3.13.a.: Illustration of the 1838 performance. (Courtesy: thehindu.com)



Img. 3.13.b.: Statue of Ammani by Jean Auguste Barre. (Courtesy: mutualart.com)

This is one of the first proper illustrations of the saree over a pyjama costume of the later Maratha period (post-annexation). As seen here in Img 3.13., the dancers sport a short bodice, and a pyjama, with the saree tied over it in a way that the inner layer is tucked between the legs for ease of movement, the outer part is pleated and the remaining taken over the left shoulder. The ornate end is pleated and tucked in front to form the front fan. The sculpture of Ammani shows elaborate brocade work on the saree, which must be the Tuyya Zari work stitched on to decorate the costume. They wear the traditional Talaisaman, Rakodi and their hair in a long braid that is adorned with the Kunjalam at the end. On their neck is a variety of necklaces, including the Tali. They have bangles and arm-bands on their hand. On their feet is the Salangai. However, a discrepancy seen between the illustration and the bronze bust of Ammani is that the costumes in the illustration are portrayed as having the back tucked, while the sculpture shows that the back looks like the drape of the normal saree.



Img. 3.14.: Tanjore Dancers in Baroda 1881. (Courtesy: sathirdance.wordpress.com)

Through the description and the pictures, it can be presumed that the dancers wore a complete Kaccham style costume, which then evolved to the saree over pyjama costume that was followed till the redesigning of the Aharya in the 1930s. They wear the usual jewellery except that the early Maratha period dancers wore the Krishna Kondai and Nathu-Bullaku, while by the end of the Maratha rule, the grandeur of the costumes seems to have been tamed, but the bulkiness has increased. This may be due to the preference for silk and Tuyya Zari, which gives a stiff look to the costume. It is to be noted that by this time, the element called a *Salla* was a staple in the Sadir costume. Made of Organza with strips of Tuyya Zari stitched over it in different patterns and motifs, it was worn as the front fan, which considerably increased the bulkiness of the costumes as seen in the photograph of the Tanjore dancers in Baroda⁹⁶ seen in Img 3.14. Except for the saffron paste, and eye make-up, reference to any other make-up products used do not come up in any descriptions but going by the common practice of the period, they must have used beetle leaves or beetroot juice to colour their lips. The hairstyle can be seen as the Nayaka style chignon in the earlier parts, while the later dancers wore their hair in a braid. This is a sign of shifting tastes and preferences and the advent of new hair accessories that would better suit braided hair.

⁹⁶ A troupe consisting of two Devadasis was sent as a dowry to the Tanjore princess who married the Prince of Baroda.

3.5. Nautch and Salon Performances (1855 – 1930):

The British, through their East India Company, had already established themselves as a governing force since they landed on the Coromandel coast at Madarasapattinam⁹⁷. They had started out trading in Cotton textiles from the Tamil region, which was in high demand in the European market. The British, who gradually rose to power, for obvious reasons, found the art of Sadir and its practitioners against the purity preached by Christianity. As seen in the writings of the Western travellers in the previous chapter, the Devadasi, her art, and her Aharya was seen through the lens of either the image of the Christian equivalent – the Vestal Virgins, or through the Christian morality. More than the question of morality, the Devadasi was an object of interest that the Christian overlords enjoyed even from the beginning of their advent into the coromandel coast. The increasing demonisation of the community of women, who were the only ones who were educated and held agency over their economic and individual freedom, by the European officials, travellers, and Christian missionaries that were rapidly spreading in the coasts of South India must have seeped into the thoughts of the natives since the same perspective was seen in the post 16th C.E. writings of the regions too.

The British Government, which annexed the Tanjore Maratha principality by utilising the Doctrine of Lapse in 1855, created a void in the traditional Hindu institutions and patronage practices, especially that of temple priests and the Devadasis. This led to a large migration of Devadasis and Nattuvanars from the southern districts to Madras, the newly established business hub that was entirely under British control, where “the Salon Nautch was already thriving” (Soneji, ‘Unfinished’, 67). By this time, the Dasis were equated to the common prostitute. The Devadasis found refuge in the growing urban elite of Madras’s Blacktown⁹⁸, most of whom were accountants and translators for the British officials. These urban elites found themselves donning the role of a patron (they also adopted entire temples in Madras) and hired dancing women to do the rituals at the temple and to entertain both local and white guests at private soirees that they hosted at their mansions. The Devadasis resorted to all sorts of gimmicks since their major source of employment, courtly patronage, was suddenly pulled from beneath their feet. One such account of Chennai Nellaiyappa Nattuvanar’s (1859-1905), grandson of Ponnaiyah Pillai of the Tanjore Quartet, students performed a Varnam in Mylapore

⁹⁷ The land was given by the Damarla Venkatadri Wandiwash, who was a governor of the later Vijayanagara Kingdom. He governed over Chennapatnam which he had named after his father Chennappa Nayaka. The land was given in 1639 (for rent) in the middle of 17th century.

⁹⁸ When George Town of Madras was established with the St. George Fort, the native settlement that formed around the fort was referred to as Black Town.

in which vegetables were tied to their costume and knives placed at strategic positions, cut the vegetables one by one after every rhythmic sequence (Knight, D. 2018; Sundaram, 2003; Soneji, 2014). The British, although they enjoyed these ‘Nautch parties’, also despised the practice of the art form and the lewdness of it. Anupama Taranath notes how the English masters patronised the salon performances and anchored them on the sexuality and lasciviousness of the dancing female body in order to “encourage comprehension of the unfamiliar on a more general level, to partake in various excesses, sexual and otherwise, that India seemed to offer” (Taranath, 15). These Nautch parties (as Lakshmi Vishwanathan terms it) or Salon Nautch (as Daves Soneji terms it in *Unfinished Gestures*) became the reason for the ultimate downfall and vilification of the dancer. During this period of raising voices against the system, the Dasis, “though openly condemned for their lifestyle, existed vibrantly on the margins of the society, hidden from respectability” (Gupta 122). The outward detestation and the secret embracing of the practice by British officials can be seen right after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Immediately following the mutiny, the British, under the new rule of Queen Victoria, stepped back from religious meddling in order to not provoke any further mishaps with the natives. Thus, when the Indian Contagious Diseases Act (Act XIV of 1868) was implemented by the English in order to curtail the spreading of venereal diseases that the British troops were contracting, the Devadasis were not included (officially) in the stipulation for regular checkups in the ‘Lock Hospitals’ of Madras. Though the Devadasis were expected to get checkups, they were not legally bound by the Act.

One of the most precise depictions of the costume of this period comes from Konnerirajapuram in Nagapattinam.



Img. 3.15.: Konnerirajapuram, 19th century. (Courtesy: thehindu.com)

The mural here, depicting a dance party receiving British officials, is from the 19th century. It depicts the dancer in a typical later-period Maratha costume. The dancer wears a blouse and

pants in the same fabric, mostly silk or satin, by this time. The dancer is draped in a white saree that has the Zari part pleated in the front as a fan. A closer look at the lower end of the saree shows the fabric going upwards, indicating that it was tucked at the back. She has a simple flower garland; the details of the other neck ornaments are undecipherable. A simple Oddiyanam is seen on her waist while her feet are adorned with the Salangai. On her head is the traditional Talaisman, and flowers, and her long-braided hair ends with a Kunjalam.

In such a setting, interestingly, is where the most accurate documentation of the Aharya of the Devadasi is seen. Company paintings and later photographs of the period serve as a treasure trove of details of the Aharya of the Devadasi and establishes the roots of the tethering of indecency to the image of the Devadasi, which occurred during the anti-nautch discourse. A few Western writings that are accompanied by photographs are also added here for ease of reference. In 1875, the Prince of Wales toured India and was welcomed in Madras with a Nautch performance. Below are two such descriptions of the same event.

George P. Wheeler:

“The most enchanting portion of the scene was the stage with the groups of black-haired dancing girls attired in dresses of white and gold with shoulder-sashes of yellow and purple and scarlet, and armlets and bracelets of diamonds and all manner of precious stones. In their ears and noses there were rings which were simply constellations of diamonds.”

(Wheeler 177)

Julia A. Stone:

“Their dress was exceedingly picturesque. Ropes and wreaths of jewels-chiefly pearls-encircled their heads; their long hair, encased in a thick covering of yellow silk crusted with jewels, hung down in one coil to their waists. Heavy nose-rings of pearls, scarcely- to unaccustomed English eyes - contributed to the enhancement of their jewellery. They wore short light jackets of embroidered silk in various colours. Their waists were girdled by a belt of elastic gold, supporting loose floating drapery of white muslin, with heavy borderings of gold studded with jewels and bouquets of flowers. Around their necks hung great strings of pearls down on their bare bosoms; wrists and ankles glittered with jewelled bangles.”

(qtd. in Roebert 207-208)

J. Drew Gay:

“(...) they have rings, great pearl-adorned rings in their noses, rings in their ears, rings of balls on their ankles, and wreaths of flowers on their heads. Strictly speaking, not one of them can be styled pretty; their features are regular and their forms fairly good, but those beauties of Madras, selected on account of their personal attractions to dance before the Prince, are neither graceful in appearance nor lithe in movement. Their dress, which could not be more resplendent, so entirely covered is it with gold, silver, and jewels, has a cumbersome look about it which by no means adds to the facility of motion, and the long red trousers which each damsel wears hang in a slovenly manner over the naked feet, and occasionally impede the danseuse in the very midst of her steps. Still, it must not be denied that these nautch girls are picturesque in appearance. Their long black hair, worn in plaited tresses, their olive-coloured skins and great white eyes, their curious costume, and their wonderful ornaments, lend them in the flashing lime-light a fictitious weirdness which the three witches whom Macbeth Baw might have sighed for in vain.”

(Gay 167)



Img. 3.16.a: Dancer Gyanam of the Royapuram Performance. (Courtesy: sathirdance.wordpress.com)

Img. 3.16.b.: Tanjore Princess Vijaya Mohana (1845-1885). (Courtesy: sathirdance.wordpress.com)

One of the earliest photographs of a Devadasi, this photograph of Gyanam beautifully showcases the muslin saree with the strips of Zari stitched on to it. It also shows an elaborate Maatal, vanki and nose ring, all of which seem to be made like a bunch of pearls in gold. On her feet are the Salangai and an anklet. This is very similar to the attire of the princess of Tanjore, as seen in Img. 3.16.b. The princess is seen wearing a similar headset and Jhumki-Maatal. Also visible on the princess is the cross garland seen in many Maratha dancers, including the dancers of the Tanjore Nautch party sent as dowry to Baroda (Img. 3.14.). This extraordinary Aharya of Gyanam can also be in lieu of the Prince's visit in an attempt to deck to the highest to showcase our rich heritage to the Prince of Wales.

In the last part of the same decade, Jules Blum (Mayor of Pondicherry) writes on the practice of Devadasis along with a few illustrations. He calls them 'debauched women who publicly traffic their charm'. He speaks of their costume and says:

"Of all the women of India, it is the bayadères, and above all those who are attached to the temples, who is the most modestly attired; they place extreme attention on not allowing any part of their bodies to be seen uncovered. No doubt, experience has taught them that the open display of their charms dulls rather than excites desire."

(qtd. in Roebert 229)

A scathing view on what the others termed 'modest clothing'. Ironically, his illustration shows two dancers, one in a traditional saree, while the other is wearing a blouse with a saree draped as a skirt without a Melakku (Img. 3.17).



Img. 3.17.: Devadasis in Album Indien by Jules Blum. (Courtesy: Donnovan Roebert)

An ongoing lack of both financial and social patronage, fueled by changes in law policies and the collapse of the Maratha rule, had already pushed the dancers to resort to performing in private spaces. This period can be seen as one in which there was heightened visibility of the Dasi in public, especially in more secular and entertainment spaces. This disconnect between the religious space and the dancing girl might have been the reason behind the growing discomfort in society regarding these women. In terms of Aharya, the fully decked jewellery and eye-catching costumes must have fit perfectly with the festive background of the backdrop of the temple or, later, the pompous Royal courts and processions. The Aharya in a private soiree or a private performance, overwhelmingly out of place for both the English and the new generation of natives who could not connect these nonconjugal dancing women to their superior and ritualistic past, leading to a sudden hatred and outright disgust in many writings of this period, especially as the anti-nautch discourse was gaining strength.

In 1886, Jean de Ponteves-Sabran, a French military officer, documents his experience of a paid performance by the dancers of Villianur near Pondicherry. His description of the Aharya can be seen as proof of the argument above. He says:

*“So far from being nude like the dancers of Aden, the bayadères dancing before us are fully clothed - even **too heavily clothed from an aesthetic point of view** – so that the cloths of silk which veil them allow nothing but their extremities to be seen. Their necks are hung with rich collars, their hair is woven through with an equipage of jewels and chains, at their left nostrils hang rings of gold with pendants of pearl and emerald; their arms are covered with bracelets, and their ankles, like their big toes, are encircled by silver rings. We noticed that their nails are well manicured, and painted pink.”*

(qtd. in Roebert 250)

The illustration that comes along with this description shows a dancing girl entirely decked in what looks like a silk saree and a shawl wrapped around her shoulders. The Devadasi seen here is very unlike the other illustrations.



Img. 3.18.: Villianur Dasi, Illustrated by Jean de Ponteves-Sabran, 1886. (Courtesy: Donovan Roebert)

Just a year later, Gustav le Bon expresses how he is disappointed that the Devadasis and their costumes are nothing like how it was described in the West.

“(...) poorer girls, of mediocre graces and very badly dressed [and] are not able to convey to the European the idea of those charming creatures enveloped in light gauzes and covered in sparkling jewels, whose pantomime-dance mysteriously and undulatingly unfolds itself in the depths of a temple in South India, and where their principle function is to dance before the gods.”

(qtd. in Roebert 263)

This brings to light three things; one is that they were dressed badly (according to him); second, that the Western travellers had discussed much about these ‘mysterious’ creatures. And lastly, an idea of the dresses of the previous decades. The adjoining photograph illustrates heavily clad young dancers, who, reflecting the disappointed rant of Mr. Bon, are not draped in the translucent muslins that seem to have been the choice as seen in company paintings and previous writings.



Img. 3.19.: Photograph used in Le Bon's Description. (Courtesy: Donovan Roebert)

The dancers shown here are similar to Gyanam seen in Img. 3.16.a. The same pearl-bunch Maatal and nose-ring and the elaborate Zari work on the pallu stands as a testament to the fashion trend of the Devadasis of the period. And Bon's disappointment points to an underlying urge to see the dancer in a sensual diaphanous material that is posed as a review of the mediocracy of the dancer's Aharya here.

In 1901, F. Dunsterville, in his work *The Madras Railway Company Pictorial Guide to its East and West Coast Lines* (published in 1902), comments thus,

"Most, if not all, of the Dancing girls are attached to the principal Hindu temples: they dress themselves in brightly coloured garments of richest silk with gold embroidery and the largest amount of jewellery they can obtain, they perfume their persons to a considerable extent and dress their hair into one long plait into which are woven strongly-scented flowers. (...) no ceremony is complete without their presence and at all principal religious festivals a Nautch is one of the most important features. Many of them are pretty in face and delicate in form, with very symmetrical figures: dedicated from child-hood to unchastity they usually show in public a modesty of demeanour which could hardly be expected from them."

(Dunsterville 3)



Img. 3.20. Madras Dancing Girl 1901. (Courtesy: F. Dunsterville).

The dancer here in Img. 3.20., is seen in the typical gold pearl Maatal, headset, and the huge Chandran and Surya Pirai. She wears a Vanki, a tight metal belt (Oddiyanam), and an embellished frontal fan. But Dunsterville, in describing the dancer's Aharya along with her physique, assumes the moral position to comment on her modesty. The modesty of the same girl that he describes as having "pretty in the face and delicate in form, with very symmetrical figures".

By 1910, the famous French artist Albert Besnard beautifully illustrated and documented his experience of a Tanjore Nautch as follows:

"Her bayadère's cap is supplemented at the rear by a garland of yellow flowers held by a comb which reveals between her two shoulders the line of the braid in which it is woven. Her neck is laden with necklaces and her slender arms with heavy bracelets. The very short, small bodice which houses the breasts of the young girl encircles the shoulders, fitted tightly to the arms and it is of a black cloth embroidered with gold. The pantaloons of red silk dotted with gold descend to the ankles, where they are succeeded by rings and anklets made of an infinity of small bells which chime at the slightest quiver of her idol's feet. (...) these bands of gold and silver shoot sparkles onto the floor in the shadow of her draperies."

(qtd. in Roebert 447)



Img. 3.21.: Illustration by Albert Besnard. (Courtesy: Alemy.com)



Img. 3.22.a.: South Indian Dancer 1897. (Courtesy: Joachim K. Bautze)

Img.3.22.b.: Madras Dancer 1901. (Courtesy: F. Dunstreville)

Img.3.22.c.: Devadasis in European Ethnic Exhibition 1908. (Courtesy: Deepthi Sasidharan's Instagram Handle @lampglow)

An analysis of Photographs from the early 20th century portrays a clear image of the dancers of Madras. An obvious amalgamation of the cultural milieu that Madras was, the Devadasis of the early 20th century dressed similarly to their predecessors. The long sarees were draped in a similar manner, but the pyjamas were mostly not visible. These sarees were either muslin, silk, or organza, depending on the affordability of the dancer. Their ornaments

stayed the same, yet their blouses showed great works of embroidery, a handiwork of the Islamic embroiderers of the region. Swarnamalya Ganesh attributes the usage of materials like satin and velvet for both pants and blouses to the thriving Arab trade that existed from the Nayaka era (Through, 10). The trend of tying the hair up in a knot had long been replaced with the long plait with either brooch placed ornamentally through the length or a Jadai Nagam. The socio-economic position of the Devadasis of Madras by this period was marked by a pronounced difference between two sects, the rich sect who enjoyed patronage by local elites, and the poorer sect who had to scrape their finances to make ends meet. Therefore, a generalisation of the Aharya that they possessed would be ignorant. The Devadasi on the higher end of the spectrum owned both heirloom jewellery and those that were gifted by her patrons, while the one on the lower end might have only held on to her heirloom possessions. Lakshmi Vishwanathan comments, “Many of the jewels were worn by Devadasis every day, particularly when they were entertaining important visitors or going out on social engagements. The prominent Devadasis believed in status symbols and decked themselves out even when they visited temples for worship” (“Women” 98). This serves as a vital point in indicating the connection between the Devadasi and her Aharya and how it was a symbol of her status. Therefore, the yoking of her Aharya to the notion of indecency was an indirect move to sink her status.

3.6. The Shaping of Community Aesthetics – Social Reform and Anti-Nautch Campaign:

The move to eliminate Sadir and its practitioners started way back in the mid-nineteenth century when the Christian missionaries strongly fought for the abolishment of the system, which the British administration disregarded for obvious reasons. The mindset of the middle class of Englishmen and women who were part of the Missionaries and British administration of India came from a Victorian background and valued the chastity of their women. The efforts taken to purify the society by removal of the Devadasi system were “linked with evangelical values” (Whitehead 95). This argument, however, was taken up by the educated, urban elites of India, whose “familiarity with European history, institutions and languages and the concomitant influence of the European ideas of liberty, rationalism and humanism made Indians critical of their own institutions and consequently led them to reform” (Panikkar 3). While the British Government did put in place laws like the Act of 1861, prohibiting the buying or selling of girl child below seventeen, they could not meddle with the Devadasi system itself

either due to their non-intervention policy in religious matters, or due to their evident love for the Salon dance performers which they frequently visited or arranged. With the British struggling to take legal actions on the Devadasi system, the economic base of which was taken away after the annexation of the Maratha-ruled Tanjore, local voices that were now in search of a national image rose to prominence in the anti-nautch discourse from 1890 onwards. One of the underlying reasons for the raise of the native voices can be understood as the Christian missionaries' growing disdain towards the Hindu religion and their weaponising of the Devadasi system as the epitome of the Hindu superstition. The small agitations in public were given a bigger form with the collective effort of Indian social reformers and Western Christian missionaries, who led the anti-nautch campaign from 1890 for the next half a century. The social reform that started as a way to save Devadasis and other common prostitutes from the evils of their own ways was shaped in the form of a concern for "social hygiene" (Kannabiran 56) and ended up being the largest campaign of the period with the Devadasi issue being used by multiple parties as a way to address many other women-centric issues such as female feticide, child marriage, etc... As Lakshmi Subramanian frames it, "By the last decades of the nineteenth century, social reform movements as well as colonial discourse about prostitution combined to make the devadasi issue an agenda for social reform" (126). Spearheaded by the upper-caste groups of Madras, the social reform focused on upholding the high morals that traditionally India was known for. The British administration's laws, along with the social reformists, tried to create a new standard of morality, ultimately, a new standard of aesthetics that the elite viewed as fit for the growing, urbanised, educated society of Tamilnadu.

The anti-nautch campaign, which was an undercurrent in many social issues that arose in the late 19th and early 20th C.E., caught speed by the last decade of the 19th century with many local political leaders, as well as national leaders like M. K. Gandhi, voicing against the system. With Muthulakshmi Reddy spearheading the campaign, the Brahmin elite of Madras City started fostering the idea that it was in their hands that the task of nation-building lies. The community "responded to the imperatives of nation building that, on the one hand, demanded the consolidation of secular spaces for a range of practices, including arts and, on the other, the formalisation of a classical aesthetic that would legitimise the more precious and unique aspects of the nation's heritage" (Subramanian 72). By cleansing the Devadasi system, the urban elites aimed to superimpose a set of aesthetic preferences that resonated with their sensibilities and priorities. The Brahmins saw themselves as the custodians of centuries-long traditions and historically held the highest position in the social hierarchy. The historical role of the Brahmins

as the custodians of textual and ritual practices were held as proof to legitimise their efforts to build the new cultural identity of the nation by forming Academies that focused on saving the art form by shifting the focus group to the educated minds of the urban cities. By now, the Devadasi was considered a separate caste, but in an attempt to attach a sense of respectability, the whole community, including the Nattuvanars, were christened the Isai Vellalar community, giving them an identity as a respectful caste of the non-Brahmin sect. Unfortunately, this only benefitted the men of the community, while the women still bore the mark of the detested. The clear discrimination against this community is seen by the outright rejection of school admission to the children of the Devadasis, stating that this might “spoil the other children of upper caste”. However, by the 1920s, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Periyar’s⁹⁹ self-respect movement, and other local groups kept pushing for the abolition of the dedication of Devadasis and against the orthodox Brahminical voices, backed by the Indian National Congress, that supported the dance form if not the dancer. Srividya Natarajan aptly states that “Afflicted by a sense of their own retrogressive appearance, the members of the Music Academy of Madras, who were part of the cultural wing of the Congress, and who were projecting devadasis as performers of Bharatanatyam called themselves the ‘pro-art progressives.’” (13).

The social discourse behind the abolition of the Devadasi system and the anti-Hindi, anti-Brahmin campaign of Periyar has been widely discussed by many scholars such as Soneji (2014), Kannabiran (1995), Amrit Srinivasan, Mathew Allen (1988). But what is in interest of this study, in this string of events, is the attempt to impose the aesthetics of the Brahmins equally upon all communities. The very fact that by the late 19th century and early 20th century, the concept of Sabhas was introduced to Madras proves the point of a large-scale agenda to hold up their idea of aesthetics as the universal one. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) points out how, often, the taste of the higher class of society is always considered “good taste”. This was the basis of the formation of Sabhas in Madras, the establishment of the role of Brahmins in shaping the aesthetic and taste preferences of the common man. On this effect, Kristen Dawn Rudisill states, “It, therefore, makes sense that those who aspire to higher status would alter their entertainment choices and professed tastes to be in closer accord with those arts patronised by recognised elites. The sabhas are, on the one hand, ‘aimed at people...who wanted desperately to present themselves as educated, sophisticated, and aesthetically articulate.’ On the other, they are aimed at the actual elite and provide a forum in which “quality”

⁹⁹ Born E.V.Ramaswamy Naiker, Periyar spearheaded the non-Brahmin Dravidian movement in Tamilnadu. A member of Congress, he later mobilised the Self-Respect movement in Tamilnadu

performances can be seen. Sabhas (...) give their members a schedule that they can follow throughout the year to become more cultured (...) The sabha patronage structure allows powerful members of the community to define taste according to their own standards by becoming sabha secretaries and organisers and arranging entertainments for their members in that capacity. Sabhas construct high-brow Indian culture through the classical music and dance performances they offer.” (61).

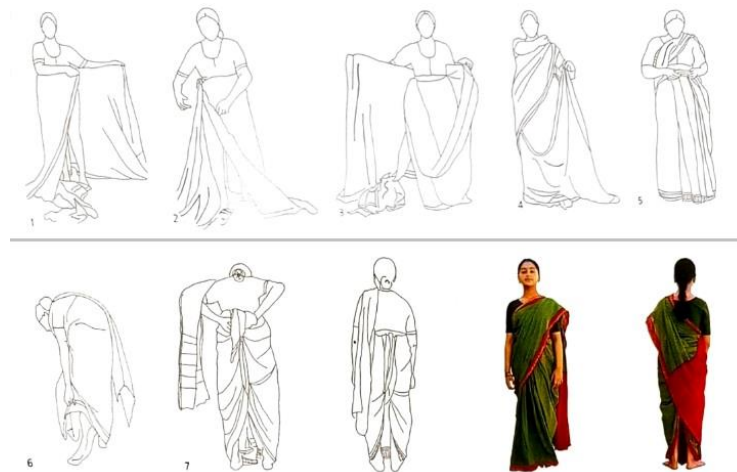
When Music Academy started patronising Sadir performers by the second decade of the twentieth century, it also mentions the possible changes in their costume that would make the dancers look more appealing by stating that “the heavy costumes and ornaments which affected the free execution of movements by the dancer, thereby reducing the grace and charm of the dance, should be dispensed with” (The Journal of Madras Music Academy 112-123). In this, appealing to whom is the question that needs to be addressed. The taste hierarchy thus formed in urban cities like Madras resulted in a major shift in the audience pool who favoured the dance in the 20th century. The changes in the costume that was proposed at this period were the result of a perception where, much like their Western overlords, the modernised upper-class could not digest the fact that the Devadasi system allowed the inhabitant display of the female form and its “casual evocation of the relationship between money and body” (Natarajan 230). In line with Norman O. Brown’s argument of the psychic manifestation of equating money to excrement, the Devadasi’s barren display of her beauty through the various articles of wealth that she owned, like the jewellery, and silk, would have been understood by the elite class rebuilding the nation as the ‘excrement’ or the impure that needed to be cleaned since this class that rebuilt the nation, consciously built its ethics on the evangelical beliefs subconsciously inherited through being under centuries of Western schools of thought. Speaking of this building of specific taste habits, Soneji says, “Historians and theorists of popular culture (...) have noted that a key marker of the postmodern condition is the blurring of visual and social boundaries between “high” and “low” culture. (...) These arts, by their very social and political constitution, were trapped in class- and caste-inflected stratifications of taste. Upper-caste nationalist reinventions of Bharatanatyam combined social power with cultural capital and high-brow taste. While non-Brahman individuals do marginally participate in the professional world of Bharatanatyam today, it is almost always to reify and even valorise the aesthetic parameters of Brahmin aspirations” (‘Unfinished’, 24-25). Thus, similar to how erotic lyrics were weeded out due to it being a contextual reminder of the unchaste past, the Aharya of the dancer became the ocular reminder of the same unabashed eroticism that she carried, leading

to a period of reconstruction and refashioning of the visual elements of the art form. The result of this mass superimposition of the Brahmin and other upper-class, Western-educated, Anglo-Indian tastes on the Aharya of the Sadir performer can be seen as the foundation of the ultimate refashioning of Bharatanatyam that was conducted by Rukmini Devi later. The replacement of muslin with silk, “jarring” ness with subtlety, bulkiness with grace, that is seen in today’s Bharatanatyam costume is nothing but the play of the taste hierarchy where the choices of the lower caste Devadasis were not good enough for the prosceniums and Sabhas of the newly evolved aesthetic values of the urban elite. The re-established Bharatanatyam’s aesthetics was built on dressing the upper-caste bodies in attire that did not resemble the Devadasi yet was a true representative of 'Indian-ness'.

3.7. To Summarise:

I see this as a continuation of the conclusion of the previous chapter. It is imperative to view the dressing of the Devadasis and the consequent changes, or the lack of, from a socio-economic and political perspective in order to understand the events that triggered the changes that are visible. This chapter dealt with how the textual documentation of the Aharya of the Sadir performer fits in visually. Although minor, the Aharya of the Devadasis changed under different rules and regions and, fortunately, has been documented through various visual mediums of documentation. The materials of the costumes seem to be ones that were either locally produced, such as silk, cotton, and muslin, or acquired through trade, such as organza and satin. The jewellery has remained the same, although a few ornaments, like the cross garland seen in Nayaka and Maratha period, were later lost in the transition to Madras. There are also ruler-specific jewellery traditions, such as the three layers of hip chains seen in the Nayaka depictions are slowly noticed to be brought down to one Oddiyanam that is tightly fit around the waist, even by the Maratha period. In line with the discussions seen in the works of Jennifer Howes (2003), K. S. Mathew (2007), K. N. Ganesh (2013), and Lennart Bes (2016), the stronghold of maritime trade on the Coromandel coast held by generations of Tamil rulers, is reflected in the Aharya of the Devadasi as deciphered from the abundance of ruby, emerald, pearls and diamond in their jewellery. The hairstyle shifts from a five-strand plait seen in Silapadikaram to a coiffure in the Nayaka period to a long plait by the time of the later Maratha period. Although, it cannot be entirely taken out of consideration that there exists a possibility of the same being practised well into the 20th century in other parts of the region.

Discerning exclusively through the pictorial depictions, the draping style must have changed from a traditional saree style or a complete Kaccham style to the saree tucked between the legs seen in the later Maratha and British era photographs. Studying the political shifts and the resultant cultural exchanges in the region, it is possible that the Nayaka rulers' relation with the Nawabs of the Deccan, resulted in the pyjama holding a permanent spot in the Bhartanatyam Aharya. The Maratha rule added to this with their Nauvari style drape that metamorphosized into what is now called the Madisar worn by Brahmin ladies. This was adopted into the Bharatanatyam costume witnessed in Img. 3.10. above. Interestingly, the later Maratha costumes that look like the typical saree drape from the front, but is tucked in at the back, is still prevalent in the Saurashtrian community of northern and central Tamilnadu (Img. 3.23.).



Img.3.23 Saurashtrian Style Drape (Courtesy: Rta Kapur Chishti)

It is imperative to understand that apart from the fact that the Saurashtrian community served as weavers in many of the silk centres of Tamilnadu, Saurashtra (present-day Kathiawar, Gujarat) was ruled by the Marathas from the beginning of 18th century. This drape was prevalent until the redressing of the art form by Rukmini Devi later. The Maratha costumes look bulkier than the previous versions owing to the change in materials used and the addition of the Salla over the saree by the end of the 19th century. The casual draping of the upper part of the saree added to the clumsiness of the costume. This draping style, on many occasions, displayed the bodice, revealing a major part of the dancer's bosom that added to the perceived sensuality of the dancer. In the later part of the 19th century, it is evident that the observation of the jewellery was a part of the private performances hosted for British officials, which enabled the Devadasi to be seen as an 'object' that was up for inspection, thereby objectifying her through her Aharya.

This chapter is an exploration of how caste supremacy, as an undercurrent of the anti-nautch campaign, shaped the taste preferences of the public, which will form the crux of the next chapter in justifying the aspect of caste politics and the inherent taste hierarchies as the foundation of the acceptance of Rukmini Devi's refashioned Aharya. At the fair end of the life of the Devadasi system, the sudden urge in the middle class of the Tamil region to do away with the system can be seen as the "masculine anxiety about the shifting sexual and moral economy of late nineteenth and early twentieth century India" (Soneji, 'Unfinished', 94). The Aharya, which was initially used to beautify the body, was cautiously moulded by the changing society to be seen and used as a symbol of the immortality of the Dasis who heavily relied on beautification as a way to display their sexual availability, which by this period had become their primary avenue of income. The criticising of the jarring and bulky Dasi was, in many arguments, contrasted with the domesticated female sexuality that had become the social norm of the patriarchal society. In such a society, there prevailed an urge for the female to be "kept safe" and guarded by men from men. To make this feasible, the female was expected not to draw any attention to their physical form, the polar end of which was the Devadasi and her Aharya. Therefore, the reform of the system started with her Aharya, wherein the modest Brahmin housewife was the new paragon. In the political climate of the early 20th century, it was the Brahmins, like E. Krishna Iyer and the other members of Madras Music Academy, that voiced for the saving of the art even at the cost of the artist as opposed to the non-Brahmin verdict of total eradication. Therefore, in the building of the new culturally strong nation, the upper-caste chaste lady was pivotal in valorising the dance form, which can be accepted to be a part of a society that was steeped in modesty and domesticity of women in its nationalist discourse. This, I argue in the next chapter, was successfully attained by Rukmini Devi through her redesigning of the Bharatanatyam Aharya. Through this shift towards a patrilineal society wherein the womenfolk existed only to bring respectability to the men, the matrilineal lineage of the Devadasi stood no chance of survival. Through her Aharya, her body, and the way she chose to adorn it, she was shunned, her Aharya redesigned to fit into the 'socially acceptable' mould created by the educated and affluent, primarily through the sense of ocular.

CHAPTER 4

Rukmini Devi Arundale: The Path to Proscenium

Rukmini Devi Arundale is a name that cannot be ignored when one studies the history of Tamilnadu or, rather, the history of India. She was a Theosophist whose beliefs in the spirit, culture and heritage of our country made her leave her mark in multiple areas of history. Through her travels worldwide, as a part of the Theosophical Brotherhood, she had exposure to various cultures and thought processes that moulded her. This exposure and her close association with great minds such as Colonel Olcott¹⁰⁰ and Annie Besant¹⁰¹ enabled her to develop a broad perspective where she recognized what Indian culture could offer to the world. Through a period of more than eight decades, Rukmini Devi Arundale took on the role of a Theosophist, revivalist, reformer, artist, institution-builder, and animal welfare activist, all of which she gave her complete devotion. Even though scholars may question her choices today, her efforts, contribution and precognition of the potential that reconstructing Bharatanatyam held in regaining the cultural identity of our country deserve to be documented in the annals of history. 1930s Madras faced a considerable dilemma, with the Madras Music Academy supporting the idea of introducing traditional performers of Sadir, the Devadasis, to the proscenium to reinstate the lost respect of the art form on the one hand and the anti-nautch campaigners led by Muthulakshmi Reddy fighting to annihilate the practice itself on the other. Amidst this unsettling climate, a new movement to propel the idea of cultural nationalism was being spearheaded by Annie Besant through the Theosophical Society, Adyar. Through the Theosophical Society, miss Besant aimed to bring back the cultural and spiritual supremacy of the country. This thought of hers fructified through her pupil, assistant and ‘daughter’, Rukmini Devi.

Rukmini Devi’s reconstruction of Bharatanatyam, its institutionalisation and Sanskritization has been at the forefront of re-establishing the cultural identity of our country. Her modifications and contributions towards the art form and its ‘Classical’ status, the framework later adopted by many other dance forms of India, is considered the renaissance period of Bharatanatyam. Her best inputs in the reconstruction can be seen in the area of

¹⁰⁰ Co-founder and first President of the Theosophical Society.

¹⁰¹ A former English Socialist who had a career in England as a champion of women’s rights, socialist, free thinker and Theosophist.

Aharya, in both her solo recitals and later her dance drama productions. This chapter deals with Rukmini Devi's contribution to creating the 'new look' for Bharatanatyam through its sartorial presentation. This chapter is in three parts; the first, 'Rukmini Neelakanta Shastry', is an attempt to briefly look into Rukmini Devi's life and understand the influences that shaped her beliefs, worldview and creative choices. The second part, 'Rukmini's Redressing of Sadir', will look at her reconstruction of Bharatanatyam Aharya, especially in the initial days of her solo performances. The third and final part, 'Beyond the Banyan Tree', is an ode to a few of Rukmini Devi's remarkable contemporaries and successors who have significantly shaped the present-day Bharatanatyam Aharya.

RUKMINI NEELAKANTA SHASTRY

Rukmini was born on February 29th, 1904, when the Indian Nationalist movement was in full swing. She was born in Madurai in Tamilnadu and was the sixth of the eight children Neelakanta Shastry, and Seshammal had. Rukmini had three older brothers (Sri Ram, Padmanabhan, Yagneshwaran), two elder sisters (Subbalakshmi, Shivakamu), a younger sister and a younger brother (Visalakshi, Subramaniam). Rukmini's father, Neelakanta Shastry, was an executive engineer in Madras Presidency. His job was supervising dams, canals and construction all over South India; therefore, the family travelled a lot. As a result, the children were sent to boarding schools except the last three, who were tutored at home. They moved around with their parents. Rukmini's mother taught them Tamil while private tutors were appointed for other subjects. Her paternal grandfather was a Sanskrit scholar who contributed immensely to Vedanta literature. Her father himself was a Sanskrit scholar who wrote commentaries on Upanishads. Her maternal grandfather is said to have learnt music from saint-poet Thyagaraja and Seshammal, and Rukmini's mother would sing to the kids at home. Therefore, she was surrounded by arts and literature from a very young age, though she did not have formal training in any of them. Her family lineage made her mind deeply rooted in sacred texts like Ramayana and inclined towards arts. Neelakanta Shastry was also drawn towards Theosophical Movement due to its liberal and universal attitudes. "Though he hailed from a family of staunch Hindus, he did not believe in imposing the customs of the religion," says Leela Samson (22). Captivated by the values and ideas of Annie Besant, the president of the Theosophical Society, Chennai, he decided to move closer to his calling. Finishing his last project as the chief engineer in the Princely State of Pudukkottai, Neelakanta Shastry shifted,

along with his family, to the Theosophical Society grounds in Adyar, Chennai, in 1918. This proximity influenced the family to a great extent through their involvement in the reforms started by Annie Besant that were aimed not just at the Indian freedom struggle but also at advocating for the spirit of India and its culture.

Annie Besant, a former Socialist in England, had gone through agnosticism and atheism. Finally, she found her path in Theosophy, followed Madam Blavatsky, and landed in India in 1893. She had been highly impacted by the speeches of Theosophists in Theosophical conferences around the world and yearned to learn the philosophies propagated in Hinduism. When she landed in India, she was taken aback by the sheer atrocities of British rule and how Indians were giving up on their rich traditions and culture to the tyrannical oppressions of the British Raj. She believed in the ancient spirit of India, nurtured by its culture and arts, to guide Indians to their freedom. As Joanne Stafford Mortimer notes, “Her activities were aimed at reform on the fronts of religion, culture, education, social reform and political uplift of the country” (64). Annie Besant vowed to embrace the ‘Hindu’ way of living completely and, through example, intended to shine the spotlight on the spirit of ancient India to Indians who were now looking to the West for ‘knowledge’. She actively took part in movements towards the Indian freedom struggle, especially through educational reforms and voicing out equal rights for women. She founded the Central Hindu College in Benares¹⁰², amongst many others. As the first woman president of the Indian National Congress, her hand in the awakening of the Home-Rule movement is undeniable. Under her leadership, the Theosophical Society gained national and political prominence. She actively shifted between the Theosophical Society’s Indian headquarters in Benares and its international headquarters at Adyar, Chennai, spreading the fire of nationalism, patriotism and theosophy and awakening the spiritual heritage in the young Indian minds. Besant believed that “patriotism was aroused by pointing to the splendour of Indian religious and poetic literatures, and that ‘religion must inspire nationality’” (qtd. in Natarajan 191). Even though the Society followed a more active programme towards the Indian freedom struggle and nationalist movement under Besant’s leadership, unlike the promotion of occult studies carried out by Besant’s predecessors, its fundamental intention was not to establish India’s lost glory and provide its identity back. Joanne Stafford Mortimer illuminates the fact that Annie Besant set out to establish a ‘bind between East and West

¹⁰² Now known as Benares Hindu College.

together in partnership' where India stood responsible for justifying its stand to the World, especially the West (64-67).

In this setting of the Theosophical Society, Rukmini grew up starting from her teenage years. She spent much time attending to Annie Besant, who considered Rukmini to be her daughter. Even though Rukmini did not understand English initially, she was pulled towards the cause the leaders were fighting for. She had developed a bond with Ms Besant and was taken under her wing. Amongst the many who were drawn towards the Theosophical Movement and the Theosophical Society's headquarters in Adyar was George Sydney Arundale, the principal of the Central Hindu College, a comrade of Dr Annie Besant, who was also the organising secretary of the All-India Home Rule League started by Annie Besant. George Arundale had moved to Chennai to work at the international headquarters of the Theosophical Society, of which Annie Besant was now the president. Here, Rukmini and Arundale met for the first time in 1919 and married in 1920 when Rukmini was 16 years of age. This sparked many debates across the country due to an Indian girl from a Brahmin community marrying an aristocratic white man, especially when the freedom fight was at its peak. Despite a whirlwind of opposition, Rukmini's marriage to Arundale further solidified her connections to the Theosophical Society and her belief in their ideology.



Img. 4.1.: Rukmini and George Arundale Post Wedding. (Courtesy: Sunil Kothari Collection)

Along with being in the eye of the Independence struggle, Rukmini was even more entwined in the mission of the Theosophical Society post her wedlock to George Arundale. She immersed herself in spreading their message, and her marriage to George Arundale can only be seen as the beginning of her rebellion.



Img. 4.2.: Theosophical Society, Adyar. (Courtesy: Sunil Kothari Collection)

4.1. Rukmini – Theosophy and Beauty:

Spending her teens in the Theosophical Society and later her marriage to Arundale made Rukmini, as Avanti Meduri words it, “Daughter, pupil and helper to Dr Besant as well as life’s companion and assistant to Dr Arundale” (9). Even though she did not study the Theosophical philosophy, she practically imbibed its values through her relationship, not only with Annie Besant and George Arundale but also with her association with theosophists like H. S. Olcott, C. W. Leadbeater¹⁰³, C. Jinarajadasa¹⁰⁴ and J. Krishnamurti¹⁰⁵. Under the guidance of Annie Besant, Rukmini Devi followed her husband around the world to conventions and conferences held by Theosophical Society’s centres worldwide. In 1923, 3 years after her marriage, at the age of 19, she was made the President of the All-India Federation of Young Theosophists and, in 1925, the President of the World Federation for Young Theosophists. Under this title, Rukmini delivered many a lecture throughout her extensive travels. Her intercultural marriage and exposure post-marriage sowed an awareness in her about the heritage and culture of India in the context of its place in the world and what this could contribute to the betterment of the human race. Radha Burnier says that Rukmini delivered the message that India had to say to the world through her lectures titled ‘Message of Beauty to the Civilisation’ wherein she proclaimed to the young recruits that “To be truly Indian one had to be truly international exhorting them to honour the best in all civilizations and to live it in their daily lives” (63).

¹⁰³ Member of the Theosophical Society, an author and occult practitioner. A clairvoyant with psychic abilities (ts-adyar.org)

¹⁰⁴ Author, Occultist and the fourth President of the Theosophical Society.

¹⁰⁵ Philosopher, author and Theosophist. Jiddu Krishnamurti was the ‘World Teacher’ along with Rukmini Devi who was the ‘World Mother’, both movements were the brain-child of Annie Besant.



Fig. 4.1.: Influences on Rukmini Devi

Theosophical society seems more like a cult that believed in its members' universality beyond their race, religion, caste, colour and creed. The theosophical spirit sought after the metaphysical spirit of a being and wanted to outdo with the empty beliefs and dogmas surrounding religion. In Rukmini Devi's own words, "Theosophy is not the property of any individual mind or heart. It is Truth, and Truth can be only one's own truth" (qtd. in Ramani 79). Nevertheless, the leaders of the Theosophical Society were each drawn towards various religions; Colonel Olcott towards Buddhism, Annie Besant towards Hinduism and George Arundale towards Christianity¹⁰⁶. All these beliefs mingled in the ways of the Theosophical Society as Rukmini was surrounded by these different worldviews, which all ultimately combined in their view on the 'Universal Brotherhood'. Rukmini was to propagate the idea of Beauty through her travels and was anointed as the 'World Mother' by Annie Besant in 1928 as a parallel to the 'World Teacher' initiative with J. Krishnamurti. Annie Besant declared that this would be the 'feminine spirit' being brought to life. Thus, Rukmini became 'Rukmini Devi', the divine mother. The ceremony of consecration was performed in Liberal Catholic Church on the grounds of the Society, and the ceremony was described by a witness as

"On the floor of the vestry Rukmini knelt, her shining black head bent low over her hands that were palm to palm on her breast. In front of her stood the short, white-

¹⁰⁶ George Arundale was ordained a Bishop in Huizen, Holland, on August 4th of 1924.

haired 'Mother', her hands outstretched, palm down over Rukmini's head, her face turned upward in an act of consecration".

(qtd. in Samson 67)

Thus, Rukmini was initiated to take on the 'World Mother' role, who, as Josephine Ranson commented, "represents the feminine side of Divinity and the Ideal Womanhood" (485). While J. Krishnamurti stayed away from the world in his quest for knowledge and spirituality at 'the feet of his master', Rukmini Devi stayed present with the world undertaking her role to work with the global society in the fields of education, culture and the arts. Rukmini Devi did so at such a time that the world was going through great changes, both the East and the West, and it would not be a surprise that this shaped her thoughts and outlook. Ranson further states that in her role as the World Mother, Rukmini Devi was viewed as "the 'resuscitator' of all that is best in India's traditional art and culture, giving them new interpretations (...)" (486). This part of Rukmini Devi's life took her to the far corners of the world, and this multitudinous source of influence only seems to have rooted her more deeply into her own culture and heritage. Being with Theosophy gave Rukmini the freedom to look at her country's religious, spiritual, philosophical and artistic glory, not through the tainted window of orthodoxy.

Theosophical Society, Annie Besant and Rukmini Devi's initiation as the World Mother had given her a profound sense of liberation that women of that time had not experienced. Theosophical philosophies and the works of her mentors had constantly pushed Rukmini to look at the beauty in everyday things and made her outright reject 'ugliness'. The concept of beauty had been something that she grew up with, a deeply ingrained innate sense of aesthetics that she possessed that kept cropping up in every account of her life that we could get our hands on. Though beauty is a personal perspective, it is also a collective taste that is acquired as a community due to the availability of certain materials, exposure to specific social practices and, in Rukmini Devi's case, access, especially to Western education and, in turn, Western perspectives and standards of 'beauty'. Rukmini's lectures around the world that spread the message of Beauty show how it was almost expected of her to lead the way and set an example by living in a specific manner that portrayed her as the epitome of beauty. She was shaped by Theosophical thoughts that formed concrete opinions in Rukmini Devi's mind regarding what was beautiful and what was ugly. Thus, through beauty, primarily through the beauty of Indian cultural heritage, Rukmini was to raise human consciousness to a higher level. Incidentally, Rukmini Devi was considered synonymous with the very concept of Beauty by

Theosophists of her time. Leela documents that Rukmini Devi was named the ‘the Dark Madonna’ as she travelled around Europe with Arundale (61). Throughout what we know about Rukmini Devi, we are always brought back to the aspect of Rukmini Devi being the most gracious, enigmatic, beautiful dusky Indian woman who captivated others with her sense of aesthetics.



Img. 4.3: Rukmini Devi with Fellow Theosophists, Holland. (Courtesy: Sunil Kothari Collection)

Through the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant had already paved a path in which she established that through Indian arts and culture, India would attain her greatness. Though this is not precisely why Sadir was taken up by Rukmini Devi later on, it is definitely why she did not have an aversion to the idea of resurrecting the form since she was already in tune with Annie Besant’s vision of the spirit of the art of ancient India. Annie Besant plays a significant role in Rukmini Devi’s worldview. The propagation of feminism in the form of women’s rights in middle-class Indian society was the crux of Annie Besant’s political career amidst the Indian freedom struggle. Besant introduced art and spirituality as a path to discovering oneself, even in her early days as the President of the Theosophical Society. Hence, Rukmini Devi’s passion for beauty and later arts can be traced back to her mentor, Annie Besant. The effect that Annie Besant had on Rukmini Devi was, understandably, so supreme that Rukmini Devi writes:

“(...) Although I’m Indian I learnt what it is to love this country from her. She gave me the eyes to see India; she gave me the inspiration to revere India. When she returned to India from her travels abroad, she would always touch the earth with her forehead, dedicating herself once more to the service of the land hallowed by the Sages, Seers and Teachers of all Religions.”

(qtd. in Samson 74)

Thus, through her work for Theosophy, Rukmini Devi opened herself to the task of viewing ancient Indian art and philosophy through the perspective of a Western approach, ultimately detaching spirituality from the confines of ritualistic dogma.

4.2. Ballet Before Bharatanatyam:

Embraced by the nationalist ideology of Annie Besant and as the international representative of the social, political and cultural causes that the Theosophical society fought for, Rukmini Devi was first a nationalist, Theosophist and later a revivalist.

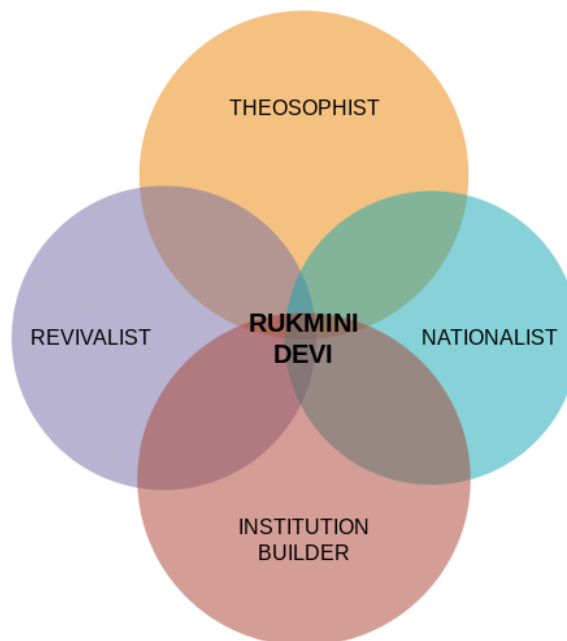


Fig. 4.2.: Multiple Roles that Rukmini Devi Played

Rukmini Devi's introduction to the world of arts began in the Theosophical Society, where she was a part of many of the cultural activities that the teenagers of the Society took part in. Primarily these events were trained by Theosophists who visited the Adyar centre. When she was about fourteen, her earliest encounter with international arts seems to be at one such occasion, trained by Eleanor and Kathleen Elder from Scotland, who had coached the teenagers in Greek dance.



Img. 4.4.: The Elder Sisters (Courtesy: Sunil Kothari Collection)



Img. 4.5.: Rukmini Devi in Rehearsals for Plays Staged in Theosophical Society.

Img. on Left - Rukmini seated in the Right-Hand Corner. Img. On the right – Rukmini Devi at the Centre
(Courtesy: Sunil Kothari Collection)

Rukmini Devi was later part of ‘The Adyar Players’, a theatre group that staged dramatic renderings of classic English plays in a bid to “promote artistic and creative life at Adyar”, says Leela Samson (69). Devi grew up in a household where music surrounded her everyday life, and this branched out to poetry, literature and theatre as they settled down in the Theosophical Society campus at Adyar. Though she spent her childhood in various districts of Tamilnadu, witnessing Sadir in several instances, Rukmini Devi was never particularly drawn to the art form. Her interest in dance, in general, was piqued when she encountered the performance of Anna Pavlova in 1924 London. Rukmini Devi and Pavlova’s paths collided at multiple junctions post this initial performance; in Australia in 1926 and later in Bombay in 1928. So

much so that in one of her personal writings, Rukmini Devi writes that “fate seemed to throw me into her constellation time and again” (qtd. in Samson 70).

On a trip to South East Asia to Australia, Rukmini Devi happened to share the same boat with Pavlova and her entire company of forty dancers from Surabaya to Australia. This meeting must be agreed upon as a turning point in Rukmini Devi’s life and Bharatanatyam's history. Rukmini Devi had a natural pull towards beauty, and she was drawn to Pavlova’s grace and followed the dancer to every show she performed around Australia. Having developed a close relationship with Devi over her stay in Australia, Pavlova noticed Devi's interest in the dance form. Pavlova offered to teach Ballet to Rukmini Devi. Unfortunately, Pavlova passed away after the initial lesson; nevertheless, Rukmini Devi continued learning lessons from Pavlova’s assistant Cleo Nordi in London. It was Pavlova who had encouraged Rukmini to revive the art of her own country. Rukmini’s exposure to Pavlova’s stage presence, and the technically strong and aesthetically pleasing Ballet, opened her eyes to the beauty of dance in general. At this juncture, it is interesting to note that Rukmini saw Anna Pavlova at a time when Pavlova was borrowing Oriental elements from her travel to India in 1922 to make “reforms that could make ballet more meaningful” (Fisher 61).



Img. 4.6.: Rukmini Devi’s vs Anna Pavlova’s Swan (Courtesy: Google Images)

Due to the deteriorating health of her mentor, Annie Besant, Rukmini Devi and Arundale were called back to Madras, where they continued to take care of the Theosophical Society’s operations, even more on behalf of Annie Besant. During this period, in the December of 1932, Rukmini Devi was invited to a Sadir performance at the Madras Music Academy by E. Krishna Iyer, a time when the Devadasi Abolishment Bill was seriously being

pushed forward in the Legislative Council by Muthulakshmi Reddy. Madras Music Academy, which was already campaigning to preserve the art if not the artist, under the leadership of E. Krishna Iyer, had arranged for the performance of the Pandanallur Sisters, Jeevaratnam and Rajalakshmi who were both disciples of Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai Nattuvanar. This was not Rukmini Devi's first time witnessing a Sadir performance. She had lived opposite a Nattuvanar's house in Pudukkottai during her childhood and had constantly heard the Nattuvanar teaching the Devadasis who learnt under him. She had also seen Sadir performances in the temples as part of the Navaratri festival. But these performances had not left any impression on young Rukmini. But the Rukmini who had been initiated into the world's beauty during her Theosophical service, especially to the beauty of dance through Pavlova, was a different person than who she was in Pudukkottai. Witnessing the Sadir performance at Madras Music Academy made her realise the beauty of the form when stripped of its immediate social, cultural and ritualistic surroundings. Placed on the proscenium, the technical clarity and beauty of the form stirred Rukmini. This is where she decides to turn Pavlova's advice of 'reviving the art of her own country' into reality.

This performance made Rukmini Devi decide to learn the art form. E. Krishna Iyer, who was already campaigning to save the art form, obviously saw Rukmini Devi as the perfect choice for the mission. A Brahmin woman who had married a white man and was already a part of the national movement through the Theosophical Society as the 'World Mother' was indeed the ideal option. With his help, Rukmini Devi learned the art form from Mylapore Gowri Amma¹⁰⁷ and later from Pandanallur Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai¹⁰⁸. This was the time when, on the cultural front of India's identity struggle, Sadir was being put under the spotlight by two sides of activists, one who painted Sadir as an art form and an institution that needed to be uprooted and the other that wanted to save the art form even if the practitioners of the said art form had to become collateral damage for the same. Rukmini Devi learnt Sadir over a period of three years. The brilliance of Rukmini Devi lies in the fact that she learnt the art form from both a Devadasi and a Nattuvanar. Traditionally, Devadasis were the performers, and Nattuvanars were the teachers. While the beauty of execution, grace and presence on stage lay with the Devadasis, the Nattuvanars held sole proprietary over the realm of technical knowledge, especially the Tala. Therefore, learning Sadir from both sides enabled Rukmini

¹⁰⁷ The last Devadasi of Mylapore Kapaleeswarar Temple, Chennai.

¹⁰⁸ A noted Nattuvanar (the traditional community that was responsible for conducting a Sadir performance and also the Gurus of Devadasis) from Pandanallur, Tanjore, Tamilnadu.

Devi to gain a holistic understanding of the art form, which aided the reconstruction. Without a complete knowledge of the art, it would have been impossible to weed out the unnecessary and make the changes she later did.

Rukmini Devi's decision to steer her life towards dance and beauty should not be considered an isolated act. As mentioned, Rukmini Devi resulted from the thoughts and actions of theosophists before her, who paved the way and groomed her to fit into this position consciously or unconsciously. Apart from Annie Besant promoting Indian arts, Eleanor Elder, one of the two Elder sisters from Scotland, had conducted experiments embodying the arts of dance and drama into the Theosophical ideology. Her work in the Theosophical Society during the 1910s also included her being the brain behind a group named 'Arts League of Service'(ALS), which aimed at making arts a part of everyday life. The ALS staged small shows, initially in India, for the poor, complete with minimal sets and costumes. Eleanor explains her experiments with dance as a reflection of her firm belief that the world is torn between the 'ugly' and 'beauty'. She was sure that it was the learned who should make the latter rule. Elder thought that beauty and arts should be a part of the curriculum for young children who should not be left to grow in an 'ugly world'¹⁰⁹.

Elder's works in the Theosophical Society in Adyar should be credited as the one that moulded the aesthetic outlook of Theosophists and eventually influenced the path of Rukmini Devi. Elder was also known for penning down a nationalist manifesto for the reform of Sadir called 'Dance: A National Art' in 1918. The strict norms and standards of excellence in dance, especially Sadir, made her denounce the form as 'Vulgar' years before Rukmini Devi came into it. Speaking of Indian dance, Eleanor Elder wrote in her manifesto:

'The remnants of the true art of the Natya Sastras are only to be seen in a debased form nowadays in the nautch, and here again, it is being Westernised. It is a tragedy indeed that such an art should be allowed to die out and it is to be hoped that Indian artists (...) will come forward and take up the subject seriously before it is too late.'

(Elder 27)

Elder wrote that the nautch, Sadir, is too deformed to be referred to for reconstruction. She stated that the system must be 'built up afresh'. Going a step further, Elder suggests that whoever takes up the task of reconstructing this dance form should look into *Shastras* and

¹⁰⁹ Note the repeated reference of 'Ugly' and 'Beauty' in Theosophical writings and speeches.

temple sculptures for the reconstruction. Her writings indicate that she was aware that if not during her time, somewhere in the future, a ‘saviour’ would take up this task of reforming Sadir and restore it and that her work would lay the foundation for it. She writes:

“To create a system of Indian National Dance Drama from the study of these works (the Shastras) and that of Indian sculpture and music, is a great work which awaits some skilled artist to take it up. It must be created by an Indian, and be truly expressive of Indian life and character; and it is now that it is needed, when fresh life is pouring into the Nation through its spiritual and educational awakening, and it may be through drama and this sacred art (that) India will find a means of delivering her message to the world’

(Elder 28)

It is uncanny that her writing of an Indian Messiah of dance was someone from within the Theosophical Society, and this reconstruction was not very far away. Though Rukmini Devi had not stepped into the field of dance when Elder wrote this, Elder and Rukmini Devi were later friends. Elder’s thoughts and ideology lay the foundation for the theosophical perception of dance as a nationalistic tool. Clearly, they felt the need to reconstruct the dance form of the land, albeit it fell under her category of ‘ugly’. Therefore, it is amidst this group of minds that perceived dance as one of the ways to establish India’s individuality, yet labelled Tamilnadu’s own dance form as vulgar, that Rukmini Devi was nurtured.

After her lessons with Mylapore Gowri Ammal and Pandanallur Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, Rukmini Devi Arundale decides to perform ‘her’ reconstructed Sadir, now Bharatanatyam, in front of an audience at the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of the Theosophical Society in the December of 1935. The performance, which created quite a stir in the upper-class, educated society of the Madras Presidency, sowed the seed for the reconstruction of Sadir into Bharatanatyam. Over a thousand people attended this performance and were struck by the spirituality that shone throughout the recital. As recorded by Barbara Sellon,

“Rukmini Devi has great beauty of face and form, great grace of movement but curiously enough, it was not these qualities of which one was more conscious. The performance was so utterly impersonal and so spiritual in its feeling that the bursts of applause, at some unusually beautiful or skilful moment seemed incongruous and out of place; as soon might one applaud a priest at the altar.”

(Sellon 1936)

S. Sarada, one of the primary associates of Rukmini Devi, then a small girl, recollects the performance as:

“Rukmini Devi appeared on the stage like a damsel come alive from one of the ancient Indian sculptures. (...) the dancer was not only beautiful, but her graceful movements and expressions and her complete identification with the spiritual message she was endeavouring to convey through her dance, made for complete rapport between her and her spectators. She had proved that this physical art, when presented with purity, devoid of vulgarity, could convey the soul-uplifting message of ancient India.”

(Sarada 1985)

Rukmini Devi's debut is her first move to radically alter the 'image' of Sadir from the minds of the audience, and its details and effects will be discussed in the latter half of this chapter.

Furthering on the idea that Rukmini Devi and her work is not an isolated event, we come across the writings of George Arundale, who, as discussed earlier, wrote to reinforce and secure a space for Rukmini to be the synonym of Beauty. Rukmini Devi's husband, Dr George Arundale, penned an article for the Theosophical Society in 1936, soon after her debut performance, 'The future Development of the Theosophical Society', which pushes forth the idea of beauty to be added to the existing interpretations of Theosophy by leaders like Blavatsky and Olcott (Cosmic Wisdom), Annie Besant (Will and Activity), Leadbeater (Larger Science) and J. Krishnamurti (Individual Uniqueness and Self Sufficiency). He suggests through this article that Theosophy through the beauty of the arts is the next focal area of the Theosophical Movement in Chennai. He states in this that 'the beauty aspect of life will be much more definitely stressed' and names Rukmini Devi as the person to embody this 'beauty' aspect of Theosophy. This effort of George Arundale to explicitly pen down an article entwining the element of beauty to Rukmini Devi can be deliberated as a desperate attempt to help Rukmini Devi stabilise herself in an otherwise hostile political climate that prevailed in Chennai at that time. Though many aristocrats, mostly belonging to the Brahmin caste, attended the debut performance of Rukmini Devi, there were still a few notable individuals like E. V. Ramasamy (Periyar), the leader who fought against Brahminical dominance in the social structure of Tamilnadu, who refused to attend it. Therefore, Arundale must have felt the need to reinforce, at least within the Theosophical Society, that what Rukmini Devi had undertaken

was a Theosophical cause and a noble one at that. This can be noted in one of Rukmini Devi's writings:

“When I first started dancing, people in the Society thought it was demeaning to the Society and to my position as the President's wife. How can we bring art into the life of the Society and into the attitude of its members? I believe that a new Theosophical work will grow out of this cultural work. If everyone develops a high standard of appreciation, the nation gains. But the soil must be prepared for the planting”

(qtd. in Samson 98)

Within a week of her debut performance, with the encouragement of her dear friends, Rukmini Devi Arundale established the International Academy of Arts on the grounds of the Society on January 6th, 1936. The Academy aimed to teach Bharatanatyam, Carnatic music, painting, pottery and drama. Through the Academy, she wanted to create awareness regarding the newly birthed Bharatanatyam in people's minds. This step was seen as the next practical step of the Theosophical Society, which believed in the revival of India's culture and heritage as a part of the Nationalist Movement. The seniors of the Society, including C. Jinarajadasa and Cousins, believed that Rukmini Devi was the right person to lead the movement to revive this dance form on the verge of extinction as a part of reinstating the Nation's lost spirituality through the arts.

4.3. Individual to Institution:

Rukmini Devi's debut recital was not just a replication of the art she learnt from her Gurus, one a Devadasi and one a Nattuvanar. Unlike a traditional Sishya, student, who would seek a Guru at the tender age of five or six, Rukmini Devi sought her Guru at the ripe age of 29. By this age, Rukmini Devi had married, toured the world, became the World Mother, and was intricately linked with the Nationalist movement. Therefore, the Sishya that Rukmini was was not a naive young mind that the Guru could mould according to their opinions and choices. Rukmini Devi was old enough and had a firm conviction, and learning the art form from both sides enabled her to view it as one complete entity instead of learning it in fragments. The art that she learnt and internalised was pruned off the grime that it had accumulated over the past century. The purpose of the performer was to please the patron, be it the temple wherein the importance was given to either the ritual, which did not need much presentability of appearance

or in the court, where the presentability would be evaluated through the richness of the fabric or the amount of decking up. The presentability depended on the audience and their expectations. Now that it had become a performing art for the public, the change in the space of performance and a wider audience brought new perspectives to the presentability of the performance. So the shift in purpose is to be noted. This, perhaps, was the need of the hour, not only to draw presentability from other cultural interventions of performance but also the responsibility of holding the spiritual, and archaic culture of the nation at a time when we as a nation were struggling to find a footing. Her deep-rooted sense of Carnatic music through her mother and exposure to Sanskrit through her father enabled her to place the form in a textually and spiritually ingrained space. Uttara Asha Coorlawala, while discussing the same, says, “The urge to legitimize oral traditions of performing arts by association with an ancient revered text became necessary to validate its authentic antiquity in a time of newly embraced Western Scholarship” (179).

Rukmini Devi spent the next decade perfecting her training, research and reconstruction of Bharatanatyam. International Academy of Arts had now employed Pandanallur Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai and Pandanallur Chokkalingam Pillai in the Dance department and legendary Papanasam Sivan in the Music department. Rukmini Devi continued travelling and performing solo recitals alongside her tours on the Theosophical Society’s work with her husband and Society’s President, George Arundale. The Academy gradually grew from one pupil, one cottage and one teacher to many more. The task at hand was to take the art form from being personal to becoming a global identity. She had to curate takers for the art form that she was redesigning. Her institutionalisation of Bharatanatyam created a niche for Bharatanatyam on the cultural front, thereby propelling the art form’s reach from a community to eventually a global platform. Others followed suit by creating institutes that would preserve and nurture the country’s cultural treasures. Rukmini Devi’s notable contribution to saving the arts of India was her efforts to go in search of great artists, stalwarts, who had been pushed to the margins due to the decline in patronage of arts, and persuade them to come and teach in the Academy. The Academy became a reverse Gurukul system wherein the Gurus were brought in from many parts of South India to teach the Sishyas, who slowly warmed up to the idea of learning the traditional art forms (Fig 4.3.). Rukmini Devi imbibed the knowledge that she had gained through her travels, training and theosophy to create changes to Bharatanatyam that she believed would retain the traditional aspects while also making the dance form contemporarily relevant.

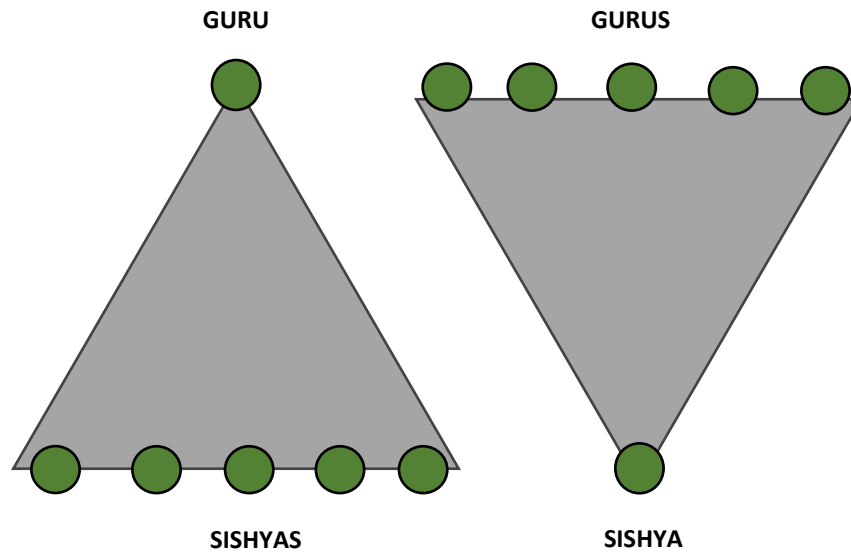


Fig. 4.3.: Traditional Gurukul System vs Kalakshetra's Gurukul System

Along with the Academy, Rukmini Devi later inaugurated the weaving section of Kalakshetra to revive India's traditional weaving techniques and fabrics that were slowly declining. With Rukmini Devi's association with Maria Montessori¹¹⁰, the Montessori method was first taken on a trial run in the Kalakshetra Foundation. It became a part of the curriculum for children of the memorial school that George Arundale had started in memory of Annie Besant, Besant Theosophical High School. Through Maria Montessori, Rukmini was convinced that the Montessori method could aid her in providing children with a healthy environment and surrounding where they are led on a path of self-discovery-based learning while simultaneously exposing the young minds to the beauty of arts and aesthetics. The Academy now offered courses in dance, drama, music, painting and pottery, thus exposing the students to an aesthetically built environment that, she believed, would create a complete artist. By establishing the institute, Rukmini Devi provided the students with a comprehensive knowledge of dance, music and supportive texts instead of the age-old practice of gender-based knowledge sharing.

Along with the Arts Academy, which was later christened Kalakshetra, Rukmini Devi also took under her wing the school, established the weaving department, publishing unit, and the U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar Research Library. Even though she started her career in dance as a soloist, Rukmini Devi performed solo recitals only for a decade before she found her creative outlet in choreographing dance dramas in Bharatanatyam, a trademark of Rukmini Devi and Kalakshetra. Even though the Theosophical Society cut its support to Rukmini Devi and her

¹¹⁰ An educationalist who was the creator of the Montessori method of teaching.

institutes post the demise of George Arundale in 1950, Rukmini Devi managed to slowly shift the campus to Kalakshetra's present-day campus in Thiruvananthapuram from the Theosophical Estate in Adyar. Through struggles of patronage, Rukmini Devi kept her five institutes together and thriving.

4.4. Rukmini and the Reform:

In her five-decade-long service to the arts, Devi has been praised and criticised for the remodelling of Bharatanatyam. A significant step that Rukmini Devi took to re-present the art form in the public domain is to exhaustively establish connections between this 'spiritual' dance form to art history in the form of temple sculptures, Sanskrit dramaturgical theories like Natya Shastra and Abhinaya Darpana and to the living tradition of Guru-Sishya parampara. This way, she could directly bypass the unpleasant immediate memories of the public and connect them directly with the glories of the distant past. Apart from constituting literary value to the art form, she also kept the Guru-Sishya lineage alive by permanently housing the Gurus in her institution. But she did also go against the norms of the traditional ways of teaching Bharatanatyam. By exposing the students to the aspects of dance, music and Tala, Rukmini Devi empowered her female students with a holistic knowledge of the art form wherein they could understand it not just to perform but were also equipped to create their own art in the future.

This privilege of mastering the Tala nuances of the art form was sadly not available to the traditional Devadasis, who merely performed what was created and taught by the Nattuvanar. Similarly, the male aspect in the equation of Sadir was always the one behind the cymbals and never on the performing end. Rukmini Devi's initiative to teach Bharatanatyam to male pupils allowed them to perform rather than their previous role of instructing, even though exceptions like Ram Gopal and Udhay Shankar were already creating their mark in history as male performers. Rukmini Devi, in a sense, broke the gender bias that was prevalent in the Sadir pedagogy and created equal opportunities for both genders alike. Rukmini Devi

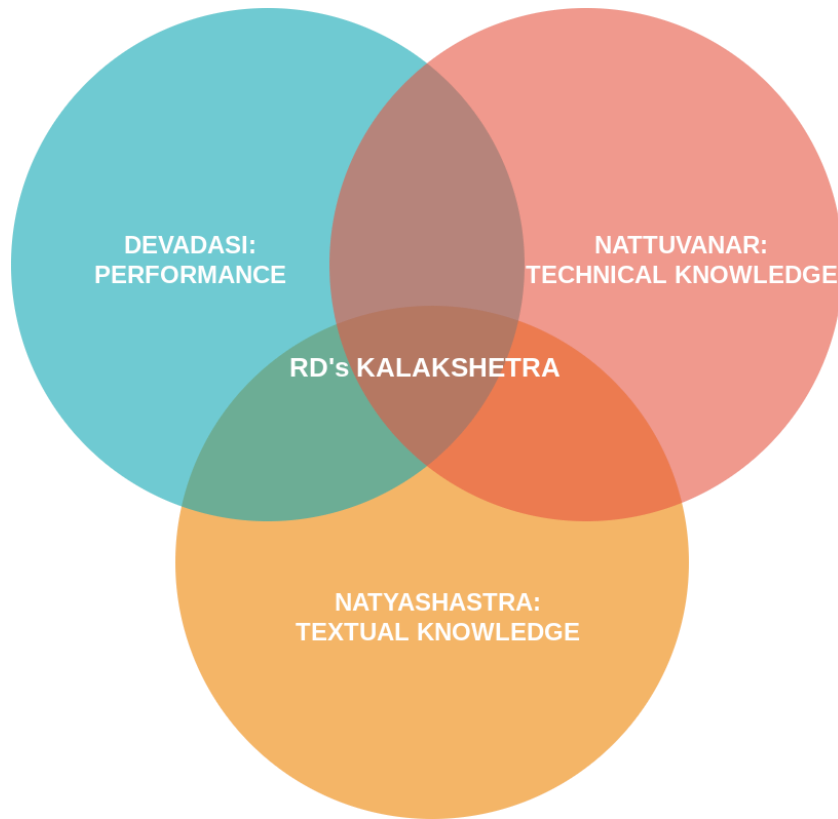


Fig. 4.4.: The Balance of Knowledge in Rukmini Devi's Kalakshetra

understood the state of the Society and what was necessary to legitimize a dance form that was so far passed on exclusively through oral channels to a singular closed-door community. And this she successfully achieved through her institution. She introduced divinity over Sringara (amorous emotion) and, for the same, introduced Keertanams and Sanskrit verses to her solo performances and introduced Bhakti Saint poetry and the Trinity's Keertanams into the Solo repertoire of Bharatanatyam. Her monumental work can be seen in her efforts to create the aesthetics and space for Sadir to fit onto a proscenium as Bharatanatyam.

She had built two full-sized auditoriums in Kalakshetra's Thiruvannamiyur campus, one open-air and one called Bharata Kalakshetra Auditorium, built in the Kerala Koothambalam design. Rukmini Devi's brilliance, both in her solo and dance dramas, shone in how she choreographed and presented the same. Her group choreographies, stage space occupancy and patterns were as unique as possible, and her two dozen dance dramas testify to it. In the Kalakshetra Foundation, Rukmini Devi emphasised the importance of languages and drew insight from not only Sanskrit texts but also Tamil and Telugu texts. Her dance dramas were also inspired by many stories and literary works nationwide. Rukmini Devi strongly argued that Bharatanatyam is the Natya Bharata spoke of, even though she admits that she has never read the Natya Shastra. Her expertise in texts came from her close associates, Narayana Menon,

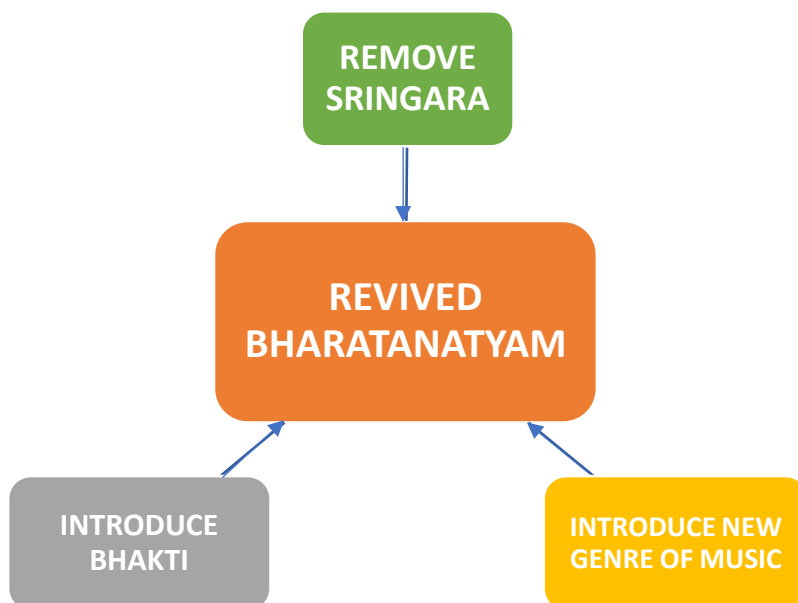


Fig. 4.5.: Bhakti and Sringara in Rukmini Devi's Bharatanatyam

Shankara Menon and S. Sarada, all of whom were not dancers. This intellectual approach served as the backbone of her institute. By institutionalising Bharatanatyam, she gave a structure to the art form and bagged a place for it on the national and international fronts.

4.5. Devi and the Class Politics:

Before we move on to the next part of Rukmini Devi's journey, it is vital to understand her position in the class hierarchy of the early 20th-century Tamilnadu. Even though it is agreeable that Rukmini Devi was a nonconformist and proved her rebellious attitude towards empty beliefs and societal expectations of a woman through her marriage and later through her reform activities of Sadir, it is evident that she was able to relish the fruit of her rebellion due to the privilege of the community she was born into, at least to a reasonable extent. Rukmini Devi was born into a Brahmin family, and as discussed in Chapter 3 of this work, the political and social climate of Tamilnadu in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century made education and arts the prerogative of the Brahmin community. Lakshmi Subramanian pens down on the same as "Brahmin community (...) had traditionally dominated civil society" (151). The Non-Brahmin Movement brought to light the caste-based bias in the society especially in the fields of administration and education, and the oligarchy of the Brahmin community. At a time when the Non-Brahmin Justice Party was campaigning against the special preferences that the Brahmins enjoyed in arenas of education and job opportunities, it

is not surprising that a Brahmin girl who grew up under the guidance of a white woman who supported the oligarchy of the Brahmin community in the State's voting procedure¹¹¹, and later married a white man, had the liberty to utilise the opportunities that came her way in abundance without the shackles that bound women, and men, from lower-class communities at that time period. In no way are we undermining the contribution of Rukmini Devi to the multitudinous fields she has worked in, but rather pointing out how it has always been made to look like the constellation worked in her favour by placing her at the right place at the right time. It is an undeniable fact that the very reason Rukmini's venture was a success was because of her position in the community as the Brahmin woman who was the wife of the President of the Theosophical Society. As recorded by S. Sharada in her book on Rukmini Devi, George Arundale had a massive following amongst the educated members of the 'Brahmin intelligentsia', and these Brahmins attended Rukmini Devi's performances since they believed that George Arundale worked tirelessly towards India's liberation and education by propagating the idea that "a revival of Bharatanatyam based on religion and spirituality would help the regeneration of India" (43). The Tamil Brahmin community considered itself as the guardian of arts and education, even though this was possible only because of their ability to afford exposure, and were deeply drawn towards the eloquent English speeches that Arundale delivered as a prelude to every solo recital of Rukmini Devi. Rukmini Devi's caste position, along with her marital position, fuelled her journey. Her worldwide travels, her exposure to great minds of the time and the luxury to seek after and learn an abolished dance form and practice it behind the safety of the Theosophical Society were all a high-fetched dream for any individual from other castes who could not afford education and were still trying to cope with caste-based discriminatory practices that were still rampantly prevalent during the time of Rukmini Devi. Most of the reviews written on Rukmini Devi and her performances seem to deliberately wipe out any information regarding the community who were previously, for centuries, the guardians of the art form that Rukmini Devi was now performing on the proscenium.

Rukmini Devi revived the dance form of Sadir from its deathbed and made it accessible to other castes. Her revival was based on the Sanskritization of the dance form. The term Sanskritization does not intend to demean her contributions but rather point out the upper-caste approval that the form needed to be accepted by the larger public as 'respectable'. Prof. M. N.

¹¹¹ Refer to Srividya Natarajan's doctoral thesis (1997), Lakshmi Subramanian (2006), and Vaasanthi (2008) for a detailed take on Brahmin Politics in Tamil cultural milieu.

Srinivas coined the term Sanskritization in 1952 and defined it as the “lower castes emulating the customs and culture of the upper castes to upgrade social status” (481 – 496). In Rukmini Devi’s reconstruction of the dance form, we see a similar pattern wherein the origin of the dance form was traced back to Sanskrit texts and temple sculptures, all of which were the domain of the Brahmins. It was a conscious effort to take the art’s history to the Vedic past and connect it to the Brahminical value system and customs from an intellectual perspective to make it appear closely related to Sanskrit, which had been the exclusive field of the Brahmin men. Therefore, to gain the acceptance of the public amidst a raging anti-naught campaign, Rukmini Devi had to use her caste position as a recommendation of the serenity, credibility and sacredness of the dance form that she was attempting to bring to the forefront. In her endeavour to make Bharatanatyam accessible to everyone outside the Devadasi community, Bharatanatyam became the art form that young Brahmin girls learnt as a hobby. Post Rukmini Devi, Bharatanatyam became a domain for dancers from primarily upper-class or middle-class backgrounds. Srividya Natarajan, in her doctoral thesis, pens that

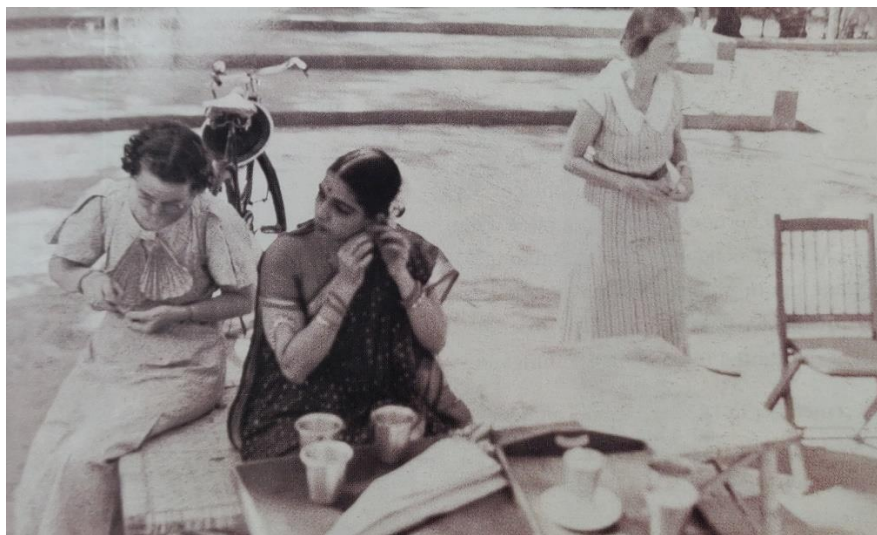
*“In subsequent discourse generated by the International Academy of the Arts (...) the blending of paeans to divinity and attention to soul-making on the one hand with a finicky care for social status on the other becomes so standard that the bathos ceases to be noticeable. Dance is finding its place in **upper-caste** culture.”*

(Natarajan 202)

This association with caste and Rukmini Devi’s journey in the revival of Sadir becomes evident when we look at the emphasis placed on Shastras, Sanskrit, silk costumes and Bhakti, which were the links that directly triggered connections in one’s mind to the domains of Brahminical practices. Similar to how the anti-naught campaigners tried to yoke the Devadasi abolishment to the nationalist movement, Rukmini Devi did the same with her efforts to link the reconstruction of Bharatanatyam to the nationalist identity. She did this by having a clear idea of her target audience, the cosmopolitan audience of educated Brahmin or other upper/middle-class members and the Whites from the Theosophical Society. The stressing of the importance of the dance form’s spirituality and an underlying thought that all dance forms of India are spiritual stems from the thought process of the elite of the time that they needed to ‘purify’ the socio-political gunk that Bharatanatyam had accumulated till then. This usage of terms such as ‘Beauty’, ‘Spirituality’, ‘Spirit’ etc., are widely used in the Theosophical Society’s agenda for dance and Rukmini Devi’s own writings in such a manner that the ambiguity of what these

terms refer to in reality can be seen as a tool that was used to tune the minds of the audience to perceive the art as one that is almost on an un-humanly status that mere humans could not reach and only a sect of people who had access to these pure ideologies could. The obsession with the concept of purity and the need to ‘purify’ an art form itself is a thought that stems from a caste-based conviction, whose main task was to ‘ritually purify’ space, and that is precisely what one sees in the transformation from Sadir to Bharatanatyam, purification. Thus, Rukmini Devi’s caste position and her association with Theosophical ideology gave her the upper hand in jump-starting her role as the saviour of a despised dance form. Her associations and the opportunities that came her way might have, to some extent, been the play of stars, but it definitely was not just that.

RUKMINI’S RE-DRESSING OF SADIR



Img. 4.7.: Rukmini Devi and Madam Cazan Trying Out Costumes (Courtesy: Sunil Kothari Collection)

Rukmini Devi Arundale, the Theosophist, Nationalist and Reformist, set out to give the dust-ridden dance form, Sadir, a new ‘glow’. As a person who had taken on such multitudinous roles within such a short span of her lifetime, at the age of 30, reformation and reconstruction of Sadir to match its new name Bharatanatyam was only the next task at hand. As discussed earlier, her plan of action was to link Bharatanatyam to the idea of nationalism, therefore, attaching a sense of priority to her new project. Through her writings, we can decipher that this thought of hers was not a deliberate one nor a conscious decision. She says:

“Unless India learns once more to reverence her own splendid standards in the Arts, neither will she be worthy of Swaraj nor will she be able to take her rightful place among the nations of the world.”

(Arundale et. al. 1936)

The Theosophical Society’s evangelical ideologies, her own Brahminical upbringing and her first-hand experience of the cultures around the world became the impeccable admixture that fuelled her ideas for what needed to be retained and what needed to be removed from Sadir to make Bharatanatyam the torchbearer of India’s cultural identity. The deep-seated need to find ‘beauty’ in everything materialised, in Rukmini Devi, as the urge to reconstruct Bharatanatyam in a way that she, and her followers, found ‘clean’. Clean and pure of the dark shadow that its traditional practitioners cast on it, on a form that was otherwise spiritual and divine. She writes:

“What I wanted to prove was that what was wrong was not the dance itself but the circumstances surrounding it and what people had done with it. So, I tried in many ways to reform it, to clean it (...) but when I say ‘clean it’, I do not mean that the dance was unclean. I considered it like a great jewel which had been encrusted by dirt. The only thing that was needed was to remove what did not belong to it, to reveal the beauty of the jewel itself.”

(qtd. in Sarada 98)

In one of her crucial moves to distance the dance form from its practitioners and teachers, Rukmini Devi made sure that the body played the central role and everything adorning it, from emotions to costumes, was pure and as far away as possible from the tainted image of its previous keepers, Devadasis. She aimed to sever the form’s identity from the profanity it was associated with, keeping in mind the complications that came with learning, teaching and performing a dance form that used the body, predominantly the female body, as the medium of expression. Rukmini Devi’s modus operandi for resurrecting Bharatanatyam and giving it a whole new identity, especially on the visual front, focused on catering to the tastes of the cosmopolitan audience.

The new face of Bharatanatyam was not painted from a single source. Rukmini Devi carefully rummaged through the different regional styles of Sadir and other local theatrical forms like Therukoothu and Bhagavatamela Natakams to find the exact amalgamation of costumes, jewellery, stage set up and props that together formed a new visual aesthetic for

Bharatanatyam that did not hurt the eyes that were accustomed to the clean, and symmetrical lines of Western Ballet. In a similar fashion to how Pavlova had borrowed Oriental aspects from India to make Ballet's contents more meaningful, Rukmini borrowed from Ballet's presentation and presentability to make it more visually appealing. Therefore, she placed presentation, proscenium and presentability at the core of her reform.

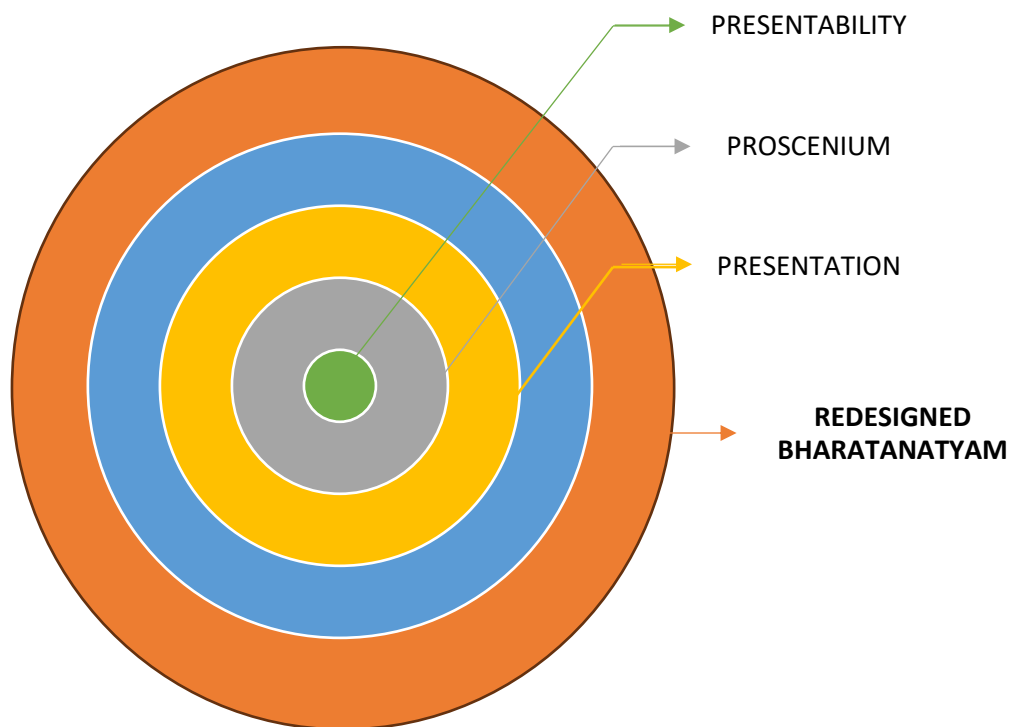


Fig. 4.6.: Core of the Redesigned Bharatanatyam

4.6. Dressing for the Debut:

She meticulously weeded out elements that had, by her time, become synonymous with a Sadir performance and replaced them with what she believed were polished and respectful enough for the young girls of respectable families to learn. The main elements of the visual aesthetics of Sadir were the bulky costumes, garish colours, flimsy/cheap-looking fabric, haphazard lighting, messy stage setting and props that were sore to the eyes of learned upper-class Indian and international audiences. These anomalies were what Rukmini Devi targeted to create the

first and most powerful, visual imagery that she aimed to etch in the mind of the audience. Rukmini Devi writes,

“of course, I made many other reforms also from the aesthetic point of view. Those days dancers used to wear dresses which were often bought from Professional costumiers. The peculiar pyjamas, shapeless blouses often with frills in the most inartistic colours and materials used to give a crude impression. the dancers always wore a Kaccham over these pyjamas. The Salangai ankle bells, would be tied over a piece of cloth. This would get undone very often and trail along behind the dancer as she danced, it used to be so comical! (...) They have no idea of makeup - collyrium was used for the eyes and they chewed betel leaves to colour their lips red. (...) Generally, no attention was paid to the stage presentation. The musicians would follow the dancer with music and drumming as she moved about the stage. Very often you would find the backdrop with advertisements on them. I wanted to change all that.”

(Rukmini Devi Birth Centenary Volume 45)

And that is precisely what she did on her very first performance on the 30th of December in 1935.

Based on witness accounts, we can dissect Rukmini Devi’s Aharya of the debut performance into three: Spiritual, Textual and Historical. The stage was set in a way that the audience had never witnessed in a Sadir performance before. The open-air stage in the Theosophical Society had a dark green backdrop. The orchestra led by the Nattuvanar, which, till Rukmini Devi’s advent, either followed the dancer as she went about performing or stood behind a bench at the back end of the stage, were made to be seated at the stage right on neatly laid rugs on the ground. The stage left was adorned with a Nataraja statue. Amidst the dimly lit stage, Rukmini Devi appeared to dance a dedication for Lord Shiva in his cosmic form, Nataraja, as a group of young men chanted Sanskrit Sloka in unison, invoking the Supreme. An eyewitness account mentioned in Gowri Ramnarayan’s article records the performance as follows:

“Nearly a thousand people were seated under the great rain tree through who’s giant branches glimpses could be caught of the stars in an almost purple sky. The stage was at first in semi-darkness: on one side the ensemble of musicians including her guru was seated on rugs with their picturesque instruments; on the other a group of young

men appeared chanting in unison a most impressive dedication of the dance recital Bharata Natya to Nataraja, that aspect of Divine life. The music grew stronger, then the lights came on and against the green curtains of the background, Rukmini appeared in her archaic white and gold dress, looking like some temple carving, full of arrested movement. (...) For more than two hours she danced with scarcely a pause and all the time the audience sat spellbound absorbed by the beauty of movement, no less by the telling of beloved stories in voice, gesture and expression."

(qtd. in Ramnarayan 21)

Medhuri argues that by placing the Nataraja idol on stage, Rukmini Devi connected her performance to the cosmic dance of Lord Nataraja (204). The placement of Nataraja as the Lord of Dance can be seen as a physical manifestation of Anand Coomaraswamy's famous 1912 essay, 'The Dance of Shiva'. Invoking the Lord through chanting was used to induce a sense of spiritual hypnosis over the crowd, most of whom were Theosophists and Brahmins. By yoking her recital to the dance prescribed in Natya Shastra, she successfully declared textual credibility to her performance. She established the historical continuum of her revival by seating the Guru on stage in a respectable yet authoritative space by drawing attention to the Nataraja idol and the Nattuvanar with the help of a specially focused spotlight on both. By staging Bharatanatyam on the proscenium, devoid of the flashy colours, unprofessional lighting and erratic stage setting, she created an image of a clean, pure and beautiful dance form that the Theosophists long claimed as the original glorious past of the country¹¹². Rukmini Devi achieved her aim of disassociating the dance form from its traditional performers by using staging techniques and costumes that bypassed centuries and connected the dance form to the pre-colonial era. She succeeded in performatively establishing a visual image that legitimised Bharatanatyam's textual, anthropological and sculptural histories and imprinted this image of a multi-directional history in the minds of the urban audience of the 1930s.

To a great extent, she achieved this by replacing the despised, impure image of Sadir with her newly constructed visual aesthetics. Her choice of performance space, backdrop, neatly fitted costume, and aesthetically lit stage using British stagecraft gave her performance the contemporaneity that the dance form needed. Therefore, merely in her first performance, Rukmini Devi very skilfully managed to envision a contemporary, classical and yet traditional

¹¹² Read 'Rukmini Devi and 'Sanskritization': A New Performance Perspective' by Avanti Medhuri (2005) for further discussion on staging as a decisive factor in the success of the initial performance.

performative path for Bharatanatyam purely through Aharya. She removed the bulky costumes that Devadasis wore and redesigned the Bharatanatyam costume in this debut performance, symbolically associating herself and the dancing body with the divinity and grace of the dancing sculptures. The choice to dress in white must have been a deliberate step to invoke a sense of purity since Rukmini Devi's revival was one that aimed to 'purify' the form. This colour choice can also be seen as the result of the colonial hybridity that she grew up in. The fact that white is considered the most divine in Christianity shows the influence of evangelical philosophies and Western-modernist education on Rukmini Devi's creative process. Her white form-fitting costume was perceived as modest and ascetic. The very things that Rukmini Devi and her seniors in the Theosophical Society hoped for the dance form of Devadasis to be. The Society, especially Annie Besant, argued that the Devadasis were meant to be akin to the vestal virgins of the catholic system. The main argument of the Theosophical Society was that the dance form was so pure that the practitioners were supposed to be unadulterated. The very idea that the Devadasis had autonomy over their bodies and were independent financially was seen as the antithesis to the concept of the ideal 'womanhood'. Therefore, one can view the white costume as an attempt to establish that Rukmini Devi had reinstated the lost purity of the dance form.

The Devadasis used their body as a means of their livelihood, both on stage and within closed quarters. This over-sensualisation of the female form for economic transactions was an aspect of Sadir that the educated, liberated, upper-class could not stomach. Rukmini Devi, however, brought back the focus to the female body. She did this by claiming that the female body she was focusing on was divine. She did away with the sensual moves and gestures that the Devadasis had developed in their performances and made the dance form more geometric. Coorlawala comments on Rukmini Devi's purification. She says,

"In Sanskritized dance, the body is the central object and the word 'pure', the ultimate arbiter that is applied to the interpretation of emotions to costumes – all must be refined and purified".

(Coorlawala 190)

The move to detach the hovering masculinity of the Nattuvanar from behind the dancer to a designated space revealed and highlighted the female dancing body. Replacing the distractive backdrop with a solid dark-coloured fabric highlighted the dancer's figure, form and movement.

And as the final flourish, the introduction of proper stage lights helped the audience focus solely on the performer without any aberration.

Focusing on the execution of her costume, stage setup and stage lighting, three critical aspects of Rukmini Devi's attempt to refashion Bharatanatyam, one must first understand that the changes made by Rukmini Devi were not done solely by her. Rukmini Devi was a mastermind who knew what she wanted and had the right people to execute her plan to the T. The names that we need to know to make sense of what teamwork went behind the costuming of 'Bharatanatyam' are Alex and Mary Elmore¹¹³, Madame Cazan¹¹⁴, Paul Strom¹¹⁵ and Conrad Woldring¹¹⁶. All of them were Theosophists who had visited the Theosophical Society Headquarters in Adyar and were associates of the Arundales. From her debut performance, these associates helped her create the magical recital she wanted to present. Madame Cazan and Mary Elmore were the ones that should be credited for the execution of the new costumes that Bharatanatyam adorned. Especially, Madame Cazan, a seamstress from Italy, helped materialise Rukmini Devi's design ideas for the new outfit. They created a costume that, according to Rukmini Devi, was graceful and modest and took one back to the sculptures of ancient India. Rukmini Devi writes about the changes she made to her costume as,

"I still remember very well how on the stage behind the dance often they were advertisements of Amrutanjan and all kinds of things! The back curtain was a dirty piece of cloth. There was no aesthetic sense evident anywhere outside the actual dance. The jewellery was very beautiful, but the kind of costumes that were used- the sarees, for example - were very cheap tinsely stuff that did not match the dance and were, according to me, too showy. The pyjamas that were worn, the Victorian type of cholis - they all seemed to me to be a mixture of many different civilizations. All these I felt required thought and after thought, appropriate change. It was not easy to design a new costume. I had to try to make something new - not with the idea of making it look new but with the idea of making it look old. In other words, create costumes that were in the spirit of what our people wore thousands of years ago. This was not very easy. It was not easy to get help from the sculptures because they were clothed only below the

¹¹³ Theosophists from England who had come to Theosophical Society in Adyar. Alex had prior experience in staging school theatres and was adept at stage props and lighting.

¹¹⁴ Theosophist and Seamstress from Italy

¹¹⁵ Theosophist, Actor and Theatre Director from Holland, who helped building stage props and designed stage lighting for Rukmini Devi's productions

¹¹⁶ Dutch Theosophist, Photographer and Printmaker. Did the photography and lighting for the initial productions and performances.

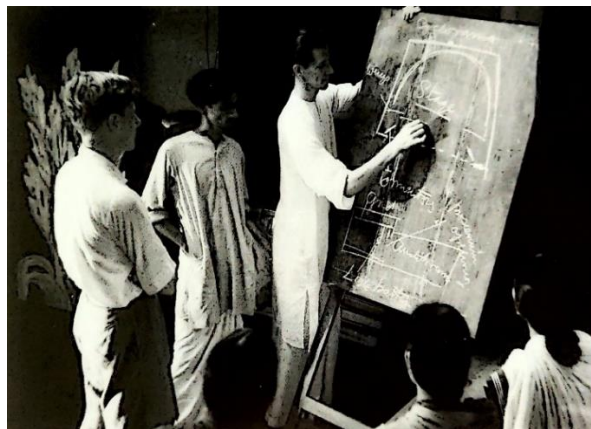
waist! Therefore we had to think creatively in order to catch the old spirit. Gradually I evolved my costume, and those used in Kalakshetra are based on my original design.”

(Arundale 2005)

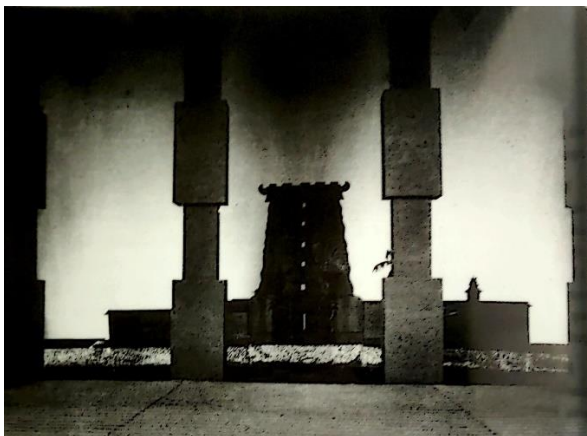
Until then, costumes had solely represented the patron's wealth, not a personal choice but a political statement. Rukmini Devi's redesigned Aharya had much more weight to pull and was designed to represent the Indian cultural identity for which she had to establish the sculptural and scriptural connection. Rukmini Devi, however, adapted the jewellery of the Devadasi as it is since she considered them “exquisite”. She writes:

“The ornaments they wore were, however, beautiful - the Oddiyanam on the waist, the vanki on the arms and the traditional jimikki earrings and necklaces. They also used to wear a very beautiful ornament on the shoulder and upper arm. These jewellery, unlike the Dress, was really exquisite.”

(Rukmini Devi Arundale Birth Centenary Volume 46)



Img. 4.8.: Paul Strom Teaching Stage Design (Courtesy C. Nachiappan Archives)



Img. 4.9.: Backdrop designed by Rukmini Devi, Executed by Alex Elmore. (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)

Alex Elmore did the stage lighting with basic wooden boxes. Conrad Woldring, who was good at furniture making and painting, took care of setting up the stage and stage props. Paul Strom, an actor and Theatre director from Holland, helped Rukmini Devi with the overall techniques of British Stagecraft. He also taught drama and stage techniques as a subject at Kalakshetra Foundation.

Rukmini Devi's solo recitals were consistently associated with spirituality, divinity and a sense of antiquity that it carried. In addition to the silk costumes and the temple jewellery, a monumental contribution of Rukmini Devi through her solo recitals is her design of backdrops, side wings, front curtains and stage lighting. Rukmini Devi designed various backdrops with paintings of temple pillars, Gopurams and Nandi and carried them with her wherever she travelled for a performance to instil a sense of spirituality and draw the attention of the spectator to techniques executed by the dancer. Alex and Mary Elmore helped her with the stage settings for her solo recitals and a few of her early productions. A few of the backdrops were designed by Rukmini Devi herself and executed by Alex and Mary Elmore, while a few were designed and executed by the couple. Betson Coats, the wife of John Coats – a Theosophist and President of Adyar Theosophical Society from 1973, recalls how the early days of Kalakshetra, the International Academy of Arts, and Rukmini Devi's solo career, "There was a great deal of costume designing, scenery painting, rehearsals and such like activities (...)" (qtd. in Nachiappan 9). Thus, with the help of a small community of artists, Rukmini Devi was able to create magic on her first performance and establish new visual aesthetics for Bharatanatyam through her solo recitals.

The point of argument of this research is that Rukmini Devi's attempt to resurrect Bharatanatyam depended on its visual effect to a vast extent. She placed importance on 'beauty'; what this term visually meant was never verbally or in writing described by her. Her criterion for beauty and vulgarity of an element depended solely on her perception of the world around her, which was shaped by her bourgeois upbringing. The changes she made to music and the body vocabulary of Bharatanatyam do make for a noteworthy factor. Still, Rukmini Devi's attempt to revive Bharatanatyam and present it on a proscenium depended heavily on her first impression at the Diamond Jubilee performance. She strategically placed the weight of her revival on the presentability of that performance. She is believed to have persuaded the many dignitaries of the elite Madras social circles by saying, "I request you to come and see it this one time, and if you do not like it, do not come to another (performance)" (qtd. in Samson). The audience's mind is always taken by the visual effects first before it starts to analyse the

technicalities of a performance. The audience was subconsciously made to connect the performance and the performer to the spiritual past through the sculpturesque costumes, temple backdrops and the idol on stage. Rukmini Devi had to design her Aharya in such a way that it legitimised the art form in the social, anthropological and historical avenues. Through her actions of disjoining the Nattuvanar and the dancer, refashioning the dancer and redesigning the space, Rukmini Devi provided the perfect ‘magically divine’ performance wherein the urban spectator could, for the very first time, view the ‘despised’ Sadir in a new light, clad like the Apsaras of the long past. In fact, the Devadasis were themselves not financially sound to afford new costumes. But Rukmini Devi, in her initial performance and consequent performances through the years, preferred having a costume change for the latter half of the performance, clearly indicating how powerful the presentation and presentability were for her revival.

4.7. Innovation, Inspiration or Imitation?

In many instances Rukmini Devi and her followers and associates campaign that she was solely responsible for the restaging and re-presenting of the despised Sadir through which Bharatanatyam saw a new lease of life. But when we look a little deeper, we are brought to the point where it is clear that these changes were attempted by a few even before the time of Rukmini Devi. In his biographical work on Balasaraswati, Douglas Knight records the fact that Kandappa Pillai ¹¹⁷ was one of the pioneers to make changes in the presentation of Sadir/Bharatanatyam. A monumental move in Bharatanatyam’s stage presentation that was famously accredited to be an innovative move of Rukmini Devi seems to have already been implemented in the early 1930s. Knight says that in the early 1930s, before Rukmini Devi even entered the dancing scene,

*“When Jayammal performed with the ensemble, **Kandappa moved the musicians from a standing position behind the dancer to a seated position to the side of the dancer.** One of the reasons that he seated the musicians was out of respect for Jayammal and other women who joined her as accompanists, whom he would not permit to stand and sing on a platform.”*

(Knight 72)

¹¹⁷ 1899 – 1941 Great grandson of Chinnaiyya – the eldest of the Tanjore quartet.

Kandappa Pillai also made changes to the costume of the musicians themselves and disregarded the courtly etiquettes that were followed till then, as discussed in Chapter 3, that he did not seem fit for the changing spaces of performances since the audience members were not royals (Knight, 72). Knight attributes these changes as ones that were necessitated by the changing ‘performing venue and audiences’ (Knight, 70). He further adds,

“The modifications introduced by Kandappa Pillai are significant for what they tell us about the processes of change within the traditional artistic community. Authenticity in Bharatanatyam became an issue for debate when the art form became detached from its creative source, but the controversies raised within artistic communities themselves are of different sort. They are descriptors of the process of change of a traditional practice within the confines of its own integrity - within the aspects of the practice that seem to defy emulation and non-intuitive, self-conscious imitation.”

(Knight 70).

Yet another innovation Rukmini Devi is accredited for is the change in the backdrop of a performance with temple-like cut-outs that transported the viewer to a temple. Contradicting the temple-stage image that Medhuri attributes to Rukmini Devi, Hari Krishnan, in his work, gives a clear picture of records of this tradition existing even from 1838 (81). He points to an account of five Devadasis and three musicians who were taken from Thiruvendipuram, Cuddalore District, to perform in Europe by the French impresario E. C. Tradivel. In their tour of Europe, in one particular instance when they performed at Adelphi Theatre in London, they are said to have performed in front of a backdrop that resembled a temple. Krishnan quotes Jeop Bor (2007):

“The Indian dancers showed up in the second piece, in a one-act burletta called The Law of Brahma or The Hindoo Widow. (...) They were drawn to the front of the stage ‘upon a moving platform.’ Sitting with flywhisks in their hands ‘around a statue of Vishnu, in the interior of a temple, they [were] performing the important duty of fanning the image’”

(qtd. in Krishnan 81).

He adds, “These dancers inevitably performed against backdrops that vaguely resembled European cathedrals or Oriental pagodas” (Krishnan, 81). Ruth St. Denis¹¹⁸ staged her oriental dance production titled ‘Radha’ in New York in 1906, with Indian costumes and a temple setting including the backdrop (Img. 4.10.).



Img. 4.10.: The Devadasis from 1838 (top) and Ruth St. Denis’s Radha, 1908 (bottom). (Courtesy – Hari Krishnan)

Speaking of visionaries before Rukmini Devi, we have various dancers from the West who, in their search for Oriental art, recreated the costumes and backdrops of the Hindu Temples and temple dancers as they perceived them. But one of the noteworthy contributions to the resurrection of Indian dance and its image in the mind of Indians and Westerners alike comes from Ragini Devi. Born Esther Luella Sherman, it is fascinating to trace her journey to India and her eventual identity as an authentic performer of Indian dance forms. Even though she started her dance career in New York, recreating what she thought the Indian dance would look like, she eventually settled in India. She took a journey into Indian arts, a journey much similar to that of Rukmini Devi. Ragini Devi was supported by the Theosophical Society (Bangalore) even in 1930 and learnt Bharatanatyam from Devadasi, Jetti Thayamma of Mysore Bani and also from Mylapore Gowri Ammal (in the year 1931) that is, even before Rukmini Devi learnt the form in 1933. Ragini Devi’s first performance of Bharatanatyam (along with a

¹¹⁸ American pioneer of Modern Dance and one of the early performers of the ‘Oriental Dance’.

few of her repertory items from her New York days) was allegedly performed with a stitched costume (Rahman 38).



Img. 4.11.: Ragni Devi in a Traditional Bharatanatyam Costume and Jewellery (1933) (Courtesy – Sukanya Rahman)



Img. 4.12.: Ragni Devi and Guru Gopinath, 1930's (Left) and Ragini Devi as Parvati, the 1920s (Courtesy – Sukanya Rahman)

The changes attributed to Rukmini Devi were, collectively or individually, tried by stalwarts before her time. It is hard to deny that Rukmini Devi may never have heard, come across, or been influenced by these changes when she used them in her own revival. Rukmini's contribution can be seen as the culmination of all the abovementioned attempts to refashion or re-present the dance form according to the changing space and time demands. Krishnan notes that "Arundale's temple backgrounds thus are a part of a long chronology of optical fascination with Hindu temples and the Visual imbrications of temples and history of dance in India" (Krishnan 82). Rukmini Devi's initial performance and the establishment of the historical and spiritual connection can be viewed as the necessary steps that she had to take to legitimise the dance form to her target audience, the elite of Madras and abroad, who would not have

witnessed the dance form away from its stigmatised surrounding. Therefore, be it inspiration, imitation or innovation, Rukmini Devi's standardisation of Bharatanatyam has set the stage for the norm for Aharya to be followed by Bharatanatyam dancers for years to come.

4.8. Rukmini's Aharya:

In the years that Rukmini Devi spent establishing Bharatanatyam as ancient India's quintessential classical art form, she struggled to connect the 'texts' and the performative tradition. In numerous instances, she stresses the link between form and its textual heritage to present Bharatanatyam with a sense of historical and literary authority. But she was not a learned scholar of the treatises on dramaturgy and claimed that her recreation was based on the 'spirit' of the texts and not on the actual content. Hence, Rukmini Devi, even in the department of her Aharya for solo recitals, did not recreate aspects of Bharatanatyam based on texts but rather used them as a 'guiding spirit'. Rukmini Devi's reconstruction of Aharya became the show's star since it gave the audience a sense of witnessing a 'polished' art. Going further, she seems to have based the revival on three main goals: To enhance the charm of the dance presentation through her heightened sense of aesthetics, replace gaudy costumes with exquisitely tailored ones, and revamp the stage presentation through various props and lighting. All three concerns Aharya and goes to prove that it played an essential role in establishing 'Rukmini Devi's Bharata Natya'. I believe she placed the revival on the Aharya since she knew the technique was already there. She needed to remove the 'jarring' elements and replace them with her aesthetics. In her own words:

*“Jeevaratnam and her sisters as dancers opened my eyes to the inherent spirituality of the Indian dance. Though there were some **elements that were jarring** to me, I saw through all that a great art submerged partly in ignorance and vulgarity though the devotional character and **the technique of the dance were inspiring**. This was a great moment and I saw how the gold can be separated from the dross.”*

(qtd. in Nachiappan 7)

In the nine years Rukmini Devi performed solo recitals, her costumes were all of different colours, materials and patterns. In the photographs we could collect of her early days of solo performance, she is seen fashioning various patterns of blouses, none with a separate *Melakku*, adorned with frills at multiple places. It is curious to see these frills on her blouses

since she did not have an excellent opinion of the same on the costumes of the Devadasis. Speaking of which, she opines:

“The peculiar pyjamas, shapeless blouses often with frills in the most inartistic colours and materials used to give a crude impression.”

(RDA Birth Centenary Volume 46)

Speaking of the costumes of the Devadasis, she also remarks that:

“Dancing girls perform before men dressed in an unsightly polyglot dress a mixture of Hindu, Muslim and Christian cultural influence. The top of the dress is the saree, tight pyjamas encase the legs and the blouses have, more often than not, flounced sleeves.”

(qtd. in Samson 102)

Every person who has had the opportunity to interact with Rukmini Devi personally speaks highly of her eye for aesthetics. Her choices of colours were soft and did not look too bright. Most of the colours she used for her costumes were similar to those already prevalent in the looms of Kanchipuram. At this juncture, we should revisit the kind of exposure Rukmini Devi had. She expresses in an interview with All India Radio:

“(...) my contacts came through my sources of inspiration; the great music of the master composers of the West, the study and appreciation of the Western classical arts, painting architecture as well as literature.”

(qtd. in Nachiappan 59)

These factors, adjoined with her learning the classical art of Ballet, had refined her taste so that she could appreciate the aesthetics of Indian art through the developed senses of the Western perspective.



Img. 4. 13.: Anna Pavlova's Radha (Left) vs Rukmini Devi's Radha (Centre) vs Ruth St. Denis's Radha (Right)

(Courtesy: National Library of Australia [Anna Pavlova's Radha] and Sunil Kothari Collection)

Rukmini Devi lived and grew up in a time when the West was actively seeking Oriental Mysticism. These oriental dancers, including Ruth St. Denis, Anna Pavlova and Ragini Devi, through their interpretation of the Indian *Nautch* and their captivating Aharya, laid the basis for revivalists like Rukmini Devi Arundale to build back the almost extinct Indian dance forms. We see traces of its influence in Devi in her experiments with cross-cultural dance pieces similar to that of Ruth St. Denis ('Radha', 1908), Uday Shankar and Anna Pavlova (As Radha in, 1922). This was even before she stepped into the arena of Bharatanatyam. She is seen in costumes that resemble that of Pavlova and Ruth St. Denis and created her own Radha under the banyan tree of the Theosophical Society, with her own dance moves (Img. 4.13.). Notably, Pavlova, Denis and Ragini Devi toured India in 1922, 1926 and 1931, respectively, before Rukmini Devi's interest in reviving Indian Dance. Denis's company, Denishawn Dance Company, which she ran with her dance partner Ted Shawn, toured India in 1926 and had an eighteen-month-long tour performing *Nautch* and *Dance of the Apsarases*. Uttara Asha Coorlawala (1992) gives a detailed analysis of the Denishawn Dance company's performance tour and its reception by the Indian audience. Even though Rukmini Devi openly credits Pavlova for inspiring a generation of cultural awakening in India, she does not credit Ruth St. Denis or Ragini Devi. It is not inconceivable to attribute this to the fact that Pavlova was from a bourgeois Ballet background, while the other two were from a modern dance background which might not have appealed to the upper-class associations that Rukmini Devi had and to her Victorian sense.

Rukmini Devi disapproved of the Devadasi's sartorial choices and clad herself in the materials and colours of the 'cultured and learned'. Though access was denied to document the few surviving solo costumes of Rukmini Devi visually, I had the opportunity to study and take notes of the colours and patterns of it. Most of the remaining pieces of her costumes are just blouses with a single pyjama and a back piece. Below is a catalogue of Rukmini Devi's solo costumes that are currently shelved in Kalakshetra's museum.

Table No. 4.1.: Catalogue of Surviving Solo Costumes of Rukmini Devi Arundale

S.No	Item Name	Description	Material	Process
1	RD solo Blouse	A yellow blouse in silk with an attached border made of zari on the lower part of the front and back of the blouse. The front right portion tapers to overlap over the left part of the blouse. The sleeves are silver zari with flower motifs and a pink and red floral zari border. The blouse has a yellow cotton lining for the body and a green cotton lining for the sleeves.	Silk, cotton for lining, metal for hooks and zari	stitched
2	RD Solo Blouse	A silk blouse in red colour with Silk patches with peacock motifs attached to it. The four patches are made of different Shades of Red. Red Zari frills are connected to the shoulder of the blouse and continue on both sleeves. The sleeves have a zari border with small gopuram designs above. The neck has loops made of rectangular red cloth, and a thread made of red cotton is made to pass through the loops. A pair of strings on both the sleeves and the neck and an extra-long cotton patch are attached to the lower side of the blouse for tying.	Silk, cotton, metal and Zari	stitched
3	RD Solo Blouse	A plain pink silk blouse with a zari border. The left front part tapers and overlaps over the correct part. Has cotton lining	Silk, cotton, metal, zari	stitched
4	-do-	A plain beige blouse in silk with a silver Zari border on the sleeves has a thin line of silver zari on the back neck and the lower front of the body. A big loop in the front near the chest. It has Threads attached to the back; has snap buttons instead of hooks, and loops for the side of	Silk, metal, cotton and zari.	stitched

		the blouse directly under the armpit.; probably to attach a separate fan to the bodice.		
5	-do-	a parrot green Silk blouse with pink borders on the sleeve. It has Zari frills attached to the shoulder to both sleeves. It has similar Threads and loops as the previous blouse, probably for attaching a separate fan piece. Has metal hooks and also press buttons.	Silk, cotton, metal and zari	Stitched
6	-do-	Yellow Silk blouse with pink Zari border with parrot motifs on both sleeves. It has regular hook buttons and two sets of pink Zari fans from the shoulder to the sleeve on either side	Silk, cotton, metal and zari	Stitched
7	-do-	Ivory-coloured Silk blouse with Zari border attached to the sleeves. The sleeves have a separate Zari strip in the shape of a 'V' attached from the shoulder down to the end of the sleeves. Press buttons instead of hooks. Four Zari threads the attached near the front and back of the neck. This blouse has a cream-coloured lining of cotton.	-do-	Stitched
8	-do-	Ivory-coloured Silk blouse with Zari border attached to the sleeves. Two gold zari frills on either side extend from the shoulder down the arms. Has a zipped front instead of hooks. Has gold Threads on the neck. Has a cotton lining.	-do-	Stitched
9	-do-	Cream silk long-bodied blouse. It has golden zari loops along the neckline with cream silk thread looped.	-do-	stitched
10	-do-	Green Silk blouse with gold zari buttas all over the body. It has purple Triangle silk zari patches from the shoulder to the hand. It has metal loops and hooks on the front, and the neck has a Zari design. Green cotton lining is used on the inside.	-do-	stitched
11	-do-	Golden Silk blouse with maroon zari border attached. It has snap buttons near the chest and a normal hook and loop for buttoning	-do-	stitched
12	-do-	pale pista green blouse with gold Zari paisley Buttass all over the body. Press the buttons on the front. Separate loops near the armpits are probably for	-do-	Stitched

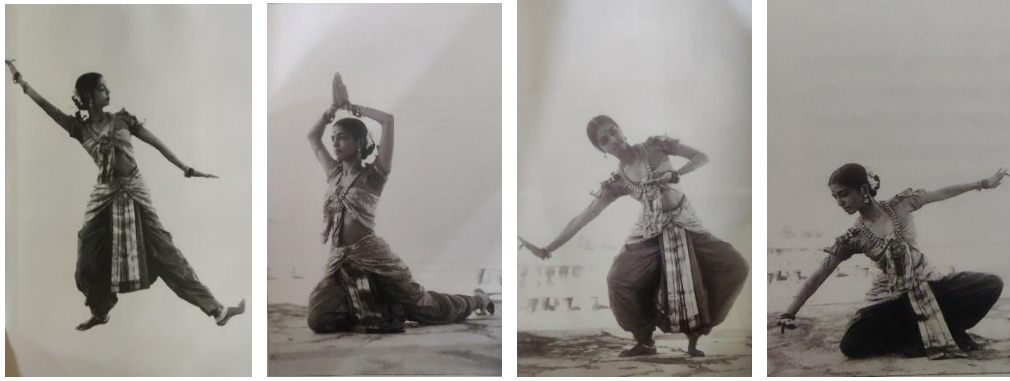
		attaching a separate fan. A piece of pink Zari with gold details is separately attached to the sleeves. The neck has rectangular green cloth patches as a design.		
13	-do-	White Silk blouse with golden yellow Zari border. Has a pair of golden yellow Zari fans from the shoulder extending to the arm on either side. It has snap buttons, probably for attaching an extra fan or a Melakku. It has hooks and loops for buttoning in front. Has two separate cotton threads attached to the neck and back. Cream cotton lining.	-do-	Stitched
14	-do-	Cream Silk blouse with beige colour Zari frills separately attached from the shoulder to the sleeves. Zari borders are connected to the sleeves and metal zip in the front instead of hooks.	-do-	stitched
15	RD Solo Blouse and Back piece	Orange-coloured Silk dance costume. Has a blouse and a back piece. Has Zari Buttass all over. BLOUSE: Orange Silk blouse with green Silk frill attached separately on the shoulder extending down both arms. It has silver Paisley Zari Buttass and a silver Zari border with mango motifs on the sleeves. Press down buttons in the front and Zari thread attached to the neck, shoulder and sleeves. Has an off-white cotton lining inside. BACK PIECE: a single unstitched piece with long lengthy strings in the same material on either side. It must have been designed to be taken between the leg and tied with the help of the strings. It has similar Zari Paisley Buttass all over and Zari stripe borders on the lower.	Silk, cotton, zari, silk strings/tapes	stitched
16	RD Pyjama	A yellow fabric like a wrap-around skirt with a maroon mango Bhutta Zari border. The waistband is stitched with loops and a button to fasten around the waist, with the fabric pleated and stitched to the front centre of the band. At the centre point at the bottom of the fabric is a stitched patch that has two loops. This piece is fastened around the waist, forming a cape-like	Silk, cotton loops.	Semi-stitched. To be draped.

		pattern at the back that reaches the floor. When the loops attached to the centre bottom are taken between the legs, up to the waist, and fastened around the waist, the whole piece forms a pyjama costume.		

If we look at the material of these costumes, it is not surprising to see that it is Silk only. Though these were all Kanchipuram silk, there were also Banarsi and Bandini Silk costumes that I was not permitted to study. White, ivory, green, pink, yellow and orange are frequently used in Tamil Silk. Few of these were woven in the Kalakshetra weaving Department that she had established. Every blouse in this catalogue and the photo collections has a different pattern of stitching and experiments with the placement of the frills. Small frills on the sleeve seem to be a favourite though their placements vary with each blouse. With the help of Madame Cazan, she must have been the first to experiment with patchwork in blouses, wherein she used patches of contrasting colours from a different saree stitched on the main blouse to create a sense of vibrancy. These designs were made possible only because of the assistance of a seamstress. These blouses were also rich with Zari works and provisions to ‘clip-on’ Melakku. In most of her costumes, the Melakku was replaced with various contraptions of frills covering the bosom region, thereby creating an illusion of a Melakku. The one pyjama in the catalogue is also a unique design wherein a single piece of fabric is made into a pyjama costume.

4.9. Analysis of Rukmini Devi’s Solo Costumes through the Photo Archives of Conrad Woldring and C. Nachiappan:

Rukmini Devi’s photos, captured by Conrad Woldring and C. Nachiappan, are the only publicly accessible archive of Rukmini Devi’s solo recitals. This section discusses a few prominent styles of costumes donned by Rukmini Devi, as seen in the above-mentioned collection.



Img. 4.14.: Rukmini Devi Solo Costume – 1 (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)

Captured before her debut performance (Nachiappan), this set of pictures (Img. 4.14.) show a neatly tailored pant/Pyjama style costume with a unique blouse. As mentioned, this blouse has a knot attached at the centre and does not have a traditional Melakku covering the torso. The costume seems to be silk and in contrasting colours. Her hair is in a bun; she is seen not wearing a Talaisaman. She has kept it simple with a single long Manga Haaram, no Addigai (Necklace), and, interestingly, no Oddiyanam.



Img. 4.15.: Rukmini Devi Solo Costume – 2 (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)

The second costume of the debut performance is the white costume (the picture might not have been taken during the first performance). A Pyjama style costume with a flowy centre fan. The blouse has a Zari detail on top, a centre fan and sleeves with small frills attached. She is wearing a full Talaisaman, the same Manga Haaram and a traditional earring with Maatal. The

Oddiyanam is not the traditional one that the Bharatanatyam dancers use, but a custom piece that is now at the Kalakshetra Museum.



Img. 4.16.: Rukmini Devi Solo Costume – 3 (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)

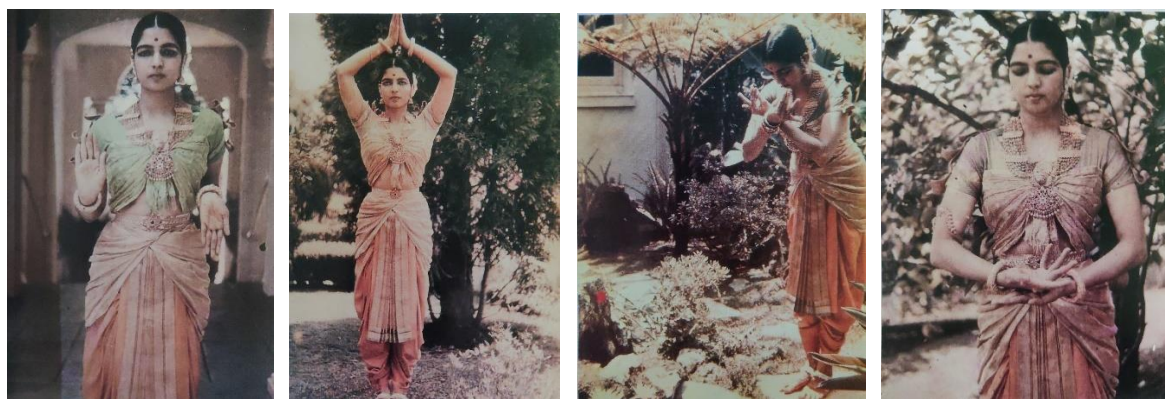
The third set of photographs (Img. 4.16.) shows one of her unique costumes. A silk costume, most probably in darker shades, that resembles a pyjama costume. The upper half is a blouse with silk tassels on the sleeve. The torso is covered by a cross belt-like attachment attached to the shoulders. This cross belt like Melakku is crossed over her chest in the same fabric as the lower half. The peculiar lower half looks like a usual pyjama-style costume, with the long middle fan, but the back piece is a longer fabric loosely tied around the waist, fastened to off-centre to her left. The material has a Zari border topped with a line of mango motifs. She fashions her usual mango Haaram, Jhumki, Maatal, Thalaisaaman, Vanki, bangles and Salangai. But she makes the interesting choice to do away with Oddiyanam for this look.

The fourth set of photographs (Img. 4.17.) shows another thought-provoking look. A pyjama-style costume in a lighter shade. The material, most possibly silk, is based on the bhutta interspersed through the body and the mango motif at the border. The blouse, yet again, sports the frills on the sleeves and a crossover style Melakku. The fabric is crossed over at the chest and secured over the shoulders. The pyjama has a long centre fan that is longer than the usual length. The back piece is a long fabric wrapped around the waist that reaches just below the knee at the back and goes over the centre fan at the front, imitating how a usual saree is draped. The indecipherable aspect of this costume is the circular patch that seems to be a part of the lower part of the costume, tucked precisely at the centre. On the ornamentation front, she is wearing her usual set, the Mango Haaram, Thalaisaman, Jhumki, Maatal, bangles, Vanki and Salangai. She again chooses to do away with the Oddiyanam for this look.



Img. 4.17.: Rukmini Devi Solo Costume – 4 (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)

The fifth set of costumes is seen in the below collection of photographs (Img. 4.18.) which is beautifully colourized by C. Nachiappan. Though the colour saturation makes the pictures appear to be different shades in each of the above images, the way the costume is stitched, the details of the centre bow and the tassels on the sleeve, coupled with the petite Oddiyanam and elaborate Haaram, leading to believe that all of these images were of the same outlook put together by her. A detailed look at the detailing on the sleeve of three, for the lack of a better descriptive term, ‘tongue’-like attachment, the body-hugging fit of the pyjama and the back piece, the super vertical centre fan, the chest band-like attachment on the blouse with a flowy bow hanging in the middle – all points to the fact that this collection of pictures is, in fact, the same costume in the Img. 4.14., her initial performance. However, we do not know if it was taken on the same day since there is a difference in how she looks and the set of jewellery she wears in Img. 4. 18. The most stunning is the Haaram, with strings of gold beads culminating in the pendant hanging in the middle. The Oddiyanam, resembling the bridal hip belts used even today, has rows of parrots on either side with a stunning diamond-shaped ruby studded brooch in the middle.



Img. 4.18.: Rukmini Devi Solo Costume – 5 (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Collection)

With costumes varying from one look to another, the constant in all the above looks is the constantly changing blouse designs, especially the sleeves with frill attachments. The next element of surprise is the lack of a proper Melakku. It must be noted that the Melakku was not just a part of the Sadir costume but also a part of how the Saree was draped in Tamilnadu. Therefore, her choice to do away with it is puzzling. Most of the jewellery Rukmini Devi wore for her recitals was designed and made for her¹¹⁹. Though she was always looking to connect Bharatanatyam to the period of temple patronage, she did not always wear jewellery the way it was traditionally depicted in temple sculptures, while she wore a full Thalai-saman for a few of her recitals; for the others, she sometimes wholly got rid of a head ornament. She switched between wearing a short and a long necklace to wearing only a long Haram. In fact, for her debut performance, she did not wear a short necklace (An Addigai), a Thalai-Saman, and an Oddiyanam, all three of which were staples in a Sadir performance. This might have been a deliberate attempt to portray Bharatanatyam as a de-cluttered and aesthetically pleasing version of Sadir. But a Vanki, an upper arm ornament, was always a fixed item in all her recitals. She wore her hair in a bun for all of her performances and did not like plaiting since it was how the Devadasis wore it and because she found the oscillating hair distracting.

Rukmini Devi, who was staunchly against exposing, vulgarity and drawing attention to the female form, ironically designed costumes for herself that did precisely that, drawing attention to the female form's grace. When it came to her Aharya, Rukmini Devi and her associates argued that this costume was meant to represent female divinity and that this was a symbolisation of the temple sculptures. What set Rukmini Devi apart from Devadasis was her well-rounded knowledge of the art, unlike the one-sided understanding of the Devadasis, and

¹¹⁹ Personal interview with Muthukrishnan, goldsmith who worked for Rukmini Devi Arundale. Interview conducted on 09/02/2022.

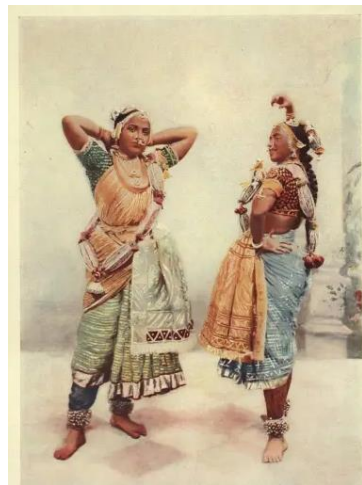
her conviction to prove herself right. Rukmini Devi had the power and expertise to establish the ground for the legitimacy of her revived art form, so much so that the learned intelligentsia could not question her. Even though many opposed the very idea of a “Brahmin woman performing on stage like a temple harlot” (qtd. in Nachiappan), nobody, to a known extent, opposed it on the grounds of her Aharya. But this aspect of the female body displayed on stage was an irreducible residue of the past that Rukmini Devi could not completely ‘purify’. Although the larger crowd slowly warmed up to Rukmini Devi’s revived ‘Sadir’, a sect of the upper caste continued disapproving of the attention to the female body on a proscenium. To make up for this, Rukmini Devi constantly, in her writings and lectures, appealed to a supreme power that permeated divinity in the feminine form.

Even though Rukmini Devi experimented with costumes, she gradually moved to costumes that completely covered her body and later added the Melakku. The costumes of her solo performances were mainly pyjama costumes in the early period of her solo career. In her solo performance, Rukmini Devi was almost always dressed in a pyjama costume, wearing her hair in a bun and using jewellery like Vanki. However, the students of her institution were not encouraged to wear pyjama costumes for their solo performances. The students of Kalakshetra are prescribed to wear a skirt or saree costume, wear their hair in a plaited fashion and wear the complete jewellery set, including the full Thalai-Saman, Rakodi, Chandran-Suryan, Thodu-Jhumki-Maatal, Addigai, Haram, Oddiyanam, bangles, anklet and Salangai. While few of her associates say that this was because Rukmini Devi was tall, her costumes were designed especially for her figure, and the students were required to wear the skirt costumes since most of them were short and young. But this can also be seen as Rukmini Devi’s need to standardise Bharatanatyam in her institute. A clear answer for the reason behind this choice is undeterminable.

4.10. Manoeuvring Male Gaze:

Speaking of the revival process of an art form through its Aharya, we cannot ignore the cons of the process. In the process of revival and reconstruction, Rukmini Devi entirely modified the Devadasi’s Aharya and completely refashioned the Bharatanatyam Aharya to give the new art form the respect, reverence, and spirituality that it deserved, unlike its despised predecessor Sadir. But in a juxtaposing move, the new Aharya of Bharatanatyam turned out to be comparatively more revealing, form-hugging and gratifying to the male gaze than that of

Sadir. In a side-by-side comparison of both (Img. 4.19.), the point of the argument is pellucid. The Devadasis seem bulky and visually cluttered, while Rukmini Devi, in her attire designed by her and executed by Madam Cazan, is comparatively more revealing, form-hugging and fits into the Victorian standards of feminine grace. Moreover, it leaves the midriff bare and has a short sleeve and a pyjama that would have otherwise been covered with a saree on top by the Devadasi. As discussed earlier, Rukmini Devi based her revival on the connection that she strived to establish between the sculptural, textual and spiritual past. By harnessing the link between Aharya of Bharatanatyam to the temple sculptures and the canons of Sanskrit treatises, Rukmini Devi unintentionally superimposed an image of a sculpted female form and characteristics of a dancing body prescribed by men, who wrote these treatises to the aesthetics of her revived dance form and, in due course, the dancer.



Img. 4.19.a: Baroda Nautch Girls (1902) (Courtesy: Attendance 2016)



Img. 4.19.b: Rukmini Devi Arundale (1933) (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)

Sadir, later Bharatanatyam, was a visual art. It is an art form that depended on the visual pleasure it promises to provide its audience. Be it spiritual or sensual. The main character of this dance form was the female performer who allowed her body to be the focal point of the audience's gaze, most of whom were male. Anna Morcom comments on how “as a performing art, dance is an embodied art. A dancer who performs in public or male space is on display and gives pleasure to the male or mixed audience through a living, bodily art form” (3). The patriarchal society’s evolution of female fashion is, as Mulvey (1989) suggested, “nothing but the fantasies of the men styled on the female form, where the female is only an exhibitionist”. This rings true in the Tamil society and its gender roles, where the Devadasis were not only subservient to their patrons but were also inheritors of a performance tradition that was

performed amidst men and in praise of men, be it God, a King or later any wealthy man who could commission it.

Nevertheless, the new attire of Bharatanatyam barely did justice by claiming to be more spiritual and more modest than that of its predecessor's. The new Aharya of Bharatanatyam was also rooted in catering to the men's expectation of the 'feminine'. It accentuated the beauty of the dancing body and made it aesthetically pleasing rather than modest. The Aharya, designed by Rukmini Devi Arundale and later accepted and adapted by her contemporaries and successors, shows the Western outlook of viewing women as petite, graceful and slender, all of which the Sadir performers were not in their presentation. The positive outcome is the global acceptance of the art form due to its ability to aesthetically please Indian and Western eyes alike through its striking yet aesthetic fabric, flow and colour palette.

BEYOND THE BANYAN TREE

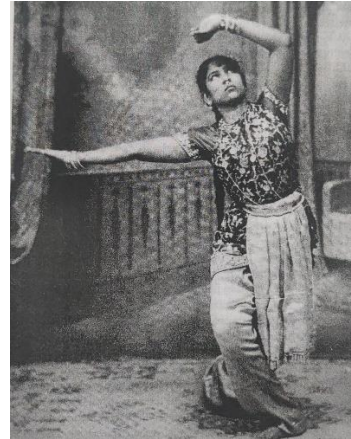
4.11. Contemporaries and Successors of Rukmini Devi Arundale:

4.11.1. Balasaraswati (1918-1984):

Albeit young to Rukmini Devi by age, Balasaraswati was older than Devi on the professional front. Hailing from a family of talented musicians and court dancers, Balasaraswati's exposure to dance was not acquired through dance classes and the like but rather ran deep in her. Her mother, Jayammal, was an acclaimed musician, and Kandappa Pillai, the successor of the Tanjore quartet lineage, trained Balasaraswati. Throughout her dancing career, Balasaraswati strived to establish the glory of her heritage and hoped to inspire artists from within the Devadasi community who had gone under the radar by the dawn of the 20th century. While Rukmini Devi is a reformer, who entered the dance scene of the 20th century to textualize and historically root the art form, Balasaraswati was, in her own right, a reformer from within the community itself. This gave her a voice that none of the elite reformists and revivalists possessed. Balasaraswati was a traditionalist who wanted to change the dance form's vocabulary based on the generations of knowledge passed down to her. Analysing the costumes she wore throughout her career, we see that she stuck to the traditional ways until her end. Unlike Rukmini Devi, who redesigned the aesthetic appeal of the dance form to detach it from vulgarity, Balasaraswati believed that "When so much importance is attached to the looks of

the dancer, it is but natural that dancing is considered carnal and Sringara vulgar” (Balasaraswati, 1975)¹²⁰.

In one of her initial dance photographs, Balasaraswati is seen wearing a satin Saree draped as a pyjama, a blouse, Melakku, and a backpiece, in the same embroidered fabric as the Melakku. The pallu end of the saree is brought into the centre, taken above the back piece, and fanned out in the centre, making a long centre fan with tassels (Img. 4.20.).



Img. 4.20.: Balsaraswati in 1934. (Courtesy: Douglas Knight)

This costume, photographed in 1934, is right after a review by a reviewer whose penname was Bhava Raga Tala reviewed Bala’s performance in 1933. In the review of this performance, he marvels at her technique but does comment on her costume. He says,

*“All is well with this art if every small source preserving it is diligently sought, and each available bit is learnt, new reforms and small modifications, following the basic principles and technique of Bharata, can be created. **All that is necessary is to take up and issue it in modern get-up. All we need to do is create a modern edition of it. More dainty dress, softer Tala and more delicate ankle bells are small things which will greatly increase the appeal of this art.**”*

(qtd. in Knight, 81).

Another review of the same performance by Chandrashekharan ‘found her costume, which consisted of a traditional full-length Pajama and a half sari tucked in at her waist, unattractive.’ (Knight, 80). This review comes just two years before Rukmini Devi’s Diamond Jubilee performance. In 1934, Bala was seen in a traditional Maratha period costume, with the

¹²⁰ Balasaraswati’s Presidential Speech at the Tamil Isai Sangam on receiving the Isai Perarignar Award - 1975

saree tied on a Pyjama and the Tuyya silk Pallu fanned out in the centre as a centre fan (Img. 4.21.). In 1938, she repeated the 1934 costume. In the years to come, Balasaraswati is seen sporting outfits similarly; the saree tied on top of a pyjama with the pallu tucked to the side (Img. 4.22.), except for few Abhinaya-only performances where she wears a regular saree. In all her looks, she keeps the jewellery to a bare minimum of an Addigai, a long-beaded chain, the Kammal-Jhumki-Maatal, bangles, Oddiyanam, and Salangai. Her trademark is the Nathu Bullaku that she sports in all her performances, which Rukmini Devi removed from her aesthetics. By the latter half of her career, she sticks to the simple comforts of dancing in a saree.



Img. 4.21.: Balasaraswati in All-Bengal Music Concert, 1934. (Courtesy: Douglas Knight)



Img. 4.22.: Balasaraswati (Courtesy: Khokkar Collection)

We do come across a few anecdotes of both the doyens commenting on each other's choice of costume or on their aesthetic decisions. When Kumbakonam Bhanumati¹²¹ shifted to wearing the stitched costume introduced by Rukmini Devi, Bala suggested not to forgo the community's traditional attire. Nevertheless, Bhanumati chose to stick to the shift since she

¹²¹ A Devadasi dancer who ventured into the cinema field as early as 1938

believed that innovations were to be accepted¹²². Kalanidhi Narayanan also corroborates this in her interview with Sruti (1977, 66). Rukmini Devi comments on Balasaraswati in an interview with Smita Shah,

“She had a great tradition behind her... She was very friendly to me (...) I felt that my mission was to be not just a performer, but to help other too, to do certain things which are better in taste, and so on, like costumes (it was all a mixture in those days). In that way I tried to help many of them. I made changes in costuming and staging and all that. She was very interested in all that. Her mother Jayammal was particularly anxious that I should do something to improve the costume of Bala. In those days the costumes were very untidy, the colour schemes very poor. So I brought bundles of clothes, with proper colour schemes to try them on her.”

(qtd. in Knight 105)

Knight also adds that “it is highly unlikely that Jayammal was interested in Bala’s costume being modernized” (Knight, 105). Balasaraswati indirectly voiced her opinion against the purification of the form through aesthetic changes. She remarks,

“(...) Steeped in art and beauty, which are pure spiritual states, she (the dancer) expresses joy, which is the basis of different moods and emotions. Such a dancer will feel no need to 'purify' any item in the traditional order of Bharatanatyam. Indeed, the effort to purify Bharatanatyam through the introduction of novel ideas is like putting a gloss on burnished gold or painting the lotus. The inadequacies that are felt in this art arise from the inadequacies of the dancer herself. (...) There is, therefore, no need to purify perfection by amending, adding, or subtracting any of the elements in the traditional order of the recital. (...) Let those who create novel dance forms present them as separate performances; they need not make a hash of the Bharatanatyam recital by interpolations of novelties”

(Presidential Speech, 1975)

She continues regarding the frequent costume changes and the priority given to the physical appearance of the dancer,

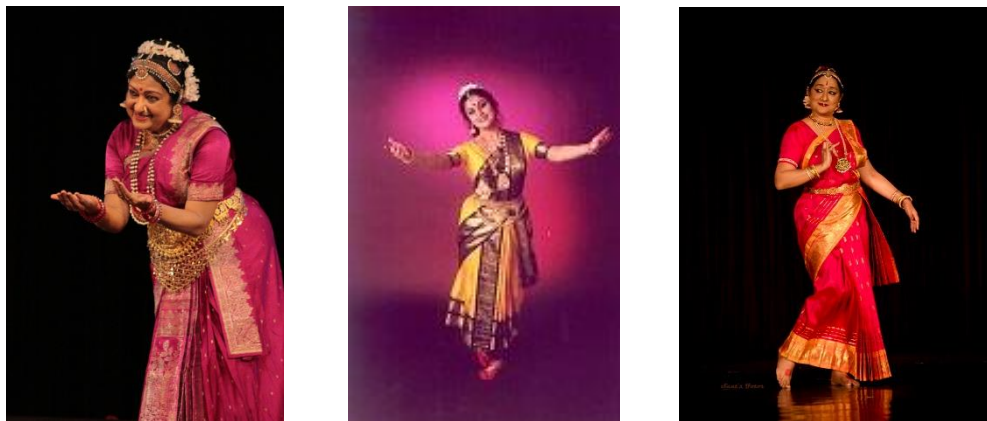
¹²² Interview in Sruti magazine titled - ‘Glimpses from a Memorable Past’, 1992 - 99-100

“My personal opinion is that this concerted effort of the experiences of dancing, which needs mental concentration, is spoilt by frequent changes of costume. Silappadikaram and Manimekalai list dance, music, and the personal beauty of the dancer in that order. Yet, unfortunately, the last and the least of them has come to the forefront at the present time. When so much importance is attached to the looks of the dancer, it is but natural that dancing is considered carnal and sringara vulgar. The truth is exactly the opposite; it is her dance and music alone that makes a dancer beautiful. Kalidasa describes Malavika standing tired and perspiring after her dance as the best of all her abhinaya. This is not just poetic conceit. Even when the collyrium gets smudged and the make-up is disturbed in the course of the dance, that itself is a tribute to the dancer's dedication. When the continuity of the dance is interrupted by costume changes, announcements and explanations the congealing of inner feelings becomes impossible and concentration is shattered.”

(Presidential Speech, 1975)



Img. 4.23.: Balasaraswati, 1950's (Courtesy: Douglas Knight)



Img. 4.24.: Padma Subrahmanyam (Left), Chita Visweswaran (Centre), and Lakshmi Vishwanathan (Right)

Regardless of the changes brought in by Rukmini Devi Arundale, which widely attracted the urban dancer and audiences alike, Balasaraswati's saree costume is still widely used, albeit in a stitched form. Many of the later stalwarts like Lakshmi Vishwanathan, Chitra Visweswaran, and Padma Subrahmanyam preferred the Saree costume for the later part of their careers (Img. 4.24.).

4.11.2. Tamil Cinema:

Chennai, the Madras Presidency, was the epicentre of the growth of both Dravidian theatre art and cinema. Cinema in the Tamil and Telugu region can only be seen as a product of the Modern Tamil Drama in the city, which the Parsi theatre of Bombay and Kolkatta inspired. As Hari Krishnan notes in his elaborate work on Bharatanatyam and Tamil Cinema, Devadasis served as one of the early heroines of the Tamil cinema, having sought an alternate source of livelihood in the drama clubs of Madras. The drama industry of Madras dabbled 'historical, pseudohistorical, mythological and (later) social themes' inspired by local Tamil theatre forms such as Therukoothu (8). Post the demonisation of Sadir and its practitioners, the artists, both dancers and Nattuvanars, migrated to Madras in search of better opportunities, which came in the form of Salon performances, gramophone recordings, Tamil Drama and Cinema (Krishna, 2019), for the traditional female performers, drama and cinema became a refuge in a time where political instabilities gave rise to the elite Urban Brahmin takeover of their art form in the name of revival. Many early Tamil and Telugu cinemas focused on mythology and therefore provided the fertile base for the prosperity of Bharatanatyam and its performers. The Nattuvanars, however, became the choreographers of the same.



Img. 4.25.: Kumbakonam Bhanumati in *Jalaja*, 1938. (Courtesy: Hari Krishnan)

The costumes of the dancers in these dramas and later cinemas followed the costumes of the Devadasis, however, in varying materials (since we do not see the bulkiness in the photographs of early gramophone recordings and cinemas). One of the earliest photographs of a dancer in cinemas is that of Kumbakonam Bhanumati in the 1938 movie *Jalaja*. Kumbakonam Bhanumati was from a long lineage of Devadasis from Tanjore and had performed with La Meri, who had learned the dance form from Bhanumati's guru Papanasam Vadivelu Pillai Nattuvanar. In the poster of the movie, 'which was the first full-length feature film on dance in South India' (Krishnan, 105), we see Bhanumathi in a traditional saree draped over a Pyjama as a Kaccham with the pallu to the side. Not overtly decked in jewellery, Bhanumati is seen wearing an Oddiyanam (Img. 4.25.). In another programme sheet of yet another Tamil movie of 1938 (name unknown), we see the Devadasi dancer Thirukazhukundram Pattammal in various poses, depicting Abhinaya to Subrahmanya Bharati's poem 'Solla Vallayo Kiliye', in which she is seen wearing a costume similar to that of Bhanumati's (Img. 4.26.).



Img. 4.26.: Pattammal, 1938. (Courtesy: Hari Krishnan)

Post Rukmini Devi's intervention, we see a change in the stitching pattern of the dancers in movies. Although both the films mentioned above are post-1935, by which time Rukmini Devi had already introduced the stitched costume to the urban audience of the city, it is vital to understand that the changes might have been adapted into cinema after the refashioning of Bharatanatyam Aharya gained popularity and acceptance among the masses.

What is interesting to see is that Rukmini Devi herself acted in a movie in 1936, soon after the opening of her International Academy of Dance. The movie, titled Raja Desigh (1936), had a dance section danced by Rukmini Devi. The movie posters proclaimed, “Also Showing Classical Bharata Natya of Sri Rukmini Devi and a Short Speech by Dr G. S. Arundale” (Img. 4.27.). Although no copies of the movie exist today, the songbook of the film lists the five songs that she danced to, along with a short write-up by Arundale. The songbook also sports Rukmini in a costume in North Indian style with the pallu over her head (Img. 4.27.). Nevertheless, no accounts of Rukmini Devi’s life by her or her close associates mention her stint in the cinema.



Img. 4.27.: Poster for Raja Desingh (Left) and the Song Book with Rukmini’s Photograph (Right) (Courtesy: Hari Krishnan)

The cinema as a visual field made Bharatanatyam, which was at the exact moment, had been refashioned to suit the tastes of the learned masses. This also aided the revival efforts of the revivalists and de-stigmatised the art form.



Img. 4.28.: R. Padma in Sabapathy, 1941.

The movie Sabapathy (1941) is the perfect example of how by 1941, Bharatanatyam had been accepted as a respectable art form, suitable as a hobby for the bourgeois. The scene in the film depicts a soon-to-be-married heroine, who clearly belongs to an upper middle-class family, dancing an Abhinaya piece for her future mother-in-law. This scene has been widely discussed by scholars as a part of their discourse on the role of cinema in domesticating Bharatanatyam. It is also notable that the heroine, R. Padma, wears a stitched pyjama costume with a backpiece and a blouse similar to what Rukmini Devi had designed for her solos. The sleeves with small frills and the blouse have a chest band-like patchwork, replacing the traditional Melakku (Img. 4.28.). This marks the beginning of the stitched costumes in Tamil cinema. In the early 1940's we can spot the completely stitched pyjama costume, almost a staple in the Tamil cinema to dress the dancers for years to come. In 1942, the movie Manonmani featured a scene with a Devadasi and a Nattuvanar; the Devadasi is seen in a completely stitched costume (Img. 4.29.).



Img. 4.29.: Manonmani, 1942. (Courtesy: Hari Krishnan)

In the years to follow, the most widely used costume on screen was the completely stitched pyjama costume, very different from what Rukmini Devi had devised. The pyjama had a very short centre fan, which reached just above the knee or, at times, even shorter, stitched to the costume. The torso had a tight-fitting blouse that was paired with varieties of Melakku - the usual Melakku, the translucent Melakku or just the blouse (Img.4.30.). The 1960s saw the rise of costumes that accentuated the breasts of the dancer with embroidered blouses sans Melakku (Img.4.30.). Although not all of this was reflected in the mainstream Bharatanatyam that was performed on the proscenium, it is vital to understand that this image of a dancer is what was essentially received by the viewers, even by those who had never seen a

Bharatanatyam performance in person. This, in turn, shaped the ‘consumption practice and aesthetic taste habits of the Indian middle class by the twentieth century’ (Krishnan, 3).



Img. 4.30.: T. Rajakumari (1962) and Padmini (1967)

4.11.3. Indrani Rahman (1930-1999):

Daughter of the eccentric Ragini Devi, Indrani Rahman avidly experimented with costumes. As one of the first female dancers to perform Bharatanatyam internationally, Indrani is credited with introducing Patola silk and silver jewellery into the Odissi Aharya (Rahman, 185). In the initial stages of her dance career, she is said to have worn two costumes for a show: a saree draped over a pyjama and a stitched saree costume. Indrani is also credited with removing the Pyjama under the saree, cutting it short to expose the legs underneath the saree. In an anecdote quoted in Yennamalli (2013), Rahman recalls,

“I danced in the nine yards sari with a long pyjama to hide the legs, and the ankle bells go over the bottom of the pyjama to secure it [As seen in the first photo of hers]. And then you know, people complained in the north. “We don’t like the pyjama and that it looks funny to have a pyjama with a sari. Salwaar kameez, that is a different matter. When I was going to China in 1955, I was the head of a huge cultural delegation on an official exchange trip, we had a farewell performance at N.D.F. auditorium and Panditji sent a message back stage-Mrs. Indira Gandhi was also sitting with him- that the pyjama doesn’t look nice. So I cut the pyjama above the knee, under the sari, and then my leg from the knees down was bare and I had the bells.”

(qtd. in Yennamalli)

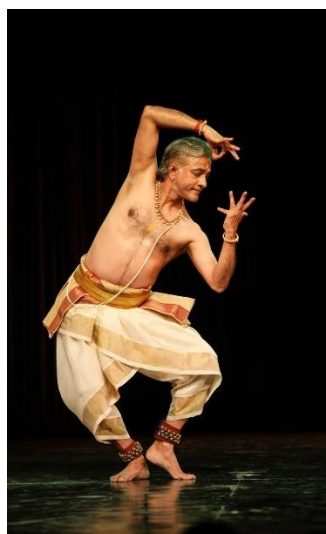
This has been adopted as the norm for Bharatanatyam's skirt and saree costumes even to this day.



Img. 4.31.: Indrani Rahman in 1949 and 1955 (Courtesy: Sukanya Rahman)

4.11.4. Male Dancers:

The introduction of the male dancer on the proscenium, dressed as a male, exuding masculinity, is very much the contribution of Rukmini Devi to the field of Bharatanatyam. The costume that we see today can only be attributed to the male dancers of Kalakshetra, many of who did not establish themselves as a solo performer away from the shade of Kalakshetra's repertory productions, except a few like Dhananjayan and C.V. Chandrashekar.



Img. 4.32.: Bharatanatyam Dancer C. Narendran in a typical Kalakshetra Kaccham style Dhoti Drape (Courtesy: Google Images)

Nevertheless, the yoking of masculinity to the male dancing body can be attributed to dancers like Ram Gopal (Img. 4.33.). He designed various costumes inspired by Udhay Shankar (1900-1977), with draped pyjamas, bare-chested with a long-pleated centre fan even before Rukmini Devi used them in her costumes. He also preferred experimenting with his jewellery. He says,

“I was never satisfied with the crudely made jewels and ornaments that are used in the traditional dances of today in the four main schools. After a minute observation and detailed search of bronzes, sculptures, and paintings, in the temples scattered all over India and paintings of Ajanta and Sigiriya in Ceylon, I sought to capture the fine and brilliantly coloured robes, ornaments, and jewellery depicted in these most authentic references that were, beyond doubt, far superior to what most of the actor dancers wear (...) today.”

(qtd. in Khokkar 17)



Img. 4.33.: Ram Gopal (Courtesy: Wikimedia)

Although Uday Shankar was never trained professionally in Bharatanatyam, his costuming was the inspiration and a reference for the male dancer. He is seen with a draped Dhoti in many of his depictions of Lord Shiva (Img. 4.34.), which might have been the inspiration for Rukmini Devi's male dancers years later. The over-accessorised look with the elaborate headgear was a common sight in our country's pre- and post-independence era.



Img. 4.34.: Uday Shankar (Courtesy: Narthaki.com)

Ram Gopal's close associate and fellow dancer, US Krishna Rao (1912-2005), pioneered the glory of the art form in the Southern states. He and his wife Chandrabhaga Devi¹²³ performed together, and he is seen wearing the stitched pyjama costume paired with elaborate headgear (Img.4.35.).



Img. 4.35.: US Krishna Rao with his wife Chandrabhaga Devi (Right) (Courtesy: Sunil Kothari)

A unique costuming for male Bharatanatyam dancers can be seen in the costumes of Nala Najan (1932-2002), Katumananrkoil Muthukumaran Pillai Nattuvanar's disciple from the USA. Unlike other male dancers of his time, Najan wore a stitched pyjama costume with a stitched blouse that reached just the top of his Pyjama with a sleeve extending to his elbow. He paired

¹²³ A dancer who performed with US Krishna Rao as his dance partner as well. She is seen sporting the stitched Pyjama costume with a long centre fan in many of the duo's pictures.

the look with an armband, Vanki, and bangles (Img. 4.36.). A variation of this can be seen in a few male dancers who prefer to wear a sleeveless shirt-tunic to cover their torso.



Img. 4.36.: Nala Najan (Courtesy: Google Images)

4.12. To Summarise:

The history of dance, especially the one of Bharatanatyam, may seem to flow seamlessly from one phase to another, but at the core, it is fragmented. What Rukmini Devi did to the Aharya of Bharatanatyam while reconstructing it might be considered a cleave that divided the flow of Sadir's history. The intervention of Rukmini Devi to save a dying art may be seen as a much praiseworthy deed as the country was facing the turbulence that the freedom movement caused. But this action itself sadly took away the art form from the hands of the artists who depended on it for their daily bread. In the history of dance, the intervention of Rukmini Devi might be the inevitable next chapter, but it served as the last chapter in the history of Sadir. The renaissance of Bharatanatyam took the art form away from the professional artists. It gave it into the hands of the society's middle and upper-middle-class women, for whom this was not the only source of livelihood. This economic freedom that the new practitioners of the art form had might have been the factor that dictated the new aesthetics of Bharatanatyam in the decades that followed.

It is vital to understand that, unlike the dancers of the present, the Devadasis did not dance as a hobby. Dance was their profession and the only source of their livelihood. Therefore, even though they often performed on royal and religious occasions, they owned only one or

two pairs of costumes all their lives, as spending money on an element of performance that did not require to be changed was an unaffordable splurge¹²⁴. The Devadasis, who owned two or more costumes, belonged to their community's creamy layer and were a rarity. Rukmini Devi reconstructing Bharatanatyam meant that Sadir was torn out of the community of performers and was now accessible to women of other communities and socio-economic strata. The costume that Rukmini Devi wore for her very first performance starkly contrasted with the traditional attire the Devadasis wore. In her own words, it was a deliberate attempt to break the association this 'Renewed' and 'Sanitised' art form had with its tainted ancestors and their art, which was now restored to its spiritual glory that it was originally intended to represent. Her new aesthetics was borrowed from many sources, including western influences, to portray the purity of the dance form. With Sadir being given the new identity of Bharatanatyam, Rukmini Devi revolutionized the textile industry with her weaving unit in Kalakshetra. To her, we owe the freedom of choice that we have today when it comes to our choices in our costuming. She was the first to introduce the concept of cutting a saree and stitching it into a costume resembling various drapes. She introduced the dance practice saree we see today that has become an indispensable part of our dancing lives. She also experimented with multiple handlooms and weaves to costume her myriad characters in the Dance Dramas of Kalakshetra. The new Kalakshetra dancer performed in proscenium stages with solid dark colour backdrops, lighting techniques adapted from theatres of England, costumes made of pure silk, traditional kemp jewellery, white jasmine flowers and make-up perfectly adapted from various sources, including Kathakali that contributed to the iconic elongated eyes and eyebrows of the Kalakshetra dancer.

The effects of Rukmini Devi's entry into the dance scene can be seen in two ways, one, she took an art form that was on the verge of extinction due to the nationalist movement and gave it a new identity and a new arena to perform; two, the reconstruction meant that the art form was now close to sealed for traditional performing communities. Nevertheless, Sadir/Bharatanatyam has continually metamorphosed its appearance based on the need of the time. Similar to how the Sadir costume changed through different patronages, the elements introduced by Rukmini Devi should be viewed as the next change the dance form underwent to survive. The only problem with Rukmini Devi's revival of Aharya comes with her imposing the Theosophical and Brahminical ideology on a dance form that she intended to be learned by

¹²⁴ As stated by Swarnamalya Ganesh in the interview conducted by the scholar on 09/12/2021, over Zoom call.

girls, and boys, of all classes and castes. Rukmini's revival project depended on the virtual disappearance of the Devadasi – Nattuvanar community, and it is clear that the first and significant step towards achieving this was to re-dress the dance form in a way that it does not resemble or remind it's not-so-glorious past. Rukmini Devi's advent into the dance field propagandised a bourgeois sense of aesthetics as the new face of Bharatanatyam. Kalakshetra, one of the pioneer institutes established during the initial period of the latest chapter of Bharatanatyam, has become synonymous with the aesthetic standards expected in a Bharatanatyam performance. These standards are primarily the result of the early practitioners' ability to afford silk and access to heirloom jewellery passed down by their ancestors. Or it can also be attributed to the cost of these materials, such as silk and silver, which are currently not affordable to all. They were comparatively cheaper in the early days, which became the norm for Bharatanatyam Aharya. Either way, in her own fashion, Rukmini Devi filled the gaps in the narrative of the cultural-nationalism of our country through her unprecedentedly smooth execution of re-fashioning Bharatanatyam that, from the very first second of the performance, evoked a sense of national pride during the times of India's freedom struggle. Rukmini Devi's efforts to textualise, sanitise, and spiritualise Bharatanatyam seem to be the need of the hour for the public of that time to accept the art form that was, till then, the art of the Devadasis. For the same, Rukmini Devi did what she had to do at the exact time in history, propelling India's cultural image at a time when it was struggling to find its foot. Through the Aharya of Bharatanatyam, Rukmini Devi successfully disassociated the collective memory of Devadasi history, that of its physical appearance that was too much a mixture of styles and a bitter reminder of the colonial past, and replaced it with a new aesthetic vision that was deeply rooted in the Indian culture.

Even though fragmented attempts were made at changing the presentation of Sadir to match the changing aesthetic habits of the 20th-century audience, Rukmini Devi's attempt to re-dress Sadir should be credited for bringing all of these elements and showcasing them in a single performance. Thus, giving the form a new look. Even after the changes were widely accepted by the public and other dancers, with help from the Tamil Cinema, traditionalists like Balasaraswati held on to her community's lineage through her costumes. If Rukmini Devi redesigned Bharatanatyam as an outsider through the changes she made to Aharya, similarly, Balasaraswati showed her loyalty towards tradition through the very same medium of Aharya – by refusing to make the shift. Like Knight points out, "Once Rukmini Devi demonstrated that the emerging middle class was willing to accept her and her divining of an ancient form of the

dance, the field was open. For this, she is celebrated.” (Knight, 106). Even though Rukmini Devi’s Aharya was deeply influenced by Western and Orientalist ideologies, her attempt to refashion Sadir enabled the Aharya of Bharatanatyam to be customised to the needs of every dancing body.



Img. 4.37.: Yamini Krishnamurthy (top), Mrinalini Sarabhai (bottom-left), Padma Subrahmanyam (bottom-centre), and Sudharani Raghupathy (bottom-right)

(Courtesy: Google Images)

Early dancers like Indrani Rahman, Mrinalini Sarabhai and Yamini Krishnamurthy took the creative liberty to play with the costume and jewellery of Bharatanatyam to enhance their bodies to appease the viewer. Yamini Krishnamurthy replaced the traditional Melakku with a fan (much like Rukmini Devi); Padma Subrahmanyam designed coiffures, costumes and jewellery that were inspired by the temple sculptures that she believed would accentuate her recreation of Karanas (Img. 4.37.) while Sudharani Raghupathy added a Yagnopavitham. After Rukmini Devi’s presentation of Bharatanatyam in a new Avtar, the Aharya of the art form has now evolved to be a representation of personal choice and has become an element in the Bharatanatyam performance that beautifies the dancing body while also accentuating the curves and lines of the Bharatanatyam dance vocabulary.

CHAPTER – 5

The Dance Dramas of Kalakshetra

The dance drama tradition of the Tamil performing past was neither a millennium old nor was it a newly concocted genre. Tamilnadu's drama tradition comes from the Telugu rulers who brought with them the Yakshagana tradition of the Telugu region. Though there are no narrative dance-drama texts available to us regarding the predecessors of such a form existing in the Tamil region, the *Sangam* literature mentions plays and their performances as a part of the Sangam period's threefold classification of arts called *Muthamizh*, namely *Iyal* (Text or Poetry), *Isai* (Music) and *Nadagam* (Drama). Adiyarkunallar¹²⁵ comments on the number of *Koothu*¹²⁶ mentioned in Silapadikaram and mentions varieties of Koothu, indicating the existence of such performative traditions in the Tamil region. A drama encapsulating the dance element as a prime factor comes into play in the Tamil region predominantly after the rule of the Nayaka rulers, the military commanders of the Vijayanagara Kingdom who later established their sovereignty over the Southern region. The same spirit was carried on through the patronage of the Tanjore Marathas, who kept the tradition alive. During the Nayaka period and later the Maratha rule, the practice of Yakshagana, mainly its regional subtypes, was performed in the temple premises, connected to a ritual purpose and/or as a part of the court recitals of Sadir.

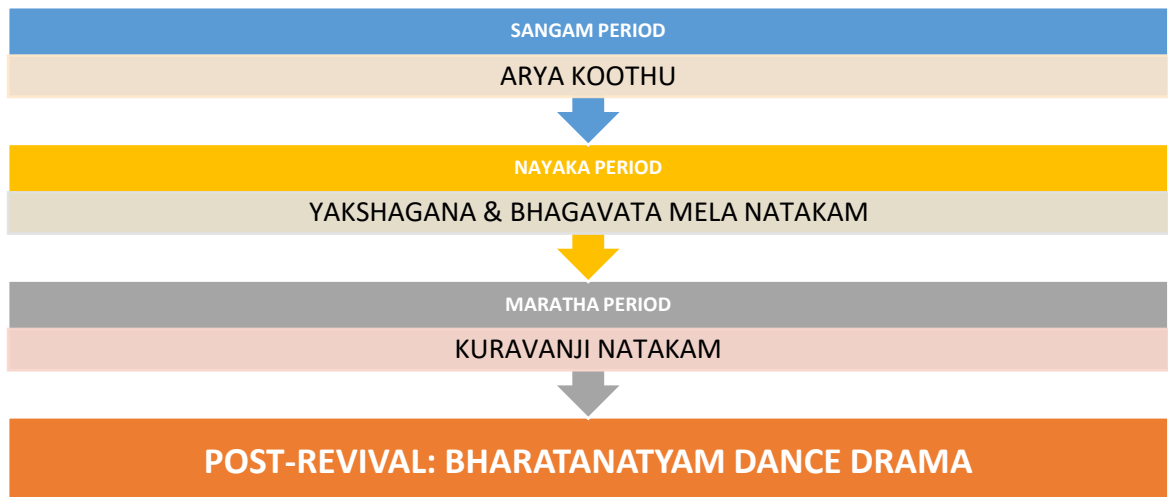


Fig. 5.1.: Bharatanatyam Dance Drama Format and its Predecessors in Tamilnadu

¹²⁵ The 13th century commentator on Silapadikaram

¹²⁶ A collective term referring to dance and drama formats in Tolkappiyam and later Silpadikaram.

The two significant varieties of dance dramas that prevailed post the Nayaka rule were Kuravanji Natakam and Bhagavata Mela Natakam. The Kuravanji literature formed an immensely popular genre of performance writing that well-learned poets from upper castes usually wrote in praise of either the King or the deity of the region. The basic plot of this format included a female protagonist, usually from the upper caste, pining for the hero, the King/God, while her friends, the Sakhis, tried to console her. A passing gypsy woman, a Kurathi (from the Kuravar tribe of the Tamil region), played the role of a soothsayer who predicted the pining heroine's union with her lord, thereby alleviating her agony. The traditional Kuravanji also had a last segment that included the Kurathi and her man, the Kuravan, comically talking to each other; this segment usually had erotic undertones. The corpus of Kuravanji literature, though traced back to works such as the *Aaichiyar Kuravai*, *Kundrakuravai*¹²⁷, *Kalampakam* and *Kuram*, gained momentum only in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. The Nayaka rulers widely patronised this format of dance drama which was later ceremoniously adopted by the Marathas, who were great connoisseurs of art. The Kuravanji dance drama was usually staged in the royal courts or on the temple premises during the annual temple festivals. Many of the temples had dedicated spaces for these Kuravanji Natakams to be staged, especially the Tanjore Brihadeeswara temple, where there is a platform called the *Kuravanji Medai* (Kuravanji 'Stage') in front of the temple's inner sanctum. In this stage was staged the Maratha period Kuravanji in praise of King Serfoji II (1798 – 1832), Sarabendra Bupala Kuravanji, up until 1940. The Kuravanji Natakam lost its patronage as a ripple effect of the Devadasi Abolishment Act and gradually vanished from the performance scene of Sadir.

The second sub-type, Bhagavata Mela Natakam, can be traced to the Brahmin settlement in the village of Melattur, Tanjore. There are two schools¹²⁸ of thought behind the lineage of the practitioners of the present-day Bhagavata Mela. One believes that the performers hailed from Telugu speaking region; as a result of an exodus, a community of Brahmin performers, Bhagavatars, fled and sought refuge in Tanjore the Nayaka rulers were in reign. Achyutappa Nayaka, a patron of arts, who ruled over Tanjore from 1560 to 1580, granted an entire to these Brahmin Bhagavatars and their families. This village, named Achyuta Puram, was later popularly known as Melattur, home to a temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu. The other school believes that the Natakams of Melattur are rooted in the performative traditions of the

¹²⁷ Both *Aaichiyar Kuravai* (in praise of Thirumal) and *Kundrakuravai* (in praise of Muruga) are mentioned in *Silapadikaram* by Ilango Adigal in canto 17, book 2.

¹²⁸ Refer to the works of Raghavan, V. (1937), Jones, R. Clifford (1963), Raman, Indu (1995) and Natarajan, Anusha (2002) for further information on the two schools.

Tamil region, the village being in prominence even from the Chola period and having only been pushed to prominence during the Nayaka reign. The Bhagavatulu adapted the Sadir technique prevalent in the Tanjore belt and presented Telugu Yakshaganas with the Sadir technique on the temple premises. Though highly patronised even by the Marathas, this form of dance drama is purely devotional and therefore contained within the temple precinct. The Bhagavata Mela Natakam was also performed and practised in other villages of Tanjore, namely Soolamangalam, Oothukaadu and Saliyamangalam.

The Kuravanji Natakam was based on Sringara rasa (the erotic), and the Bhagavata Mela was based solely on Bhakti, exclusively in a Vaishnavite setting. A group of women, Devadasis, performed the Kuaravanji, while the Bhagavata Mela consisted solely of Male artists who dressed as women to perform the respective parts in the drama. The popularity of Kuravanji Natakam amongst the general public can be assigned to the fact that the Devadasis performed the Natakam not only as a part of royal entertainment but also for public view in the temple festivals, such as the *Brahmotsavam* or *Pankuni Uttiram* since by this time Sadir performance was an indispensable component of the temple ritual and courtly proceedings by the time of the Maratha rulers. The elements of the elite Nayaka/Nayika mixed with the folk element of the gypsy soothsayer, Kurathi, made the Kuravanji a genre that was congenial to an audience from all strata of the society.

5.1. Devi and the Soothsayer:

The revival and renaissance of Bharatanatyam's solo format slowly burgeoned into the resurrection of the dance drama tradition of Tamilnadu. Rukmini Devi's persistent attempts to establish a connect between Bharata's *Natyashastra* (and other treatises) and Bharatanatyam seems to have guided her to the discovery of the dance drama tradition of Tamilnadu that shone, to her, as the answer to her quest for a total theatre format, the concept of *Natya*, in Bharatanatyam, wherein the aspects of literary text, dance and music interweaved seamlessly. This way, she could place Bharatanatyam in the historical and textual milieu, thereby successfully proclaiming the antiquity of the dance form that she was re-instating to its lost glory by establishing a historical continuum. Rukmini Devi's inclination towards reconstructing the dance drama tradition of Tamilnadu can be viewed as a part of her larger project through which she wished to recover the Indian traditional dance, as expounded by Bharata. She viewed traditional Indian dance as a complete theatre, *Natya*, and placed it on a

pan-Indian pedestal instead of considering her reconstruction as that of a regional form. The fact that Rukmini Devi started her initial training in dance through Western Ballet must have significantly influenced her perception of what an evolved classical dance form looked like on the proscenium. The dance form that Rukmini Devi mastered and reconstructed, Sadir/Bharatanatyam, was historically believed to be a solo format, but taking a closer look shows us that the Sadir repertoire, especially that of Nayaka and post-Nayaka period, was not conveniently linear. Swarnamalya Ganesh (2012), in her doctoral thesis, elucidates on how Sadir evolved exponentially during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century Tamilnadu which had a massive influx of performative traditions from various regions of the country and, therefore, the courtly repertoire of Sadir in both the Nayaka and the Maratha court had legitimised both solo and group formats into the repertoire of a Sadir courtly recital. Rukmini Devi's stumble upon the Kuravanji dance drama must have been considered the answer to her quest for justifying the 'Natya' in Bharata- 'Natya'.

Even though the Telugu Yakshagana tradition was well sustained for centuries in the Tamil region, it was the Kuravanji Natakam that grabbed the attention of Rukmini Devi for it was the only Kuravanji Natakam, especially the Sarabendra Bhupala Kuravanji in praise of Shahaji II, that had a surviving tradition of Devadasi performance since it was staged regularly at the *Kuravanji Medai* in the Brihadeeswara temple, Tanjore. Therefore, Kuravanji must have been the perfect choice for fulfilling her quest to find an Indian counterpart to the Western Ballet performed by multiple dancers simultaneously, in contrast to the solo format that she had learnt. But Kuravanji was not Rukmini Devi's initiation into the drama format. She had previously staged plays, such as *Light of Asia*, alongside her fellow theosophists, in which she had choreographed small dance sequences. But that did not suffice since the drama superseded the dance in these productions. Rukmini dreamed of not a 'modern' drama in traditional format but a truly Indian dance-drama that matched her perception of an Indian theatre, with a natural admixture of text, dance and music, as extolled by Bharata. The local format, Kuravanji, which was built on a similar concept, was what she needed to complete her project of reconstructing Sadir. This regional dance form was now taking a pan-Indian avatar.

With the decline in the patronage and disappearance of a performance space for these dance dramas during the early twentieth century, we do not have any records or a continuous performative tradition from which to decipher the Aharya of the performers. However, few surviving pictorial pieces of evidence do show us that the Sarabendra Bhupala Kuravanji was performed, by the Devadasis of the Maratha court, in the attire that they would usually wear

for a Sadir Kutcheri for any other occasion. This shows that even though the Kuravanji Natakam was a form of dance drama, highly evolved by this time in history, the traditional practitioners did not see it necessary to customise the costumes, make-up and related external representations to represent certain characters as prescribed in the Sanskrit dramaturgical treatises. It was this that Rukmini Devi witnessed and saw it fit to be merged into the newly resurrected Bharatanatyam but with a make-over of the presentation of the same.



Img. 5.1.: Sarabhendra Bhoopala Kuravanji Performers vs the Maratha Period Sadir Costume (Courtesy: Googleimages)

Kuravanji drew on both folk and classical elements in its performance and, as put forth by Indira Peterson, was primarily used as a tool by the royals to feign connectivity and relatability with the general public (50). This, she explains, they achieved by showing the royal/elite heroine and hero and the Kurathi, from the tribal background, serving the purpose of uniting the upper caste love and also being a source of comic relief. The Kuravanji's role was often isolated and performed by the Devadasis as a part of a proper 'Margam' in their courtly repertoire. Therefore, way before Rukmini Devi introduced Kuravanji, dance drama, into the realm of Bharatanatyam, it was already present even from the Nayaka period. Rukmini Devi's contribution, however, comes in the form of Aharya. As previously stated, the Devadasis did not employ variety in their Aharya, even for the dance dramas. It is this element that Rukmini Devi revolutionised through her dynamic additions to the same, even from her very first dance drama, produced in 1944.

The first dance drama that Rukmini Devi produced was the Kuravanji. I would argue that it was likely her own play at manifesting a connect between the 'classical' and the 'folk'. To further elaborate, Rukmini Devi, from her very first attempt at resurrecting Sadir, went to

great lengths to make Bharatanatyam a textually, historically and spiritually rooted 'classical' form which was, in its new form, not the possession of a closed group but is now accessible to all sects of the public. Therefore, she intended to make the 'classical' accessible to the 'folk'. This was a time in Tamilnadu, where theatre was used as a medium to propagate nationalist sentiment in the public, and Rukmini Devi used the same admixture of a theatre form being married to a classical form for the public to offer an open-arm welcome to Bharatanatyam, now that it also offered a 'new' genre. This dance drama genre became 'new' due to the fact that by 1940, Kuravanji was confined to the inner walls of the Tanjore temple and its practitioners, the Devadasis, were shunned. This being the case, Rukmini Devi cleverly re-introduced this form to the public, quite literally 'wrapped' in a new package. This new genre was the first time a seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth-century dance drama form was presented in a classical dance form technique. This was also the first time male and female dancers performed the Kuravanji in gender-appropriate roles. But also, this was the first time Bharatanatyam had Aharya, i.e., Costumes, jewellery, make-up, hair-do, stage props, backdrops and stage lighting, that was character appropriate, unlike the '*Ekaharya*' (one performer donning many roles without any change in their outer appearance) format that was prevalent at this juncture.

Rukmini Devi's first dance drama was the 'Kutrala Kuravanji' in praise of the Kutralteeswarar, the temple's deity in Tenkasi, Tamilnadu. Even though it was the Sarabhendra Bhupala Kuravanji that she saw in 1944, there was a reason behind her choosing Kutrala Kuravanji as her initiation into the dance drama genre. As put forth by Sankara Menon, one of Devi's closest associates, Rukmini Devi, was deeply displeased with the aesthetic appeal and the lack of a more profound spiritual value portrayed in the Sarabhendra Bhupala Kuravanji. In an interview with Bharatanatyam exponent and Kalakshetra's former director, Leela Samson, he says

"In the Kuravanji presented at Thanjavur, hardly any attempt was made at dramatic presentation. It was more or less a number of dances strung loosely together on a vague dramatic plot. The characters were dressed in the usual costumes worn for dance recitals and their cheap tinsel contrasted with the beautiful old jewels that they wore. (...) The tone of the Kuravanji established by Rukmini Devi on the other hand had a classical base. Though she had little foundation of a living art on which to base her presentation, yet through conversing with those who had witnessed Kuravanjis in their youth, and through her own instinctive feeling for artistic reality and truth, she was able to revive the ancient presentation with the very costumes and hairstyles which

carried a stamp of authenticity, based as they were on the essential characteristics of the ancient Tamils. With infinite patience and some genius, Rukmini Devi succeeded in rebuilding the glory of the most beautiful of all Kuravanjis. In discovering and presenting it, she revealed an object of patriotic, historical and cultural value, for what was seen was not merely the ingenuity of an artist, but a reflection of the soul of a people, of another time.”

(qtd. in Samson 108)

As Chapter 4 of this study pointed out, Rukmini Devi tended to seek the spiritual in everything she encountered, which was the same with the Kuravanji dance drama. She is said to have been appalled by the piece being in praise of a mere mortal, King Shahaji, and not in praise of a divine or mythical being. She was against the concept of ‘*Narastuti*’ wherein a mortal is given treatment akin to that given to the supreme Lord since she believed that “this would stray the purpose of art which was to transcend physicality through spirituality” (Kothari). Therefore, she did not choose the Sarabendra Bhupala Kuravanji for her reconstruction, even though this was the only one that had survived both in text and practice. Instead, on the advice given by a well-respected Tamil literary connoisseur, one Mr T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar, she chose the Kutrala Kuravanji written by Thirukuda Rajappa Kavirayar (a 16th Century poet) as her maiden project. The Kutrala Kuravanji is praised as one of the most well-written Kuravanjis with the perfect balance of *Iyal* (prose), *Isai* (music/melody) and *Nadagam* (dramatic presentation) elements. Also, the love that is portrayed in Kutrala Kuravanji, the love of Vasantavalli (Heroine) for Kutraalanathar, resonated on a spiritual level with Rukmini Devi since it symbolised the Jeevatma’s yearning for Paramatma, similar to Jayadeva’s Geeta Govindam. With the help of a team of trusted scholars which included T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar¹²⁹, S. Sarada¹³⁰ and Sankara Menon¹³¹, she was able to research the long-forgotten literary work and also get references from sculptures and paintings for her reconstruction of the folk and classical element of the Kurati and the Heroine respectively. This reconstruction of the Kuravanji dance drama, especially its spectacular Aharya, has been acknowledged by historians as the one that set the

¹²⁹ A member of the Madras Presidency Legislative council and a renowned Tamil scholar.

¹³⁰ Granddaughter of Pandit Subramania Sastri (the man who suggested the name ‘Kalakshetra’ for the International Academy of Arts), Sarada served as the right-hand man of Rukmini Devi Arundale from the age of 27.

¹³¹ A fellow Theosophist and close associate of Rukmini Devi Arundale who also served as her counsel and served as the Joint Director of Kalakshetra after her passing.

tune for later reconstructions and recitals of various other Kuravanjis in which even Balasaraswati¹³² and Mrinalini Sarabhai played the lead roles.



Img. 5.2.: Mrinalini Sarabhai as the heroine in Sarabhendra Bhupala Kuravanji. (Courtesy: Googleimages)

5.2. The ‘Natya’ in Bharatanatyam:

Rukmini Devi’s Kutrala Kuravanji, even though it was her first dance drama, marked her presence in the Bharatanatyam arena even more than her solo rendezvous. Starting with Kutrala Kuravanji, Rukmini Devi created twenty-five dance dramas, all of which were diverse in their own way in matters of theme, dance style, costumes, hairstyles, stage decor, and stage lighting. Ranging from Kuravanji to Kalidasa, Bhagavata Mela’s Rukmini to Rabindranath’s Shyama and ultimately, her magnum opus, the six-fold Ramayana series, Rukmini Devi’s innate sense of aesthetics and an insatiable curiosity to create found the perfect vessel in the Aharya that she could design in this genre. She could use the ‘guiding spirit’ of the Natya Shastra and past traditions to freely express new ideas that she saw fit, thereby successfully refashioning Bharatanatyam, both in the costuming department and in the aspect of widening the horizons. Indisputably, the dance drama genre became the playing field where Rukmini Devi’s creative genius could unfold due to the array of human, non-human, God, demi-god, animal, birds, and real and mythological characters.

¹³² As the Kurati in Sarabhendra Bhupala Kuravanji in 1950 at the Restaging of the same in Tamil Icai Sangam.



Fig.5.2.: Elements in Kalakshetra's Dance Drama

A team, including Alex Elmore, Mary Elmore, Madame Cazan, Paul Strom, Conrad Woldringh, M. D. Mani¹³³, K. Srinivasulu¹³⁴ and C. Nachiappan, and others, helped stage her dance dramas. The first dance drama, Kutrala Kuravanji's costumes and stage setting, was designed and executed, on the ideas of Rukmini Devi, by Alex and Mary Elmore. Conrad Woldringh, M. D. Mani and Paul Strom helped design and execute the stage lights for the Kutrala Kuravanji. After the untimely death of Conrad Woldringh, Nachiappan, who was trained in photography, print making and stage lighting by Woldringh, took over the stage setting, lighting and photographic documentation process from Rukmini Devi's second dance drama production onwards. Kalakshetra's in-house carpenters helped create stage props, and K. Srinivasulu, an artist, is said to have helped make her famous gauge back wings and paint the wings and curtains for her dance dramas.

In all of her dance dramas, Rukmini Devi hand-picked the students from her institute to be trained to perform the characters she deemed fit to portray. And almost always, the

¹³³ Brother of Padmasini, a trusted associate of Rukmini Devi who also looked after the hostel of Kalakshetra, M. D. Mani helped with the staging of Rukmini Devi's solo and dance drama productions by helping with the stage lighting.

¹³⁴ K. Srinivasulu was the primary painter for Kalakshetra's productions and helped paint the backdrops and stage props that we see in Rukmini Devi's dance dramas.

students she chose for the iconic characters have come to be associated with the characters themselves in the years to come. In the Kalakshetra Foundation, under the name of which Rukmini produced these dance dramas, she had a dedicated department for Aharya. This department, led by an associate named Maragatham, took care of all the sartorial needs for the dance drama. Everything from the procurement of fabrics to the stitching and alterations was taken care of in this department. The students, adept in stitching techniques, were welcome to help in this department. The department also was the vestuary where all the costumes, jewellery, wigs, crowns and props for all the dance dramas were stored. The fact that such a department was established by Rukmini Devi right from the beginning of these productions proves how important the aspect of Aharya was for the success of her dance dramas. Rukmini Devi was well aware of the fact that, unlike a solo performance of Bharatanatyam, it was not the Angika Abhinaya that was the hero of the hour. Still, Aharya Abhinaya carried the entire essence of a dance drama production, and therefore she paid conscientious attention to every minute detail regarding the same.

Rukmini Devi designed jewellery based on temple sculptures and paintings and had goldsmiths create them for her characters. The materials and colours selected for the costumes of each character were done meticulously by her, keeping in mind the drastic changes in the hues that would occur due to the different lights and filters. Rukmini Devi is also known for making last-minute changes to the costumes if she felt, even for a tiny moment, that they did not suit her perception of the said character. For example, in her production, *Meenakshi Vijayam*¹³⁵, artists like Vasundra Thomas, who worked on the show, recall that “Rukmini Devi changed the costume of Meenakshi on the day of the production after she found it not suitable for ‘Veera’ rasa that the character represented.”¹³⁶. Most of these works were done by the students themselves under the supervision of the costume department in-charge, Maragatham. Other instances of the students having to stand with pieces of fabric in different shades under specific shades of lights to choose the hue she is looking for have been recollected by noted alumnus of the institute¹³⁷.

¹³⁵ Rukmini Devi’s dance drama, choreographed and staged in 1977.

¹³⁶ Data collected by the author through personal interview with Smt. Vasundra Thomas on 31/01/2022, at her residence in Chennai.

¹³⁷ Data collected by the author through personal interview with Smt. Vasundra Thomas (31/01/2022) and telephonic conversation with Smt. Ananda Shankar Jayant (24/01/2022) both of whom are alumnus of Kalakshetra Foundation and had been a part of the institute’s repertory company.

Rukmini Devi paid attention to every detail of the production, especially in creating the Vibhavas, i.e., the determinants of the sentiment, which she achieved visually through the costumes, backdrops, and stage setting. In this sense, the Aharya of Rukmini Devi's dance dramas, including the stage setting, becomes the Vibhava that determines her characters' sentiments to the audience. The stage was designed for every scene in a way that transported us to the geographical space in which the scene occurred. The cut-outs in Geeta Govindam, the Himalayas in Kumara Sambhavam, the Ashoka Vanam in Choodamani Pradanam and the Ram-Sethu in Mahapattabhishekam are only a few examples of her exemplary set constructions. Another aspect that she played with was the concept of Tirasheela¹³⁸. This concept is a staple in traditional Indian theatres such as Kathakali, Yakshagana, Kuchipudi, and Tamil folk theatre like Therukoothu. The Thirasheela of no two characters are the same in her productions, Rukmini's Tirasheela in Rukmini Kalayanam is different from Andal's in Andal Charitram, and both of these are entirely different from Sita's at the end of Mahapattabhishekam. The Tirasheela in Rukmini Devi's productions become a rectangular representative of the character's temperament and persona.

Moving on to the make-up of her characters, it is evident that there was significant borrowing/inspiration from Kathakali. Although we do not know where this relationship between Bharatanatyam and Kathakali began, Rukmini Devi had invited noted Kathakali Ashans and Gurus to live and teach Kathakali as a part of physical training for students in Kalakshetra. Rukmini Devi was not averted to the idea of incorporating elements from other dance forms into Bharatanatyam to enhance the latter. Though such elements, especially when it came to fabrics, can be seen in many of her dance dramas, the one factor she drew from Kathakali, the make-up, seems to be all-prevailing in almost all of her productions. As seen in previous chapters, the traditional performers, Devadasis, resorted to bare minimum make-up since their performance space was in close proximity to the audience.

When Rukmini Devi decided to marry Kuravanji, or the very concept of dance dramas itself, to Bharatanatyam, a significant shift which one can note is the shift that was made in the performance space. An art form performed amidst the public was now presented as a separate entity, without any ritualistic or social connections, on a proscenium stage and to a pool of audience with almost no exposure to such a genre. Hence, Rukmini Devi had to accentuate the performers' features to make their Abhinaya more pronounced and recognisable to the new

¹³⁸ A piece of cloth, usually embellished, that is held in front of the main character for their introductory scene.

urban audience seated far away from the performer. She achieved this through her adoption of Kathakali makeup techniques, especially the prominent eye makeup and the eyebrows, which have now become synonymous with Kalakshetra's Aharya. Another effect of Kathakali that has helped in elevating the aesthetic experience in a Kalakshetra dance drama is the make-up for specific characters that Rukmini Devi has borrowed from the 'Vesha' concept in Kathakali. Kathakali follows a colour scheme in the facial make-up of its characters to denote the character's basic schema, which is called the 'Vesha'. An evil character is indicated with the colour black, while a hero is represented with the colour green and so on. This concept can be seen in Rukmini Devi's productions, especially her Ramayana, a forte of the Kathakali repertoire for centuries. In the Ramayana series, Rukmini Devi has employed the Kathakali make-up technique for the Vanaras, Jatayu, and especially, the Raakshasis in the Ashoka Vanam who don make-up similar to that of a 'Kathi Vesham'¹³⁹ of Kathakali. This osmosis of Kathakali techniques into the dance drama of Bharatanatyam has enhanced the viewing experience of the audience through the usage of colour psychology to establish a mood or the scene, which has been employed in the Kathakali practice from the time of its conception.



Img. 5.3.: Jatayu (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Instagram Handle @kalakshetrafoundation)

¹³⁹ One of the five 'Vesham' in Kathakali. The Kathi Vesham represents villainous male character. The other four are Paccha, Kari, Thadi and Minukku.



Img. 5.4.: Soorpanaka, Ravana and Rakshasis of Lanka (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Instagram Handle @kalakshetrafoundation)

Rukmini Devi, being amongst the first to employ western stage lighting techniques for staging her production, created impressive imagery through the same. The lightings designed initially by Conrad Woldringh and Paul Strom was later taken over by C. Nachiappan, who worked with her from her second production, *Kumara Sambhavam* (1947), to her very last production, *Meera of Mewar* (1984). Rukmini Devi sent Nachiappan to England to study stage techniques, and when he returned, he was equipped with the knowledge he had gained as the stagehand in many Ballet productions. This he employed in the lights that he designed for the Kalakshetra productions. Kalakshetra, Rukmini Devi, was the first in India to procure the Strand Electric Company's (London) stage lighting equipment to light the dance dramas. Also, Nachiappan was a keen observer and travelled with Kalakshetra's repertory company on their tours to Europe and Russia. During a visit to Bolshoi Theatre, he is said to have picked up light design ideas with colours for the sets and bright spot lights on the dancer's face to enhance the viewing experience. The marvels of lighting technique can be observed throughout her productions, especially in scenes like the *Swayamvaram* scene, where Sita is shown as seen from behind a window, in *Sita Swayamvaram*, the 'Parkadal' scene in *Matsya Kurma Avataram*, the burning of Lanka and Sita's *Agni-pravesham* in *Mahapattabhishekam*, and the jail scene in 'Shyama' (designed by Paul Strom).



Img. 5.5.: Ravana (note the Kathakali Attire) and Sita looking through a window. (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Instagram Handle @kalakshetrafoundation)



Img. 5.6.: Lanka Dahanam (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Instagram Handle @kalakshetrafoundation)



Img. 5.7.: Surpanaka Humiliated by Lakshmana (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Instagram Handle @kalakshetrafoundation)



Img. 5.8.: Hanuman Crossing the Ocean (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Instagram Handle @kalakshetrafoundation)

Apart from the lighting, Rukmini Devi kept the stage props to the bare minimum, using semiotics to lay down a scene instead of cluttering the space. This way, she could provide dancing space to the dancers while fortuitously denoting various scenes.

Even though Rukmini Devi was deeply attached to the traditional values and practices and her untethering efforts to tie Bharatanatyam to an un-fragmented living tradition, she often set trends that were new to Bharatanatyam and to any dance drama tradition of the Tamil lineage. Rukmini Devi had taken male students into her institution for Bharatanatyam, traditionally performed by females only. The male students turned vital in the dance dramas. It was in this, for the first time, male artists could play gender-appropriate roles as a part of mainstream Bharatanatyam. Rukmini Devi's endeavours in revolutionising the Aharya of dance dramas are a feat in itself. Beautiful examples of her minimalistic symbolisms that also were very ergonomic can be seen in her design for Hanuman in Ramayana; instead of the traditional tail that would be attached to represent the monkey God, Rukmini Devi designed headgear for Hanuman, which is a crown that is shaped like a long tail that is twirled and tucked at the top with a bell hanging at the 'tail's tip. Through this, she symbolically portrayed the monkey god while allowing the dancer to execute his steps easily.

For the same reason, Hanuman is also seen wearing a Katcham only until his knees. This is because Rukmini Devi's choreography for this character includes plenty of acrobatic movement, which would have been hindered if the traditional dhoti or the tail had been used. Similarly, the costumes for Jatayu and Jambavan are designed by keeping their movement pattern in mind. In a similar fashion to that of Hanuman's tail, in Meenakshi Vijayam, Goddess

Meenakshi is believed to have three breasts. But to portray this in a classical yet subtle fashion which will also not interfere with the warrior-like movements that she had choreographed for Meenakshi, Rukmini Devi designed the character's jewellery in a way that Meenakshi wears a sizeable round medallion-like chain that hangs between her breasts, symbolizing the third breast that the Goddess is attributed to have.



Img. 5.9.: Meenakshi in Meenakshi Vijayam (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Instagram Handle @kalakshetrafoundation)

Rukmini Devi's genius lies in the fact that she had a grand pan-Indian vision for the dance form that she could bring into reality by employing the assistance of the people around her. She was an authoritative leader who could extract what she required from people around her. Through the Aharya of her dance dramas, Rukmini Devi could teleport the audience's mind to the past and create an illusion of witnessing the divine in person. With the help of the costumes, jewellery, stage sets, props and lighting technique, Rukmini Devi brought the characters, that the audience had felt only through hearsay, mythology, or as an idol in temples, to life and ultimately evoked a sense of transcendence through her aesthetics. The main factor behind this is her usage of materials like wood, silk, and original kemp jewellery, all of which the audience, through years of socio-cultural conditioning, could connect to the temples, deities and the ethical values of the past. The reason for the grand success of this merging of dance drama into Bharatanatyam must have been due to 3 factors; one, that Rukmini Devi employed her Ballet knowledge in the stage arrangements and stage lighting; two, the vibrancy yet the subtleness of costumes, jewellery, make-up and hairdo that reflected the preferences (colour,

material and drapes) of the middle and upper-class audience; and three, the audience must have been awestruck at the character depiction, greatly influenced by the well-defined Aharya of Kathakali, that was starkly in contrast with what the visual aesthetics that they associated Sadir with.

5.3. Redressing and Re-dressing the Drama

Considering the extent of her contributions to the very design of Aharya, which has now come to be associated with Bharatanatyam, especially in its dance drama format, a humble attempt has been made to document three of her dance dramas' Aharya. The three dance dramas were selected based on the diversity in characters, geographical settings, literary sources, time periods in which they are situated, and the time in Rukmini Devi's life during which they were choreographed. The documentation has been conducted partially with the help of the Kalakshetra Foundation. The following data has been categorised based on a few parameters:

1. Costumes – including details of colour, material and motifs
2. The make-up of special characters
3. Scene-wise lighting
4. Scene-based stage props - including curtains and wings
5. Jewellery – including crowns and other headgear

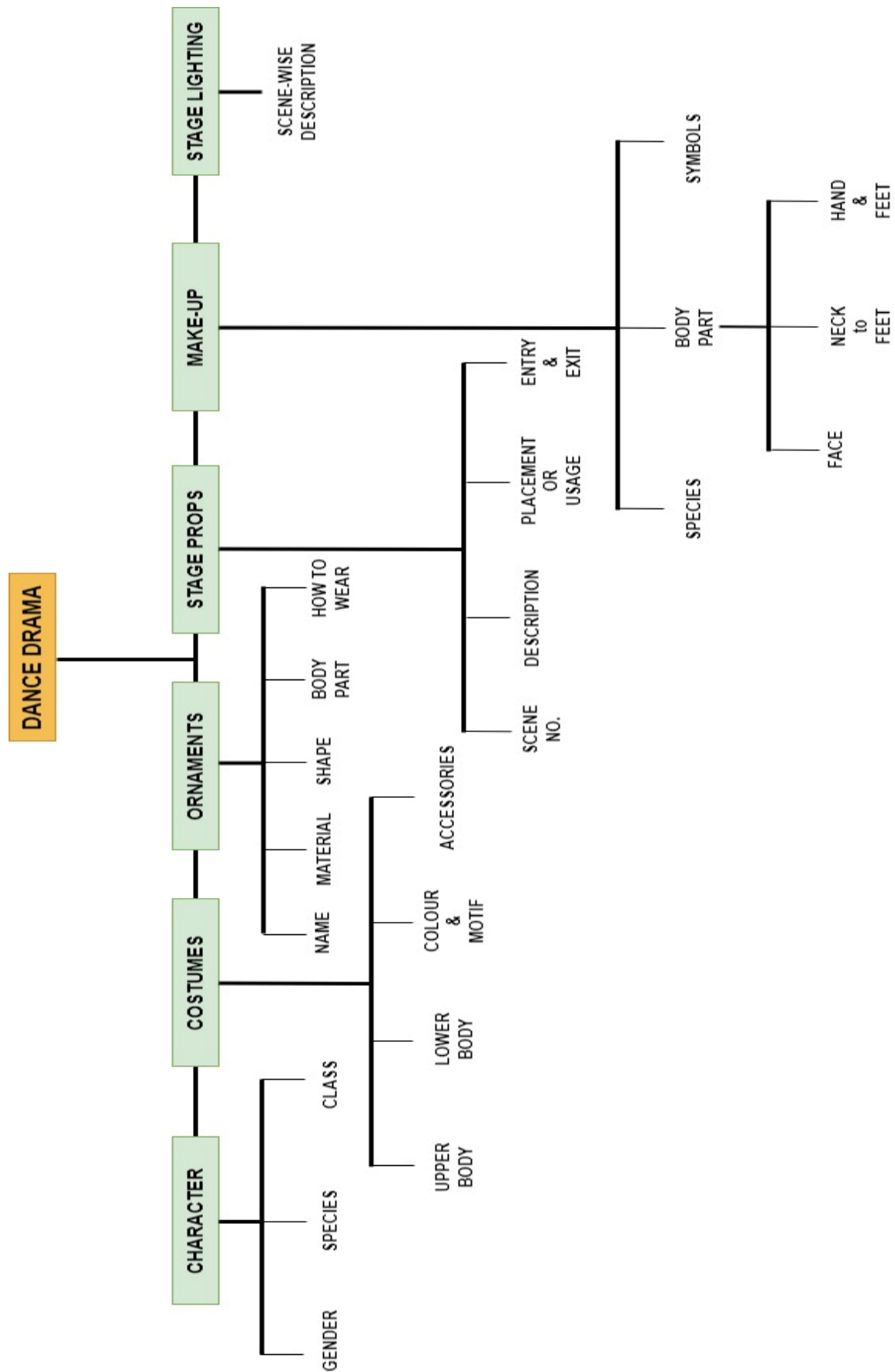


Fig. 5.3.: Researcher's Approach to Analysing Kalakshetra Dance Drama's Aharya.

Table No. 5.1.: List of Dance dramas of Rukmini Devi Arundale

No.	YEAR	DANCE DRAMA	LANGUAGE	ORIGIN
1	1944	Kutrala Kuravanji	Tamil	Traditional Kuravanji Literature from Tamilnadu. Takes place in Tamilnadu.
2	1947	Kumarasambhavam	Sanskrit	Sanskrit Text was written by Kalidasa. Mythological origin. Set in the Himalayas.
3	1955	Sita Swayamvaram	Sanskrit	1 st of the 6 part Ramayana Series. Balakanda. Based on Valmiki Ramayana.
4	1959	Rukmangada Charitram	Telugu	Traditional Bhagavata Mela Natakam. Rewritten in Sanskrit for this production.
5	1959	Gita Govindam	Sanskrit	Jayadeva's Gita Govindam.
6	1959	Usha Parinayam	Telugu	Bhagavata Mela Natakam
7	1960	Sri Rama Vanagamanam	Sanskrit	2 nd of the 6 part Ramayana series.
8	1960	Paduka Pattabhishekam	Sanskrit	3 rd of the 6 part Ramayana series.
9	1961	Shyama	Bengali	Based on the work with the same name by Rabindranath Tagore. Taken from Jataka Tales.
10	1961	Andal Charitram	Tamil	Based on the work 'Tiruppavai' by the Tamil Vaishnavite Saint-poetess Aandal. Set in Tamilnadu.
11	1962	Kannappar Kuravanji	Tamil	Traditional Kuravanji Literature from Tamilnadu. Takes place in Tamilnadu.
12	1964	Rukmini Kalyanam	Telugu	Bhagavata Mela Natakam
13	1965	Sabari Moksham	Sanskrit	4 th of the 6 part Ramayana series.
14	1967	Shaakuntalam	Sanskrit	Based on Kalidasa's Abijnana Shakuntalam.
15	1968	Choodamani Pradhanam	Sanskrit	5 th of the 6-part Ramayana series.
16	1969	Maha Pattabhishekam	Sanskrit	6 th of the 6-part Ramayana series.
17	1971	Dhruva Charitram	Sanskrit	Bhagavata Mela Natakam
18	1971	Krishnamari Kuravanji	Tamil	Traditional Kuravanji Literature from Tamilnadu. Takes place in Tamilnadu.
19	1972	Kuchelopakhyanam	Sanskrit	Srimad Bhagavatam
20	1974	Matsya Kurma Avataram	Sanskrit	Srimad Bhagavatam
21	1977	Meenakshi Vijayam	Tamil	<i>Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam</i> by M. Subramanya Bharati. A Tamil literary work.
22	1978	Damayanti Swayamvaram	Tamil	<i>Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam</i> by M. Subramanya Bharati. A Tamil literary work.
23	1979	Buddha Avataram	Sanskrit	Based on the life of Gautama Buddha. Literature is sourced from an array of texts.

24	1980	Ajamilopakhyanam	Sanskrit	Srimad Bhagavatam. Prose by Maharaja Swati Tirunal.
25	1984	Meera Of Mewar	Hindi	Based on the Bhajans by Meerabai.

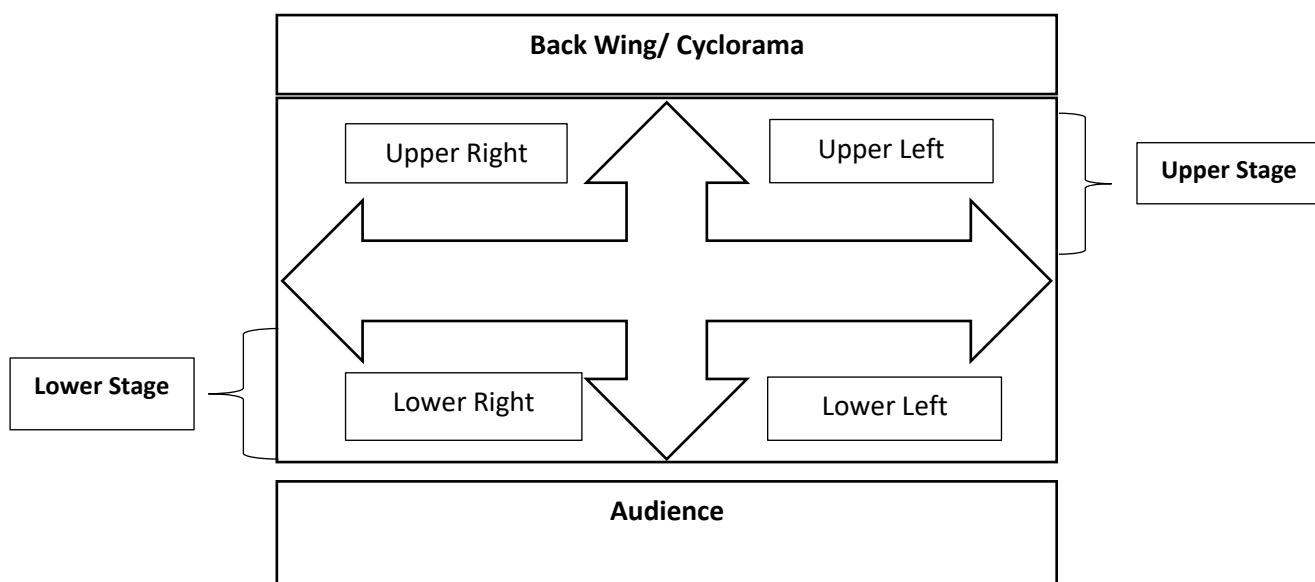
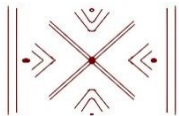
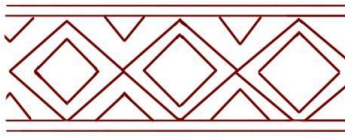
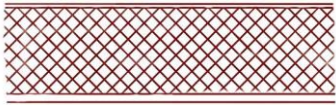
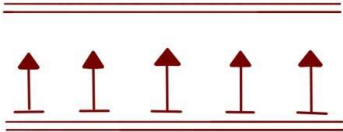
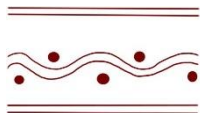
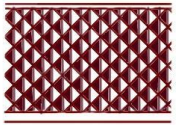
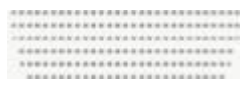


Fig. 5.4.: Reference for the Areas of the Stage

Table No. 5.2.: List of Motifs for Reference

	Rudraksham
	Vanki
	Thuthiripoo
	Pogidi

	Diamond
	Pillaiyar Mukku
	Temple Reku
	Kuyilkann
	Manga Butta
	Paneersombu
	Kodivisiri
	Jadai Nagam
	Rettai Neli
	Arai Madam

	Arai Pogidi
	Thalambu Reku
	Oosivanam
	Parrot/ Kili
	Peacock/ Mayil/ Mayura
	Horse

KUTRALA KURAVANJI

Synopsis:

“Lord Kutralanatha comes in procession through the streets mounted on Nandikeshwara and accompanied by celestial beings and Boothaganas. Vasantavalli sees the temple procession, is captivated by the divine beauty and majesty of Lord Shiva, and falls in love with him. Vasantavalli pines for Lord Shiva and longs to be united with him. Just then, the Kurathi (a Gypsy) arrives and offers to read Vasantavalli’s palm and tell her fortune. The Kurathi assures Vasantavalli that she will be united with her Lord. Vasantavalli is overjoyed and showers the Kurathi with gifts.” (Nachiappan)

Table No. 5.3.: Characters of Kutrala Kuravanji:

Total Characters: 9

S.No.	Character Name	Gender	Species	Class
1	Kattiyakaaran	Male	Human	Commoner
2	Thiraseela Holder 1	Male	Human	Commoner
3	Thiraseela Holder 2	Male	Human	Commoner
4	Vasanthavalli	Female	Human	Royal
5	Kurathi	Female	Human	Commoner (Tribe)
6	Sakhi 1	Female	Human	Commoner
7	Sakhi 2	Female	Human	Commoner
8	Sakhi 3	Female	Human	Commoner
9	Sakhi 4	Female	Human	Commoner



Img. 5.10.: Kutrala Kuravanji. Krishnaveni Lakshmanan as Vasanthavalli. Ambika Buch, Shanta Danajayan and Pushpa Shankar as Sakhis (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)

Table No. 5.4.: Costume Description of Kutrala Kuravanji

Character	Upper Body	Lower Body	Material	Colour and motifs	Accessories	Remarks
Kattiyakaaran	-none-	A - Dhoti B - Sash around the waist	A - Cotton B - Cotton	A - Yellow B - Orange	-Yellow cloth for the head -Orange band for tying around the forehead	Dhoti is tied in a typical Tamil Veshti style. Sash tied on top of the dhoti around the waist

Sakhi 1 & 2	-Blouse with gold flower design -Melakku	-Tubular skirt with saree-like pleats at the centre, pursed and tied around the waist. -side fan -pyjama	Sungdi Cotton	-Red Saree with black zari border. The zari border has a <i>Rudraksham</i> motif placed in four-row checks. It is bordered by the <i>Pogidi</i> border on top and bottom. -Red fan with the same motif as the skirt. -Red pyjama -Green Blouse with a separate jacquard green material attached as sleeves. The sleeve has gold Butta		-Saree is cut and stitched into two: a Melakku and a skirt, to resemble a typical Tamil saree.
Sakhi 3 & 4	-Blouse with gold flower design -Melakku	-Tubular skirt with saree-like pleats at the centre, pursed and tied around the waist. -side fan -pyjama	Sungdi Cotton	-Black saree with red separate zari border attached. The border has a huge <i>Rudraksha</i> Butta in the centre line with a <i>Rettai Neli</i> and diamond motif bordering on either side. -A black fan with the same motif as the skirt. -Black pyjama -Green Blouse with a separate jacquard green material attached as sleeves. The sleeve has gold Butta		Saree is cut and stitched into two: a Melakku and a skirt, to resemble a typical Tamil saree.
Kurathi	-Blouse -Shawl as Melakku	-Skirt	-cotton blouse -cotton skirt -silk cotton shawl	-Dark maroon and mustard (26) vertically striped cotton blouse with sleeves having a Kalamkari cloth strip border. The cloth has horse motifs painted. On either end of the Kalamkari strip, we		The Skirt is completely stitched and does not require a drape. The shawl is pleated and pinned on the

				have beadwork in red, yellow, black and white sewn to form a border. -Skirt in Dark maroon with yellow checks and centre dots throughout with a <i>Pillayar Mukku</i> border where the body meets the border. The waist has a band of dark maroon cotton with a <i>Rudraksha</i> motif. The border is a 5-inch dark maroon strip with an <i>Arai Madam</i> border and patchwork with a mirror. The body of the skirt has broad vertical patches of dark maroon and black cloth with mirror work. The remaining part of the skirt has a circle of black cloth Buttas and mirror work. -Shawl in White with self-diamond design. Yellow zari border on the lengthwise side. The narrow end has gold tassels hanging		left shoulder while the front is fanned into a Melakku, and the right side tip of the back end is brought to the right hip and tucked into the skirt, forming a flare at the back.
Vasanthavali	-Blouse -Melakku	-Skirt -Under Pyjama -Side fan -Sash	-Silk	-Originally Burnt Orange but currently two shades of purple with greenish vertical stripes throughout the body. The body has mustard thread designs throughout the body. The skirt has a mustard		-A single saree has been cut and stitched into a Melakku and a Skirt. The Skirt is stitched in a tubular fashion with pre-

				border, Arai Pogidi thin border, a huge Mayura motif border, and a <i>Rattai Neli</i> gold zari border. -Originally designed as a green blouse with gold flower zari motifs. Currently, the blouse is dark pink with a separately attached gold zari sleeve. The sleeve has a diamond border, <i>Kodivisiri</i> border, and parrot motif. A thin <i>Rattai Neli</i> motif separates the three motifs -A side fan stitched in the same material and border as the mustard border. Has gold zari horizontal lines. -A plain sash in the same mustard colour silk material.		stitched front pleats. The skirt can be tied at the waist using the strings looped through the waistband.
Tirasheela Holders	Uttariyam	Dhoti	Cotton	White with a maroon border.		-Dhoti tied in the usual Tamil fashion and not the Kaccham style. -Uttariyam is a white towel tied across the torso.

Table No. 5.5.: List of Ornaments of characters from Kutrala Kuravanji

Character	Name of Ornament	Material	Shape	Body part	How to wear

Kattiyakaran	Rudraksha Maalai	Fake Rudraksham. Possibly plastic	Rudraksha strung together to make a long chain	-Neck, reaching chest level. -Head	The chain on the head is to be worn on top of the towel covering the head.
Sakhis	Jhumki Maatal	Stone and Metal	-Original Kemp round Ear stud and Jhumki (Bigger size) -Single-line white stone Maatal	Ears	Stud and Jhumki secured at the ear. Maatal should be taken and pinned in the hair right above the ear.
	Extra Maatal	Gold metal	A thin gold chain with little gold beads on it.	Ear	Connected from ear stud to the hair knot at the back of the head
	Magiri Malai	Gold metal, white and red stones	A thin gold chain with large medallions (two of them) attached to it, one below the other. Has a circular mandala-like pattern in it.	Neck	The first layer of necklace. The layers reach the chest and below chest levels.
	Long Haaram	Metal with white stones	A long metal chain with stonework throughout. Has a large medal in the middle.	Neck. Diaphragm level	The chain is placed right at the diaphragm level in a way in which the medallion of the Magiri Malai rests on top of this one's medal.
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	Single metal belt. Ones worn for Bharatanatyam recitals	Waist	Worn on top of the skirt
	Bangles	Gold Metal	Single Metal bangles	Wrist	Couple of bangles on each wrist

	Rakodi	Kemp and metal	The traditional circular Rakodi	Crown of the head	Placed on top of the crown of the head.
	Thirugupoo	Kemp and metal	The traditional circular Rakodi	Head	Placed in the middle of the hair-knot
Kurathi	Jhumki Maatal	Stone and Metal	-Original Kemp round Ear stud and Jhumki (Bigger size) -Single-line white stone Maatal	Ears	Stud and Jhumki secured at the ear. Maatal should be taken and pinned in the hair right above the ear.
	Extra Maatal	Gold metal	A thin gold chain with little gold beads on it.	Ear	Connected from ear stud to the hair knot at the back of the head
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	Single metal belt. Ones worn for Bharatanatyam recitals	Waist	Worn on top of the skirt
	Bangles	Gold Metal	Single Metal bangles	Wrist	Couple of bangles on each wrist
	Rakodi	Kemp and metal	The traditional circular Rakodi	Crown of the head	Placed on top of the crown of the head.
	Thirugupoo	Kemp and metal	The traditional circular Rakodi	head	Placed in the middle of the hair-knot
	Long Chain	Plastic beads	Lots of gipsy-style bead chains	Neck, chest level and below	Lots of bead chains worn together
Vasanthavalli	Rakodi	Kemp and metal	The traditional circular Rakodi	Crown of the head	Placed on top of the crown of the head.
	Jhumki Maatal	Stone and Metal	-Original Kemp round Ear stud and Jhumki (Bigger size) -Single-line white stone Maatal	Ears	Stud and Jhumki secured at the ear. Maatal should be taken and pinned in the hair right above the ear.

	Extra Maatal	Gold metal	A thin gold chain with little gold beads on it.	Ears	Connected from ear stud to the hair knot at the back of the head
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	Single metal belt. Ones worn for Bharatanatyam recitals	Waist	Worn on top of the skirt
	Vanki	Gold Colour Metal	Leaf designs	Upper Arm	Worn on top of the blouse sleeves
	Manga Maalai	Metal and Kemp stones	Big typical Mango shaped temple jewellery, usually worn for solo Bharatanatyam recitals.	Neck, reaching below chest level	It is the only piece of neckwear.

Table No. 5.6.: List of Stage properties from Kuttrala Kuravanji

Scene No.	Description of Prop	Placement on Stage Or Usage	Mode of Entry and Exit
	Backdrop: Dark blue backdrop with four floor-to-ceiling temple pillars painted in grey.	Back curtain at the upper stage.	Stays the same throughout the production.
1	Kattiyakaran Stick: A long wooden stick painted brown with red spirals that start at one end and ends on the other.	Held in hand by the Kattiyakaran.	Brought in and taken back from the stage by the Kattiyakaran.
	Thirasheela: a large rectangular piece of fabric held as a part of a character introduction. This Thirasheela is navy blue with a hand-painted image of Lord Shiva in the centre with a single sinuous rectangle around it as the border. The top of the Thirasheela and the bottom have a single straight line as borders with mango leaves. All of this is hand painted with white paint.	Held by the Thirasheela holders for the introduction of both the Sakhis, Vasantavalli and Kurathi	Brought in and taken back from the stage by the Thirasheela holders.
2	Bamboo Basket: A small woven bamboo basket with a round opening	Held at the left waist by the Kurathi. And later placed at the	Brought into the stage by the Kurathi.

	and a conical bottom. It is filled with neem leaves.	lower left quadrant of the stage, where Vasantavalli is seated along with her Sakhis. Later the basket is moved to the far end of the lower left quadrant of the stage, where it stays till the end of the production.	
	Pearl Necklace: a long necklace made of strung white pearls.	A Sakhi brings it to Vasanthavalli in the middle of the scene and is placed around the Kurathi's neck by Vasanthavalli as a token of appreciation.	Brought into the stage by a Sakhi. Stays with Kurathi till the end of the production.

Stage Lighting for Kutrala Kuravanji

LIGHTING INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE

Make-up for characters in Kutrala Kuravanji

MAKE-UP INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE

The Researcher's Observations:

The dance drama has only human characters and therefore does not present any dramatic characters. The character of Vasantavalli is presented as a perfect example of a traditional Tamil heroine with her yellow and ruby Kanchipuram silk costume and minimal but impeccable jewellery. The Kurathi character is unique and can be seen in the Kuravan community, so commonly seen on the streets of Madras. Her multi-coloured skirt and the multiple layers of beads that she adorns are a direct influence of the Kuravan community, who dress up similarly to this day. The Aharya of Kurathi also resonates with the description of the Kurathi seen in texts like Tyagesar Kuravanji and Kutrala Kuravanji in Chapter 2 of this study. This denotes a continuation of the textual traditions in contemporary practice, which was reflected on stage through the Aharya designed by Rukmini Devi. Whether it was inspired by the actual Kurathi or from the textual description is unclear. Unfortunately, no recent staging of this particular Kuravanji was staged for an analysis

of the lighting and make-up since both aspects were not decipherable in the archive videos.

SHYAMA



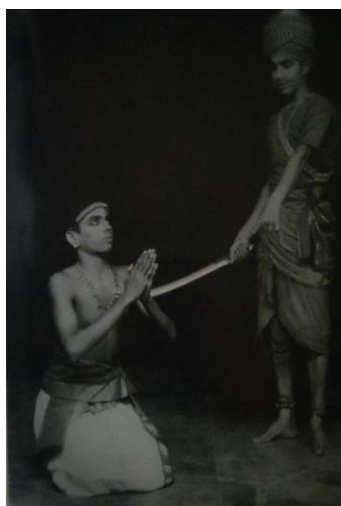
Img. 5.11. Initial staging of Shayama. Pushpa Shankar as Shyama and Balagopalan as Vajrasen (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)

Synopsis:

“Vajrasen is a handsome Merchant Prince. He owns a precious necklace and spawns the suggestion that it should be sold to the King, whose agent is also keen to acquire it. Vajrasen prepares to free the country rather than part with his treasure. The King's custodian of law and order (Kotwal) meets and asks him to open the casket where the rare necklace is kept. But Vajrasen eludes him, and the custodian swears vengeance.

Shyama is a beautiful court dancer with an army of ardent admirers, one of them being Uttiya, who bears his love for Shyama in silent devotion. He enjoys the sympathy of Shyama's companions. While Shyama is engaged in dancing and singing with her friends, Vajrasen, chased by Kotwal, runs across her courtyard, and the handsome youth immediately attracts her. She prevails upon Kotwal to give her time to rescue Vajrasen, who has been captured. None of her admirers will help her in her plans except Uttiya. He offers to substitute himself for Vajrasen and is executed in prison while Vajrasen can escape. He and Shyama are blissfully united.

But soon, Vajrasen realizes that he owes his life to the sacrifice of another, and he rejects Shyama's love and abandons her. Later he is remorseful and calls for her, and she appears before him. But again, he casts her off, overcome by revulsion. Shyama leaves him after a sad adieu. And Vajrasen prays to God to forgive him for his behaviour.” (Nachiappan)



Img. 5.12.: Janardhanan as Uttiya (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)

Table 5.7.: Characters of Shyama

Total Characters: 14

S.No.	Character Name	Gender	Species	Class
1	Vajrasen	Male	Human	Royal
2	Vajrasen's Friend	Male	Human	Courtier/Commoner
3	Kotwal	Male	Human	Courtier
4	Uttiya	Male	Human	Courtier
5	Shyama	Female	Human	Courtesan
6	Sakhi 1	Female	Human	Courtier
7	Sakhi 2	Female	Human	Courtier
8	Sakhi 3	Female	Human	Courtier
9	Sakhi 4	Female	Human	Courtier
10	Sakhi 5	Female	Human	Courtier
11	Village Girl 1	Female	Human	Commoner
12	Village Girl 2	Female	Human	Commoner
13	Village Girl 3	Female	Human	Commoner
14	Village Girl 4	Female	Human	Commoner

Table No. 5.8.: Costume Description of Shyama

Character	Upper Body	Lower Body	Material	Colour and Motifs	Accessories	Remarks
Shyama	-Blouse -Melakku	-Skirt - Underpyjama -Small Front fan	-Silk -cotton under pyjama	-Originally Cerise Skirt and Melakku with Gold check and broad green border.		-A single silk saree was cut into four parts. One to make the Melakku, the second piece made the skirt with self-pleats at the centre to mimic a saree, the third

		-Side Sash made with a scarf (2)		Currently Yellow with pink border with gold <i>Rudraksham</i> like Butta made with hearts -Originally Green blouse Currently Pink blouse. -Originally Cerise satin with white spot scarf. Currently Mustard with pink border sash -Originally a Mustard fan. Currently Pink with gold Butta front fan		piece was to make the two side scarfs, and the fourth and final piece was to make the small front fan. The original blouse piece of the saree was made into the blouse of the costume -the Melakku is to be worn on top of the blouse, pinned to the left shoulder in the usual fashion. The skirt goes on top of this and is tied at the waist. The small fan is secured in the centre at the waist. The details of the drape of the two side sashes are pinned below this table.
Sakhi 1	-Blouse -Saree	-Saree -Side Fan	-Art Silk Saree -Cotton Blouse	-Blue art silk saree with <i>Oosivanam</i> pattern with red border with white '<i>Phool Paar</i>' border of Bengal. Red with yellow stripe Pallu. -Yellow and Orange striped cotton blouse. -Kalakshetra Green sash.		-Draped like a regular dance saree. Pallu forms a side fan at the left waist. The extra sash is tied to the right waist.

Sakhi 2	-Blouse -Saree	-Saree -Side Fan	-Art Silk Saree -Cotton Blouse	-Blue with a red border and pallu with mustard lines. The border has the same Bengal flower border design for all Sakhis -Yellow sash and Brown border with <i>Thuthiruppoo</i> (in white) and <i>Pogidi</i> pattern. -Same yellow with brown stripped blouse.		Same as Sakhi 1
Sakhi 3	-Blouse -Saree	-Saree -Side Fan	-Art Silk Saree -Cotton Blouse	-Green with yellow <i>Oosivaanam</i> design. With a red border and pallu. The border has the Same Bengal flower print as the first 2 Sakhis in white. Pallu has a mustard pinstripe design. -Blouse and sash same as the other Sakhis		Same as Sakhi
Sakhi 4	-Blouse -Saree	-Saree -Side Fan	-Art Silk Saree -Cotton Blouse	-Green with the same border as the previous sakhis. Pallu has mustard lines in <i>Thalambu Reku</i> and <i>Diamond</i> designs. -Yellow sash with gold mango Butta.		Same as Sakhi

Sakhi 5	-Blouse -Saree	-Saree -Side Fan	-Art Silk Saree -Cotton Blouse	-Same Saree and border as Sakhi 1 -Same blouse and Sash as Sakhi 2		Same as Sakhi
Kotwal	-Shirt	-Dhoti -Scarf -Sash	-Cotton	-Red cotton saree as dhoti with mustard border -Brown Shirt with cross tie-ups like an <i>Angaarakha</i> . Elbow-length sleeves. Neckline has a gold thread border. -Pre-stitched Red sash with gold thread border. - Pre-stitched maroon sash with Odiya motifs. The colour is the same as the saree body. - Scarf with a 'Lungi' design (not in use anymore)	-Red with white line turban	-Saree tied in a typical Kaccham ¹⁴⁰ Dhoti fashion. -The Shirt comes on top of the dhoti, and the maroon sash is tied over the dhoti and the shirt. More like a belt. -The red sash is worn as a cross belt from the left shoulder to the right waist.
Vajrasen	-Cross Sash Angavastram	-Dhoti -Backpiece	-Cotton Dhoti -Silk Backpiece	-Originally White dhoti and Angavastram	- Yellowish mustard	-Dhoti tied in the usual Kaccham fashion. -The purple sash is tied as a backpiece with

¹⁴⁰ A full saree 6-9 yards, draped and tucked between the two legs to the back. The other end is brought forward to form pleats that is either tucked around the waist completely or tucked to one side of the waist and the loose end left to form a side fan. Worn by Men as a lower garment in a typical Bharatanatyam performance.

			-Cotton Angavastram	with <i>Kuyilkan</i> border in gold. Currently White dhoti with a maroon <i>Kuyilkann</i> border. Angavastram is the same as the original. -Originally Red silk sash with <i>Rudraksham</i> and Mayil motif border. Currently, Royal purple Sash with gold zari broad checks.	turban with maroon border. The border has a gold rudraksham motif. Turban has a white and green stone brooch.	both ends crossed over to the opposite sides and hung as side fans on either side. -the white angavastram is tied as a cross belt on the torso from the left shoulder to the right waist.
Uttiya	-Cross Sash Angavastram	-Dhoti -Backpiece	-Silk Dhoti -Silk Backpiece -Cotton Angavastram	-Yellowish Orange silk dhoti with jasmine bud gold Butta body. <i>Kuilkan</i> zari border with <i>Temple Reku</i> border on top and a small line of <i>Rudraksham</i> border on the bottom. -White angavastram with gold <i>Kuyilkann</i> border. -Green silk sash with Dark red Ezhai. Cream <i>Jadai Nagam</i> border with a	- Original ly green turban. Currentl y Golden yellow turban with a gold pearl chain in front and a golden brooch.	-Dhoti is tied as usual. -The sash is tied as a backpiece with both ends crossed over to the opposite sides and hung as side fans on either side. - The white Angavastram is tied as a cross belt on the torso from the left shoulder to the right waist.

				small row of vanki border on top and bottom.		
Vajrasen's Friend	-Cross Sash Angavastram	-Dhoti -Backpiece	-Cotton Dhoti -Silk Backpiece -Cotton Angavastram	-White dhoti with maroon <i>Arai Madam</i> border -Angavastram with green and maroon <i>Kuyilkann</i> border on either side. -Mustard Scarf as backpiece with gold and green <i>Rudraksham</i> zari border with tassels at the end.	-Dark wine turban with mustard and white stripes. Gold zari border. Pearl chain stitched to the turban.	-Dhoti is tied as usual. -The sash is tied as a backpiece with both ends crossed over to the opposite sides and hung as side fans on either side. -The white Angavastram is tied as a cross belt on the torso from the left shoulder to the right waist
Village Girl 1	-Blouse -Saree	-Saree -Sash	-Cotton	-Black with Mustard stripes. Same Mustard border with <i>Rudraksham</i> and <i>Pannersombu</i> motif. Pallu has tassels. -Red with a black striped cotton blouse with a <i>Mayilkan</i> Zari border. -Mustard and brown Ikkat pattern cotton sash.		- Draped like a typical dance saree. Pallu forms a side fan at the left waist. The extra sash is tied to the right waist.
Village Girl 2	-Blouse -Saree	-Saree -Sash	-Cotton	-Green with black stripe cotton saree with Dark red border		- Draped like a typical dance saree. Pallu forms a side fan at the left waist. The extra

				with Mustard stripes. -Red with a black striped cotton blouse with a <i>Mayilkan</i> Zari border. -Mustard and brown Ikkat pattern cotton sash.		sash is tied to the right waist.
Village Girl 3	-Blouse -Saree	-Saree -Sash	-Cotton	-Blue with mustard stripes. Same mustard border with <i>Rudraksham</i> and <i>Panneersombu</i> motif. -Red with a black striped cotton blouse with a <i>Mayilkan</i> Zari border. -Mustard and brown Ikkat pattern cotton sash.		- Draped like a typical dance saree. Pallu forms a side fan at the left waist. The extra sash is tied to the right waist.
Change for Sakhis 1, 2, 3 & 4.	-Blouse -Saree	-Saree -Sash	-Cotton	Details of the four sarees are mentioned below in the Notes. -Same blouse as the 1st costume. -Same Sash.		- Draped like a typical dance saree. Pallu forms a side fan at the left waist. The extra sash is tied to the right waist.

NOTES:

1. The term Ezhai means the colour of the yarn used as a weft in weaving a saree or silk fabric. The contrasting colour of the weft gives a dual shade to the fabric.

2. **Shyama's scarf:** Tie the pink part in front, take the two sashes, tuck one end of the sash to the left front, bring the rest to the back, and tuck it in the left back at the waist. Repeat on the right. The sash should be tucked so the pink border forms two arcs on both sides.
3. **Sakhi 1 change:** Korainadu (Also called Koorai Saree. Made in the Korainadu region of Tamilnadu) pattern sarees in cotton. Magenta with a maroon body with Mustard line checks throughout the body and a Mustard long border with Rudraksham motif in white. Same Blouse and Sash as the previous costume.
4. **Sakhi 1 change:** Same as above
5. **Sakhi 1 change:** Black body with green border. The body has mustard checks. The border has a minor magenta border with a silver Panneersombu motif.
6. **Sakhi 1 change:** Red with Rust long border with Rudraksham motif. The body has black checks.



Img. 5.13.: Girish as Uttiya and Sakshi as Shyama (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Facebook Handle.)

Table No. 5.9.: List of Ornaments of characters from Shyama

Character	Name of Ornament	Material/ Colour	Shape/ Description	Body part	How to wear
Shyama	Talai Saman	Originally Stone and Metal Currently, metal beads.	-Originally Full Nethichutti, Chandra Pirai and Surya Pirai Currently , only full Nethichutti with a single drop in the centre.	Head	

	Jhumki Maatal	Stone and Metal	-Original Kemp round Ear stud and Jhumki (Bigger size) -Single-line white stone Maatal	Ears	Stud and Jhumki secured at the ear. Maatal should be taken and pinned in the hair right above the ear.
	Addigai	Gold colour Metal	-traditional Addigai pattern with a single chain and a single round-shaped dollar hanging in the middle. Has bells hanging through the length of it. Both from the chain and the dollar.	Neck.	Worn as the first layer. Very close to the throat.
	Maalai	Gold colour Metal	Five layers of metal chains held together at mid-length with two small gold plates on either side. Joins at the centre with a leaf-shaped dollar with three small bells hanging from it.	chest	Second layer. Chest-level. Hangs below the Addigai.
	Long Haaram	Gold Colour Metal	Small square plates joined together to form a long chain. A huge medallion in the centre with leaf motifs.	Chest – Lies at the level of the diaphragm	Third Layer. Diaphragm level. Worn below the Maalai.
	Vanki	Gold Colour Metal	Leaf designs	Upper Arm	Worn on top of the blouse sleeves
	Oddiyanam	Gold Colour Metal	Single belt with floral design	waist	Worn on top of the skirt
	Side belt	Gold Colour Metal chain	Single chain with smaller chains hanging in small curves with bells at every intersection.	waist	Worn from the left side of the waist, down in a curve to the right side and taken behind and pinned back to the left waist

	Bangle	Gold Metal	Solid bangle with a small sphere in the middle	wrists	Single bangle on each wrist.
	Anklet	Gold Metal	A single chain of anklets	ankles	One anklet on each ankle just below the Salangai
Sakhis 1,2,3,4&5	Jhumki Maatal	Stone and Metal	-Original Kemp round Ear stud and Jhumki (Bigger size) -Single-line white stone Maatal	Ears	Stud and Jhumki secured at the ear. Maatal should be taken and pinned in the hair right above the ear.
	Addigai	Gold Metal		Neck	Worn close to the neck.
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	Single metal belt. Ones worn for Bharatanatyam recitals	Waist	Worn on top of the skirt
	Bangles	Gold Metal	Single Metal bangles	Wrist	Couple of bangles on each wrist
Vajrasen	Ear stud	Metal and white stone	Flower-like design with white stones	earlobe	
	Ring	Gold Metal	A sizeable spherical ring.	Finger	Worn on the right-hand ring finger.
	Addigai	Metal and white with red stone	Pentagon-shaped small plates joined together to form the necklace with inlaid white and centre red stones.	Neck	
	Long Haaram	Gold colour metal	Small metal spike-like long chain. A leaf-shaped medallion with the same spike-like design	Chest length	To be worn in the next layer to the addigai
	Bajuband	Gold colour metal	A giant flower design in the middle	Upper arm	Tied to the upper arm
	Hasta Katakam	Gold colour metal	A broad bracelet with a big flower design in the middle that protrudes out in a 3D fashion	Wrist	Tied with a string on the wrist

	Oddiyanam	Gold colour metal	Square metal sheets with flower motifs threaded together	Waist	Tied around the waist with a string
Uttiya	Ear stud	Metal and white stone	Flower-like design with white stones	earlobe	
	Addigai	Gold colour metal	A series of long mango leaf-shaped metal pieces, each with a flower motif on top of it, strung together.	Neck	
	Long Haaram	Gold colour metal	Long leaf shaped metals strung on a big chain.	Chest length	
	Bajuban	Gold colour metal	A giant flower design in the middle	Upper arm	Tied to the upper arm
	Hasta Katakam	Gold colour metal	A broad bracelet with a big flower design in the middle that protrudes out in a 3D fashion	Wrist	Tied with a string on the wrist
	Oddiyanam	Gold colour metal	Square metal sheets with flower motifs threaded together	Waist	Tied around the waist with a string
Vajrasen's Friend	Ear stud	Metal and white stone	Flower-like design with white stones	earlobe	
	Addigai	Metal with white and red stones	Small stones are set in the chain with a large round medallion in the middle with a flower pattern inlaid with stones. Has gold pearls hanging at the end	Neck	
	Long Haaram	Gold colour metal	Long chain with small spheres all through the length of it. Has a long leaf-shaped dollar in the middle.	Chest length	
	Bajuband	Gold colour metal	A giant flower design in the middle	Upper arm	Tied to the upper arm
	Hasta Katakam	Gold colour metal	A broad bracelet with a big flower design in the middle that protrudes out in a 3D fashion	Wrist	Tied with a string on the wrist
	Oddiyanam	Gold colour metal	Square metal sheets with flower motifs threaded together	Waist	Tied around the waist with a string
Village Girls	Earring	Silver metal	Flower shaped studs	Earlobe	
	Addigai	Silver metal	Stiff and ring-like with flower designs	Neck	Close to the collar bone

	Long chain	Glass beads	Glass beads, long chain	Chest	Reaches the chest level
	Bangles	Silver metal	Small thin bangles	Wrist	Four-five bangles on each wrist
Sakhi Change	Long Maalai	Glass beads	Long chain made of beads strung together	Chest level	Worn along with the first set of jewellery
	Bangles	Silver metal	Thin bangles	Wrist	Replace the previous bangles with this one.
Kotwal	Addigai	Silver metal	Stiff and ring-like with flower designs	Neck	Close to the collar bone
	Kada	Silver Metal	A single thick bangle	Wrist	One on either hand.



Img. 5.14.a: Vajrasen and Shyama's Initial Staging with Pushpa Shankar and Balagopalan (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)

Img. 5.14.b.: Recent Staging with Hari Padman and Sakshi (Right) (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Facebook Handle.)

Table No. 5.10.: List of Stage properties from Shyama

Scene No.	Description of Prop	Placement on Stage Or Usage	Mode of Entry and Exit
1	Jewel box: a rectangle wooden traditional jewel box. Has a small handle on top and a metal latch at the front. The box is brown and has hand	Carried in by Vajrasen. Placed next to him when he and his friend sit down to talk.	Carried into the stage and taken back by Vajrasen

	painted square and diamond motifs on all sides in black, red and white.		
	Stick: a long wooden stick, 'Laati', carried by the Kotwal. Painted dark brown with a yellow spiral around the entire length of it.	Carried in hand by Kotwal.	Carried into the stage and taken back by Kotwal.
	Sword: A wooden sword with a brown handle and black painted blade.	Carried with Kotwal. Placed in his left hip.	Carried into the stage and taken back by Kotwal.
2	Letter Manuscript: a wooden scroll painted brown with red thread wound around it	Carried at the waist by Uttiya and taken into the hand when he sits on the stage to write a letter to Shyama.	Carried into the stage and taken back by Uttiya.



Img. 5.15.: Jayakrishnan as Kottwal and Hari Padman as Vajrasen in the 2021 staging of Shyama. (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Facebook Handle.)

Stage Lighting for Shyama¹⁴¹:

Scene 1:

- Red wing lights soon after curtain rise. A gradient orange light fills the space.
- Vajrasen and his friend enter as the whole stage lights up in amber.

¹⁴¹ Lighting documented by the researcher on 27/12/2021, at Bharatakalakshetra Auditorium. Lighting technician: Murugan

- A front top spot lights them both as they sit on the floor on the lower half of the stage and talk.
- The front spot fades to front wing lights as Kotwal enters
- All lights fade slightly to continue to the second scene.

Scene 2:

- Uttiya enters, and the stage lights up in amber again
- He sits in the lower right quadrant of the stage, where he gets a front amber spot light
- Spot fades away as he gets up to perform
- Uttiya exits, and Shyama enters with Sakhis
- The light stays fully lit for most of the scene until Kotwal and Uttiya exit.
- Once they exit, the stage is lit only by the amber wing lights.
- A Diagonal spot from the stage's lower right quad to the upper left quad is lit in amber. A rectangular gobo gives the effect of jail doors with bars where Uttiya sits.
- Kotwal enters and comes to centre stage, lit with a red front spot.
- Spot fades for Kotwal
- Black out
- Shyama enters from the front stage left door. The stage is lit with red, blue, green and yellow. Mixing looks like purple on stage.
- The stage is not entirely lit. Side wings have a fog machine. Red light from the front, blue and yellow from the side wings. Establishes a night time effect. Shyama exits through the same door.
- Black out

Scene 3:

- Vajrasen sits in the centre stage and is lit with the front centre amber spot. Blue and red lights from the wing. Other lights faded.
- The front spot on Vajrasen turns red. All lights fade except the back wing, red and the front-most wing, blue.
- Black out
-

Table No. 5.11.: Make-up for main/special characters in Shyama

Character	Origin/ Species	Body Part			Corresponding Symbols
		Face	Neck to feet	Palm and Feet	
Vajrasen	Human	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes -Moustache is drawn with collyrium. -Red lips	Tilakam on both shoulders with yellow and red	-	A Tilakam drawn on the forehead resembling a 'lamp'. The outline is drawn in yellow, and the flame part of the lamp is filled in with red.
Uttiya	Human	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes -Red lips	-	-	A Tilakam drawn on the forehead resembling a 'lamp'. The outline drawn in yellow and the lower part of the lamp filled in with red and the upper part filled in with black.
Vajrasen's friend	Human	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes -Moustache drawn with collyrium. -Red lips	Yellow Tilakam on both upper arms with a red dot at the base	-	A Tilakam drawn on the forehead the outline made with yellow line and filled with red.
Shyama	Human	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes		-Alta on the finger tips. With dots on the palm -Alta on toe tips with a small dot in the middle.	-Red adhesive Bindi with a white line underneath

		-Pink based eyeshadow -Pink blush -Gold dots that outlines the top part of the eyebrows. -Red lips		The whole sole of the feet is painted with Alta.	



Img. 5.16.: Girish Madhu as Uttiya in the 2021 staging of Shyama. (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Facebook Handle.)

The Researcher's Observations:

The complete mortal cast of this Bengali drama is dressed in materials not native to the geographical setting of the story. The only Bengal-related aspect of the costumes is the flower motifs on the border of the Sakhi's costumes that resemble the usual flower motifs of the Bengal region. The jewellery is designed to show that the story does not occur in the country's Southern parts. The usual kemp jewellery that can be seen in Rukmini Devi's works, like Rukmini Kalyanam and Meenakshi Vijayam, is not used in this dance drama. Plain gold-coloured metal jewellery is used for all female characters, and white stone-embedded jewellery is used for male characters. This does not essentially reflect Eastern Indian aesthetics, but it does succeed in contrasting it with Southern Indian aesthetics. One striking colour reference in his production is the colours used for the costumes of Vajrasen and Uttiya. Vajrasen is a prince given a purple sash to indicate the 'royal'ness.

On the other hand, Uttiya, a noble person at heart, is given yellow/mustard, a colour usually used to denote Lord Krishna. Here the symbolism points to the fact that Vajrasen is a royal yet not as divine at heart as Uttiya, who sacrificed his life for love. The scenes are limited and are mainly lit in amber, and the stage is completely illuminated most of the time.

Nevertheless, the genius of Paul Strom in designing the Jail scene gobo (A cut-out of the desired shape placed in front of the primary light source) is extremely impressive. The colour red has been used to subtly indicate the negative theme throughout the drama as an undercurrent. The red wing light, in the beginning, indicates the terror that awaits. Kotwal, lit with a red spot in the Jail scene, symbolically depicts the persecution of Uttiya in a beautiful yet grueling manner. And finally, the red spot on Vajrasen shows us the remorse he holds in his heart for being responsible for another man's death.

MAHA PATTABHISHEKAM



Img. 5.17.: Mahapattabhishekam Coronation Scene (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)

Synopsis:

“Vibheeshana, brother of Ravana, surrenders to Sri Rama, having failed in his attempt to make Ravana see the folly of keeping Sita captive. With the aid of the army of monkeys, Rama builds a bridge across the ocean and fights a battle with Ravana. On the first day of battle, Lakshmana is mortally wounded but is saved by a miraculous herb brought by Hanuman. After a fierce battle, Ravana is finally killed. Sita proves her purity by entering the fire and is united with Sri Rama. They return to Ayodhya, and Rama accepts his Kingdom back from Bharata and is coronated the King.”¹⁴²

¹⁴² Nachiappan, C. 2010

Table No. 5.12. Characters of Maha Pattabhishekam**Total Characters: 42**

S.No.	Character Name	Gender	Species	Class
1	Sri Rama	Male	Human	Royal
2	Sita	Female	Human	Royal
3	Lakshmana	Male	Human	Royal
4	Bharatha	Male	Human	Royal
5	Shatrugna	Male	Human	Royal
6	Mandodari	Female	Human	Royal
7	Kousalya	Female	Human	Royal
8	Sumitra	Female	Human	Royal
9	Kaikeyi	Female	Human	Royal
10	Ravana	Male	Asura	Royal
11	Ravana Sarathy	Male	Asura	courtier
12	Ravana Guard 1	Male	Asura	courtier
13	Ravana Guard 2	Male	Asura	courtier
14	Vibhishana	Male	Asura	Royal
15	Rakshasi 1	Female	Asura	Courtier
16	Rakshasi 2	Female	Asura	Courtier
17	Rakshasi 3	Female	Asura	Courtier
18	Rakshasi 4	Female	Asura	Courtier
19	Rakshasi 5	Female	Asura	Courtier
20	Rakshasi 6	Female	Asura	Courtier
21	Rakshasi 7	Female	Asura	Courtier
22	Rakshasi 8	Female	Asura	Courtier
23	Nalan	Male	Human	Commoner
24	Sugriva	Male	Ape	Royal
25	Hanuman	Male	Ape	Royal
26	Jambavan	Male	Ape	Royal
27	Angada	Male	Ape	Royal
28	Monkey 1	Male	Ape	Commoner
29	Monkey 2	Male	Ape	Commoner
30	Monkey 3	Male	Ape	Commoner
31	Apsara 1	Female	Nymph	Divine
32	Apsara 2	Female	Nymph	Divine
33	Apsara 3	Female	Nymph	Divine
34	Apsara 4	Female	Nymph	Divine
35	Agni Deva	Male	Demi-god	Divine
36	Nagaralankaram Girl 1	Female	Human	Commoner
37	Nagaralankaram Girl 2	Female	Human	Commoner
38	Nagaralankaram Girl 3	Female	Human	Commoner
39	Nagaralankaram Girl 4	Female	Human	Commoner
40	Nagaralankaram Girl 5	Female	Human	Commoner
41	Vasista Muni	Male	Human	Sage

42	Vayu Deva	Male	Demi-God	Divine

Table No. 5.13.: Costume Description of Maha Pattabhishekam

Character	Upper Body	Lower Body	Material	colour	Accessories	Remarks
Rama and Lakshmana	-Sash	-Dhoti -Sash	-Art Silk	- Narmudi (Beige) Colour art silk dhoti - Simha (Kaavi Orange) colour art silk scarf and sash, two each	-Poonool/ Sacred Thread	-Dhoti is worn in the usual Kaccham fashion. -One scarf tied as a backseat and formed a knot at the left waist with loose ends hanging to make a side fan. -one scarf tied diagonally across the torso from the left shoulder to the right waist, forming a knot at the right waist.
Rama 2nd Change	-none-	-Dhoti -Sash	-silk	-Golden Yellow Dhoti -Purple with gold chequered sash.	-Golden Poonool	-Dhoti is worn in the usual Kaccham fashion. -Scarf tied as a backseat and forms a knot at the left waist with its loose ends hanging to make a side fan.
Lakshmana 2nd Change	-none-	-Dhoti -Sash	-Cotton Dhoti -Silk Sash	-White Dhoti with broad gold border -Magenta sash with a broad red border	-Golden Poonool	-Dhoti is worn in the usual Kaccham fashion. -Scarf tied as a backseat and forms a knot at the left waist with its loose ends hanging to make a side fan.
Vibhishana	Anagavastram	-Dhoti -Scarf	-Cotton Dhoti -Cotton scarf	-Purple dhoti	-Golden Poonool	-Dhoti is worn in the usual Kaccham fashion.

			-Cotton Angavastram	-Cream colour Angavastram with a self-zari border. -Yellow scarf		-Scarf tied as a backseat and form a knot at the left waist with loose ends hanging to make a side fan. -Angavastram is worn around the neck with the two ends symmetrically going down either side of the chest till the waist
Vibhishana 2nd Change	Angavastram	-Dhoti -Sash	-Silk Dhoti -Silk sash -Cotton Angavastram	-Maroon dhoti -Yellow sash -White Angavastram with gold Zari border	-Golden Poonool	-Dhoti is worn in the usual Kaccham fashion. -Scarf tied as a backseat and form a knot at the left waist with loose ends hanging to make a side fan. -Angavastram is worn around the neck with the two ends symmetrically going down either side of the chest till the waist
Sugreevan	-none-	-Dhoti -Sash -Apron	-Silk Dhoti and Sash -Cotton Apron	-Light coffee colour dhoti with zari Butta -Bright red with zari border sash -White Kodi (half-white) colour frill apron		-Dhoti is worn in a typical fashion but to the knee. -Pleated and stitched apron tied in the centre to form a fan. -Sash tied as a backpiece with both ends crossed over to the opposite sides and hung as side fans on either side.
Hanuman	-none-	-Dhoti -Sash -Apron	-thin 2/2 cotton Dhoti	-Blueish white dhoti	-Gold Poonool	-Dhoti is worn in a normal fashion but to the knee.

			-Cotton Sash -Art silk Apron	-Cream colour zari line apron -Cream colour gold design sash		-Pleated and stitched apron tied in the centre to form a fan. -Sash tied as a backpiece with both ends crossed over to the opposite sides and hung as side fans on either side.
Angadhan	-none-	-Dhoti -Sash -Apron	-Art Silk Dhoti, Apron and Sash	-Deep rust colour dhoti -Same rust colour apron -Cream colour sash		-Dhoti is worn in a typical fashion but to the knee. -Pleated and stitched apron tied in the centre to form a fan. -Sash tied as a backpiece with both ends crossed over to the opposite sides and hung as side fans on either side.
Nalan	-none-	-Dhoti -Sash -Apron	-Cotton Dhoti, Apron and Sash	-Gray dhoti -Gray with <i>Kaka zari</i> border sash -Gray cotton apron		-Dhoti is worn in a typical fashion but to the knee. -Pleated and stitched apron tied in the centre to form a fan. -Sash tied as a backpiece with both ends crossed over to the opposite sides and hung as side fans on either side.
Jambavan	-Shirt -Gloves	- Pyjama -Scarf -Socks	-‘Turkish’ cloth pyjamas, shirt, gloves and socks -cotton scarf	-Black shirt and Pyjama - Originally Dark grey with white zari border scarf Currently light brown plain scarf		-shirt and pyjama are worn first -the scarf is tied as a backpiece with both ends crossed over to the opposite sides and hung as side fans on either side.

				-Grey socks and gloves		
Ravana	-Angavastram	-Dhoti -Scarf	-Cotton Dhoti -Silk scarf -Cotton Angavastram	-White with gold striped dhoti -Cerise colour with gold checks and <i>Temple border</i> scarf (<i>poojai pattu</i>) -White with red border Angavastram		-Dhoti is worn in the usual Kaccham fashion. - Sash tied as a backpiece with both ends crossed over to the opposite sides and hung as side fans on either side. -Angavastram is worn around the neck with the two ends symmetrically going down either side of the chest till the waist.
Ravana 2nd Change	Anagavastram	-Dhoti -Sash	-Cotton Dhoti and Anagavastram -Silk Sash	-Reddish orange dhoti with a red border -Creamish white angavastram -Olive green sash		-Dhoti is worn in the usual Kaccham fashion. - Sash tied as a backpiece with both ends crossed over to the opposite sides and hung as side fans on either side. -Angavastram is worn around the neck with the two ends symmetrically going down either side of the chest till the waist.
Ravana Guard	-none-	-Dhoti -Sash	-Cotton	-Red Dhoti -Maroon Sash with self embroidery	-Red Cloth Turban	-Dhoti is worn in the usual Kaccham fashion -Sash worn as a backseat, tied at the waist.
Bharata	Anagavastram	-Dhoti -Sash	-Cotton Dhoti and Angavastram -Silk Sash	-White Dhoti with broad orange zari border. -Magenta sash with tassels at the end.		-Dhoti is worn in the usual Kaccham fashion. - Sash tied as a backpiece with both ends crossed over to the opposite sides

						and hung as side fans on either side. -Angavastram tied diagonally across the torso from left shoulder to right waist, forming a knot at the right waist.
Shatrugna	-none-	-Dhoti -Sash	-2/2 cotton dhoti -silk sash	-Cream colour dhoti with an orange border. -Light green with flower motif silk sash with a small red border.		-Dhoti is worn in the usual Kaccham fashion. - Sash tied as a backpiece with both ends crossed over to the opposite sides and hung as side fans on either side.
Ravana Sarathy	-none-	-Dhoti -Sash	-cotton	-Blue dhoti -Red and black sash	-Maroon fabric turban	-Dhoti is worn in the usual Kaccham fashion. -Sash tied as a backseat and forms a knot at the left waist with its loose ends hanging to make a side fan.
Agni Deva	-Dupatta	-Dhoti - Pyjama	-thin cotton dhoti -cotton pyjama -cotton dupatta	-Red Dhoti -Red Pyjama	-Red tissue Dupatta	-Dhoti tied in the usual Kaccham fashion on top of the pyjama. -the red tissue is worn like a veil covering the face and most of the torso. -the red cotton shawl is worn to form an 'X' across the torso.
Vayu Deva	-none-	-dhoti -Sash	-cotton	-Bluish grey dhoti with silver zari border. Same colour sash	White netted Dupatta	-Dhoti tied traditionally with the sash tied over it as a back seat. -The white dupatta is worn around the neck with the loose

						ends hanging down the front of the body on either side.
Sita	-Blouse -Saree	-Saree -Front Long Fan	Silk	-Originally a Red cotton saree with green & yellow line Currently, Red and Maroon Saree with gold Zari stripes and a thick zari stripe border. -Bright red with a gold spot silk blouse -Red silk front fan with the same zari pattern as the saree.	Thin white netted dupatta with gold zari border as a veil	Blouse and saree worn in a typical fashion with the length coming up to mid-calf. The saree's pallu is pleated and tucked at the left side of the waist as a side fan. -the long fan is tied as a centre fan on top of the saree. -the veil is worn on the head, covering the face.
Sita 2nd Change	-Blouse -Saree	-Saree -Sash	Silk	-Red Saree with complete gold Zari work -Green Blouse with red border with zari work -Green sash with gold zari border and tassels at the end.		-The saree is tied to the mid-calf length. Instead of being tucked into the waist, the saree's front pleats are turned outwards and fanned out to create a small front fan. -The saree's pallu is pinned to the left shoulder, and the right-hand end is taken and pinned to the right shoulder, forming an arch at the back. -The sash is tied over the waist part of the saree to form a side fan on the left side.

Mandodari	-Blouse -Chest belt	-Skirt -Side fan	-Silk	-Purple saree with red and gold Zari border. -Light green blouse with purple border with zari work. -Light green silk Sash		-A single saree has been cut into two parts. The longer part is hand-stitched and iron-pressed into a skirt with front pleats. The pallu part is taken to the left side of the waist to form a side fan. -The smaller part of the saree is tied around the chest region to resemble a 'Kacchu' style chest band. One end of this fabric is pleated, taken over the right shoulder, and let fall over the Kacchu blouse. -the Sash is tied around the waist to form a knot on the right side of the waist that makes another side fan.
Kausalya	-Blouse	-Saree -Sash	-Silk	-White with red border saree. The border has gold zari work. - Originally Red brocade blouse. Currently Purple plain blouse with a gold zari border on the sleeves. -Purple sash with gold dots and lines.		-Saree tied traditionally. Mid-calf length. -the Pallu of the saree is taken around the waist and tucked at the left side to form a side fan. -the sash is tied over the saree and tied into a knot at the right side to form a side fan.
Sumitra	-Blouse -Chest Band	-Saree skirt -Sash	-Silk	-Red with yellow check saree		-A single saree has been cut into two parts. The longer

				-Light green silk blouse -Red with <i>Oosivaanam</i> motif pleated silk chest band -Light green silk sash		part is hand-stitched and iron-pressed into a skirt with front pleats. The pallu part is taken to the left side of the waist to form a side fan. -The smaller part of the saree is tied around the chest region to resemble a 'Kacchu' style chest band. One end of this fabric is pleated, taken over the right shoulder, and let fall over the Kacchu blouse. -the Sash is tied around the waist to form a knot on the right side of the waist that makes another side fan.
Kaikeyi	-Blouse -Chest Band	-Saree skirt -Sash	-Silk	-Purple with gold flower design saree. -Light green blouse -Red gold brocade chest band-like bodice -Magenta sash		-A single saree has been cut into two parts. The longer part is hand-stitched and iron-pressed into a skirt with front pleats. The pallu part is taken to the left side of the waist to form a side fan. -The smaller part of the saree is tied around the chest region to resemble a 'Maar Kacchu' style chest band bodice. One end of this fabric is pleated, taken over the right shoulder,

						and let fall over the bodice blouse. -the Sash is tied around the waist to form a knot on the right side of the waist that makes another side fan.
Apsara 1,2,3&4	-Blouse -Melakku	-Skirt	-A viscose material called 'Bisilisi'.	-Light green with mustard centre part skirts – 2 -Purple with mustard centre part skirt– 1 -Light pink with mustard centre part skirt– 1 -All skirts have gold hand-painted dots and a gold Zari border. -Blouses the same colour as the skirts with a zari border on the sleeves -Purple shawls. Underskirts same colour – 4 Tissues - 4	-White netted duppatta.	-The skirt and blouse are worn as usual. -The shawl is pleated and pinned to the left shoulder. -The front part is fanned out and tucked to the right waist. The back part is also taken to the right waist and wholly tucked into the skirt. -The netted dupatta is casually openly draped over the shoulders and manipulated as the scene requires.
Nagara-Alankaram Girls 1,2,3,4&5	-Blouse -Melakku	-Saree	Cotton	-Rust colour Blouse -Red with Ikkat design Scarf as Melakku Girls 1&5 – Maroon Sungdi Saree with Mustard border and Pallu Girl 2&4 – Yellow Sungdi		-the saree is draped as a skirt with pleats in the front and the pallu taken around the waist and tucked at the left side of the waist to form a side fan. -the Ikkat scarf is pleated and pinned on the left shoulder.

				Saree with a red border and Pallu Girl 3 – Dark green Sungdi Saree with yellow border and Pallu		-The front part is fanned to cover the chest, taken to the right side of the waist, and goes into the skirt. -The right-hand side end of the back part of the scarf is taken to the right shoulder and pinned there to form an arc at the back.
Rakshasi 1&2	-Blouse -Melakku	-Skirt -Sash -Front fan -Under pyjama	-Cotton Skirt, blouse and fan -Art silk Melakku, Sash and under pyjama	-Purple with white and yellow mango motif stitched-on skirts -Maroon with black stripped art silk scarf up -Black with white, red and mustard threadwork front frill -Black art silk pyjama -Black with white and red vertical stripes blouse.		-Blouses and skirts are worn as usual. -The art silk Scarf is pleated to form the Melakku tucked into the skirt, both in front and at the back. -The small fan comes in the front at the top of the skirt. -The extra sash is roughly tied at the hip to form a right-side fan.
Rakshasi 3	-Blouse -Melakku	-Skirt -Sash -Front fan -Under pyjama	-Cotton Skirt, blouse and fan -Art silk Melakku, Sash and under pyjama	-Black with green and yellow conch motif stitched on the skirt -Maroon with black stripped art silk scarf up -Black with white, red and mustard threadwork front frill		Same as Rakshasi 1 & 2

				-Black art silk pyjama -Black with self-design blouse		
Rakshasi 4	-Blouse -Melakku	-Skirt -Sash -Front fan -Under pyjama	-Cotton Skirt, blouse and fan -Art silk Melakku, Sash and under pyjama	-Black with embroidery border skirt -Maroon with black stripped art silk scarf up -Black with white, red and mustard threadwork front frill -Black art silk pyjama -Black with self-design blouse		Same as Rakshi 1 & 2
Rakshasi 5	-Blouse -Melakku	-Skirt -Sash -Front fan -Under pyjama	-Cotton Skirt, blouse and fan -Art silk Melakku, Sash and under pyjama	-Black with embroidery border skirt -Maroon with black stripped art silk scarf up -Black with white, red and mustard threadwork front frill -Black art silk pyjama -Black with self-design blouse		Same as Rakshi 1 & 2
Rakshasi 6	-Blouse -Melakku	-Skirt -Sash -Front fan	-Cotton Skirt, blouse and fan	-Black with embroidery border skirt		Same as Rakshi 1 & 2

		-Under pyjama	-Art silk Melakku, Sash and under pyjama	-Maroon with black stripped art silk scarf up -Black with white, red and mustard threadwork front frill -Black art silk pyjama -Black with self-design blouse		
Rakshasi 7	-Blouse -Melakku	-Skirt -Sash -Front fan -Under pyjama	-Cotton Skirt, blouse and fan -Art silk Melakku, Sash and under pyjama	-Black with green and yellow conch motif stitched on the skirt -Maroon with black stripped art silk scarf up -Black with white, red and mustard threadwork front frill -Black art silk pyjama -Black with self-design blouse		Same as Rakshi 1 & 2
Rakshasi 1&2 Change	-Blouse -Melakku	-Skirt -Sash -Front fan -Under pyjama	-Cotton Skirt, blouse and fan -Art silk Melakku, Sash and under pyjama	-Orange skirt with embroidery. -Maroon with black stripped art silk scarf up -Black with white, red and mustard threadwork front frill -Orange under pyjama		Same as Rakshi 1 & 2

				-Maroon and mustard striped blouse		

Notes:

1. Sungdi Saree: A traditional tie-and-die process cotton saree native to Madurai, Tamilnadu.
2. Kaka Zari: Fake Zari



Img. 5.18.a: Sethubandhanam Scene (Courtesy: C. Nachiappan Archives)



Img. 5.18.b.: Sethubandhanam Scene (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Facebook Handle.)

Table No. 5.14.: List of Ornaments of characters from Maha Pattabhishekam

Character	Name of Ornament	Material/ Colour	Shape/ Description	Body part	How to wear
Rama and Lakshmana	Tulsi Maalai	Wood	Small cylindrical beads of Tulsi wood strung into a chain	Neck	Single chain reaching chest level.
	Poonool	Cotton	Traditional cotton Upanayanam	Torso	Worn across the torso from the left shoulder to the right waist.
Rama 2nd Change	Addigai	Gold Metal and Red stone	Pentagon-shaped small plates joined together to form the necklace with inlaid white stones and a centre red stone.	Neck	Worn as the first layer of necklace. Close to the throat.

	Magiri Maalai	Gold Metal and Bluestone	Long leaf-shaped metals are strung on a hefty chain. Has a sizeable leaf-shaped dollar in the middle with a single blue stone.	Neck	Worn as the second layer. Reaches the chest level.
	Long Haaram	Gold Metal with White and blue stone. Pearl.	Single metal rectangular plates with two blue stones joined with two chain links strung to make a long Haaram. The centre medallion is inlaid with white and blue stones. The edge has hanging pearls.	Neck	Worn as the third layer. Reaches the navel level.
	Karnabharanam	Gold Metal and Red stone	A circular ear stud, almost 3 inches in diameter, with white and red stone inlay work.	ears	Single stud on each ear.
	Baju bandh	Gold Metal	A giant flower design in the middle and a chequered diamond design on either side.	Upper arm	Tied to the upper arm
	Hastakatakam	Gold Metal	A broad bracelet with a big flower design in the middle that protrudes out in a 3D fashion	Wrist	Tied with a string on the wrist
	Bangle	Gold Metal	A solid, thick gold bangle.	Wrist	Worn only on the right hand
	Ring	Gold Metal and Orange stone	A gold ring with an elliptical-shaped orange stone in the middle.	Ring finger	Worn on the left hand.
	Gold poonool	Gold Metal with inlaid Red stone. Pearl	Small rectangular metal plates with two red stones inlaid in each are connected through two strings of pearl each.	Torso	Worn in the place of a traditional Upanayanam. From left shoulder to right waist.

	Kathakali belt	Gold-plated wood with inlaid red and blue stone	Rectangular wooden blocks are covered in a gold sheet and have golden flower motifs with alternate centres of red and blue colours.	Waist	Tied around the waist as a belt on top of the costume.
	Long hip chain 1	Gold Metal	Two rows of gold spheres strung together	waist	Tied in the waist but flows down to the crotch level and goes back up to the waist, tied like an Oddiyanam with strings.
	Long Hip Chain 2	Gold Metal	Large amulet-shaped metal cases strung together with a cylindrical metal tube between each.	Waist	Tied in the waist but flows down to the crotch level and goes back up to the waist, tied like an Oddiyanam with strings.
	Anklet	Gold Metal	A bangle-like ornament for the ankle. Often called a 'Silmabu' in Tamil.	Ankle	Worn above the Salangai.
	Kadhamba flower garland	Real flower	A long flower garland made of yellow, white, red flowers and green leaves.	neck	Worn as the final layer, on top of all the other ornaments. Reaches mid-thigh level.
Lakshmana, Bharata & Shatrugna	Ear Stud	Metal and white stone	Flower-like design with white stones	Earlobe	
	Small Maalai	Metal with white and red stones	Small stones are set in the chain with a large round medallion in the middle with a flower pattern inlaid with stones.	Neck	The first layer of necklace. Worn close to the throat.

	Magiri Maalai	Gold Metal and Bluestone	Long leaf-shaped metals strung on a hefty chain. Has a large leaf-shaped dollar in the middle with a single blue stone.	Neck	Worn as the second layer. Reaches the chest level.
	Long Haaram	Gold Metal with White and blue stone. Pearl.	Single metal rectangular plates with two blue stones joined with two chain links strung to make a long Haaram. The centre medallion is inlaid with white and blue stones. The edge has hanging pearls.	Neck	Worn as the third layer. Reaches the navel level.
	Baju bandh	Gold Metal	A big flower design in the middle and a chequered diamond design on either side.	Upper arm	Tied to the upper arm
	Hastakatakam	Gold Metal	A broad bracelet with a big flower design in the middle that protrudes out in a 3D fashion	Wrist	Tied with a string on the wrist
	Gold poonool	Gold Metal	Usual Upanayanam in gold thread	Torso	Worn in the place of a traditional Upanayanam. From left shoulder to right waist
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	The usual hip belt is worn for solo recitals of Bharatanatyam	Hip	Worn as a belt over the costume
	Anklet	Gold Metal	A bangle-like ornament for the ankle. Often called a ‘Silmabu’ in Tamil.	Ankle	Worn above the Salangai.
Ravana	Addigai	Gold Metal	Small hanging leaves strung together	Neck	Worn as the first layer of neck ornament.

					Close to the throat.
	Small Haaram	Gold Metal	Gold metal beads shaped as Rudrakshams made into a necklace. The centre has a larger metal Rudraksham hanging.	Neck	Worn as the second layer. Reaches below the jugular notch.
	Rudraksha Maalai	Wood and Gold Metal	A chain of large Rudraksham, each capped on both ends with gold metal and linked with gold metal chain links.	Neck	Worn as the third layer. Reaches upper chest level.
	Haaram	Gold Metal	Small gold beads linked together with metal chain links to form the Haaram	Neck	Worn as the fourth layer. Reaches just below the Rudraksha Maalai.
	Long Haaram	Gold Metal with White and red stone. Pearl.	Single metal rectangular plates with four red stones and two white stones. The plates are joined with two chain links, strung to make a long Haaram. The centre medallion is inlaid with white and red stones. The edge has hanging pearls.	Neck	Worn as the fifth layer. Reaches just above the navel level.
	Ring	Gold Metal and White stone	A gold ring with a white stone design in the middle.	Ring finger	Worn on the left hand.
	Bajubandh	Gold Metal	A big flower design in the middle and a chequered diamond design on either side.	Upper arm	Tied to the upper arm
	Hastakatakam	Gold Metal	A broad bracelet with a big flower design in the middle	Wrist	Tied with a string on the wrist

			that protrudes out in a 3D fashion		
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	The usual hip belt is worn for solo recitals of Bharatanatyam	Hip	Worn as a belt over the costume
	Karnabharanam	Gold Metal	An earpiece with a stud and a large gold pearl hanging at the bottom has an attached ear cuff ornament in the shape of small leaves that form two small rows with a line in the middle.	ear	Worn on the ear with the ear cuff covering the curve of the ear to the top.
	Shoulder Cap		Originally designed to have, but it is not in practice now.		
	Poonool	Gold Metal	Usual Upanayanam in gold thread	Torso	Worn in the place of a traditional Upanayanam. From left shoulder to right waist
	Anklet	Gold Metal	A bangle-like ornament for the ankle. Often called a 'Silmabu' in Tamil.	Ankle	Worn above the Salangai.
Vibhishana	Earstud	Metal and white stone	Flower-like design with white stones	Earlobe	
	Small Haaram	Gold Metal	Small metal pearls bunched together to form the main chain. Gold mango-shaped hangings are placed on the chain at a ½ inch distance.	Neck	1 st layer of the neckpiece. Worn a bit lower than the Addigai.
	Tulsi Malai	Wood	Small cylindrical bits of Tulsi wood strung into a Chain	Neck	Chain reaching chest level. This is the second layer of the neck ornament.

	Long Haaram	Silver Metal, Pearls, White Stone.	Two parallel strings of pearl are strung together to form the two sides of the long necklace. The mid of these two strings is metal cut like a flower with inlaid white stone. In the centre is a white medallion with a six-petal flower. This has pearls hanging on the bottom.	Neck	The third layer of necklace. Reaching just below chest level.
	Bajuband	Gold Metal	A big flower design in the middle and a chequered diamond design on either side.	Upper arm	Tied to the upper arm
	Hastakatakam	Gold Metal	A broad bracelet with a big flower design in the middle that protrudes out in a 3D fashion	Wrist	Tied with a string on the wrist
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	The usual hip belt is worn for solo recitals of Bharatanatyam	Hip	Worn as a belt over the costume
	Gold Poonool	Gold Metal	Usual Upanayanam in gold thread	Torso	Worn in the place of a traditional Upanayanam. From left shoulder to right waist
Hanuman	Small necklace	Gold Metal	Small oval beads strung together	Neck	The first layer of necklace. Worn loosely but close to the neck
	Long Haaram	Gold Metal, white stones and pearl	Small metal beads form a string, and strings on either side form the chain. In the centre is a flower-shaped	Neck	Second Layer of necklace. Reaches mid-chest level.

			pendant with white stones and hanging pearls		
	Tulsi Maalai	Wood	Small cylindrical bits of Tulsi wood strung into a Chain	Neck	Single chain reaching chest level.
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	The usual hip belt is worn for solo recitals of Bharatanatyam	Hip	Worn as a belt over the costume
	Bajuband and Hastakatakam	Plastic	Small-length imitation Spatika Mala with thread strings on both the ends	Upper arm and wrist	Tied with the help of the strings on both the upper arms and wrists.
	Earstud	Gold Metal with White stone	Flower-like design with white stones	Earlobe	
	Anklet	Silver Metal	A bangle-like ornament for the ankle. Often called a 'Silmabu' in Tamil.	Ankle	Worn above the Salangai.
	Poonool	Gold Metal	Usual Upanayanam in gold thread	Torso	Worn in the place of a traditional Upanayanam. From left shoulder to right waist
Sugreevan	Earring	Gold Metal	Small stud with a metal drop hanging	Earlobe	
	Necklace	Gold Metal	Small oval beads strung together	Neck	The first layer of necklace. Worn loosely but close to the neck
	Mango Haaram	Gold Metal	A huge stiff metal neckpiece that looks like a chest shield. Both sides of the haaram have mango-shaped pieces whose tips face right on the rightside and left on the left. Both come and culminate in a	Neck	Worn as the second layer. Cover almost the entire chest.

			larger mango motif centre with mangoes whose tips face either way, with a small design joining the two.		
	Long Haaram	Gold Metal	Long haaram made of gold beads	Neck	Reaches the navel.
	Bajubandh	Gold Metal	A big flower design in the middle and a chequered diamond design on either side.	Upper arm	Tied to the upper arm
	Hastakatakam	Gold Metal	A broad bracelet with a big flower design in the middle that protrudes out in a 3D fashion	Wrist	Tied with a string on the wrist
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	The usual hip belt is worn for solo recitals of Bharatanatyam	Hip	Worn as a belt over the costume
Angadan	Earstud	Gold Metal with White stone	Flower-like design with white stones	Earlobe	
	Addigai	Gold Metal	Square plates joined together closely to form the necklace	Neck	Worn close to the neck.
	Bajubandh	Gold Metal	Kathakali Bajubandh. A line of outward-looking spikes with lines of gold beads below it.	Upper arm	Tied to the upper arm
	Hastakatakam	Gold Metal	A broad bracelet with a big flower design in the middle that protrudes out in a 3D fashion	Wrist	Tied with a string on the wrist
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	The usual hip belt is worn for solo recitals of Bharatanatyam	Hip	Worn as a belt over the costume
	Anklet	Silver Metal	A bangle-like ornament for the ankle. Often called a 'Silmabu' in Tamil.	Ankle	Worn above the Salangai.

Nalan	Earring	Silver Metal	Metal hoop earrings	Earlobe	
	Long Haaram	Paper Mache	Two strips of paper mache with fabric back layer. The Centre has a rounded pentagon-shaped huge pendant.	Neck	Single neckpiece reaching below the chest level.
	Bajubandh and Hastakatakam	Paper Mache	Paper mache with fabric back in an elliptical shape with thread on either side	Upper arm and wrist	Tied with the help of the strings on both the upper arms and wrists.
	Oddiyanam	Paper Mache	A strip of paper mache with a fabric back layer.has strings on either end	Hip	Tied around the hip as a waistband
	Anklet	Silver Metal	A bangle-like ornament for the ankle. Often called a ‘Silmabu’ in Tamil.	Ankle	Worn above the Salangai.
Jambavan	Long Haram	Gold Bead	A long string of gold beads worn in three layers	Neck	Single neckpiece. Reaches above chest level, chest level and below chest level.
	Bajubandh	Silver wire	A silver wire cut-out rectangular piece	Upper arm	Tied to the upper arm
	Hastakatakam	Silver wire	An elliptical piece of silver wire made an ornament with threads on either side.	Wrist	Tied with a string on the wrist
	Poonool	Silver wire	A long thin rectangular strip of silver.	Torso	Worn like a usual Upanayanam, but both ends are tied to the waist belt on the right side of the waist.
	Oddiyanam	Silver wire	A long strip of wire belt with a semi-circle in the middle.	Waist	Worn as a belt over the costume

			Two long vertical strips hang on both sides of the semi-circle.		
Agni Deva	Small Necklace	Gold Metal	Stiff bangle-like necklace	Neck	Close to the collarbone
	Long Haaram	Gold Metal	Long chain with small spikes on both sides with a large pendant in the middle	Neck	Worn after the Addigai. Reaches just above the navel
	Poonool	Gold thread	Three to four gold threads joined together	Torso	Worn across the torso, from left shoulder to right waist
	Bajuband	Gold Metal	A big flame-like design in the middle and a diamond-chequered design on either side.	Upper arm	Tied to the upper arm
	Hastakatakam	Gold Metal	A broad bangle	Wrist	One bangle on each wrist
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	The usual hip belt is worn for solo recitals of Bharatanatyam	Hip	Worn as a belt over the costume
	Earstud	Gold Metal	Small metal clip-on stud	Earlobe	
Vayu Deva	Earstud	Silver Metal	Small clip on studs	Earlobe	
	Short necklace	Gold Metal with red stone	Metal elongated beads strung together to form a long chain with a leaf-shaped pendant and a red stone in the centre.	Neck	The long chain is wrapped around the neck once to form two layers, one close to the neck and the other longer until below the chest level where the pendant lies.
	Bangles	Gold Metal	Plain broad bangle	Wrist	One bangle on each wrist.
Vasista Muni	Rudraksha Mala	Wood	Rudraksha beads strung together	Neck	Two necklaces, one

					close to the chest level and another below the chest level.
	Bajuband and Hastakatakam	Wood	Rudraksha beads are strung together to form small bracelets. One with two rows of beads (for the Bajuband) and one with a single row (for Hastakatakam)	Upper arm and wrist	Tied with the help of the strings on both the upper arms and wrists.
Nagaralankaram girls	Ear stud	Silver Metal	A large conical ear stud with a single chain Maatal	Earlobe	
	Addigai	Silver Metal	A broad Choker with flower designs and silver pearls hanging on the bottom line.	Neck	Worn very close to the neck.
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	The usual hip belt is worn for solo recitals of Bharatanatyam	Hip	Worn as a belt over the costume
	Hip chain	Silver Metal	A long silver anklet with small silver chains hanging in semicircles.	Hip	Worn loosely to one side of the hip.
	Bangle	Silver Metal	Thin bangles	Wrists	Two to Four bangles on each wrist
Rakshasis	Ear stud	Silver Metal	A large conical ear stud with a single chain Maatal	Earlobe	
	Addigai	Silver Metal	Stiff and ring-like with flower designs	Neck	Close to the collarbone
	Long Chain	Silver Metal	Small flower-shaped plates connected with chain links in metal.	Neck	Long necklace. Reaches below Chest level.
	Bangles	Silver Metal	Thick solid bangle	Wrist	One bangle on each wrist.
Apsaras	Ear stud and Jhumka	Silver and Kemp	Usual temple jewellery is worn for solo Bharatanatyam recitals	Earlobe	

	Addigai	Gold Metal	Stiff and ring-like with flower designs	Neck	Close to the collarbone
	Long Chain	Gold Metal	Thin chain with a large circular pendant in the middle	Neck	Reaches below the chest level.
	Oddiyanam	Gold Metal	The usual hip belt is worn for solo recitals of Bharatanatyam	Hip	Worn as a belt over the costume
	Bangles	Silver Metal	Broad, solid bangle	Wrist	One bangle on each wrist.
	Rakodi	Silver and Kemp	Usual temple jewellery is worn for solo Bharatanatyam recitals	Head	Worn in the middle of the lower bun.
	Nethichutti	Silver Metal	Separate plates with flower designs linked to form a chain	Top of Head	Goes from the top knot to the low bun at the nape.
	Ring	Gold Metal	A thick metal ring with a small spear shape in the front pointing upwards	Near the crown	Worn around the knot of hair on top of the crown region.
Sita	Kondai/bun	Fake hair with gold-coloured ribbons.	A semi-circular hair attachment used as an accessory with a small jadai billai attached to the lower end.	Crown of the head.	Attached at the top of the head with hairpins.
	Talaisaman	Gold-plated silver and kemp.	The complete Nethichutti with Chandra and Surya Pirai.	On top of the head along the centre partition of hair and down the hairline on both the sides.	Worn from the top of the head to the forehead and secured by tying the thread attached to the sides at the nape of the neck.
	Jhumki Maatal	Gold plated	-Original Kemp round Ear stud and Jhumki (Bigger size)	Ears	Stud and Jhumki secured at the

		silver and kemp	-Single-line white stone Maatal		ear. Maatal should be taken and pinned in the hair right above the ear.
	Addigai	Gold plated Silver with kemp.	Traditional Addigai pattern with a single chain and a single round-shaped dollar hanging in the middle. Has bells hanging through the length of it. Both from the chain and the dollar.	Neck.	Worn as the first layer. Very close to the throat.
	Long Haaram	Gold colour Metal	Five layers of metal chains held together at mid-length with two small gold plates on either side. Joins at the centre with a leaf-shaped dollar with three small bells hanging from it. The same design Haaram is repeated thrice in three different lengths.	chest	Second, third and fourth layer. Close to the addigai, Chest-level, and below chest-level.
	Long chain	Beads	A single long strand of beads.	From neck till waist.	Hangs below all the layers of necklaces.
	Oddiyanam	Gold Colour Metal	Single belt with floral design	waist	Worn on top of the saree.
	Side belt	Gold Colour Metal chain	Single chain with smaller chains hanging in small curves with bells at every intersection.	waist	Worn from the left side of the waist, down in a curve to the right side and taken behind and pinned back to the left waist

	Bangles	Gold Metal	Solid bangle paired with thinner bangles on either side	wrists	Multiple bangles on each wrist
	Anklet	Gold Metal	A single chain of anklets	ankles	One anklet on each ankle just below the Salangai
	Vanki	Gold Colour Metal	Leaf designs	Upper Arm	Worn on top of the blouse sleeves
Mandodari	Talaisaman	Gold-plated silver and kemp.	The complete Nethichutti with Chandra and Surya Pirai.	On top of the head along the centre partition of hair and down the hairline on both the sides.	Worn from the top of the head to the forehead and secured by tying the thread attached to the sides at the nape of the neck.
	Jhumki Maatal	Gold plated silver and kemp	-Original Kemp round Ear stud and Jhumki (Bigger size) -Single-line white stone Maatal	Ears	Stud and Jhumki secured at the ear. Maatal should be taken and pinned in the hair right above the ear.
	Addigai	Gold metal	An array of Tamil Thali pendants joined together to make a necklace.	neck	Worn close to the collar bone, around the neck.
	Haaram.	Gold Metal	Traditional Kaasu Maalai, an array of coin shaped pendants.	Chest level	Second layer of necklace.
	Bangles	Gold Metal	Single solid bangle.	wrists	single bangle on each wrist
	Anklet	Gold Metal	A single chain of anklets	ankles	One anklet on each ankle just below the Salangai
	Vanki	Gold Colour Metal	Leaf designs	Upper Arm	Worn on top of the blouse sleeves

Kausalya	Addigai	Gold plated silver with kemp	Traditional Addigai pattern with a single chain and a single round-shaped dollar hanging in the middle.	Neck.	Worn as the first layer. Very close to the throat.
	Earring	Metal and white stones.	A round stud with a semicircular hoop hanging from it.	Ear	
	Long Haram	Metal and beads	Gold metal single-line long chain with multi coloured glass beads, and a meddallion at the centre.	Chest-level	Worn around the neck, as the second layer after addigai.
	Oddiyanam	Gold Colour Metal	Single belt with floral design	waist	Worn on top of the saree.
	Vanki	Gold Colour Metal	Leaf designs	Upper Arm	Worn on top of the blouse sleeves
Sumitra	Addigai	Gold plated silver with kemp	Traditional Addigai pattern with a single chain and a single round-shaped dollar hanging in the middle.	Neck.	Worn as the first layer. Very close to the throat.
	Earring	Metal and white stones.	A round stud with a semicircular hoop hanging from it.	Ear	
	Long Haram	Metal and stones	Gold metal long haaram with multi coloured stones, and a meddallion at the centre.	Chest-level	Worn around the neck, as the second layer after addigai.
	Vanki	Gold Colour Metal	Leaf designs	Upper Arm	Worn on top of the blouse sleeves
Kaikeyi	Talaisaman	Gold-plated silver and kemp.	The complete Nethichutti with Chandra and Surya Pirai.	On top of the head along the centre partition of hair and down the hairline	Worn from the top of the head to the forehead and secured by tying the thread attached to the sides at the

				on both the sides.	nape of the neck.
	Jhumki Maatal	Gold plated silver and kemp	-Original Kemp round Ear stud and Jhumki (Bigger size) -Single-line white stone Maatal	Ears	Stud and Jhumki secured at the ear. Maatal should be taken and pinned in the hair right above the ear.
	Short necklace	Gold metal	Five layers of metal chains held together at mid-length with two small gold plates on either side. Joins at the centre with a leaf-shaped dollar.	Neck.	Worn as the first layer. just below the neck.
	Manga Maalai	Metal and Kemp stones	Big typical Mango shaped temple jewellery, usually worn for solo Bharatanatyam recitals.	Neck, reaching below chest level	Second layer of necklace.
	Vanki	Gold Colour Metal	Leaf designs	Upper Arm	Worn on top of the blouse sleeves
	Side belt	Gold Colour Metal chain	Single chain with smaller chains hanging in small curves with bells at every intersection.	waist	Worn from the left side of the waist, down in a curve to the right side and taken behind and pinned back to the left waist



Img. 5.19.: Rama, Lakshmana, and Hanuman in Mahapattabhishekam



Img. 5.20.: Opening scene at Ravana's Court, Mahapattabhishekam

Table No. 5.15.: List of Stage properties from Maha Pattabhishekam

Scene No.	Description of Prop	Placement on Stage Or Usage	Mode of Entry and Exit
1	Back Curtain: Black curtain with a lower border of maroon and mustard fabric of 10 inches width.	Upper Stage	
	Wings: three side wings. The first one (closer to the audience) is a gold-coloured pleated wing. The other two		

	are gauze painted with green leaves, resembling a forest.		
	Shivalingam: a small wooden four-legged stool about 8 inches tall with a foot-tall black Shivalingam on top. It has a back arch of 2 feet high with fabric pinned on top. That fabric is cotton and dark pink with mustard polka dots. The back arch has a border with a black and mustard floral pattern. A real flower garland made of yellow, white, and red flowers and green leaves is placed around the arch of this prop.	Centre stage.	Placed on stage before the scene commences by the stagehands. The Shivalingam is placed till the end of the scene.
	Small Gadhai: A small mace of 1 foot in length, made of wood, painted mustard with the end painted red and green.	Held in hand by Vibheeshana	Brought into the stage and taken back by Vibheeshana. The Gadhai is placed on the floor next to Vibheeshana's stool or on the stool as he performs.
	Vibheeshana Stool: a square stool, approximately 15 inches tall, covered with green cotton fabric with a gold zari tied around the middle, making the stool resemble a damaru.	Upper left quadrant.	Placed by Rakshasi in the court after the invocatory item danced by Vibheeshana. Stays till the end of the scene.
	Ceremonial Umbrella: Yellow fabric umbrella with maroon border and mirror work. Has a long brown wooden handle.	Brought in as Ravana enters the stage.	Brought in and taken back by the Rakshasi.
	Wooden Moda: a low-seated rectangle wooden stool. Painted cream with brown and yellow designs on the borders.	Lower right quadrant.	Placed by Rakshasi in the court after the entry of Ravana. Stays till the end of the scene.
2	Back Curtain: Cyclorama with two feet tall mountain-like props behind the cyclorama covered in green 'gada' fabric resembling a mountain. In front of the cyclorama is four curtains vertically strung from the ceiling to the floor. Has gaps in the middle, exposing the cyclorama.	Upper stage	The black curtain from the first scene is opened to reveal this set-up.

	Back Curtain Change: Blue-lit cyclorama with a gauze curtain in front. A single green curtain bunched and hung from ceiling to floor in the middle.		Changed in the middle of the scene after the Sethu bridge scene.
	Stone Stool: a half-foot high square stool with plaster of Paris pasting on all four sides and top resembling rocks.	Upper left quadrant	Placed by the stagehands before the scene's opening and stays till the end of the scene.
	Wooden Stool: A foot-high wooden stool made from fallen coconut tree stumps.	Mid-stage right.	Placed by the stagehands before the scene's opening and stays till the end of the scene.
	Small Gadhai: A small mace of 1-foot length, made of wood, painted greyish white.	Held in hand by Hanuman throughout the drama.	Brought into the stage and taken back by Hanuman. The Gadhai is placed on the floor as and when needed.
	Bamboo Bow and arrow (2): two bamboo bows and a wooden arrow. Arrow is painted black, and the arrowhead is painted white.	Held in hand by Rama and Lakshmana	Brought into the stage and taken back inside by Rama and Lakshmana
	Small circular Stool: Small wooden stool with three legs. Painted cream.	Stage centre.	Placed and taken back by Sugreeva.
3	Sword: Long wooden sword painted black and edges grey	Held in hand	Brought in by the respective characters
	Bamboo Bow and arrow: Two bamboo bows and a wooden arrow. Arrow is painted black, and the arrowhead is painted white.	Held in hand by Ravana.	Brought into the stage by Ravana.
4	Wooden Stool: A foot-high wooden stool made from fallen coconut tree stumps.	Upper right quadrant	Placed by the stagehands before the scene's opening and stays till the end of the scene.
	Kamandalam and Stick: Metal yogic Kamandalam and a wooden meditation stick	Held in hand by Sage Agasthya	Brought in and taken back by Sage Agasthya.
5	Thirasheela: A rectangular cotton mustard cloth with a large Kalamkari rectangle patch in the middle. The rectangle patch has a mirror work border and four large maroon mango motifs in the corners.	Handheld by the Rakshasis	Brought in and taken back by the Rakshasis.

	Pyre: a low rectangle set-up with a lighting fixture hidden in the middle. This setting is covered with a mustard cotton cloth.	Upper stage centre.	Placed in this position from the beginning of the scene.
	Wooden Stool: small three-legged circular wooden stool. Legs irregularly shaped like tree branches.	Lower right quadrant.	Placed on stage from the beginning of the scene.
6	Back Curtain: A gauze curtain hand painted to resemble a forest	Middle Stage, from the second wing	Added after the previous scene.
	Stool and Wooden Sandal: Small square wooden stool painted brown and decorated with yellow paint. The Paaduka sandal is placed on top of this stool, and a small flower garland is placed on top.	Centre stage	Placed in the centre of the stage from the beginning of the scene. Placed there by the stagehands. Taken away by stagehands.
	Brass Lamp: A small traditional brass lamp	Centre Stage, placed near the foot of the stool	Placed in the centre of the stage from the beginning of the scene. Placed there by the stagehands. Taken away by stagehands.
	Angavastram: White cotton Angavastram	Held in hand	Brought in by Shatrugna and placed around Hanuman by Bharata.
	Ceremonial Umbrella: A yellow fabric ceremonial umbrella with a red top and red wooden handle.	Held in hand	Brought into the stage and taken back by a court girl.
	Back Curtains: the main auditorium's curtain is drawn, closing the entire stage except for the front quarter.	Front stage	Drawn after the exit of Bharata.
	Back Curtains and Wings: Dark Maroon back curtains and side wings. The back curtain has a rectangle opening in the middle with the blue cyclorama showing.	Upper stage	Post the Nagaralankaram scene.
	Rectangle Bench: Wooden bench covered in green fabric with a red border on the bottom and a yellow border on top.	Mid-stage right	Placed after the Nagaralankaram part by the stagehands.
	Centre setup: A rectangle brown covered bench on top of which is a magenta cloth-covered smaller rectangular stool. In front of this brown bench is a small but lengthy rectangular step stool covered in dark mustard cloth with maroon trimming	Upper mid-stage.	Placed after the Nagaralankaram part by the stagehands.

	Small Stool: Same stool used by Ravana in Scene 1	Mid-left stage.	Placed after the Nagaralankaram part by the stagehands
	Ceremonial Umbrella: A fabric umbrella in yellow with tasselled edges. Has a spear-like fixture on top with a fabric tied to it.	Upper mid-stage	Placed after the Nagaralankaram part by the stagehands
	Whisk fan: two white hand-held whisk fans	Held in hand	Brought in and taken back by Vibheeshana and Lakshmana
	Small Stool: A small white wooden stool with maroon trims.	Centre stage	Brought in and taken back by Hanuman
	Metal Pots: 5 Metal pots are usually used in pooja. The centre one has coconut and mango leaves tied with white thread on top.	Centre Stage	Four of the pots brought in by the Apsaras. The one in the centre brought in by Hanuman.



Img. 5.21.: Agnipravesham, Mahapattabhishekam (Courtesy: R. Prasanna Venkatesh's Facebook handle)

Stage Lighting for Mahapattabhishekam¹⁴³:

Scene 1:

- Curtain raises
- A red spot on the Linga placed in the centre stage
- The stage flooded with amber as the maids entered.

¹⁴³ Lighting documented by the researcher on 01/01/2022, at Bharatakalakshetra Auditorium. Lighting technician: Venkatesh Krishnan

- Stays lit for the entire scene
- Vibhishana exits. All lights dim except the red spot on Linga, red wing lights. And a yellow spot on Ravana seated on the lower right quadrant of the stage.
- Blackout

Scene 2:

- The back curtain is replaced with a gauze curtain lit by a blue cyclorama with low cutouts resembling mountains.
- The full stage lights up as Jambavan enters. Followed by Rama and Lakshmana
- Front lights cut, and only bright wing lights remain, as the Vanaras and Jambavan discuss.
- Stage front right door lit as Vibhishan enters.
- Stage floods again as he reaches the camp.
- Lights dim as everyone rushes to inform Rama.
- Dim down to only wing lights and gradually blackout.
- Blue cyclorama and amber spot on Rama, who is seated on the upper left quadrant of the stage.
- Sugreeva enters. Stage fully lit.
- Sugreeva exits. Vibheeshana enters.
- Vibhishana gets crowned on a small stool in the centre stage. All lights are dimmed except the centre stage, a centre spot for Vibhishana.
- After Vibhishana's coronation, the stage is fully lit again.
- Vibhishan comes to Rama, standing in the lower right quadrant of the stage.
- All lights are dimmed gradually.
- Blackout.
- Cyclorama lights up in blue.
- The diagonal path created using a rectangle Gobo spot creates an amber path depicting the Sethu bridge from the lower right quadrant of the stage to the upper left quadrant.
- The entire stage lights up.
- Gobo spot fades to front wing lights as a suggestion for the change in direction.
- Lights fade to just the cyclorama.
- Blackout.

Scene 3:

- Cyclorama blue
- Full stage lights up
- A spot into the audience for Ravana and army entry from the audience's right, from within the seating area of the auditorium
- Spot fades after Ravana and the army reach the stage.
- Wing lights dimmed, and front spots and the centre stage lit for Ravana, Vibheeshana and Lakshmana to fight.
- All lights dimmed, only wing lights, when Ravana hits Lakshmana, and Lakshmana falls. Hanuman lifts Lakshmana and exits, stage blackout.
- Lit back again to reveal Rama
- Ravana exits through the stage right door. The door lit and blacks out.
- Rama and Hanuman in centre spot
- Stage blackout
- Cyclorama lights up blue. Spot on Lakshmana in the lower right quadrant of the stage on the ground. Front wings lit.
- Rama enters. Spot still on Lakshmana.
- Dim stage lights. Ocean blue side wing lights.
- A back blue, green spot follows Hanuman as he enters carrying the Sanjeevi Parvat from upper right wing to stage upper left wing, diagonally right to the mid-stage to lower left wing and finally to the front centre, closer to where the spot on Lakshmana and Rama is. Spot fades.
- The front spot fades as Rama and Lakshmana go to centre stage. The full stage is lit.
- Dark stage with a centre blue spot for Rama, Lakshmana and Hanuman.
- Fade out.
- Blackout.



Img. 5.22.: Apsaras, Mahapattabhishekam (Courtesy: Ganesh Ramalingam's Facebook handle)

Scene 4:

- Apsaras scene. The stage is fully lit.
- Calm blue lights along with yellow for Sage Agastya entry. The upper stage is fully dim except cyclorama. Front wing lights only.
- As Agastya sits down with Rama in the front centre of the stage, a spot lights them. The rest of the stage is only lit with mild blue wings and cyclorama lights.
- The full stage was lit after the sun salutation. Spot on Apsaras on the stool on the upper right quadrant of the stage, watching Rama.
- As Rama and Ravana fight, light fluctuates to denote a flash of lightning.
- Ravana is killed and falls on the lower left quadrant of the stage.
- Red spot on Ravana's lying body.
- A yellow spot is added as Rama comes to Ravana, surrounded by Apsaras.
- The rest of the stage is still lit bright as Lakshmana enters and talks to Rama.
- Everybody leaves except the body of Ravana.
- Vibheeshana enters and sits in the yellow spot near Ravana. The stage is lit only with back wing lights, dim front amber light and the red spot on Ravana.
- Mandodari enters.
- Mandodari cries on Ravana in the same yellow spot. While the Rakshasis accompanying her are lit by ambient yellow lights.
- Centre stage lights as Mandodari moves to the centre stage for her monologue.
- The stage is completely dim except blue cyclorama and red spot on Ravana.
- Full blackout.

Scene 5:

- Cyclorama.
- Sita enters in a palanquin
- Only the lower half of the stage is lit, and the cyclorama is lit.
- Then slowly back wings fade in
- Rama, Lakshmana and Hanuman are in the lower right quadrant of the stage.
- Light intensity dims as Lakshmana exits to start the sacrificial fire.
- He goes to the pyre-like stage prop at the centre of the upper stage, lit by lights from both the back wings.
- Once the fire starts, a red light is lit inside the prop.
- Sita stands in the centre of the prop at the back as the cyclorama turns red, and the spot at the feet of Sita is cranked up to full intensity. Everything goes red
- Once she is declared ‘blemish-free’, and Rama runs to her, the spot turns yellow from the top.
- The red spot inside the setup fades off as she gets down from the pyre. Cyclorama turns purple to blue. Rama and Sita are lit in a back centre amber spot.
- As they come forward, all lights fade in. The spot fades off.
- All lights dim slightly to focus on the front stage spot on Rama and Sita.
- All lights, including the spot, fade and blackout.



Img. 5.23.: Nagralankaram, Mahapattabhishekam (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Facebook Handle)

Scene 6:

- A stool is set in the lower middle of the stage, on top of which padukas are kept.

- Light fades in, in blueish-green tones. The backdrop is the painted screen with trees and creepers denoting the jungle. But the backdrop is in the middle of the stage, cutting the stage in horizontal half leaving only the lower stage in visibility.
- Spot on Bharata performing pooja to paduka while the rest of the stage is dimly lit in blue-green.
- As Bharata prepares to welcome Rama, only the front wing lights are lit, while the rest of the stage is lit in dim blue.
- As they exit, lights dim and blackout.
- The main front closing curtain of the stage is drawn for the next part. Only the front part of the stage is used for Nagaralankaram. Fully lit in amber.
- Curtains open to reveal the stage with brownish-maroon wings and a backdrop. The centre part of the backdrop is open, revealing the blue cyclorama. The royal seat for Rama's ceremony is in the centre of the backdrop, with a royal umbrella at the back.
- As Rama wears the Paduka, all lights dim. A centre front spot of amber on Rama, a blue spot on the throne. Cyclorama is still on.
- All lights fade back in as Bharata takes away the Paduka.
- Rama and Sita sit on the throne. A top spot for them
- All lights except the cyclorama and back spot fade to low as Rama and Sita are sat in the spot while flower showers on them from the top.
- Blackout.



Img. 5.24.a: Make-up of Hanuman (Courtesy: R. Prasanna Venkatesh's Facebook Handle)



Img. 5.24.b.: Make-up of Vanara (Courtesy: Instagram Handle of Kailasanathan. P. K.).

Table No. 5.16.: Make-up for Main/Special characters in Maha Pattabhishekam

Character	Origin/Species	Body Part			Corresponding Symbols	Remarks
		Face	Neck to feet	Palm and Feet		
Ravana	Human/Asura	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes -Moustache is drawn with collyrium. -Sideburns elongated with collyrium -Red lips -A gold highlighting line on top of both eyebrow curves.			-three upward-facing semicircles resembling a curved Tripundra are drawn on the forehead with red colour. A small red dot is on top of this, and a red line is below it. -all of the symbols are bordered with gold lines. -Tripundra mark with ash on both upper arms, forearms, chest and stomach.	
Hanuman	Ape	- Orange base make up -Black around the eyes extending to the cheekbone and the forehead to the hairline. - Yellow borders to these. -Nose painted yellow, with a black outline -a large area around the mouth is painted white. -lips have a small black 'V-shaped mark in	Sandal wood covering the entire torso and arms		-A large 'Namam' is incorporated into the black design on the forehead. The Namam has an outer layer of Yellow, a mid-layer of black and a centre red line that is highlighted with a thin yellow line. -the makeup is very similar to the Hanuman represented in Kathakali.	A very great influence of Kathakali Aharya.

		the middle and two moustache-like curves on either end.				
All Vanaras except Hanuman	Ape	-Orange base make up -Black around the eyes extending to the cheekbone and the forehead to the hairline. - Yellow borders to these. -Nose painted yellow, with a black outline -lips have a small black 'V'-shaped mark in the middle and two moustache-like curves on either end.			-The design used for the eyes is similar to the Vanara Vesham in Kathakali. Refer to Image X below for further details.	
Vasista Muni	Human	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes	Ash Tripundra on the upper arm, elbows and wrists of both the arms		A large Tripundra covers the entire forehead with a red spot in the middle outlined with yellow.	
All Female Characters except Sita and Apsaras	Humans and Asuras	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes		-Alta on the fingertips. With dots on the palm -Alta on toe tips with a	-Red adhesive Bindi with a white line underneath	

		-Pink-based eyeshadow -Pink blush -Red lips		small dot in the middle. The whole sole of the feet is painted with Alta.		
Vibhishana	Human/Asura	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes -Moustache is drawn with collyrium. -Sideburns elongated with collyrium -Red lips -A gold highlighting line on top of both the eyebrow curves	Yellow Tilakam on both upper arms with a red dot at the base		A simple Namam with red colour outlined by a yellow line.	
Rama and Lakshmana	Human	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes -Red lips	- Yellow Tilakam on both upper arms with a red dot at the base - Yellow Tilakam on		A proper Namam on the forehead with an outer layer of Yellow and an inner Tilakam with red. A small yellow dot on the bottom part of the red. Two yellow dots below the Namam, between the eyebrows.	

			the upper chest (Anahat a Chakra) arms with a red dot at the base			
Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrugna post-costume change	Human	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes -A gold line that highlights the top part of the eyebrows. -Red lips	- Sandal wood paste on the torso and arms. - Yellow Tilakam on both upper arms with a red dot at the base		A proper Namam on the forehead with an outer layer of Yellow and an inner Tilakam with red. A tiny yellow dot on the bottom part of the red. Two yellow dots below the Namam, between the eyebrows	
Sita	Human	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes -Pink-based eyeshadow -Pink blush -A gold line that highlights the top part of the eyebrows. -Red lips		-Alta on the fingertips. With dots on the palm -Alta on toe tips with a small dot in the middle. The whole sole of	-Red adhesive Bindi in the shape of a Tilak.	

				the feet is painted with Alta.		
Apsaras	Divine	-Pink/skin colour foundation. -Black detailing on eyebrows -Elongated eyes -Pink-based eyeshadow -Pink blush -A gold line that highlights the top part of the eyebrows. -Red lips		-Alta on the fingertip s. With dots on the palm -Alta on toe tips with a small dot in the middle. The whole sole of the feet is painted with Alta.	-Round Red adhesive Bindi with a gold line underneath	



Img. 5.25.: Coronation, Mahapattabhishekam. (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Facebook Handle)

The Researcher's Observation:

Considered to be the Magnumopus of Rukmini Devi, Mahapattabhishekam serves as a one-

stop reference site for all the aspects of Aharya that Rukmini Devi has experimented with. Starting with the costumes, Rama and Lakshmana's initial orange cotton costume brilliantly contrasts with the grandeur of the coronation costume of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrugna. Sita's first entry is breathtaking, draped in the auspicious red and covered in a veil. She is brought in with the Rakshasis holding the Tirasheela in a way that represents a palanquin. The red of Sita's saree, combined with the red of Agni aided by the red lights, transports the audience to the Agnipravesam (Img. 5.25.).



Img. 5.26.: Agnipravesam, Mahapattabhishekam (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Facebook Handle)



Img. 5.27.: Sita Before and After Agnipravesam, Mahapattabhishekam (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Facebook Handle)

The second change of Sita, also in red, again shows the auspiciousness of Sita and that she is Goddess Lakshmi incarnate. I decipher the choice to dress Sita in red both before and after (Img. 5.19.) in the Agnipravesam as Rukmini Devi's silent protest against the act of 'purification' that Sita was put through. Using Aharya as a tool, by dressing Sita in the same colour before and

after, Rukmini Devi establishes that Sita has always been pure. The Vanaras costumes are used both as a semiotic tool and as a costume that enables the acrobatic moves of the army of monkeys. Jambavan's costume can be seen as highly dramatic and leaning more towards a dramatic production than a Bharatanatyam performance. As discussed earlier, the Rakshasis in the black reflect their Tamasic Guna. The Apsaras dressed in pastel colours emit an aura of unearthly beauty and charisma. The usage of the netted shawls as hand-held props by the Apsaras creates a mystical and whimsical feel to the scene. The court scene is filled with silks in royal purple and blue hues, effectively establishing a royal air to the scene. The Nagaralankaram girls bring in a touch of desi in the dance drama. Though they are dressed in Sungdi saree, a tie-and-dye technique native to Tamilnadu, one can assume that it was meant to represent the Bandhini technique of the Northern region.

The jewellery is classified as royal and common. Almost all the royal characters are decked similarly except Sita. The jewellery of Sita is almost similar to that of the decoration of the bronze idols of Goddess in many of the Tamil temples. She is decked with a ruby-laid coronet, a complete Talaisaman, three separate Haarams, Vanki, bangles, a Waist belt, a hip chain, and a golden anklet. Sita's look is nothing below regal. The Rakshasis and the village girls wear silver jewellery, indicating that they are commoners and are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The head ornaments of the Apsaras, especially the golden clasp around the top knot and the slender chains that go from the top of the head to either side, add a touch of sculptural divinity to the characters.

Even though it has already been discussed, a special appreciation for the brilliantly designed Hanuman's crown is due. The lightings beautifully highlight the senses and have been put to use to yield the maximum output of the given situation. The Rama and Ravana war, where the stage is divided into two to depict the war scene on one side while the Apsaras narrate it on the other is one fine example of lighting to create two different spaces on a single platform. The lightings for the Agnipravesham are yet another masterpiece. The lighting for the final coronation scene is nothing less than the others; simple lighting with the help of cut-out back wings creates a scene of serenity and divinity simultaneously. The stage props, although minimal, serve the purpose of establishing the scene while not excessively cluttering the space. The characters' make-up is also carefully curated. The Nagaralankaram girls' make-up is simple, them being commoners. While characters like Rama and Lakshmana don the normal look before the court scene, the look for the coronation scene is elevated by a simple golden highlight above the eyebrows. The same technique of using a line of golden highlight above the eyebrow is used for Apsaras and Sita. The Vanara characters, including that of Hanuman, are a direct influence of Kathakali and add to the dramatic element of the production.



Img. 5.28.: Sita in Mahapattabhishekam (Courtesy: Kalakshetra Foundation's Facebook Handle)

5.4. To Summarise:

The dance dramas of Kalakshetra have been the life's work of Rukmini Devi Arundale, spanning four decades and remaining the institute's pride. To the extent of their power, the repertory of the institute and its costume department has safeguarded the details of the Aharya without much deviation from the initial plan of Rukmini. The costumes, props, wigs, crowns, and jewellery of all the two dozen dance dramas used to be stored in a dingy 100 square feet cottage. Thankfully in the last decade, the institute has upgraded its costume department and has successfully shifted and stored the costumes and accessories in a highly orderly manner. From what the assistants in the department say, over the last 60 decades since the first dance drama of Rukmini, the costumes have been mended or entirely remade as and when necessary. This meant they had to compromise with minute changes in shades due to the lack of availability of similar materials and motifs in the market. This might be one of the major causes for the change that we see in many of the costumes. It is also interesting to note that in many costumes when the main body is torn, the costume department safely removes the original zari borders from the torn costumes to restitch on to the next version of the same. It is safe to argue that the aspects like make-up (of common characters) and stage lighting could not be what she had executed since the advent of technology, and the wide availability of materials for make-up could only have led to changes in both these aspects, arguably for the better. The main auditorium, Bharata Kalakshetram, has been rebuilt with modern lighting amenities and rigs, enabling precise lighting design. Unlike initially believed, the handlooms used for the characters are not specific to where the story is centred. After analysing her work, we understand that silk, especially Kanchipuram and Pochampally, were preferred for lead roles such as Meenakshi, Shyama, Rukmini, and Sita. At the same time, cotton like Sungdi

and Korainadu were used for commoners and Sakhis. The men, in most of the dramas, except roles like Krishna, Rama, Ravana and the like, wore white cotton dhoti while the latter wore, yet again, Kanchipuram silks. Even though an effort has been made to match the motif to the region, regional handlooms have not been exclusively sought after for the dramas.

Rukmini Devi has contributed to many streams in her lifetime. Yet, the concept of Dance dramas being introduced into Bharatanatyam has to be one of her monumental contributions. In her huge body of work, her dance dramas must be regarded as a treasure of dramatic representation in the Bharatanatyam style and must be documented to a great extent. In this chapter, we could look into three of her works partially. Albeit a small part of her work, the information we could gather has been monumental. The thought process put into the designing of the costume and jewellery for each of the character is meticulous. In studying the same alongside the prescriptions of Bharata, we see a lot of similarity between what was suggested in *Natyashastra* and what was executed by Rukmini Devi even though she has never read the text herself. Looking at a few similarities between the text and the practice, in Rukmini Devi's dance dramas studied here, men belonging to royal lineage wore jewellery and head gears similar to those described in *Natyashastra*¹⁴⁴, the turban, ear ornament, layers of necklaces, rings, armbands, bracelets, the sutra and waist bands. While the same men, Rama for example, when in exile are rid of all these jewelleries and have their hair tied in a knot, and dress in orange. Similarly, Rishis are dressed in saffron and sport a beard. The women, usually heroines, their Sakhis, and other women of the royal household are seen dressed in various colours and have their hair in a knot or a braid. their jewellery denote their economic status in these dramas. An interesting character to study is the Apsara seen in *Maha Pattabhishekam*. The hair, and jewellery is the exact replica of the suggestion provided by Bharata, hair in a top knot and adorned in precious stone-embedded jewellery¹⁴⁵. A similar reference of *Natyashastra* is seen in the Aharya of the Rakshasis who are dressed in black and sport prominent white teeth as a part of their make-up. Such similarities aside, Rukmini Devi also took the creative liberty to differ from the textual references in instances like the costumes of Hanuman, where symbolism is used instead of an actual depiction. The one aspect of the treatises that is undoubtedly justified by Rukmini is that she followed the suggestion of Bharata and other authors to use her own discretion to make changes to the prescriptions of the text as and when required based on their habitation, birth and age. Like Bharata suggested, she gathered information required to design the Aharya of her characters from not only the texts but also "from the popular passage [people]" (Ghosh 439).

Even though much of her work has been continuously restaged through the years, even after her demise, the lack of documentation has led to many changes in her initial design, which we have no way of knowing. In dramas like *Shyama*, the first heroine on whom this was

¹⁴⁴ Table 2.1. in appendix.

¹⁴⁵ Table 2.3. in appendix.

choreographed was a senior dancer named Pushpa. She recalls the costume being a cerise. But, in the version of Shyama that was restaged in December 2021, the costume was yellow. Comparing the drapes too, the original is very different from the revived staging of the same. In aspects like this, we understand the necessity of documentation of Aharya since it is so volatile that even the smallest change can steer us away from the original creative process.

CHAPTER – 6

ALLYING THE ALLIED: AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ANCILLARY FIELDS OF BHARATANATYAM AHARYA

As a classical dance form, Bharatanatyam has found its aesthetic identity and has stuck to it, albeit at the primary level, for over half a century now post-revival. The changes brought in by Rukmini Devi, which were accepted, adapted or, many-a-times, adjusted by her contemporaries and successors, have become the norm for Bharatanatyam Aharya in the present times. No form of art, especially performing art, can thrive as a single entity without the inflow of aid from allied streams that feed into it. Bharatanatyam is no exception to this. The Aharya of Bharatanatyam has transcended the realm of being just an art and has established its own socio-economic ecosystem that thrives on it. Apart from learning the art form and its grammar, the presentation of the dance form on a proscenium has been the ultimate goal of the learning process of all classical dance forms. The ninety-minute performance and preparation take much more than the hours spent with the Guru and the musicians in rehearsal studios and classrooms. Traditional¹⁴⁶ and, most of the times, even the not-so-traditional¹⁴⁷ performances heavily rely on the physical representation of the art. And this initial impression that the artist establishes through their physical presentation is possible only through the group of artists and artisans behind the scenes. At this juncture, a classical dancer who can be metaphorically seen as a blank canvas becomes an exhibition in motion, carrying the works of these artists. The handiwork of a weaver, tailor, goldsmith, makeup artist, florist, and lighting designer elevates a dancer's stage presence. Therefore, a Bharatanatyam Kutcheri becomes the culminating point of half a dozen individual fields of work.

¹⁴⁶ Traditional here is used to refer to spaces such as a Temple, Proscenium or Sabhas that Bharatanatyam is traditionally associated with.

¹⁴⁷ Other experimental spaces such as Blackboxes, Museums, Intimate performances, Studios etc.



Fig. 6.1. Allied Arts of Bharatanatyam Aharya

6.1. WEAVING A SAREE

The Weaves of Patronage:

The art of weaving, sculpture, painting and other visual mediums of expression cannot be traced linearly. They interweave, like the roots of a great tree, feeding into each other's creative process. The weaving profession is an age-old practice in the country and has several mentioning in the Sangam poetry. The community of 'Panchanar'¹⁴⁸, later known as Vishwakarmas, consisted of the society's five primary professions: the weaver, cobbler, goldsmith, carpenter and potter. In the Tamil-speaking region, all forms of art flourished under the generous patronage of the rulers, one not lesser than the other. Thus developed, the art of weaving and textiles, which boasts of handloom and weaving techniques in both silk and cotton, has placed Tamilnadu on the global pedestal for centuries. Well documented in the

¹⁴⁸The term denotes five communities and was explained by Prof. Raghuraman in his lecture for Natyakala Conference in Chennai, 2023

Sangam works like *Silapadikaram* and *Manimekalai* is the profession of weaving and the export of the same. *Silapadikaram*, in its first canto, provides vivid imagery of the bustling markets for the silk and cotton trade in Madurai and the port town of Puhar (Poompuhar). Aiyangar. R also notes that the *Periplus*¹⁴⁹ mentions the coasts of Tamilnadu being the hub of soft ‘Muslin’ cotton, silk and wool and also cotton that was almost transparent and had flower patterns on it (82). As early as the 9th century, the Chola rulers invited a community of weavers from Sourashtra to settle in Kanchivaram, Tamilnadu. The Chola rulers, who were a force to be feared, used their position in the Bay of Bengal to acquire a monopoly over the sea trade of all things from spices to textiles, all through the eastern and western waters. Ramaswamy, V. opines that most weaving centres in present-day Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh (which came under the Chola territory) can be traced back to the Chola patronage (422). This strip of coastal land that was the centre for trading was called the Chola mandalam (The Land of the Cholas), later named ‘Coromandel Coast’ by the Britishers. The Cholas, with their unwavering love for material pleasures, set up these weaving centres close to the temple towns and levied tax (named *Tari Arai* – loom tax) on the weavers wherein the first saree off the loom had to be given to the temple for the deities as a part of the cess. The silk fabric was considered religiously pure and believed to hold spiritual importance. Kanchivaram silk, also called Kanchipuram silk, has become the symbol of luxury in the state and throughout the country. Nevertheless, Tamilnadu also has weaving hubs in Tirubhuvanam, Arani, Woraiyur, Kumbakonam and Tanjore, all specialising in cotton and silk weaving. Nandita Krishna notes that during this period, we see textile trade between China, Assyria, and Persia from the Coromandel Coast (20).

The patronage of weaving then shifted to the Vijayanagara Empire, which highly commercialised the art form. The colossal temples of the period, which were built as parallels with the palaces, created a massive demand for silk textiles that still represented purity. Philip B. Wagoner, draws a detailed picture of how the Vijayanagara period saw the development in weaving techniques in the peninsular region due to their proximity with the Deccan Sultanate and the constant inflow of merchants and officials from foreign land owing to their infamous hospitality of European merchants and a general increase in ‘Islamicisation’ in the Southern region of the country (851-880). The Vijayanagara period saw the rise of the weaver community from serving the lower string of social hierarchy to focusing on the courtly proceedings of cross-cultural exchange. The weavers played a considerable role in the economy

¹⁴⁹ A voyager’s manuscript that lists details of ports.

and display of wealth of a Kingdom, and they played their part by constantly fine-tuning their techniques through a process of give and take from the weavers of the Deccan and Mughal Kingdoms¹⁵⁰. Nevertheless, throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the weaving community migrated within the Deccan, especially between the Tamil and Telugu-speaking regions, resulting in a constant process of refining weaving techniques. Throughout history, the weaving hubs of Tamilnadu had weavers from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Sourashtra, thus serving as the sanctuary where these artisans could safely practice their art form and pass it on to the next generation without fear of political turbulence.

As early as 17th C.E., the Dutch East India Company eyed the Coromandel coast for the textile trade, significantly contributing to the flourishing of the King's coffers. The textile trade in the Coromandel Coast was later taken by the British East India Company. The British EIC eyed the Coromandel coast due to the global demand for the region's textiles that was already well established by this period. The British extended their administrative clutch over the Indian peninsular from the land given to them by the Nayaka ruler in Chennapatnam, present-day Chennai, to conduct trade in textiles. This transition from the patronage of Vijayanagara rulers to the monopolising of the textile industry by the British happened due to the turbulence inside the merchant guilds and their patrons, especially during the Maratha invasion, which gave way for the British East India Company to set their foot, firmly, in the field¹⁵¹. With incentives and privileges, the British established a strong hold over the textile industry and carried out colossal export of South Indian cotton textiles that soon became a huge rave in the British high society, thus increasing the demand far higher than what the weavers or the traders of textiles could meet. While the weavers ceased to enjoy the elevated privileges and respect, they enjoyed during the reign of the Indian rulers, the British monopoly over this industry did result in intercultural assimilations. As Madras prints such as the Coromandel Chitz (closely related to the Kalamkari Pen technique) and the Madras checks soon found their place in the Victorian fashion scene, and sartorial practices such as puffed sleeve and high neck blouses found a home in India.

¹⁵⁰ For more information on weaver community and their role, through centuries, in placing the country on the global fashion map, see Riello and Thirthankar, 2009.

¹⁵¹ Refer to Mukund, K. (1999) and Parthasarathi, P. (2001) for economy and trade shift during late 17th and 18th century South India.

The Saree Sentiment:

The traditional attire of the Indian women is believed to be the Saree. A term loosely used by our White lords to refer to the rectangular piece of cloth that was draped in no less than a hundred ways all through the different regions of the country. To a vast extent, the fashion in which this piece of cloth is draped depended on the region's topographical conditions and the class or sect of the society that the women belonged to. The same garment, for the lack of a term, called 'Saree', has been projected as the epitome of elegance. This image has been laid upon the garment by the cultural nationalists of the early 20th century in order to retrieve the idea of the Indian women from the shadow cast upon them by the colonisers as the 'oppressed' sex. The saree, particularly the 'Nivi' drape (Img.6.1.), was propelled by early cultural activists like Annie Besant and Gyanodanandini Tagore (Sister-in-law of Rabindranath Tagore), gave the drape a prominent place in the reconstruction of the image of the Indian woman and became the 'National Drape', pushing aside the regional styles.



Img. 6.1.: Traditional Nivi Drape (Courtesy: Pinterest)

The second industrial revolution of Britain lasted up to 1914, and the drastic development in fast technology resulted in handloom sarees being replaced with mill-made satin and chiffon saris from the European mills while cotton from the Madras presidency was exported by sheets to Britain. The eventual mass production of textiles gradually cast the weaving community out of their own professions, now being replaced by power looms. The colonial move to marginalise local artisans by replacing them with power looms imported from Manchester led to weavers quitting the profession, resorting to mass production of designs, compromising on technique and quality, and incorporating material, motifs and patterns that pleased the coloniser, who was now their employer. The nationalists and activists understood

the path to extinction that the handloom industry was on and stepped in to protect the weavers' art. By this time, A crucial scene at the turn of the century was the move to revive the handloom industry. Along with the work to reconstruct and revive various other art forms in the music and dance fields, a crucial revival occurred in the weaving industry. The Swadeshi Movement made handloom resuscitation the means of fighting for our identity as a nation. And the portraits of Bharatmata (Mother India) by Raja Ravi Varma only aided in correlating the saree with the notion of patriotism. For this very purpose, in the 1920s, the Indian Government took the initiative to bring all the regional weaver's guild and co-operative associations in Tamilnadu and form a single state-wide co-operative society for weavers called the Co-optex, which now functions under the Tamilnadu state's 'Department of Handlooms, Handicrafts, Textiles and Khadi'. The co-optex cut the role of a middleman and started buying pure handloom sarees and other textiles directly from the weavers while providing subsidies to re-establish their livelihood. Today, co-optex sarees are valued for their unadulterated quality of natural dyes and thread and count rate while also being one of the leading exporters of textiles in the country.

Rukmini Devi Arundale also played an essential role in the re-instating of the traditional attire to its lost glory when she, at the request of the Indian Government, started a weaving unit in her institute, the International Academy of Arts, in 1937, within a year of establishing the Academy. At the inauguration of the centre, Rukmini Devi said in her speech that:

"Our aim is not to set up a huge factory, but rather in a small way to produce fine materials of beauty and simplicity. We hope that what we produce here will reflect the most wonderful things that had been produced in our country in olden days."

("Crafts Centre History")

The pioneer who operated on her one goal to revive the lost aesthetic of the country, especially of the South, took it upon herself to eliminate the colonial residue from the traditional weaves. She, who hailed from a family of Brahmins, who were at one point the only commoner who was allowed to wear silk due to their ritualistic significance, collected traditional silk sarees from family and friends and used the colour palette, motifs and patterns as a reference to rebuilding the Kanchipuram silk saree which she succeeded through her weaving unit, wherein she provided a protective work environment for weavers from traditional families around Kanchipuram, Kumbakonam and Arcot districts of Tamilnadu. The weaving unit grew in

popularity due to its beautiful motifs and efficient display of workmanship. The broad-bordered, contrast-coloured sarees woven in the Kalakshetra weaving unit soon became known as the ‘Kalakshetra Sarees’ throughout the Madras social circles. In the 1950s, the Handicraft Board of the Tamilnadu State Government sanctioned funds to build a more significant building to house the looms, and it still operates from the same premises. What started as the revival of the handloom saree slowly branched out to the revival of traditional dyeing patterns while she also experimented with chemical dyes for her own sarees. The weaving department served as an essential element in the revival of Bharatanatyam, mainly due to the efforts of Rukmini Devi, since she utilised the fabric woven in this centre for her dance drama costuming and stage design. Many of the sarees adorning her leading ladies, especially her Vasantavalli from Kutrala Kuravanji, were woven by the craftsmen of this centre, now called the Crafts Education and Research Centre. In the 1970s, Rukmini Devi added the craft of Kalamkari and block printing techniques to the centre. The centre now has a weaving unit, dyeing unit, Kalamkari unit and a block printing unit, the blocks for which are made in-house or directly bought from artisans in Jaipur, Rajasthan¹⁵². Another contribution of Rukmini Devi to the Aharya of everyday Bharatanatyam is the invention of dance practice sarees. These sarees are a take on the dance costumes of the Devadasis, wherein the dancer wore a blouse, a full-length pyjama, and the cotton saree, in the usual Nivi drape, on top of the pyjama. The Pallu is secured around the waist. The dimensions of the dance saree vary from that of a normal saree, here the length is longer, and the breadth is shorter, resulting in a drape where the saree only reaches below knee level, providing comfort to dance and also advantageous to the Guru to observe the footwork of the dancer. Post-revival, the dance saree has been the new norm for a Bharatanatyam dancer. Practitioners of other classical dance forms like Kuchipudi, Mohiniattam and Odissi have later adapted it. The dance saree is now woven and sold in other textile showrooms besides the CERC. However, Kalakshetra’s dance saree remains a crowd favourite. The CERC, Kalakshetra, currently houses 14 full-sized frame looms, of which 10 are cotton looms, and 4 are silk looms.

Kanchipuram Pattu – The Silk of Gods and for Gods

The *Pattunoolkarar*, as the Sourashtrian silk weavers of Kanchipuram were called, were held supreme for their time-immemorial technique of saree weaving. Even though the Tamil state boasts of other regional silk weaves, such as Arani Pattu and Thirubhuvanam Pattu,

¹⁵² Data collected through a personal interview conducted with the head of block printing unit, K. Dakshinamurti, at Chennai on 05/01/2022.

the Kanchi Pattu was and is famous for its intricate workmanship and simple yet striking looks all over the country, especially the South. Due to its ability to capture the onlooker's attention, the Kanchi Pattu has always been the main fabric to fashion the dancing body of the region for aesthetic and often political reasons. "The very fact that this city has served the textile needs of the royals and commoners alike, even from the time of Pallavas, serves as proof of the outstanding quality and aesthetic appeal," says archaeologist and historian Chitra Madhavan (2005).

The Kanchi Pattu is distinct in how contrasting colours are used in the body, border and the Pallu parts of the saree. The weavers of the Kanchi Pattu saree use the technique called '*Korvai*'¹⁵³ (incidentally, also a term used in Bharatanatyam to refer to a string of Adavus that end with a Theermanam), which means to string, bead, or join together. According to the Geographical Indication Description, India, an original Kanjivaram should be in the lustrous three-ply silk (called *Murukku Pattu*), real *Zari* (thread made of gold or silver), with contrast borders (*Karai*) in *Korvai* (an interlocking weaving technique by hand). The *Pallu* (*Thalaippu* – in Tamil), in contrast to the body of the sari, is joined by a technique called *Petni*. The beautiful colours, contrasts, motifs and borders of the Kanchipuram Saree reflects the topography, the temple sculptures, the mythology associated with these temples and the people's aesthetic preference, especially the region's elite. A few of the defining motifs and colours of Kanchi are given in Table 6.1. below.

Table No. 6.1.: Kanchi Weaver's lexicon¹⁵⁴

S.No.	Term	Meaning
1	Warp and Weft	In weaving a textile, the lengthwise threads/yarn is called the warp, while the breadthwise/horizontal yarn is called the weft. In a loom, while the warp stays stationary, the weft is interwoven using the shuttle, creating a dual-toned look with the use of two different colours for the warp and the weft. This weft in a silk saree, in the Tamil language, is called an <i>Ezhai</i> , an undertone created by the weft.
2	The loom	Kanchipuram sarees are weaved on either frame looms or pit looms. While very few weavers use pit looms in the present day, frame looms have been an efficient tool for weaving these masterpieces. The loom is often fitted with a jacquard machine that helps add the zari motif to the saree.

¹⁵³ Refer to Table no. 6.1.

¹⁵⁴ Information in both Table No. 6.1., and 6.2., were collected through a personal interview conducted by the scholar with a weaver named Ulaganathan in his residence at Kanchipuram on 28/01/2022.

3	Butta	Motifs, commonly called Butta, is the pattern created on the saree, using an extra weft yarn, either pulled up by the jacquard attachment or by hand. The by-hand technique is called an <i>Adai</i> and is highly complex since it is done free-hand and requires two weavers to finish the weaving process.
4	Pethni or Benth	A technique original to the Kanchipuram weaving community, wherein the Pallu of the saree is in an entirely different colour from the body and the weaver, by hand, interweaves the yarn of the body to the yarn of the Pallu, thus creating a clear-cut demarcation of the yarns that is visible on the backside of the saree. This separate interweaving process requires great skill and serves as an identifier of the original Kanchi Pattu.
5	Korvai	a similar interweaving technique, wherein bold patterns are woven to join the body with its contrasting border.

Colours of Kanchi:

The beauty of the Kanchipuram saree is using local terms to refer to the colour and colour combinations. This proves how the weaver drew inspiration from his surroundings, especially nature. The natural dyeing process of silk yarn has been a long-standing practice in the Tamil region. The water of the river that flows through Kanchipuram aided in the unique colours of the loom. In 1868-69, synthetic dyes with tar as the base was introduced, and the evolution of the colour palette of the Tamil saree was inevitable. Below are the most traditionally used colours of the Kanchipuram loom, along with its Tamil names.

Table No. 6.2: Colour Terminology of Kanchipuram Silk Sarees

COLOUR	VERNACULAR TERM	CONNOTATION
Black	Kanmai Karuppu	Black of the collyrium
Grey	Yaana	Elephant
Ash	Sambal	Ashes
Silver	Eeyam	Tin, as in tin utensils
Off-White	Kumaran	Unknown
Off-White	Sandhanam	Sandalwood
White	Muthu	Pearl
Golden White	Vennai	Butter, white with gold/yellow undertones
Orange	Simham	Lion

Lemon Yellow	Elumicchai	Lemon
Yellow with red undertone	Mambazham	Ripe Mango
Saffron	Kunkumapoo	Saffron plant
Mellowed Yellow	Pasumanjal	Turmeric
Light Orange	Kanakambaram	Tropical Flame flower
Gold	Goldu	Gold
Brownish Yellow	Vendhayam	Fenugreek Seeds
Light Green	Ilai Pacchai	Leaf green
Parrot Green	Kili Pacchai	Parrot green
Emerald Green	Maragatha Pacchai	Emerald
Green with Red undertones	Manthulir	Tender leaf of the mango tree
Cyan	Mayilkazhuthu	Peacock's neck
Ruby Red	Kempu	Kemp stone of the temple jewellery
Bright Red	Kumkumam	Vermillion
Dark Red	Arakku	A form of wax mixed with sand. The adhesive used in temple jewellery
Red with orange undertones	Thakkali	Tomato
Red with brown undertones	Sengal	Brick
Pinkish Purple	Vengayam	Onion
Pink	Thamarai	Lotus
Cerise	Rani Pink	Royal Pink
Dark Pink	Pattu Rose	Dark pink of the rose flower
Sky Blue	Ananda blue	Happiness, believed to refer to Lord Krishna
Indigo	Nilambari	Unknown
Blue with a green undertone	Ramar Blue	Colour of Lord Rama
Aubergine	Kathiripoo	Flower of the Brinjal plant
Violet	December Poo	Bluebell Barleria
Purple with pink undertone	Vadamalli	Globe Amaranth flower
Purple with red undertone	Naval Pazham	Jamun fruit

The above list is not limited to itself and represents only a part of the Kanchipuram colour palette. With the development in dyeing techniques, new variations of colours, inspired by later, more contemporary objects, have come into the market. For example, a shade of grey resembling cement powder was named 'cement grey', owing to the introduction of cement. M. S. Blue, a very favourite colour in the Brahmin household, was inspired by the dark blue worn by the renowned yesteryear singer M. S. Subbalakshmi. The 'Fanta' orange shade has also been in vogue, inspired by the cult-classic aerated drink.

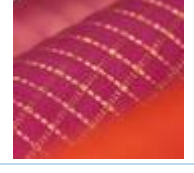
The Beauty of the Butta:

The beauty of the Kanchi Pattu lies in the clever use of motifs and other designs in the body and border of the saree. The motifs that make a Kanchipuram Saree instantaneously recognisable are again inspired by nature. The most commonly used motifs belong to the family of leaves, fruits, animals, birds, mythical creatures and gem/precious stones.

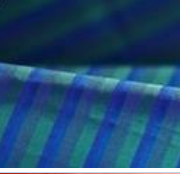
The Dots, Lines and Squares:

The construction of the Kanchipuram saree heavily relies on the basic geometry that the creative piece of work, the saree, is intended to create. A few basic structures guide the body patterns of the silk saree, as explained in the below table.

Table No. 6.3.: Design Patterns on a Kanchi Silk Saree¹⁵⁵

S.No.		Term	definition
1		<i>Muppagam</i>	A <i>Muppagam</i> or a three-part body is a design where the body of the saree is divided into three lengthwise or breadthwise.
2		<i>Araipagam</i>	Araipagam, or a two-part body, is when the body is divided into two breadthwise.
3		Kasa-Kasa Checks	Tiny checks named after the Poppy seed, which in Tamil is called Kasa Kasa.
4		Puliyangkottai Check	Checks on the body, roughly the size of a tamarind seed (Puliyangkottai).
5		Muthu Kattam	Broad checks with the lines resembling a pearl-like dot

¹⁵⁵ Images, for reference, were taken from Kanakavalli.com

6		Paimadai Kattam	Checks that resemble the checks in a woven straw mat are called <i>Pai</i> .
7		Kambi Kolam	Wave-like lines with dots that resemble the geometric pattern of the traditional <i>Pulli-Kolam/Kambi-kolam</i> of the Tamil household
8		Vazhaipoo Stripe	lengthwise alternating stripes on the body, usually in a contrasting colour.
9		Vaira Oosi	Thin dotted lines that run lengthwise parallel to each other. Usually done with Gold Zari.

Dressing the Dancer – Fables of Fabric:

The Tamils and their love for silk have been an acquired sense of aesthetics. Primarily a tropical region, the Tamils preferred cotton wear to endure the hot climate. With the great history of seafaring merchants in the land, silk found its way into the markets of the Tamil-speaking region. It quickly became the preferred fabric of the royals for adorning their deities and themselves. The Cholas and, later, the Vijayanagaras preferred silk clothing for royal and ritual affairs due to the association of the material with purity. Through an inevitable matter of sartorial Sanskritization¹⁵⁶ “the usage of silk slowly seeped into the lives of, in descending order, courtly nobility, regional nobility, officials, merchants, dancers and the like” (Ramaswamy 64). With the shifting of weaving centres, silk weaving centres close to the temple square were soon emulated by the dancing girls, who stayed in close quarters to the temple, even by the time of Raja Raja Chola¹⁵⁷. At this juncture, it is also crucial to be mindful that not all dancing girls could afford the silk saree, and historically, only the Rajadasis would have had the economic freedom to dress in silk. Another reason for the adaptation of silk by the Rajadasis should also be attributed to the fact that they were in a position in the royal court

¹⁵⁶ Sartorial Sanskritization: A term that refers to the process in which the people of lower hierarchical position in the social pyramid, emulated the sartorial practices of the upper/elite class.

¹⁵⁷ As observed in the temple inscriptions of the Brihadeeswara temple. South Indian Inscriptions (S.I.I.), Vol. II, no.19.

wherein they served as the physical manifestation of the King's wealth and therefore were dressed similarly to that of the Royal family.

The Kanchi silk, or any silk for that matter, has not always been the choice of fabric for the dancer. Due to the economic downfall of the Devadasis post-British colonisation and subsequent abolishment of the system, the Western accounts do state that the dancers were dressed in muslin sarees. The accounts of 'garish' sarees cannot be seen as a reference to the subtle contrasts of the Kanchi Pattu saree, whose use of pure silver and gold Zari must have been unaffordable for the poor economic viability of the Devadasi in the early 20th century. In the heat of the cultural revival of the country during the Nationalist Movement, the activists took to Kanchi silk saree to dress the women of the country, and so did the women activists of Madras. Rukmini Devi's aesthetic appeal was indubitably interwoven with her own Aharya, even more than that of her dance form, Bharatanatyam. Her work in reinstating the weaving industry, as a part of her Institution, alongside Carnatic Music, painting, and pottery, forever allied these art forms into the mainstream of Bharatanatyam as a rejuvenated art form. The sarees and fabrics woven in the CERC were quite literally displayed on the dancing bodies of her institute, giving both the textile and the dance form mutual space to grow popular with the help of each other. The weavers beautified the dancer while the dancer popularised the creation of the weaver. Rukmini Devi's intervention in the field of weaving and textiles thus became a win-win situation for her, her institute and both these art forms that she had directly revived. Thus, the silk saree came to be associated with the Bharatanatyam dancer and, as sartorial practices tend to be, the connoisseur of the art. By 1950 – 1970, the Bharatanatyam scene was greatly dominated by the upper and upper-middle-class dancers who could afford the silk saree and, even when unaffordable, sought to dress in Kanchi Pattu as a representation of their class and aesthetic superiority (Sharma 63). The Margazhi season of Madras, even today, is marked by the beautiful glitter of the golden Zari of Kanchipuram silk.

Rukmini Devi's urge to explore led her to experiment with the silk weaves of other states, like Pochampally and Banarsi silk, in her Aharya. She is said to have weavers in the CERC weave the Pochampally sarees that her female dancers fashioned in dance dramas like *Shyama* (1961) and *Rukmini Kalyanam* (1964). However, the centre does not have Pochampally artisans currently. Many dancers, especially post-1990s globalisation which accelerated the mobility of commodities within the country, have started freely experimenting with fabrics based on personal choice, economic factors, and durability. Established artists like Revathi Ramachandran and Geeta Chandran explore their choice of fabric, especially for their

thematic and group presentations, while dancers like Rukmini Vijaykumar and Parshwanath Upadhyay, play with fabric even for their solo performances. Rukmini Vijaykumar, in particular, shared¹⁵⁸ that she shifted to chiffon and tissue materials due to their affordability, even though she hails from an upper-middle-class background. Even though weavers and costume designers stand by Kanchipuram silk for its long-term durability, the new generation dancers also have factors like social media to consider before investing in silks. Many dancers, who do not have a socio-economic background, opine that posting images of their performance on social media handles limits them from repeating costumes since the image of them in a particular costume has already been widely viewed by audiences who were not even present in the auditorium for the performance. Therefore, they resort to fabrics like Silk cotton, which costs only a fraction of the original Kanchi variety, is comparatively durable, and gives an almost similar stage presence. In a survey conducted for this study, 52.6% of the youngsters preferred silk cotton, 26% preferred silk, and the rest claimed to shift between both depending on comfort and other factors. Whichever material ends up draping the dancing body, the role of the weaver and the weaving industry has been and always will be, an indispensable part of the Bharatanatyam Aharya, forming the basis of the aesthetic identity of the art form.

6.2. TAILORING

It is a common belief that the Indian subcontinent did not wear tailor-made dresses but rather draped long fabrics in different drapes and shapes. Contrary to popular belief, the ancient texts in Sanskrit, like the Kamasutra of Vatsyayana, mention the art of tailoring as one of the 64 arts to be learnt by the prince, princesses and the *Ganikas*. Tamil texts like the Silapadikaram¹⁵⁹ mentions tailoring as a profession, as Ilango Adigal (the author) describes the shops in the town square of Puhar (Present day Mayiladudurai district, Tamilnadu). The Sangam period poems also mention the presence of soldiers or bodyguards from Rome, called Milechas in the local dialect, in the towns of Tamil-speaking region as wearing an upper garment called ‘*Kanchukam*’, a stitched shirt. From the references in Sangam works such as Silapadikaram and Manimekalai, we understand that these Milechas and professions, like the goldsmiths, wore stitched upper garments. The tailors also helped stitch armours and household necessities. A stitched blouse for women is often not seen in the Tamil region, except in a few

¹⁵⁸ In a telephonic interview conducted by the author on 09/01/2022.

¹⁵⁹ Canto 1, describes the various businesses of Puhar and Madurai.

Pallava and Chola period sculptures that show women's upper garments with flower patterns. This can also refer to the breast band, an unstitched cloth tied around the chest. The subsequent evidence of tailoring is the Brihadeeswara temple inscription belonging to the period of Raja Raja Chola (1010 C.E.), which states the emoluments paid to the costume makers, which is higher than the payment made to the dancers themselves¹⁶⁰. The Nayaka period and the assimilation of sartorial practices between the courts of the Nayakas, the Nawabs and the Mughals had already brought in the concept of stitched garments for the male and female members of the royal family. Regarding royal patronage, we have no inscriptional or other pieces of evidence. Still, deciphering from the murals of the 16th century through 19th century Maratha murals, the use of blouse by female dancers imply that some form of tailoring must have existed.

The British invasion, which brought with it the patriarchal mindset and Victorian morals, looked down upon the Indian common women who, up until the early 20th century, did not choose to wear an upper bodice under their sarees nor an underskirt. When the factor of women's empowerment started being brought into the limelight by activists like Muthulakshmi Reddy, women began to come out of their private lives and into the public space being part of the independence movement and at this juncture is when the need to dress women 'appropriately', appropriate for the eyes of the British, was even considered. The answer was incorporating a blouse and petticoat as a part of the saree, the 'Nivi' drape, which was also propagated to represent the newly empowered women of the country. Though the concept of a bodice itself was not new to many parts of the country, especially the '*Choli*' of the north, incorporating the same into the wardrobes of women all over the country was only a result of the freedom movement. But the blouse as a garment was always a part of the trousseau of a dancer, as the literary evidence discussed in Chapter 2 of this work evidently proves. Similarly, in every account of a dancer, be it on miniatures, murals, company paintings, later British photographs or the various traveller accounts from the West, the dancer of the Tamil region has always been described as wearing a tight bodice that was tightly fitted around her arm, must only imply that either tailoring was a profession throughout Tamil history, or that the women of the state, especially the dancing girls were adept at the art of stitching.

Apart from the stitched blouse and the stitched pyjamas used by the dancers during the Nayaka and later the Maratha periods, the saree remained unstitched and purely draped until

¹⁶⁰ S.I.I., Vol. II, Part 1.

the advent of the cine industry. With the migration of Devadasis from Sadir to lead roles in movies and the themes of these movies being highly mythological, a great deal of importance was placed on the classical dance and the dancers' costumes. Most of the dance costume tailors today, especially the two leading costume designers of Chennai, D. S. Aiyyelu and Shanti Tailors, both had initial training in tailoring as tailors for dance costumes in Tamil movies of the early 1940s and 1950s, respectively. A common belief and claim by many followers of Rukmini Devi are that she was the first to cut a saree and stitch it into a costume. At the same time, D. S. Aiyyellu's son A. Sivakumar¹⁶¹, states in an interview¹⁶² that it was his father and Vijayantimala Bali¹⁶³ who first devised the modern stitched pant costume, but considering the fact that Vijayantimala Bali had her debut performance in 1949, this may not be the fact. While A. Sivakumar is true in that Bali might have come up with the completely stitched Pyjama costume, Rukmini's followers have a point on their side. Rukmini Devi's stitched costume was designed to resemble a saree draped in Katcham style. But the costumes stitched for the movies, the pant costumes, were highly tailored and form-hugging. Whatever the origin, the stitched costume had made its way into the Aharya of Bharatanatyam almost entirely by the 1950s. Though traditionalists like Balasaraswati opposed the stitched costume and stuck to her traditional drape over a pyjama until her last, even her Bani, led by her grandson Aniruddha Knight¹⁶⁴, has shifted to sewed costumes, owing to the comfort and convenience of it.

The Art:

The Bharatanatyam costume cannot be stitched by a tailor who deals with everyday wear. The stitching of the costume needs expertise and specific ways of cutting the fabric to achieve maximum comfort for the dancer while performing. The costume specialists are fewer but not a rarity in most metropolitan cities, including Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Delhi, Surat and Kolkatta. During the interview with A. Sivakumar of D. S. Aiyyelu and Sivakumar¹⁶⁵ of Shanti Tailors, both of which are large-scale costume makers, mentioned that for the process of stitching the costume, they have a line assembly model to complete the job

¹⁶¹ Proprietor of D. S. Aiyyellu Dance Costume Designers, Chennai.

¹⁶² Data collected through a personal interview conducted by the scholar with A. Sivakumar, proprietor of D. S. Aiyyellu Dance Costume Designers, at Chennai on 01/02/2022.

¹⁶³ Vijayantimala Bali is an Indian actress (active till 1970), Bharatanatyam dancer and a parliamentarian (1984-1991).

¹⁶⁴ The grandson of legendary Balasaraswati, Aniruddha Knight is a Bharatanatyam dancer and Guru. He is currently the artistic director of Bala Music & Dance School.

¹⁶⁵ Proprietor of Shanti Dance Needs, Chennai.

efficiently¹⁶⁶. Nevertheless, smaller tailoring units with two or fewer employees do not have the luxury of such a process, and often one tailor completes most of the whole process themselves. Aiyyelu, the founder of D. S. Aiyyelu Dance Costume Designers, Chennai, in an interview to Sruti in 1998, categorises dance costumes into:

- Pyjama Costume with a fan and a blouse tucked in.
- Pyjama with a big fan. A tucked-in blouse with attached pallu and small fan.
- An old-type pyjama with a vertical border running down each leg and a big fan in the middle.
- The pyjama with three fans
- The pyjama with a short and a long fanman
- A dhoti pant that does not have a backpiece
- Two kinds of saree costume
- Saree-skirt type costume.

Today, stitched costumes are of many forms, and to better understand them, there are a few terms that one needs to know. They are:

- **Blouse:** the upper bodice that covers the torso of the female dancer. The sleeves reach just above the elbow, and the back is raised, much higher than a regular saree blouse.



Img. 6.2.: Blouse (Courtesy: Googleimages)

- **Shirt:** a stitched sleeveless waistcoat-like upper garment worn by a few male dancers.

¹⁶⁶ Data on costumes and the stitching process was collected through personal interviews conducted by the scholar with A. Sivakumar of D. S. Aiyyelu Dance Costume Designer (01/02/2022) and Sivakumar of Shanti Dance Needs (14/02/2022) at their respective offices in Chennai.



Img. 6.3.: Dancer Vineeth Radhakrishnan Sporting a Shirt (Courtesy: Googleimages)

- **Melakku:** the piece of cloth that is pleated and stitched, resembling the top of a Nivi-style Saree drape. The shoulder is stitched with a pad to hold the form. The front part is tied across the torso with the help of a string of thread stitched into the middle part of the Melakku, while the back part is then diagonally across the torso to the right waist, where it is similarly secured around the waist to its front counterpart.



Img. 6.4.: Melakku (Courtesy: Googleimages)

- **Skirt:** the body of the saree is stitched into a tubular skirt that extends from the upper waist to below-knee level. The waistband is lined with a fusible interline, the material used in shirt collars, to make it stiff and is fastened using small hooks on the left side of the waist. The centre of this skirt is predominantly the contrast part of the Pallu (primarily seen in Kanchipuram Silk Sarees, also imitated in silk cotton varieties), forming the centre fan that is box pleated.
- **Saree style Skirt:** made entirely from the body portion of a saree, this kind of skirt has a self-made pleats section in the middle, overlapped by another layer of fabric that gradually tapers as it goes from right to left. Making the finished look resemble an actual saree drape.

- **Pant Style:** long tapering pyjama-like lower wear with pleats all along the length, diagonally, and usually has a long fan in the middle, box-pleated and symmetrically opens on both sides.
- **Dhoti Style:** A comparatively flowy pyjama costume resembling a Kaccham style lower wear. The pyjama also has an extra layer of fabric draped over it from the right to the left side. This additional layer of material has broad pleats and gradually tapers as it goes from right to left.
- **Backpiece:** A semi-circular piece of fabric stitched at the top edge to perfectly fit the hip's back portion. It tapers on both sides, at the ends of which hooks are hand sewn to secure the piece over the skirt or pants.



Img. 6.5.: Backpiece with an Attached Small Fan (Courtesy: Googleimages)

- **Small Fan:** A small semi-circular pleated piece of cloth held together with a patch stitched in the centre that forms the centre point of the pleats. This is placed on top of the skirt in the front and secured by tying it around the waist with the help of the two threads on either end.
- **Long Fan:** Some types of costumes, like the Saree costume, requires the Pallu to be stitched into an average, 15-18 inch-long fan that is made by pleating and ironing the Pallu of the saree and stitching it at the top to hold it together. It also has two threads at both ends to tie it around the waist, mainly on the left side of the hip.



Img. 6.6.: Long Fan (Courtesy: Googleimages)

- **Under pyjama:** a broad and airy pyjama worn inside the skirt or Saree style costumes and usually made using cotton fabric in the same colour as the skirt.

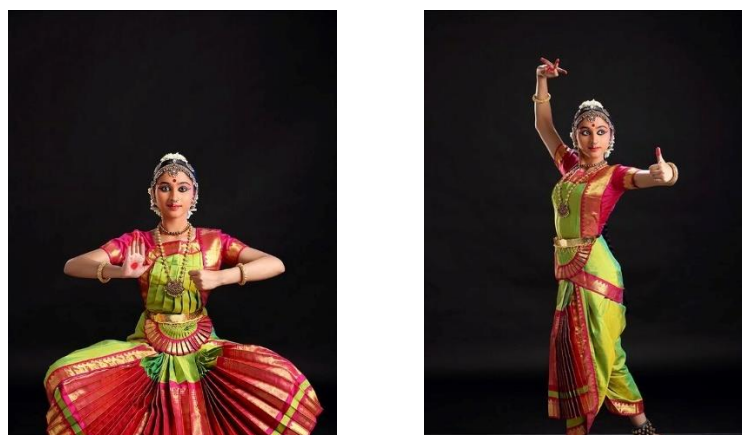
To make a costume, the process of stitching and ironing plays an equally important role. Vigorous roll-pressing (a fabric pressing technique) is what keeps the stitched pleats of the Melakku, Fan and pyjama a concrete definition that does not misalign even after hours of vigorous dancing. As mentioned before, there are innumerable ways to costume a Bharatanatyam dancer. However, the process of putting together a few of the most commonly used kinds of costumes are:

- **The Skirt Costume:** A costume consisting of a blouse, a Melakku, an under pyjama, a Skirt, a small fan and a back piece.



Img. 6.7.: Skirt Costume (Courtesy: Researcher)

- **The Pant Costume:** A costume consisting of a blouse, a Melakku, a pant, a long centre fan and a back piece.



Img. 6.8.: Pant Costume (Courtesy: Googleimages)

- **The Dhoti Costume:** A costume consisting of a blouse, a Melakku, a dhoti, and a side fan.



Img. 6.9.: Dhoti Costume (Courtesy: Prathibha Ramaswamy on Instagram @prathibha_ramaswamy)

- **The Saree Costume:** A costume consisting of a blouse, a Melakku, an under pyjama, a skirt, a back piece and a side fan.



Img. 6.10.: Saree Costume (Courtesy: Googleimages)

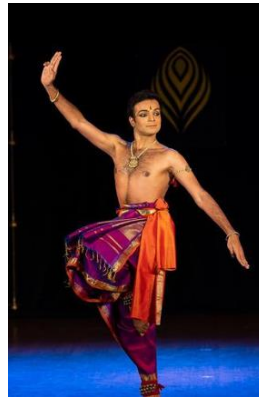
The area of male costuming has gradually faded through the years. This may be why many male dancers prefer to drape a saree in a Katcham fashion rather than getting a pre-stitched costume. Usually, the male dancers do not cover their upper body and fashion a dhoti (draped out of a saree) with the Pallu part hanging to one side as the side fan. Some artists add an extra fabric on top as a side sash. And some add an additional fabric as a back seat. Few male artists prefer a shirt (Img. 6.3.), while some wear an Angavastram¹⁶⁷ hanging on either side of their neck, going down the torso and held by the hip belt. The advent of male dancers into the field of Bharatanatyam was popularised through Rukmini Devi and her institute. And it is the Katcham-style dhoti costume that many male dancers follow. Albeit the majority lean towards unstitched, draped sarees as costumes, a few dancers like Aniruddha Knight (Img.

¹⁶⁷ A towel-like fabric that is often worn with the Dhoti

6.13.), Revanta Sarabhai¹⁶⁸ (Img. 6.14.) and Vineeth Radhakrishnan, still prefer to wear the stitched costume.



Img. 6.11.: Saree tied in Dhoti/ Kaccham Style, with a Sash as a Backseat (Courtesy: Instagram Handle of P. K .Kailasanathan @kailasanathanpk)



Img. 6.12.: Saree tied in Dhoti/ Kaccham Style, with a Sash as a Side Fan (Courtesy: Instagram Handle of Bhavajan Kumar. @bhavajan.kumar)



Img. 6.13.: Aniruddha Knight with a Shirt and Stitched Pyjama Costume (Courtesy: Instagram Handle of Aniruddha Knight. @aniruddhaknight)

¹⁶⁸ Bharatanatyam dancer and theatre artist, grandson of Mrinalini Sarabhai and son of Mallika Sarabhai.



Img. 6.14.: Revanta Sarabhai in a Stitched Pyjama Costume (Courtesy: Googleimages)

The tailoring profession seems to evade the factors that affect the other aspects of the Bhartaantyam Aharya. The element of affordability does not affect the field. This is because no matter one's economic status, we are at a point in time where the stitched costume has become an indispensable part of the Bharatanatyam Aharya. Even though artists like Leela Samson have set the stage for preferring drapes over stitched costumes, the trend has yet to sweep over the dance scenes. Many Gurus still prefer the stitched costume for their pupils as long as they are under the Guru's tutelage. Stitched costumes are the most chosen for events like Arangetrams, Margam presentations and group performances of Margam. Many Gurus prefer skirt costume for younger dancers, while the pant/pyjama costume is for grown-ups. With the change in performance spaces, we do see a shift towards draping an everyday silk saree on top of a pyjama which resembles a dance practice saree but in silk. The current estimate to stitch a dance costume in Chennai would range anywhere between Rs. 4000 – 8000.

6.3. PAINTING THE STAGE

Traditionally, 'Aharya' does not include a performance's lighting design. This was due to the fact that, though lights played the role of illuminating space from time immemorial, it was not until the advent of electricity that lights and the designing of the same became an inseparable aspect of the viewing experience. With the advancement of technology aiding light design, it is most logical to consider lighting as one of the extraneous modes of expression. Post-revival, lighting has played a significant role in the presentation of a dance performance. Accounts of Rukmini Devi, having used resistance dimming techniques in the initial days with the help of Alex Elmore and Paul Storm, prove that Rukmini Devi took stage lighting quite seriously and was incorporated into even her earliest performances. Even though establishments like the Madras Music Academy were equipped with the primary stage lights

required for a proscenium, the designing and customisation of the same in the field of Bharatanatyam were propagated by Rukmini Devi. One of the very first Western lighting equipment was installed in Kalakshetra Foundation under the supervision of C. Nachiappan, who led the institution's lighting, photography, printing and weaving departments. Over the years, the field of light designing for a stage performance has been fine-tuned with the increased availability and accessibility of technology. The element of stage lighting in the field of classical dance seems to have been borrowed from Parsi Theatres¹⁶⁹ and other commercial theatres of Kolkata that experimented with stage lighting way before the revival of Sadir, with the creative works of stagecraft designers like Satu Sen¹⁷⁰ and Tapas Sen¹⁷¹. After his studies in the USA, Satu Sen brought back innovative stage lighting techniques. At the same time, Tapas Sen went a step ahead and created ingenious lighting methods on his own. These theatrical lighting techniques can be considered the inspiration for the stage lighting technique followed by Bharatanatyam.

The primary function of stage lighting is to illuminate the dancing body and draw focus to facial expressions and body movements, as in the case of Bharatanatyam. In a solo performance, the lighting helps in focusing the audience's attention on the dancer and her movements. At the same time, in a dance drama, light design plays a significant role in establishing mood and in the entry, exits, prop placements and highlighting a character. In some cases, light denotes moods, even in a solo performance. In theme-based solo performances, light becomes the determining factor of the success of such a show. The ability to control visibility at almost every stage corner lies at the crux of light design. Before the arrival of electricity, it so happens that even Sadir was not performed on a proscenium. It was part of a socio-cultural setting and was performed in gatherings in the open or the dance halls of temples. These dance halls were sometimes in closed spaces where the only lighting source was lamps and torches. This light source emits an amber hue that illuminates the dancer similarly to that of a God in the sanctum sanctorum. This effect of a wick-lit lamp created an atmosphere of reverence that was demanded by the social setting of that time. This multi-wicked lamp, or the thick torch, had a way of creating lit spaces on the body of the dancer while also allowing a

¹⁶⁹ Parsi Theatre is an umbrella term used to denote the modern theatre tradition staged and run by Parsi community. It was highly influential in shaping the contemporary theatre and other performing arts' staging techniques.

¹⁷⁰ Satu Sen (1902-1972): A popular and important stage technician who was known for his works in *Mantra Shakti* (1935), and *Bibahotsab* (1938) to name a few.

¹⁷¹ Tapas Sen (1924-2006): Leading stage lights designer of the 20th century who took active part in the Bengali Theatre Movement in Kolkata.

role for the shadows. This play of light and shadow drew focus to the facial expression of the dancer but also created a dramatic effect as it shone off the folds of the silk of the performer's costumes and reflected off the stones of their jewellery. In such a setting, even when the dance paused, the sway of their costume's fabric constantly glistened under the lamp's glow. This effect was difficult to replicate when the performance was alienated from its immediate social setting. Adapting the West's lighting techniques would not have done justice to the ritualistic and cultural past of the Indian classical dance forms, especially as Sadir transitioned to Bharatanatyam. Therefore, the Indian designer, especially that of the Bharatanatyam field, has learnt to adapt and create personalised techniques that would aid in the overall aesthetic experience ingrained in the collective memory of the Tamil-speaking audience.

To do this, the designers use a variety of tools and techniques. The primary technique in lighting is the play of colours. Apart from the fact that our country's preferred colour palette varies based on region and religion, a common belief system exists when discussing specific colours. The human mind subconsciously links colour to emotions, and it is this trait that light designers take advantage of. A comparison of the most common colour associations made by stage lighting designers¹⁷² to evoke or represent various emotions and the colour-Rasa connect propounded in *Natyashastra* (Ghosh 107) is given in the table below.



Img. 6.15.: Light Effects for a Thematic Production (Courtesy: Instagram Handle of Sheejith Krishna. @sheejithkrishna)

¹⁷² The data for this table was collected from the article 'Stage Lighting' and corroborated with light designers Victor Paulraj (28/01/2022), Murugan (03/01/2022), and Krishnan Venkatesh (04/01/2022) at Chennai.

Table No. 6.4.: Colours and Emotions

Colour	Contemporary Stage Light Designers	Natyashastra ¹⁷³
Light Green/ Green	Nature, Growth, Fertility	Erotic (<i>Sringara</i>)
White	Pure, Innocent, Neutral	Comic (<i>Hasya</i>)
Grey	--	Pathetic (<i>Karuna</i>)
Red	Anger, Passion, Reverence	Furious (<i>Raudra</i>)
Orange/Gold	Warmth, Prosperity, Sun	Heroic (<i>Veera</i>)
Black	Deadliness, Rakshasa, Dark	Terrible (<i>Bhayanaka</i>)
Blue	Water, Coolness, Nightfall	Odious (<i>Bheebatsa</i>)
Yellow	Energy, Cheer, Celebration	Marvellous (<i>Adbhuta</i>)
Purple	Royal, Pride	--

The light designers play with a combination of these lights, produced from the combination of primary colours (different from the primary colour followed in painting), Red, Blue and Green, to create the desired mood and ambience. To achieve this, a tool called ‘Gel’ filters the primary light source, which is white. A gel is a coloured filter made of polycarbonate material with dye applied on top. This serves as the primary tool to create a colour play on stage.



Img. 6.16.: Light Effects for Margam Performance (Courtesy: Instagram Handle of Shijith N Parvathy. @shijithnparvathy)

In the Western context, like the spaces for Classical Ballet, the stage lighting fixtures are incomparably advanced compared to what we have in India. Though many performance spaces in India are not equipped with all these tools, many Sabhas across the country possess most of them. Most commonly used lighting fixtures based on their functions, the creative use

¹⁷³ Information corroborated by the works of Manmohan Gosh (2012) and P. S. Appa Rao (1967).

all or a combination of which can lead to the success of a performance are given in the Figure below.

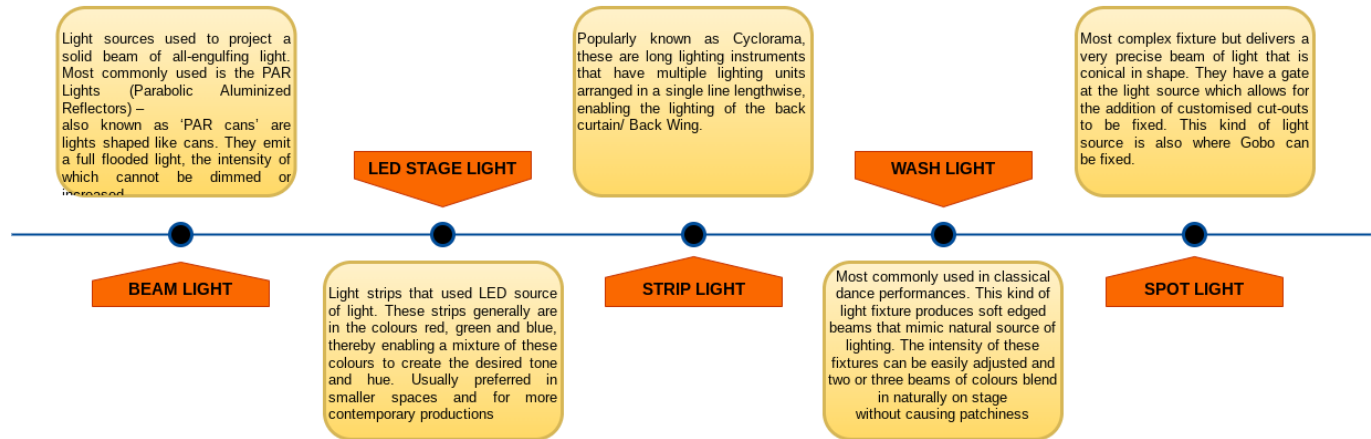


Fig. 6.2.: Lighting Fixtures

Note: Gobo is metal cut-outs that create specific imagery and shapes like water, windows etc.

All of these fixtures, except the beam light, allow the designer to customise the lights' intensity based on the space's requirements and the artists. Now, based on the need of the dancer/choreographer, the lighting designer also decides the placement of these fixtures at different parts of the stage. This process of placing the light fixtures is called rigging. This rigging can be placed in different parts of the stage to create different ambience (Refer to Fig. 6.3. For details)

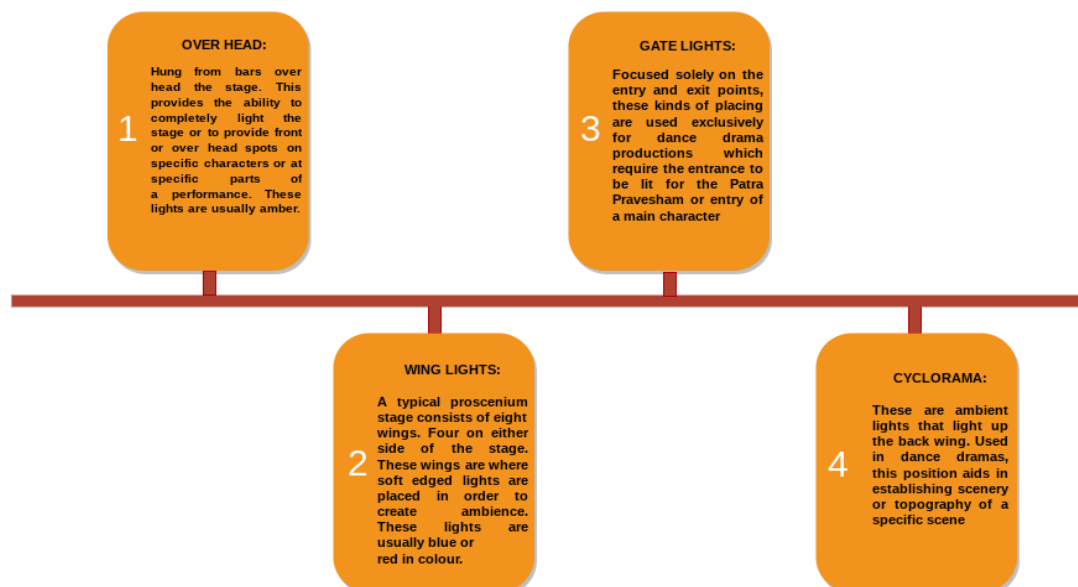


Fig. 6.3.: Rigging Positions

A light designer is a constant in many dance performances, solo or dance drama formats. With the help of a few of the leading lights designers in Chennai and Bangalore, including Victor Paulraj, Murugan and Krishnan Venkatesh¹⁷⁴, an understanding of the intensity and depth of the connection between dance and lighting as two art forms that synergise a dance performance. The designers engage with the choreographer from the concept's inception to understand what the choreographer has in mind. Many seasoned artists who perform solo concerts prefer the lights designer to create a customised light design plan for their performance based on every item of the Margam they are performing. In thematic presentations and dance drama, light designing becomes inevitable since most choreographers depend on the lighting, especially the spot lights and Gobo effects, to drive the intended dramatic imagery forward to the audience. Therefore, the designer learns the plot of the performance, understands the requirements of the choreographer and comes up with a detailed lighting plan. Apart from the choreographer's theme and plan, the designer also looks into the colour of the costumes, stage wings and backdrop and decides on the colour palette accordingly. This is done to bring out the best visual appeal without 'bleaching' the performer. Despite the growing demand for lights to be custom designed, most of the young and upcoming solo performers of Bharatanatyam find it hard to spend their limited monetary resources on customised lights design. This hesitancy stems from both the economic standpoint and the lack of knowledge on the dancer's part. Performance spaces that a Bharatanatyam performance usually takes place in, such as a temple, or a Sabha, are not well equipped with lighting fixtures. Even in a culturally attuned city like Chennai, few auditoriums have the required fixtures.



Img. 6.17.: Lighting a Solo Recital (Courtesy: Pinterest)

¹⁷⁴ The data for this section on stage lighting has been collected by the scholar through a series of in-person and mail interviews conducted by the scholar with Victor Paulraj (28/01/2022), Murugan (03/01/2022), and Krishnan Venkatesh (04/01/2022) at Chennai.

Most of these Sabhas with lighting fixtures are too expensive for a middle-class performer to afford. To add to this plight, the performer must hire a light design technician to customise light design, which again irks the budget. This adds to the inaccessibility of light design. Most dancers, especially youngsters, do not possess the necessary lighting knowledge to extract the requirement from the designer. The technicians interviewed for this study shared that many dancers do not even communicate their needs for the technicians to design the plot. The lack of knowledge, lack of funding and the lack of equipment form the basic trifecta that causes the lack of technical brilliance and mundaneness in a typical Bharatanatyam performance, barring a few. It can be noted that those who crack the code of exploring light design to aid their performance in reaching the next level of aesthetic gratification are the ones who have left their mark in the minds of the common public both nationally and internationally.

6.4. GOLD FOR THE GOD

The ornamental tradition of the Southern states overlaps due to their shared history. Though an array of ornaments has been prescribed for a dancer as deciphered from regional texts like Silapadikaram and Sanskrit texts like Natyashastra and Sangitaratnakara, as discussed in Chapter 2, the contemporary practice of the Bharatanatyam dancer, of wearing the ‘Temple Jewellery’ or ‘Kemp Jewellery’ has very much become the norm. The Tamil land and its people have long been seafarers who had used the position of the Coramendal coast to their mercantile advantage. Thirumangai Alvar¹⁷⁵ mentions in his *Periya Tirumozhi* that the port cities of the Pallava, especially Mamallapuram, were busy with the constant influx of elephants and gemstones on ships. This transaction of materials through the land and the sea routes resulted in an abundance of materials such as gold, silver, pearls, diamonds, coral, rubies and emeralds. Men and women of the Tamil-speaking region were equally inclined towards adorning themselves, and this has been evident even in the Sangam literary corpus. Though the occupation of Goldsmiths has not been mentioned much in the inscriptions, gauging by the amount of jewellery the members of the royal family wore, as understood from the temple sculptures of the period, the Goldsmiths must have been in high demand.

¹⁷⁵ Last of the 12 Vaishnavite poet saints of the Tamil Bhakti Movement, belonging to the 8th C.E.



Img. 6.18.: Traditional Ear Jewellery of Tamilnadu. (Courtesy: Waltraud Ganguly)

The importance given to ornaments in Tamil society can be observed from their collection of great epics called ‘*Aimperumkaapiyam*’ – the five great epics, all of which are named after a specific ornament namely, *Silpadikaram* (Adigal. I, 2nd C.E.) (*Silambu* – anklet), *Manimekalai* (Saatanar, 6th C.E.) (Mekalai – Hip chain), *Seevaga Chintamani* (Tiruttakkatevar, 10th C.E.) (Chintamani – Gem or precious stone jewel), *Kundalakesi* (Unknown, 10th C.E.) (Kundalam – Ear ornament), and *Valaiyapathi* (Natakuptanar, 10th C.E.) (Valayal – Bangles). Though the stories are not directly connected to these ornaments, in the Tamil tradition, they are mentioned as the five ornaments that adorn the body of ‘Mother Tamil’¹⁷⁶.

The imperial Cholas believed that the metal gold was auspicious and, therefore, extensively used it for personal adorning apart from gifting it to temples. The contemporary tradition of Temple Jewellery is believed to have originated from the temple of Vadassery¹⁷⁷, Nagercoil, Tamilnadu, in the 9th century¹⁷⁸. The Chola Kings commissioned the goldsmiths of the town to create jewellery to be offered to the Gods and Goddesses of the Nagaraja Temple of Nagercoil. Later, the chieftains of Ramnad and Chettinad (Sivagangai district, Tamilnadu) ordered custom-made jewellery for temples in and around the Tanjore, Trichy and other temples in the Kaveri Delta belt from the artisans of Vadassery.

¹⁷⁶ The language Tamil is considered to be the ‘Mother’ by the native Tamil speakers and hence is referred to as ‘Tamil Thaayi’ – the Tamil Mother/ Mother Tamil, in many works.

¹⁷⁷ A small town in the district of Nagercoil, Tamilnadu.

¹⁷⁸ Personal interview conducted by the scholar with Goldsmith Muthukrishnan at Vadassery, on 09/02/2022.



Img. 6.19.: Jewellery of Sri Ranganatha Swamy, Trichy. (Courtesy: Pinterest)

The pieces of jewellery initially custom-made for the deities were large and extravagant and made with pure gold, embedded with genuine rubies, emeralds and pearls. As observed in many aspects of material culture, the jewellery offered in temples, the ‘Temple’ jewellery, was adopted by the Kings for their personal use, King being akin to God. When the transition from the temple to Courts occurred, we can observe a decrease in the size and weight of these jewellery pieces, considering the comfort of the men and women who wore them. This jewellery tradition has been adopted by the court dancers who, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this work, imitated the decorative practices of the royal or upper-class women. Thus, the temple jewellery, especially ones made in Vadassery, must have been added as a permanent fixture to the dancer’s trousseau by the period of the Ramnad rulers, early to the mid-seventeenth century. “The dancers prior to this, also wore similar jewellery, made of gold, ruby, diamond, and pearls”, notes N. Subrahmanian (365), but the term ‘Temple Jewellery’ in the dance vocabulary solely refers to the inlaid work of the craftsmen of Vadassery, which is unique in its own rights.

Making Of Vadassery Temple Jewellery:

The village of Vadassery is home to around 750 families of craftsmen who specialise in the making of temple jewellery to this day. The craftsmen claim to be following the same technique for centuries. The material used has changed over time due to varying economic conditions and the availability of raw materials. The base metal, gold, was replaced with silver during the 1962 Indo-China war, where a spike in the gold price created a shortage in the market. Since then, silver has replaced gold in making temple jewellery unless a specific order is placed for the same.

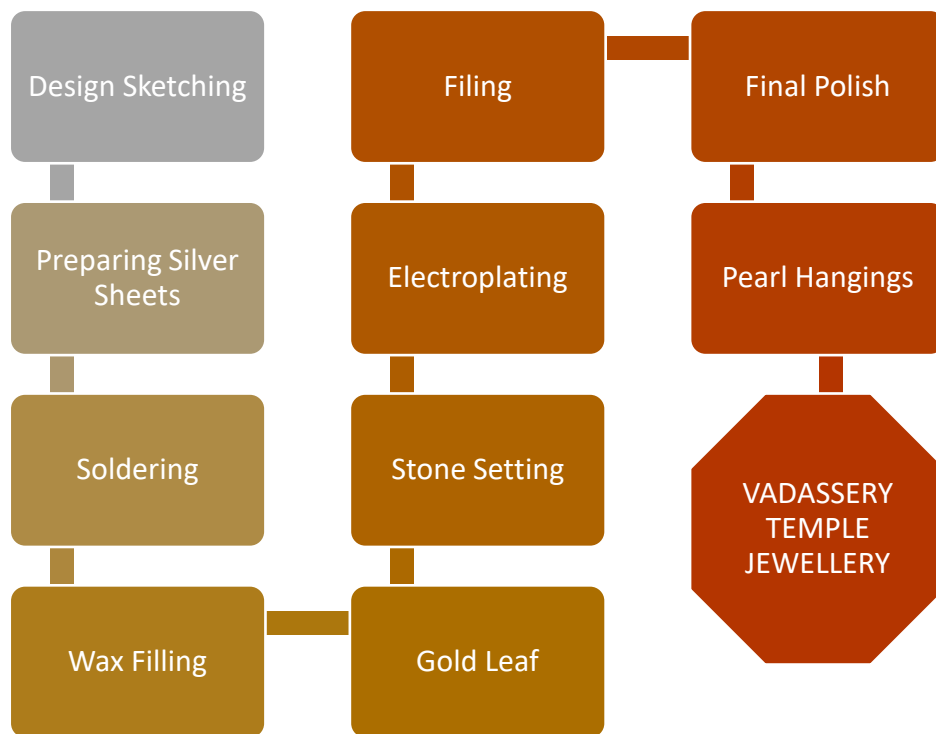


Fig. 6.4.: Process of Making the Vadassery Temple Jewellery

Moving on to the process the artist begins the process by sketching out the design on a piece of paper for reference. He then cuts out silver sheets into base sheets, strips and rings according to the desired design. The base plate and the designs on top are soldered together according to the sketch. Now that the basic model is complete, a mixture of beeswax and locally sourced stone powder is mixed to make a substance called *Arakku*. This adhesive mixture is applied to the base, and the base layer is heated so that the *Arakku* can melt and reach even the tiniest crevices of the base layer. Now at this point, the piece is filed to remove excess metal and excess wax.

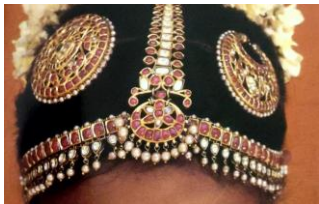


Img. 6.20.: Artisan making the Temple Jewellery (Courtesy: Nanditha Krishna)

The piece is then buffed using a hand-held buffer machine and thoroughly washed in soap water to remove excess dirt. The next step of the process is electroplating, wherein the piece is submerged in a plating solution and with electricity, a thin layer of gold is plated onto the silver at the sides and the base layer of the ornament. The artist then takes molten Arakku and fills it into the cavities where the stone has to be fixed. Once the Arakku is filled, the stone is set with the help of a small instrument resembling a tweezer. Once the piece cools down, a thin gold leaf is placed on the gaps between the stone and the base metal, where the Arakku is exposed, to cover it. The piece is heated again, so the gold leaf sticks permanently to the exposed Arakku. A final polish reveals the Temple jewellery in all its glory. In the case of a Jhumki, a pendant, or a Nethichutti, pearls are strung using gold thread or hung at the edges as the final step of the process. A typical Bharatanatyam dancer wears either the complete set of Temple Jewellery (Table No. 6.5.) or an assortment, depending upon the dancer's preference.

Table No. 6.5. List of Temple Jewellery

S.No.	Name	Image	Description
1	Rakodi		Worn on the crown of the head, Rakodi is a circular disc about 5-7 cm in diameter. A typical Rakodi has a swan motif as the centre and is set with red and green stones.
2	Talaisaman		An elaborate head ornament that consists of a long strip of metal that comes down the centre parting of the hair and splits into two rows right near the top

			of the forehead. Both the rows go down the hairline to either side of the head and are secured at the nape of the neck at the back with the help of a thread. The set also consists of a Chandra Pirai and Soorya Pirai, a golden crescent and the sun, respectively. The talaisaman is set with ruby, interspersed with emerald and diamond (Red, green and white stones currently)
3	Todu-Jhumki-Maatal		Todu or Kammal is the ear stud which is either circular or in the shape of a six-petal flower. To this is attached an umbrella-shaped hanging called the Jhumki; it has pearl hangings at the bottom. To this is connected the Maatal, an ornamental string that is attached between the ear stud and the earlobe and has a hook at the top. The hook is fixed to the hair above the ear to support the weight of the Toddu and Jhumki. The Maatal and Toddu come in various designs.
4	Addigai		Worn close to the neck, the Addigai is made of large red stones set in a row with a pendant in the centre. The pendant has many designs, including lotus motifs and the swan or peacock motif.
5	Long Maalai/Haaram		Most commonly, there are three varieties of the long Haaram. The most stunning is the Maanga Malai or the Mango Haram, which consists of a long line of mango motifs studded with rubies and emeralds in ascending order culminating in the centre with a large pendant encrusted with peacock design. Next is the pearl strands with a large pendant. And finally, the gold spheres are strung together with a large pendant in the centre. While most dancers use the latter two, the Manga Maalai has been and still is a symbol of status and a piece of pride due to its cost.

6	Oddiyanam		This is the waist belt tied tightly around the waist to secure all parts of the costumes in place and, as a bonus, also provides stunning aesthetic appeal. Made of metal plated in gold, it comes in various designs.
7	Valaiyal		The bangles are not made of Kemp and have no hard and fast rule. Dancers choose the bangles based on their comfort and preference. It can either be six thin bangles on each wrist or a single thick bangle on each wrist.
8	Salangai		Salangai, or the ankle bells, can either be a long string of bells strung together on a white or red thread and tied around the anklet, or it can be pre-stitched onto a cloth or leather base that is then secured with the help of strings, buckles or Velcro.
9	Nath-Bullaku		Nath is a ring-shaped, stone-studded nose piercing, and the Bullaku is a septum piercing on top of the upper lip with a single pearl dropping. It comes in a clip-on form currently.

The male dancer does not require a separate set of jewellery since they utilise the same temple jewellery worn by the female dancers. Most male dancers don either a small necklace close to the neck or a mid-length necklace reaching just above the chest. They wear Vanki/ armlets/Bajuband and single thick bangles on each wrist. Oddiyanam, or the hip belt, is mandatory along with the Salangai. Some dancers are seen wearing the Kadukkan¹⁷⁹, while some also wear the Yagnopaveetam¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷⁹ A small stud on the earlobe. Mostly clip-on.

¹⁸⁰ The sacred thread worn by men of the Brahmin community. Mostly seen in the icons of Gods and Goddesses.

To Be or Not to Be – Original?

In a similar fashion to how silver replaced gold as the base metal, precious stones and pearls have long been replaced by a stone called *Kuchukall*, also called *Kemp*, made out of stones found at the riverbed, which are then tumble polished to reveal shiny stones that are available in red, green and blue shades. At the higher price level, rubies were replaced with *Kuchukall*, composed of Aluminium Oxide and Chromium. The pearl hangings are replaced by imitation pearls made of plastic. The thickness of the base layer also varies from single sheet base to seven sheet bases (sheets of gold overlaid on top of the silver metal base). To be considered authentic, the material used for temple jewellery can only vary between gold and silver, and the stones are between precious stones to the *Kuchukall* variety.



Img. 6.21.: Imitation Temple Jewellery (Left) vs Original Vadassery Temple Jewellery (Right) (Courtesy: Googleimages)

Nothing lesser than that, like ordinary metal and plastic imitation stones, are considered ‘temple jewellery’ but are still widely used by dancers for their performances. The difference between the two is glaringly evident for a trained eye while inconspicuous for the uninitiated (Img. 6.21.). The prime factor in a dancer’s choice of jewellery, temple or imitation jewellery, is the affordability and social background of the dancer’s family. Focusing on the first factor, affordability, original temple jewellery (a set – for Bharatanatyam dancers) costs anywhere between Rs. 80,000 – Rs. 15,00,000, depending on the number of base metal layers and the quality of the stones and craftsmanship.



Img. 6.22.: Backside of an Original Temple Jewellery on Silver Base (Courtesy: Nanditha Krishna)

Though this is a one-time investment, not all strata of dancers can afford to spend such an amount. While the imitation jewellery costs Rs. 5,000 for the entire set, the durability is unreasonably low. There is a mid-variant, introduced two decades ago, by ‘Shanti Dance Needs’ in Mylapore, Chennai, who offer the same craftsmanship of the Temple Jewellery with the base metal as copper. This mid-variant is also made by 15 families of craftsmen from Vadassery who work only for Shanti Dance Needs. The cost of a complete set of Bharatanatyam jewellery in this variant ranges between Rs. 40,000 – Rs. 60,000.



Img. 6.23.: Bharatanatyam Dancer in Traditional Temple Jewellery (Courtesy: Instagram Handle of Geethanadhan. P. K. @geethanadhan_pk)

To understand the second factor, it is imperative to realise that the temple jewellery, like the silk saree, was a part of the bridal trousseau for the wealthier sect of the society. A significant community belonging to the more affluent part of the Tamil society was the Brahmins who dominated the education and arts field for most of the 19th and 20th centuries. The temple jewellery, worn by the Brahmin brides even to this day, has been passed down the generations as a family heirloom. Therefore, from a social standpoint, the dancers hailing from

upper-class communities, such as the Brahmin community, had access to the original Temple jewellery, either as heirloom jewellery or because of their socio-economic standing made it affordable for them. Today, many dancers are self-made, and affordability becomes a hurdle when they have only Bharatanatyam as their primary source of income. But, in a city like Chennai, where the taste and aesthetic preference of the public, especially the ones who prefer attending a Bharatanatyam recital, is decided by the upper-class ‘connoisseurs’ who frequent the Sabhas of the city, Temple Jewellery becomes a question of maintaining an aesthetic standard from the performer’s part. Many performers from non-affluent backgrounds, from the prime areas of Chennai such as Mylapore, Adyar, Besant Nagar, Anna Nagar, and Triplicane, that were asked about jewellery preferences for their D-day believed that they had to source original temple jewellery somehow or had already collected original temple jewellery, piece by piece over the years. These performers were trained under renowned Gurus and could get slots to perform in top-tier Sabhas such as the Madras Music Academy, Narada Gana Sabha and Krishna Gana Sabha. On the contrary, dancers from non-affluent backgrounds who were not students of renowned Gurus and did not reside in affluent areas of the city or smaller second-tier towns of Tamilnadu did not mind wearing imitation jewellery. In a survey conducted for this study with around 50 young dancers aged 16 – 33 through an online questionnaire, 85% of the performers from Chennai preferred wearing original Temple Jewellery for its aesthetic look. Thus, the jewellery of a Bharatanatyam performance, alongside the costume’s material, becomes a significant marker of the taste preferences of the artists based on their socio-economic background and that of the target audience.

6.5. ACCENTUATING ABHINAYA

Makeup, decoration of the limbs and face with colours, play an essential role in rendering facial expressions. This aspect of the Bharatanatyam Aharya has seen drastic changes at the beginning of the 20th century. Although the concept of cosmetics has always been a part of Indian decorative traditions, the extent of the application and the variation in the base materials have been the game changer when we look at the makeup routine followed by the Bharatanatyam dancers today. In a conversation with Padma Shri awardee Viralimalai

Muthukannammal¹⁸¹, corroborated by Late Herambanadan¹⁸², she recalled how basic makeup was done using beetroot juice to stain the lips, while collyrium was used to line the eyes. Products like rouge, pots of which were available in the market post the Victorian rule, it was too expensive for many of the Devadasis except an elite few. She recalls how one pot would be shared by many. But here too, economic status played a huge role.

The advent of Sadir on the silver screen enabled the assimilation of cinematic elements into the proscenium recitals of Bharatanatyam. The demands of the cinema industry to beautify the character for the camera led to the usage of cinematic pancakes, rouges, lipsticks and eye shadows for a typical Bharatanatyam performance too. Even today, the dance industry does not have brands that produce cosmetics solely for the utilisation by a Bharatanatyam dancer.

Bharatanatyam's makeup features heavy lines accentuating the eye and the eyebrows. Khokkar opines that these 'make them more visible because they are an important part of the dance, especially for expression.' (21). In an interview with Narthaki.com, Sethumadhavan, a veteran makeup artist, comments,

“Stage and photo makeup are a bit demanding. Lighting plays a major role. If the lighting is heavy, you can use heavy makeup and can use shades. But if the lighting is less, you can use only light makeup. For photos, the cameraman plays an important role. The angles and distances he choose influence the nature of makeup. On the day of the performance, if the performance was in the evening, the artists used to start preparing themselves from noon itself. In those days, lighting was confined to petromax lights only. So turmeric and castor oil was first applied to give a yellow tint to suit his type of lighting. After sometime, the oil and turmeric was removed. Then a mixture of zinc white, glycerine and Sindhuram was applied. Zinc white mixed with Sindhuram gave a good tone and glycerine gave a good shine. This makeup used to remain for hours. Now, basically the technique is the same. Based on the tone of the skin and body heat, we decide on the makeup. When we put our hands on the head of the artist, we can feel the body temperature. Makeup tends to darken if the body heat of the artist is high, so we prefer light makeup for such people. The face will start looking shiny after

¹⁸¹ One of the last surviving Devadasis and Padma Shri Awardee, dedicated to the temple of Viralmalai, Trichy. The conversation happened during an interactive session titled 'Get Real with Muthukannammal' conducted by the Rangamandira trust on 06/08/2021.

¹⁸² Data collected through a personal interview conducted by the researcher at his residence in Tanjore on 02/02/2022.

sometime of the face is oily in nature. We consider these factors and do the makeup. To complete the makeup, costume and hair dressing takes 1 to 1 ½ hours.”

(qtd. in Narthaki, Oct. 2000)



Img. 6.24.: Dancers Getting Their Makeup Done by Professionals (Courtesy: Instagram Handle of AJ. Aj_dancephotography)

The brand of pancake and contour sticks most commonly used by dancers today is ‘Mi Fi’, which was used by makeup artists in the yesteryear cinema industry. This was the time when the movies were shot in studios with high-intensity halogen lights that generated heat. Therefore, they needed a base makeup that could withstand heat and not melt off with the sweat of the artists. Thus, brands like Mi-Fi created cosmetics that provide very high coverage and stay for long. This also made sense for the proscenium, and therefore the transition from the silver screen to the proscenium seems to have been a logical one at that. Today’s cinema industry has moved on to brands like ‘Mac’, which provides skin-like coverage and does not look alien on the H.D. camera lens. At the same time, the makeup artists who specialise in dance makeup stay loyal to Mi-Fi since the demands of the proscenium have stayed the same. Director of the Shanti Dance Needs, Chennai, recalls how even 40 years prior, in the 1970s, their shop sold only Mi-Fi as makeup for dance recitals. He reflects on another brand called ‘Cosmic’ which was superseded by the popularity of Mi-Fi. Both brands are based in Kolkata, India, and film makeup artists primarily use both. The fact that both these brands were based out of Kolkata, the epicentre of yesteryear cinema, before the shift of Bollywood to Mumbai, and the Parsi theatre, solidifies the observation of osmosis of artistic practices between these three fields, Cinema, Theatre and Dance.

In most parts of the country, where Bharatanatyam has become a key player in the cultural scene, makeup artists have taken dance makeup as their primary profession. These makeup artists are usually sought out by senior soloists, who have their own preferred makeup artists, or by Gurus, who stage group recitals for their students. The makeup artists,

predominantly men, usually hail from cinema backgrounds and have been persuaded to take up dance makeup by former cine artists cum Bharatanatyam dancers such as Vyjayantimala Bali, Padmini Ramachandran¹⁸³, Shobana Pillai¹⁸⁴, to name a few. In dance makeup, there are no rigid rules or procedures. It is the result that matters. Nevertheless, the steps described below in Fig. 6.5. are the most commonly followed for female artist makeup.

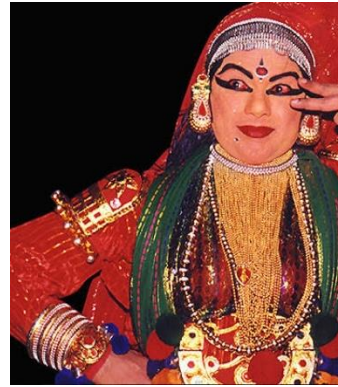


Fig. 6.5.: Make-Up Procedure for Bharatanatyam

The Bindi style varies from one Guru to another, depending on their personal preference. The final addition is the Alta, a red-pigmented liquid used to draw circular designs in the centre of the palm and colour the tips of the fingers. The same liquid is used to colour the edges of the feet, tips of toes and sometimes the entire sole. This accentuates the movement of the feet and fingers while adding beauty. The Alta, in recent days, is being replaced with red markers due to the quality of Alta to stain fabrics or any surface that it comes into contact with. In the Kalakshetra Bani, a striking feature is the upward turn of the end of the eyebrow. This is an evident borrowing from the Minuku Vesham (Female Character) of Kathakali. Many similarities can be seen in the female role makeup of art forms like Kathakali, Therukoothu, Bhagavata Melam and Bharatanatyam (Img. 6.25).

¹⁸³ Indian film actress and a Bharatanatyam dancer. One of the three Travancore Sisters.

¹⁸⁴ Indian film actress and Bharatanatyam dancer. Niece of the Travancore Sisters – Lalitha, Padmini, and Ragini.

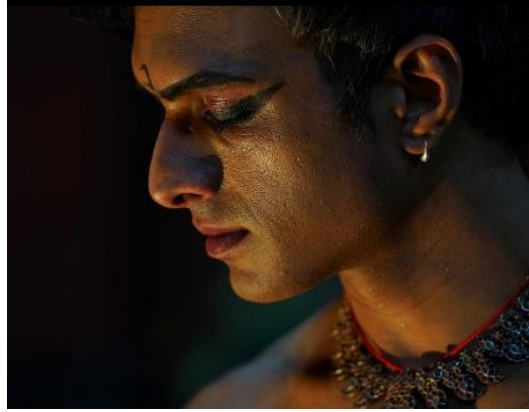


Img. 6.25.a: Kalakshetra Eyebrow Makeup (Courtesy: Instagram Handle of Periyachi Roshini. @periyachiroshini)

Img. 6.25.b.: Kathakali Minuku Vesham (Courtesy: Googleimages)

The male makeup is not very different from the female makeup for Bharatanatyam. But the male dancers do not follow the whole process mentioned above. The men sometimes skip the pan-stick and rouge. The male makeup, unlike the female makeup process, is unbound by standardisation except for the highlighting of eyes and eyebrows, both of which are the essential elements that accentuate facial features for Abhinaya to reach the audience. Almost no male dancer prefers wearing the Alta, although few exceptions exist. In an interview with Murugan¹⁸⁵, a well-known makeup artist who works for Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi artists in Chennai, he mentions how not many male dancers hire his services. He also adds how makeup and its shades aid to a great length in a performance by not only emphasising the artist's features but also by masking any blemishes that the artist might have, thereby making the facial features of the dancer more native to the audience. Moreover, the makeup aids in concealing the tiredness that arises after an hour of performing under the scorching heat of the lights on a proscenium. In an age where Bharatanatyam has shifted its performance space from huge auditoriums back to smaller intimate spaces and via the camera (live streaming of performances post-covid), the intensity of makeup has changed depending on the medium of consumption by the audience.

¹⁸⁵ Interview conducted by the researcher through an interview conducted in Chennai on 29/01/2023.



Img. 6.26.: Makeup of Male Dancers (Courtesy: Instagram Handle of Parshwanath Upadhye. Parshwanath_upadhye)

With the changing trends of the Bharatanatyam performance spaces and the body of work, the urban dancers play with the intensity of their makeup based on the space, proximity to the audience, availability of a camera set-up, and theme of the performance. While a proper Margam recital still depends on the help of Mi-Fi, smaller, intimate spaces such as a black box have inspired the shift towards minimalistic makeup routines. It is also seen that a few dancers are now shifting to brands like Mac, which provide high coverage but do not feel heavy on the skin comparatively. Many younger generation artists do not hire professional makeup artists and do their own makeup and hair. This means a decline in professional opportunities for makeup artists. But as long as the thematic productions, dance dramas and group recitals happen, the demand for this profession does not diminish.

6.6. THE ART OF FLORESCENCE

A minor component of the Bharatanatyam Aharya is also considered one of its most beautiful aspects. There seems to be no hard and fast rule regarding the placement or variety of flowers that a Bharatanatyam dancer can use. Flowers play an essential role in a Bharatanatyam recital, from elevating the aesthetic appeal of a dancer to elevating that of the performance space too.



Img. 6.27.: Flower Vendor, Chennai (Courtesy: Googleimages)

The main variety of flowers used by the Bharatanatyam dancer is the jasmine. This is simply due to the fact that it is grown extensively in the state and also grown as a household plant in many Tamil homes. Strings of jasmine flowers (called *Muzham*¹⁸⁶ in Tamil), strung together by a beautiful knotting technique, are also a constant in temple worship. Women of all strata use jasmine flowers on a daily basis or for religious ceremonies, rituals, and special occasions such as marriages or merely a temple visit. It is no exaggeration that the streets of Chennai smell of jasmine; therefore, it is no wonder that it has ended up on the proscenium as a staple. Along with jasmine, the other varieties used are in the table below.

Table No. 6.6.: Flowers used in a Bharatanatyam Performance

S.No.	Name in Tamil	Species	Biological Name/ English Name	Image
1	Malli	Flower	Jasminum Officinale/ Jasmine	
2	Kanakambaram	Flower	Crossandra Infundibuliformis/ Tropical Flame	
3	Sangu Poo	Flower	Clitoria Ternatea/ Pea Flower	

¹⁸⁶ A measuring unit of measuring strung flowers. One Muzham is the length from one's fingertip of the middle finger to the elbow.

4	Marikozhundu	Leaf/Herb	Majorana Hortensis/ Majoram	
5	Dhavanam	Leaf/Herb	Artemisia Vulgaris/ Souther Wood	

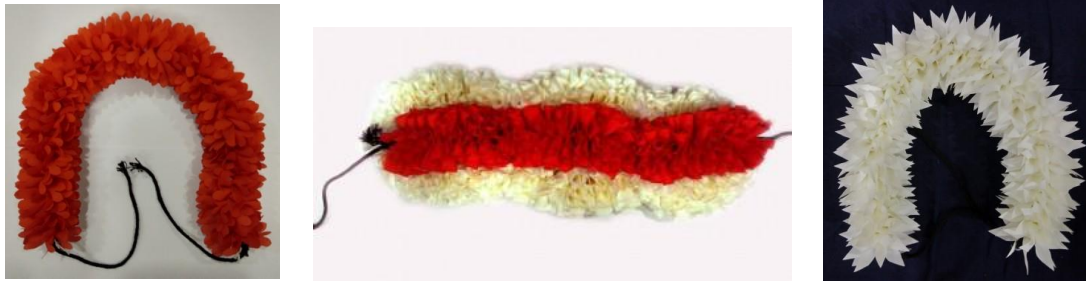
Note: When Jasmine, Tropical Flower, Pea Flower, Majoram and Souther wood are tied together as a string, it is called *Kadambam* in Tamil. Jasmine is used on its own or sometimes combined with *Kanakambaram* or *Kadambam*. Apart from jasmine, none of the other flowers and herbs is singularly used on the hair of a Bharatanatyam dancer.



Fig. 6.6.: Flower Ornamentation for Different Hairstyles

Depending on the hairstyle and the choice of head ornaments, there are a few ways of utilising these strung flowers. Although there are few flower arrangement styles followed by Bharatanatyam performers, many of these fixed patterns are observed only on younger dancers, primarily for their Arangetrams. At the same time, experienced artists mostly take creative lenience in using flowers. The three significant variations in the usage of flowers are illustrated in Fig. 6. 6. above. Like every aspect of the Bharatanatyam Aharya, the imitation trend has not

left behind the flower industry. For the convenience of the dancer, especially during shows in locations where one will not have access to fresh jasmine flowers, artificial jasmine flowers and Kanakambaram flowers are readily available in many shops dealing with dance needs. These artificial flowers are either made of cloth, Sholapith¹⁸⁷ or plastic.



Img. 6.28.: Cloth Flowers used for Bharatanatyam (Courtesy: Googleimages)

Until times before the advent of the revivalists, the flower arrangement was elaborate and was precisely what was fashioned by the brides of the region. This complicated flower arrangement took hours and was called a *Poo Jadai* (literally, braid of flowers). A base of dried leaf called *Mandaara Elai* (Leaf of the Camel's Foot tree) is hand stitched in the shape of a long braid, buds of Champangi flower (*Magnolia Champaca*, an alternate for jasmine since it takes longer to wilt than the jasmine), Kanagambaram flower and choice of small fruits like green grapes and blackberry was sewn on to the base layer in various designs. This braid made of flowers and fruits was then sewn onto the hair of the bride/performer.



Img. 6.29.: A bride with Poo Jadai (Courtesy: Pinterest)

¹⁸⁷ Also called Indian Cork, is a plant matter that is spongy and has been traditionally used by artisans of Bengal to create imitation garlands for both Gods and royals.

But even then, not all dancers followed this since photographs of Balasaraswati, Rukmini Devi, and others do not show the use of the elaborate *Jadai*. Many well-known dancers have used and still use minimalistic usage of flowers.

6.7. To Summarise:

Bharatanatyam Aharya is one of the only aspects of the dance form that is so complex in its formulation yet serves as an example of the various art forms of the region. It involves artisans from multiple fields and walks of life and requires the harmonious coming together of all of these aspects for the success of a performance. It is fascinating to see that none of the fields are solely pertaining to Bharatanatyam and yet, has created a space of their own in beautifying the dancer on stage. Areas like the textile and jewellery industries thrive individually while also being an indispensable feature of the Bharatanatyam presentation. The Bharatanatyam Aharya and its allied fields have all undergone significant transition post-globalisation, and what was once considered fundamental requirements of stage presentation have all been replaced by fast fashion. A silk costume, gold or silver jewellery and custom stitched costumes are no longer the standard, nor are youngsters forced to live up to it. Silk-cotton or polyester sarees, brass or metal-based jewellery, artificial flowers and ready-made costumes have permeated the market. These have not been accepted as the new standard but have not been shunned. A section of performers, young and upcoming mostly, are the patrons of these new developments in Bharatanatyam Aharya.

Nevertheless, veterans and dancers from the upper-middle class strata prefer lustrous silk and temple jewellery. By analysing and understanding the various aspects of Aharya as a stream of business, we are privy to the fact that the choice of putting together the trousseau for a Bharatanatyam performance boils down to affordability and, at times, societal/peer pressure. In the survey conducted by the author, 80% of the artists chose their Aharya based on affordability. But it was these same sects that found original kemp jewellery appealing. Apart from affordability, durability and ease of travel have also been major deciding factors. Young dancers who travel a lot and perform in various spaces around the country and the world prefer materials that are easy to maintain, easy to store, and easy to pack after a performance, and this is where we see the rise of artificial flowers and art silk sarees which are travel friendly and needs most minor maintenance compared to silk and original flowers (durability). But given a

choice, silk and silver will always rule the stage, at least in the renowned performance spaces of Madras.

CHAPTER – 7

CURTAIN CALL

This study started at a point where I had decided to indulge my long-standing curiosity about the connection between the evolution of sartorial practices, and the underlying web of influences and implications of the same from a socio-cultural, political, and economic standpoint. After a year of trying to frame this work, which led to me frantically searching for available resources, it was evident that the lacuna in the field was considerably more than the available pool of information on Aharya, especially regarding the Tamil region's cultural scene. This made it evident that this work's primary focus and purpose would be to get the basics right before venturing into the profound parts of the research area. In the endeavor to investigate the research statement established at the onset of this work, the study prioritised the establishing of a timeline that would enable a linear tracing of the socio-politico-religious events that led to the historical evolution of the costumes of Bharatanatyam over the past three centuries. In establishing the timeline, I narrowed down on the revival period, early twentieth century, to be the nucleus of the attempt. Keeping the revival period as the gravitational point, the events that led to the said point, and the event that unfurled post the same became the body of the work. Bharatanatyam's Aharya was thus studied keeping in mind that it was used as both an article that reflected status, functionality, religiosity, (of both practitioner and patron) pre-revival, and, during the revival, as a tool to rewire collective conscience of the public. I see this work in three parts: tracing and analysing the history and evolution of Bharatanatyam Aharya from a socio-cultural perspective with the help of textual and visual data; understanding the political and cultural undercurrent that led to the revival of the art form which was ultimately achieved by refashioning of the dancing body; and lastly, a rudimentary take on the various aesthetic practices of the Tamil society that together form the Aharya of the revived Bharatanatyam.

It was evident that to trace the Aharya of Bharatanatyam, texts would play a crucial role in providing information on both the prescriptive and descriptive angles, on regional and pan-Indian levels alike. Therefore, texts, which included any written or print material, were considered as the primary sources of this study. These texts provided a foundation to gain an insight into the history and the continuum of the practices over centuries. The study travelled through the textual references and pictorial references piecing together the evolution of the

practice of Bharatanatyam Aharya in the Tamil Society. I focused on the contributions of Rukmini Devi while dealing with the revival period, where both her solo recitals and dance dramas were analysed to, first, understand the text-vs-practice outlook, and second, to derive at the construct of Aharya at the backdrop of the cultural storm that brewed during the revival period. By the analysis of the contributions of Rukmini Devi Arundale, this work painted a picture of the drastic changes that the Aharya of Bharatanatyam underwent in the process of its metamorphosis from Sadir. The Aharya of a dance form is the result of various ritualistic and artistic practices of a society. This aspect of Bharatanatyam Aharya was explored in an attempt to understand the allied arts that became a strong integral of the present-day Bharatanatyam Aharya.

7.1. In Retrospect:

I started this monograph with an analysis of 18 major texts in Sanskrit, Tamil, and Telugu, apart from minor texts and literary sources such as Sanskrit plays, Tamil minor literary genres and Western writings. This revealed a set of facts regarding the sartorial practices of the dancers of the Tamil region and also put forth the socio-economic position of these artists through the ages. In the Sanskrit texts and treatises, the Aharya of the dancers and their description started out as a part of dramatic presentation and not as a separate entity. From the 13th century, more specific descriptions were observed. These Sanskrit texts, starting from *Natyashastra*, described Aharya in terms of ornaments, material of costumes, hairstyle and make-up. However, the dancers were not prescribed a specific draping style. Through the various Sanskrit works it was deciphered that the dancers wore ornaments on their hair, head, forehead, wrists, upper-arms, chest, neck, hip, waist, ankles and toes. The designs and names for each of these ornaments varied through the centuries. The costumes were mostly in silk or cotton, predominantly in the colours red, white, and gold. From the 13th-14th century onwards, the usage of movement-friendly articles of clothing like a bodice and an under pant is noticed in these writings. The dancers wore their hair in a bun or a plait and decorated it with various flowers. For the most part, the make-up prescribed was sandalwood/saffron paste on the body and for making patterns on the face and chest, collyrium, bindi, and alta. The description of the dancer in vernacular texts and Western writings were very similar, solidifying the research statement that the text and practice went hand in hand. Starting from *Silapadikaram*, the dancers' ornaments played the prime role in the descriptions that were studied. Similar to the

Sanskrit texts, a myriad of ornaments from top to toe is seen in these writings, but more regional additions are the low hanging hip belt, shoulder chains, breast shield made of gold, and thigh rings, commonly mentioned from Silapadikaram to the 10th century. From complex ornaments like the varieties of finger rings, and hair ornaments such as the conch-shaped hair brooch seen in earlier period Tamil works, we observed a gradual shift to comparatively minimal ornaments by 16th century. Costumes seem to be drapes that leave the upper body bare, and a bodice is mentioned from the Nayaka period, which is the beginning of this study's timeline. Through the centuries, the blouses seems to have been embellished with precious stones and embroideries. The sarees draped were of silk, cotton or jute, with later period of increased intercultural exchanges saw an increase in materials such as organza and muslin. The most common draping style became the Kaccham saree over a pyjama drape that was popularised in the Maratha period. The hair was plaited or worn in a bun decorated with strings of pearl and other precious gems and flowers. Through the texts studied in Chapter 2, it was evident that as the image of the Devadasi started declining in the eyes of the locals, patrons, and the Westerners, the description of their Aharya took a condescending and often a tone of morality that reflected the Devadasi's moral standing at the end of 19th century and early 20th century. The description of the Devadasi's costumes that started as a way to gloriously describe the beauty of the dancing girl in the earlier texts such as Silapadikaram and Sangita Ratnakara, gradually became a mode of demonising the community of dancing girls, ironically, through the description of the very same Aharya.

The information gathered through the texts were further substantiated through pictorial evidences and a socio-cultural tracing of the history of the Devadasis of Tamil region from the 16th century onwards. Through the help of murals, paintings, sculptures, and, later, photographs, I could visually corroborate the details gained from the various texts. Through this chapter, it was conclusively deciphered that the Devadasis wore a Pyjama style costume with a long central fan, or a pyjama over which translucent saree was draped. All pictorial evidence right from 15th century shows the dancer as wearing a bodice, tightly fit and revealing the lower part of the breasts. A variety of jewellery was seen on the dancers through the centuries. Each dynasty had their own unique articles that were adorned by the dancer. The Nayaka period dancer wore the multi layered hip chain, a low hanging hip chain, and a cross belt over the torso. The dancers of the Ramnad wore a side Tikka similar to the Kathak dancers. The Maratha period dancer wore the ornamental cross belt, the side bun-like ornament on the head, and a single tight waist belt. These minute changes further cemented the initial hunch

that the Aharya of the dancer changed according to the change in Kingdom and reflected the highest fashion statement of any given period. Through a study of the changes in the performative spaces and duties of the Devadasi, it was seen in this chapter that as the ritualistic duties of the Devadasi moved into to a profane setting, the attire of the Devadasi changed to suit the royal space that it was now a permanent part of. With the changing social position of the Devadasi, she dressed more extravagantly to capture the attention of her patron, whom she became entirely depended upon, now that the demarcation of a ritual dancer and a public dancer was merged to become one by the Nayaka period. In this chapter it was also pictorially seen that the dancer did in fact dress like the women of the upper class and therefore, her Aharya, played an important role in establishing her social standing and in turn, her social standing reflected in her Aharya. As the British tightened the grip over the political landscape of Tamilnadu and established themselves as the governing power, it was also their Christian perspective, and the Victorian morality, that had seeped into the minds of the educated Indians, that shunned the Devadasi whose non-conjugality baffled the minds of the Western lords who expected these dancing girls dedicated to temples to be the Indian version of the vestal virgin. This astonishment, bewilderment, and contempt was clearly reflected in the treatment that the Britishers and the whitewashed Indian elites gave the Devadasi. This treatment ultimately pushed the Devadasis to such low standards of living that her Aharya became more ‘jarring’ and unpalatable for the learned. With the growing discomfort around the Devadasi system and the activists propagating to annihilate the practice of Devadasi dedication itself, it came down to the caste power-play in the Tamil region to decide the next course for the despised Sadir performer, and ultimately the way she dressed. Through this chapter, it was brought to light how the rising Brahmin domination in the public fields such as administration and education. In cities like Madras where the Devadasis had resorted for survival due to the thriving British and urban elite settlements, the taste preference of the larger public was shaped by that of the Brahmin community which found the colours, fabric, drape and dressing of the Devadasi gaudy, bulky, and as despicable as the Devadasi herself who had stooped to the lowest point to win her bread and butter by the early 20th century.

Chapter 4 starts with a brief discussion on the Who, What, and Why of Rukmini Devi Arundale, the person who revived, reconstructed, and re-dressed Sadir into Bharatanatyam. The chapter drew on how Rukmini’s upbringing in a Brahmin household, and later in the Theosophical Society among the many multi-cultural minds that frequented it, shaped her sense of aesthetics. At a juncture where the art form was on the verge of dying its performers death,

Rukmini Devi became the revivalist that activists like E. Krishna Iyer of the Madras Music Academy needed to spearhead their campaign to save the art if not the artist. Rukmini Devi Arundale, a theosophist and nationalist who had married a white man and travelled the world spreading the message of Theosophy stumbled upon her love for dance through her exposure to Western Ballet, which she learnt from Anna Pavlova and later, Cleo Nordi. She was re-routed by fate, and Anna Pavlova, to take upon the task of resurrecting the dying art of the Devadasi, Sadir, into a much respectable dance form that a woman of an upper-class family, like herself, could perform in public without having to carry the burden of the art form's turbulent past. Rukmini Devi's debut performance saw her dressed in her custom-made costume and a stage setting that visually transported the audience to a more serene and ritual space. Though the changes that she is said to have introduced, was already tried by many before her time, Rukmini Devi can be credited for creating a perfect balance of historical, religious, and textual rooting in her performance that dramatically repainted the image of the art form to a more respectable one in the minds of the public just through the Aharya. The chapter saw how Rukmini superimposed her aesthetics on to that of Sadir in order to re-dress and refashion her debut performance in a way that it struck all the right cords in the minds of the upper and upper-middle class of the Madras society that naturally became her target audience. In the struggle to establish the cultural identity of the country, the Brahmin community played a major role. Therefore, Rukmini's attempt to re-dress Sadir in the Aharya of a respectable Brahmin women's preferred material, and colour palette tipped the scales in favour of the survival of Sadir, now Bharatanatyam. The role of various factors that shaped Rukmini's perception of beauty, makes it clear that it was factors such as Evangelism, Theosophy, Brahminical values, aesthetics of Western Ballet, among others, that formed the foundation on which the new aesthetics of Bharatanatyam was built. Rukmini Devi who learnt and performed Bharatanatyam also institutionalised the art form thereby cementing her revived art form as the new norm and benchmark for the cultural revolution that was taking place on the pan-Indian level. Anna Morcom comments, "Institutionalisation, systematisation, and canonisation thus all intertwined, with process of 'distinction'. Thus, classical performing arts were set on 'purer' or 'higher' levels on the basis of intellectual, textual, religious and aesthetic criteria" (112). Rukmini Devi achieved the same for Bharatanatyam by making it purer and higher in terms of not just technical clarity, but through the decluttering of the Bharatanatyam Aharya, which she claimed reflected the sculptures of the glorious temples of our ancient past. The Chapter explored the personal costumes of Rukmini Devi, that was deciphered through various photographs and a few surviving articles in the Kalakshetra Museum, to understand her choice

of materials and colours. Her patterns of blouses, the way she stitched her costume and set the stage with the help of her trusted group of friends who used Western tailoring techniques and stagecraft to elevate her performances, served as a proof of how Aharya played an undeniably crucial role in her very successful attempt of reconstructing Bharatanatyam. In a small yet significant way, the chapter also discusses how Rukmini Devi's refashioning of Bharatanatyam contrasted her advocacy for a modest, more respectable display of our rich cultural heritage. By replacing the long bulky sarees with soft Kanchipuram silks, and by cutting and stitching the saree to present a form hugging, figure enhancing costume, Rukmini Devi's Aharya was ironically more gratifying to the patriarchal aesthetic standards for a woman than that of the bulky, voluminous costumes of the Devadasi. The Chapter also accommodates a review of the contributions of Balasaraswati, Indrani Rehman, Ram Gopal and the like.

Chapter 5, is a simple yet voluminous one. The chapter focuses on making a systematic documentation of the creative design of Rukmini Devi through three of her major dance dramas. Looking at the history of such a format, the chapter discussed how the format has always existed in the Tamil speaking region albeit as separate forms until the Maratha period, where the Kuravanji Natakam were popularly performed by Sadir performers in the Tanjore temple. However, even during the Nayaka period, the Bhagavata Mela tradition existed in close relation to the Sadir tradition both of which had numerous technical exchanges through centuries. Rukmini Devi's contribution comes in the yoking of the dance drama format to the Bharatanatyam format that resulted in the monumental Kalakshetra Dance Dramas. This dance drama format in Bharatanatyam is a playing field for experimentation and implementation of the nuances of Aharya in a dramatic presentation as expounded by Bharata and therefore it quickly became the trademark of Rukmini Devi. Rukmini Devi anchored the success and reach of these dance dramas on the costume, make-up, lighting and stage setup. The variety of characters from different societal strata narrated in these dance dramas and the related criterions provided by the narratives gave enough space for the creative designing process of Rukmini Devi. The three chosen dance dramas were documented systematically under the categories of costumes, ornaments, make-up, stage props and stage lighting. An analysis of the same showed how the Aharya of the characters closely resembled that of Bharata's prescription but did not entirely follow it. Rukmini Devi seems to have utilised Bharata's framework and built upon it through creative liberty. For example, none of her characters sport a mustache, since she believed that mustache hindered the delivery of Abhinaya and therefore, contrary to popular opinion, she stuck to what she felt was right for her production. The chapter also analyses the

role of colours, lighting, and stage setting in elevating her dance dramas and creating a niche for it in the global front.

Chapter 6, the final chapter of the core chapters of this study, was but a humble attempt to gain the basic knowledge on the allied arts that together form the Aharya of the present-day Bharatanatyam. It has been a well-established fact at this point in the study that the Aharya of Bharatanatyam has gone through changes throughout centuries under different socio-political, economical, and religious climates. These changes have resulted in what has been widely accepted and recognised as the Aharya of Bharatanatyam not only on a national but global front. This image has been created through the culmination of the handiworks of various artisans whose works are carefully curated to dress the dancing body keeping in mind personal preferences and affordability. This chapter saw the arts of weaving, tailoring, jewellery making, stage light designing, make-up, and floral ornamentation as individual fields of art with its own cultural history and significance in the Tamil society and its aesthetic practices. Additionally, the chapter also analysed each of these allied arts by the role each played in creating the perfect aesthetic experience on stage for every performance. Through the analysis, that was enabled through the data collected from a pool of young artists via a questionnaire, we were also able to zone down to socio-economic background as a key determinant of the Aharya chosen by the current generation of performers. The background of the performer decided both their aesthetic taste and also their ability to afford few aspects of Aharya such as silk sarees, silver jewellery, and customised lighting design which affected the ultimate presentability of the dancer on the proscenium. Factors such as the changing spaces of performance, post-covid hybridisation, introduction of HD cameras, and the impact of social media on the ability to repeat costumes, cannot be ignored in this study. The post-globalisation accessibility to learn the art form that was offered to all classes of the society, has resulted in a pool of performers who are talented and well learned but do not have the resources that was available to upper-middle-class performers of the post-revival period who popularised the usage of elite materials which are unaffordable to the present generation of self-made dancers. These new generation performers are also the ones who are swayed by the ‘good taste’ set by the previous generation of performers and connoisseurs, but are unable to afford the same leading to the usage of imitation jewellery and, art silk and silk-cotton sarees.

7.2. Current Trends in Bharatanatyam Aharya:

Bharatanatyam's Aharya has been a fluid phenomenon at times, that still held on to its core properties through the years. Until the point of time in history where there prevailed an impending ultimatum that could decide the fate of this art form, there were only gradual changes in the dressing patterns and preferences of the dancers of any given time. It can be seen as a fixed base layer on top of which articles of Aharya were added on, or removed, as the time, preferences, and socio-economic positions changed. A distinct change in Aharya was noticed only after Rukmini Devi's redressing of Sadir, which, as seen in this study, started a domino effect of smaller yet significant tweaks and changes to Bharatanatyam Aharya. This resulted in a set of costume patterns that became the go-to for a Bharatanatyam performance. In a vague sense, the Pandanallur, Tanjavur Bani and Balasaraswati Bani used Saree costumes, the Vazhuvoor Bani used both Pyjama style and Saree style costumes, and Kalakshetra Bani used Skirt costumes. Bani based costume patterns exist, but the lines have been blurred in contemporary times. Post the 1970's, any addition or alteration to the Aharya of Bharatanatyam was either treated as a specific artist's individual preference, or stark changes like that of Chandralekha were even branded 'contemporary dance'. While stalwarts like Padma Subramanyam carved a niche for herself and her Karana presentations by designing coiffures and costumes that resembled the sculptures, at the later stage of her career, she is seen sporting the saree-style costumes.

Looking at the contemporary trends in Bharatanatyam performances, the one factor that comes to mind is the effect of 'globalisation' on the presentation of the art form. With new technologies available to us, and with the world at one's hand through access to internet, the costumes of the Bharatanatyam genre have gone beyond the point of categorisation. In what I see as a snowball effect of events, we now find ourselves in a space where the costumes are not expected to fit into any category of patterns, materials, and colours. Artists like Leela Samson were one of the first to bring in the draping style in Bharatanatyam solo performance, which has recently caught on with the younger generation owing to the freedom of movement and the sense of not being bound by tradition and custom, a thought that echoes with the ethos of the current generation. Bharatanatyam artists like Rukmini Vijaykumar, has created a place for herself in being one of the leads in establishing the aesthetics of present-day Bharatanatyam. Both in her earlier works and her recent ones, she has not held back from experimenting with different materials and drapes. However, the male costuming has seen a stagnation post

Kalakshetra's aesthetic standards for male costumes. The most popular still being the saree draped as a Kaccham, the stitched costume has become a rarity.

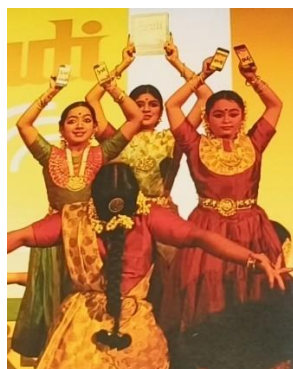


Img. 7.1. Leela Samson (Courtesy: Shubnam Gill on Pinterest)



Img. 7.2. Rukmini Vijaykumar and Team (Courtesy: Radhakalpa Facebook handle)

The last two decades have seen innumerable colours, materials, drapes, and stitches, being presented on stage. A lack of standardisation, in this case, is not something to complain about. The variety that is seen on stage is, most of the times, a pleasure to watch. On the other hand, elements of Aharya such as ornaments, make-up and hair-do have remained the same since the revival period, albeit a few changes that entirely come down to personal choices.



Img. 7.3.a.: Bharatanatyam Performance With Smartphones on Sruti Magazine's App Launch (Courtesy: Sruti Magazine)

Img. 7.3.b.: Padma Subrahmanyam's Performance with an LED Backdrop (Courtesy: SSVM World School)

An area of Aharya that has seen massive changes is the stage setting and lighting for even solo performances. The inculcation of multimedia presentations as backdrop for solo performances have become common sight except for spaces like Sabhas during the Margazhi season. This multimedia LED screens as backdrop was introduced after the IT boom in India wherein corporate offices like HCL, IBM, among others, conduct annual cultural events in which they often have Bharatanatyam performances as a cultural representation of the country to their foreign clients. I see this as a cycle that we have completed in terms of Aharya. Rukmini Devi Arundale stated that she had to get rid of flashy lights and Amurtanjan advertisements from the backdrops of shows while we now dance in front of very distracting corporate company banners as backdrops and LED screens in the name of technology. Smoke machines, LED multi-coloured lights and backdrops have become acceptable in the Bharatanatyam scene today. These have, however, not become the norm yet. This strongly suggests the ongoing exploration of Bharatanatyam Aharya. At the backdrop of the analysis, the review of both the primary and secondary sources, it may be taken into account that the statement of hypothesis “The construct of the Bharatanatyam Aharya, both in the pre- and post-revival period, is a synergetic evolution of various socio-political, socio-cultural, socio-economic, and religious dynamics of the history of the Tamil region. The synergy also reflects a matrix of texts and allied arts”, stands accepted.

7.3. Limitations of the Study:

This study has been monumental in its size due to the timeframe that it was expected to cover. With a large timeframe and the lack on the existence of academic research and writing in the chosen field, few limitations were unavoidable. The limitations are discussed below, keeping in mind how it affected the study, and for the ease of future scholars to identify the lacuna in the body of knowledge.

- Preliminary study:

Not much research has been done in this area. More so, from the multi-disciplinary and wholistic perspective. Hence, this work becomes one of the preliminary studies in analysing the socio-cultural and economic implications on the

Aharya of Bharatanatyam. The analysis of the work adhered to building up a linearity of the historical evolution of both the form and the practices involved.

- Covid Complications:

Two years of the study, especially the time that the field work had begun, was unfortunately cut short owing to the global pandemic and the resultant lockdown. This being a historical work, the research depended on literary sources from research libraries and archives, all of which became inaccessible due to the lockdown. The data related to Rukmini Devi and Kalakshetra had to be gathered by interviews with senior alumni of Kalakshetra Foundation, most of whom could not be met with due to the risk involved. Post-pandemic, after the ease of the lockdown norms many research libraries continued with restricted access to their archives. This proved to be a major setback, especially for procuring manuscripts and texts from sources like the Tanjore Saraswathi Mahal Library.

- Time-period of the Study:

When it was initially understood that the area needed a complete comprehensive study, the fixing of the timeline became a hinderance. Even though three centuries is a gigantic timeframe to cover, a lack of a complete knowledge of the evolution of the Aharya of Sadir till the 16th century, makes it hard to understand the evolution of Aharya during the core period covered in the study. Also, the post-1970s brings the new element of technology, and global access, which could have made this study a complete work.

- Nuance of Tamil Aesthetic Practice:

Study of the Aharya of a dance form is in turn the study of the aesthetic practices of a region. The concept of aesthetic practices is a complex entity that is entwined with local preferences, material availability, socio-economic power, caste hierarchy, caste-based sartorial practices, and so on and so forth. This could have shone this study in an entirely different light. Quoting S. Jayachandran¹⁸⁸ “There is nothing called Devadasi Jewellery. Fundamentally, any jewel that the devadasi wore was a miniature version of the jewellery worn by the rich people of the given geographical area.”. Therefore,

¹⁸⁸ interview conducted by the researcher over the telephone on 18/01/2022.

studying the evolution of aesthetic practices of the society in detail could have solidified the argument of the study even further.

Nevertheless, this study has only been an attempt to position Bharatanatyam at the epicenter of the evolution of aesthetic practices in the Tamil region historically. The analysis and tracing of the evolution of Bharatanatyam costumes at the backdrop of both the royal patronage and the political turmoil of the independence struggle has fortified the research question while also fulfilling the objectives set forth at the beginning of the study.

7.4. Suggestions for Future Research:

- Study of the sartorial practices of early centuries of Tamil region through Sangam Literary works.
- An analysis of the costumes of Devadasis of Chola Era.
- An exploration of the nuances of individual aesthetic practices of Tamilnadu and the socio-cultural implication of the same on Bharatanatyam Aharya.
- Documentation of the Aharya of the dance dramas of Rukmini Devi Arundale.
- Globalisation, digitalisation, urbanisation, and its impact on the Aharya Abhinaya of Bharatanatyam.

7.5. Musings:

The practice of the dedication of girls to temples is a pan-Indian phenomenon but the intricacies of the practice, such as the art form they practiced, the duties they performed and most importantly, the way they dressed were all dependent upon different localised clusters of practices. These localised practices however were influenced by pan-Indian factors such as Sanskrit textual traditions, Islamic invasion, Bhakti Movement, and later the British rule. Though influenced by all these factors, regional practices reacted to these external forces in unique manners that resulted in idiosyncratic modes of representation, especially on the front of Aharya. In the practice of Devadasis in the Tamil region, the initiation into the practice itself, the process of Pottukattudhal (tying of the sacred thread of marriage), is entwined with the aspect of Aharya – the Thali or the sacred thread. Throughout their lives as women dedicated to Gods, the ever-auspicious Nityasumangalis, the Devadasis bear their auspiciousness as external marks such as the vermilion on the hairline, the Thali, nose ring (in later periods),

flowers on their hair and toe rings, all of which are part of Aharya which the widows were not allowed to wear. Therefore, Aharya was used as a key aspect in portraying the ritual and spiritual symbolism that was associated with the Devadasis. At this juncture it is also essential to keep in mind that not all Devadasis could afford to dress in the period's finest fashion. The study of the past comes from textual and pictorial evidence of Devadasis, but it is a fact that only the creamy layer of the Devadasi community must have been documented throughout history. The majority of the Devadasi performers were marginalised and were attached to temples where they lived to the end of their lives in mundane service to the temple or their patron. Therefore, only those Dasis who were under royal patronage, held a special position in public or were of a substantial economic position, would have been captured in murals and photographs.

Through this study, especially with the help of textual evidence it was established that it was post the invasion of Western trade groups that the native outlook towards these dancing women and their profession shifted. The dominance of the European forces, after they were allowed to conduct trade in ports like Madras, Pondicherry, Karaikal, Tranquebar etc., made local customs seem alien. In the centuries that Indians were exposed to Christian missionaries, Western education and Western ideologies of morality, the natives were stuck under the shadow of the West and towards the later part of 19th century, went looking for their cultural identities in the past instead of moving forward. This led to the notion that the present was somehow undesirable, and the past was glorious, which needed to be reinstated to make the present sublime. This notion can be seen in the way the Aharya of the Devadasis were considered untasteful, undesirable, gaudy, flashy, and the costumes of sculptures of ancient past became the holy grail to the revival and reconstruction of Sadir into the more contemporary, yet traditional, Bharatanatyam.

With the royal patronage ceasing its support and the resultant migration of artists to cities like Madras, the Devadasis performed for a private audience more than ever. This shift in space and purpose opened the gates to chaos in Aharya of the art form, since there were no norms holding them back. Anything to please the patron was permissible. This painted the dancing body in a picture of sensuality and lasciviousness which was used to anchor the anti-nautch campaign. The perceived sensuality of the dancing body was intertwined with that of what she wore. Therefore, the major step to take if the art form had to be saved was to redress the female body in a costume that did not remind the public of the image of the sensual Devadasi, and this redesigned costume had to hint at the piousness and righteousness of a

housewife, who was now the target pool of takers for the reconstructed Bharatanatyam. The superiority that Brahmins enjoyed in the society then, was utilised to superimpose the aesthetics of a Brahmin women on to the dancing body of the revived art form in order to make it acceptable. Mary Hancock, in her study of the Tamil Smarta Brahmin women of Madras, notes how “Women whose bearing was modest, whose hair was neatly plaited, who were attired in silk, gold bangles, and wedding necklace (Thali), as well as ornamented with Pottu (the dot applied between the eyebrows) and daubs of Kumkumam, were ‘Lakshmi-like’ (Latcumikaram).” (103). Rukmini Devi’s re-dressing of Sadir is fabricated on the same line. By dressing herself in silk, and gold, Rukmini Devi set the Brahmin standards as the desirable and most respected standards for Bharatanatyam for generations to come. While Rukmini Devi laid the foundation stone for the personalisation and changes that she brought on to the Aharya of Bharatanatyam, her contemporary Balasaraswati, Ram Gopal, and later Indrani Rehman, brought to the table, their ideas and standards of aesthetics. Constantly tweaked according to personal preferences and aesthetic choices, the Aharya of Bharatanatyam has constantly evolved, much more so after the revival period. With the latest growth in technology and with young artists and the audience being exposed to the global aesthetics and taste preferences, Aharya of Bharatanatyam, and other Indian classical dances are on a path of unrestrained exploration.

GLOSSARY

Terms Concerning Costumes and Ornaments

- Aharya* - Mode of expression through extraneous representation
- Addigai* - A traditional Tamil necklace worn close to the neck, a choker.
- Alta* - A red liquid used to decorate the tips of the fingers, toes and the edge and bottom of the feet.
- Bajuband* - Armband.
- Bindi* - The dot made of vermillion or sandal paste worn on the forehead, between the eyebrows.
- Bullaku* - Septum piercing. Typically worn along with Nathu.
- Chandra Pirai* - A crescent shaped hair ornament worn on the left side of the Nethichutti or Talaisaman.
- Haaram* - a Long chain or necklace that reaches the chest.
- Jadai Billai* - Circular hair ornament like Rakodi. Smaller in size and worn along the length of the braided hair.
- Jadai Nagam* - A single long ornament worn from the top of the head, covering the entire braid. It often ends with a Kunjalam.
- Jhumki/Jimiki* - A bell/umbrella shaped attachment that hangs from the ear stud.
- Kacchai* - Breast band.
- Kaccham* - A traditional drape of the saree or a dhoti wherein, the fabric is knotted at the waist and the leg is spread apart to pull the fabric between the legs from the back and brought to the front, which is tucked in at the centre. Each free end of the fabric is taken in-between the legs and tucked at the back. This is then brought to the front individually and tucked at the waist, forming a pant-like garment.
- Kaccham (Female)*- In the Kaccham style female dance costume, the Pallu end of the fabric which is brought to the front is either fanned in the centre or taken to the side of the

waist where it is tucked to form a side fan which is then secured with the help of an Oddiyanam.

Kaccham (Male)- In the male practice costume or performance costume, the dhoti is tied in the same fashion, wherein both the sides are tucked at the back and the free ends are brought to the front and tucked at the waist. The tucking, fanning or pleating of the free end is left to personal choice. The different ways in which the free end is manipulated, results in different outcomes. This is then secured with a sash, on top of which the Oddiyanam is tied.

Kada - Thick bangle, usually worn as a border to thinner bangles or worn on its own.

Kammal - Ear stud.

Kasturi - Musk or Musk Paste used for decoration and as perfume.

Koppu - An earring worn on the upper part of the earlobe.

Kunjalam - An ornament worn at the end of plaited hair, typically in the shape of ball with an ornamental top.

Maatal - An ornamental string that is connected to the earring and pinned to the hair.

Melakku - The upper part of a saree that covers the torso.

Nathu - A type of circular ring-like nose ring. Usually worn on the left nostril in the Tamil region.

Nethichutti - A head ornament that is worn on the center partition of the hair. It ends with a pendant that hangs on the top of the forehead.

Nethichutti (Full)- A traditional Nethichutti of dancers often has an additional two strands going down on either side of the hairline and tied at the back of the head, at the nape of the neck.

Oddiyanam - Waist belt.

Pallu - The free-flowing part of a Melakku that flows from the shoulder.

- Pottu* - The dot made of vermillion or sandal paste worn on the forehead, between the eyebrows.
- Rakodi* - A circular saucer-like ornamental pin worn on the crown of the head.
- Salangai* - Ankle bells worn by dancers.
- Surya Pirai* - A circular hair ornament worn on the right side of the Nethichutti or Talaisaman.
- Tali* - The ceremonial necklace tied during marriage.
- Talaisaman* - Refers to a full Nethichutti along with the Chandra and Surya Pirai, as a set.
- Tandai* - A stiff circular ankle ring worn along with Salangai.
- Thirugupoo* - Hair ornament like Rakodi but worn in the centre of a bun. As a pin to hold the hair bun in place.
- Tilakam* - A flat sheet-like forehead ornament. Also refers to a vertical raindrop shaped bindi.
- Vanki* - Ornamental arm band, typically a metal wire bent around the arm in a way that it holds the sleeves of the bodice.

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APPENDIX – 1

Tables from Chapter 2

Table 2.1. Ornaments for Males:

S.No.	Body Part	Jewellery
1	Head	Chudamani (Crest Jewel), Mukuta (Crown)
2	Ear	Kundala (earring), Mocaka (Ear-pendant), Kila (Ear-top)
3	Neck	Muktavali (Pearl-Necklace), Harshaka (Snake-shaped ornament), and Sutra (Gold chain)
4	Finger	Kataka (rings), Angulimudra (Finger ring)
5	Forearm	Hastavi, Valaya
6	Wrist	Ruchika (Bracelet), Uccitika
7	Elbow	Keyura (armlet), Angada (armband)
8	Breast	Trisara (Three-stringed necklace)
9	Entire Body	Suspended pearl necklace, flower garland and the like.
10	Waist	Tarala (worn below the navel), Sutra (Golden Thread)

Table 2.2. Ornaments for Females:

S.No.	Body Part	Jewellery
1	Head	Shikapasha, Sikajala, Pindapatra, Cudamani, Makarika, Mukta-jala (Pearl net), Gavaksha and Sirsajala. Tilaka ¹⁸⁹ on the forehead with many artistic touches. Flower designs over the eyebrows.
2	Ear	Kundala (earring), Mocaka (Ear-pendant), Karnotkilaka (Ear-top), Shikhipatra, Karnika, Karnavalaya, Patrakarnika, Karnamudra (ornament that entwines the ear).
3	Neck	Muktavali (Pearl-Necklace), Harshaka (Snake-shaped ornament), Manjari, Ratnamalika (jewel-string), necklace with two, three, and four strings, and Sutra (Gold chain)
4	Finger	Kataka (rings), Kalashaka, Hastapatra, Supuraka, Mudranguliyaka (Finger ring)
5	Arm	Angada (Arm-band), Valaya (Bangles), Varjura (Bajuband), and Svecchitika (Ornament of the forearm)

¹⁸⁹ ornamental mark on the forehead. Also called Bindi.

6	Breast	Nanaratnakrta (Necklace with the most artistic work), Prshta-Vibushana (Ornaments of the back or jewelled net ornament)
7	Ankle	Nupura, Kinkini, Ratnajala (Jewel-net), and Kataka
8	Hip	Kanci (Girdle with a net of pearl – one string), Kulaka, Mekhala (eight stringed), Rasana (sixteen stringed), and Kalapa (twenty-five STRINGED). Goddesses and queens wear pearl necklaces of 32, 64 or 108 strings.
9	Cheeks	Tilaka and Patralekha (drawing decorative designs with scented pigments)

Table 2.3. Costumes and Ornaments of Celestial Women

S.No.	Category	Details
1	Vidhyadhara	Hair tied in top-knot, decorated with strings of many pearls. Completely clothed in white
2	Yaksha and Apsaras	Precious stone-embedded jewels, yaksha women should wear their hair in a top-knot
3	Naga	Wear like goddesses, ornaments abounding in pearls and jewels, and they are to have hoods on top.
4	Daughters of Sages	Single braided hair (Veni). It cannot be heavily decorated
5	Siddha	Ornaments abounding in pearls and emeralds, dressed in yellow.
6	Gandharva	Ornaments abound in rubies. They have to carry a Veena in their hands and dressed in a Saffron colour.
7	Rakshasa	Sapphires in their ornaments. Teeth to be made white and dressed in black
8	Goddess	Lapis Lazuli in their ornaments along with pearls. Their dresses are made in green colour like that of the parrot.
9	Monkey Female	Topaz and Lapis Lazuli as their ornaments and dressed in blue.

Table No. 2.4. Human Women Costumes and Ornaments Based on Place of Origin

S.No.	Place of Origin	Description
1	Avanti	Curly hair is worn in a Shikapasha and Veni
2	Gauda	Mostly curly hair in a Shikapasha and Veni
3	Abhira	Two Venis, which should be covered with a piece of blue cloth
4	North East	Hair in Shikhandas and the dresses cover their entire body up to hair
5	South	They need to have a jewel on their forehead.

Table No. 2.5. Women's Aharya based on Avasta

S.No.	Condition	Description
1	Lover has gone abroad	Not to have a clean dress and hair in a single braid
2	Separated from lover	White dress. Not to wear many ornaments. Will not cleanse their bodies

Table No. 2.6. Painting of the Limbs (Ghosh, M. 421-422)

S. No.	Category	Details
1	Original Colours	Black, Blue, Yellow, and Red
2	Primary Derivative Colours	Yellowish White (Paandu)
		White+Yellow
		Pegion (Kapota)
		White+Blue
		Padma (Lotus)
		White+Red
		Green (Harit)
		Yellow+Blue
		Dark Red (Kasayam)
		Blue+Red
3	Secondary Derivative Colours	Pale-Red (Gaura)
		Red+Yellow
		One part of strong colour (to be chosen from the original colours) + two colours of a weak colour. Blue is the strongest colour; hence, it should always constitute only one part. Many combinations can be made based on the above rules.

Table No. 2.7. Colours for Gods, Demi-Gods, Humans (of different regions), Caste and Tribe (Ghosh, M. 423-426)

S.No.	Category	Details	
1	Gods	Yakshas & Apsaras	Reddish Yellow
		Rudra, Sun, Brahman & Skanda	Gold
		Moon, Brhaspati, Shukra, Varuna, stars, ocean, Himalayas & Ganga	White
		Mars (Mangala/Angaraka)	Red
		Budha & Agni	Yellow
		Narayana & Vasuki	Dark Blue
2	Demi-Gods	Daitya, Dhanava, Rakshasa, Guhyakas, Pisaca, Hill Gods, Sky	Dark Blue
		Yaksha, Gandharva, Bhuta, Naga, Vidhyadhara, Pitru, Monkeys.	Variegated Colours
3	Humans (Regions)	Seven Continents	Burnished Gold
		Jambudvipa (Except North Kuru region)	Gold
		Bhadrashva	White
		Ketumala	White
		Other Continents	Reddish Yellow
4	Bhutas & Dwarfs	Various Colours	
5	Humans of Bharatavarsha (Based on Deeds)	Kings	Lotus or Dark blue or Reddish Yellow
		Happy Mortals	Reddish Yellow
		Evil, possessed by evil spirits, diseased or do not perform sacrifices, inferior birth.	Brown
		Sages and those involved in Tapas	Plum
6	Human tribes	Kiratas, Barbarians, Andhras, Dramilas, Kasis, Kosalas, Pulinda and inhabitants of the South	Brown
		Shakas, Yavvanas, Palhavas, Vahlikas, and those who dwell in North	Reddish Yellow

		Pancalas, Surasena, Udhra, Magadhas, Angas, Vangas and Kalingas	Dark or Deep blue
7	Human Castes	Brahmins & Kshatriyas	Red or Reddish Yellow
		Vaisyas & Sudras	Deep Blue

APPENDIX – 2

Questionnaires for Survey

SURVEY ON AHARYA

Disclaimer: The information provided by you through this form will be used for data analyses and will be a part of a Thesis that may be printed and published by the author. Thank You.

FEMALE ARTISTS QUESTIONNAIRE

A small survey to collect data for a Doctoral Thesis on Bharatanatyam Aharya from young artists

P.S.: The questions can be answered in any of the following language that you are comfortable in - English, Tamil, Telugu or Hindi.

1. What is your understanding of the term 'Abhinaya'?
2. What all elements of a performance can be termed as 'Aharya'?
3. What factors (such as space, audience age group, theme etc..) affect the final outcome of your Aharya?
4. How has virtual performances changed your costume preference?
5. While planning a performance, what amount of time do you usually spend on designing the 'Aharya'?
6. How important is stage setting and lighting for a solo performance?
7. Do you prefer doing your own make-up or do you hire a professional?
 - a. Self Make-up
 - b. Professional
8. If you prefer doing your make-up on your own, then when did you start doing your own make-up?
9. Do you think learning self make-up and hairdo is an important skill for dancers?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

- c. Other:
10. If you are a freelance performer who has worked with choreographers on thematic presentations, which choreographers costuming did you find interesting to work with and why?
 11. Which style of costume draping and hairstyle do you prefer for your solo performance and why?
 12. What fabric material do you prefer for your costumes?
 - a. Silk
 - b. Cotton
 - c. Silkcotton
 - d. Other:
 13. What jewellery do you wear for a performance?
 - a. Close neck choker
 - b. Long Haaram
 - c. Jhumki
 - d. Ear Stud / Kadukkan / Jhumki
 - e. Oddiyanam
 - f. Cross-Belt / Poonool / Upanayanam
 - g. Vanki (Upper arm band)
 - h. Rakodi
 - i. Chandran Suryan
 - j. Full Nethichutti
 - k. Single Nethichutti
 - l. Salangai
 - m. Other:
 14. Do you prefer Dance practice saree or Salwar for your classes/rehearsals
 - a. Dance Practice Saree
 - b. Salwar

c. Other:

15. What kind of venues do you perform in and how do you interact with your stage help and lighting technician?
16. What are some stereotypes regarding Aharya that you feel the younger generation should break?
17. What is your take on modern / contemporary influence (such as body suits etc..) on Bharatanatyam Aharya?
18. Where do you source your make-up, jewellery and accessories from?
19. How much do you spend on getting your costume stitched?
20. Do you prefer original kemp jewellery or artificial? Can you explain why?
21. On an average, how much money do you spend on the Aharya for a performance in total?
22. Does cost play a role in your choice of Aharya?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
23. Any opinion of yours on the Bharatanatyam Aharya (costumes, jewellery, hairstyle, make-up, stage setting, stage lighting) that you would like to share

SURVEY ON AHARYA

Disclaimer: The information provided by you through this form will be used for data analyses and will be a part of a Thesis that may be printed and published by the author. Thank You.

MALE ARTISTS QUESTIONNAIRE

A small survey to collect data for a Doctoral Thesis on Bharatanatyam Aharya from young artists

P.S.: The questions can be answered in any of the following language that you are comfortable in - English, Tamil, Telugu or Hindi.

1. What is your understanding of the term 'Abhinaya'?
2. What all elements of a performance can be termed as 'Aharya'?
3. What factors (such as space, audience age group, theme etc..) affect the final outcome of your Aharya?
4. While planning a performance, what amount of time do you usually spend on designing the 'Aharya'?
5. How important is stage setting and lighting for a solo performance?
6. Do you prefer doing your own make-up or do you hire a professional?
 - a. Self Make-up
 - b. Professional
7. If you prefer doing your make-up on your own, then when did you start doing your own make-up?
8. Do you think learning self make-up and hairdo is an important skill for dancers?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other:

9. If you are a freelance performer who has worked with choreographers on thematic presentations, which choreographers costuming did you find interesting to work with and why?
10. Which style of costume (draping a saree or pre-stitched) do you prefer for your solo performance and why?
11. What fabric material do you prefer for your costumes?
 - a. Silk
 - b. Cotton
 - c. Silkcotton
 - d. Other:
12. What jewellery do you wear for a performance?
 - a. Close neck choker
 - b. Long Haaram
 - c. Bangle / Kada
 - d. Ear Stud / Kadukkan
 - e. Oddiyanam
 - f. Cross-Belt / Poonool / Upanayanam
 - g. Vanki (Upper arm band)
 - h. Other:
13. What do you wear for your regular classes or rehearsals
 - a. Practice Veshti/ Dhoti
 - b. Track pants/ active wear
 - c. Other:
14. What kind of venues do you perform in and how do you interact with your stage help and lighting technician?
15. What are some stereotypes regarding Aharya that you feel the younger generation should break?
16. What is your take on modern / contemporary influence (such as body suits etc..) on Bharatanatyam Aharya?

17. Where do you source your make-up, jewellery and accessories from?
18. How much do you spend on getting your costume stitched?
 - a. Less than 5000
 - b. 5000 - 10000
 - c. Other:
19. Do you prefer original kemp jewellery or artificial? Can you explain why?
20. On an average, how much money do you spend on the Aharya for a performance in total?
21. Does cost play a role in your choice of Aharya?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
22. As a male soloist, what is your take on the evolution of male costume draping styles?
23. Any opinion of yours on the Bharatanatyam Aharya (costumes, jewellery, hairstyle, make-up, stage setting, stage lighting) that you would like to share

SURVEY ON AHARYA

Disclaimer: The information provided by you through this form will be used for data analyses and will be a part of a Thesis that may be printed and published by the author. Thank You.

SENIOR ARTISTS QUESTIONNAIRE

A small survey to collect data for a Doctoral Thesis on Bharatanatyam Aharya from young artists

P.S.: The questions can be answered in any of the following language that you are comfortable in - English, Tamil, Telugu or Hindi.

1. Does performing for a camera, or for an intimate audience affect your costume choice? If yes, how?
2. While planning a performance, what amount of time do you usually spend on designing the 'Aharya'?
3. Do you prefer doing your own make-up or do you hire a professional for the performances of you and your students?
 - a. Self Make-up
 - b. Professional
4. Do you think learning self make-up and hairdo is an important skill for dancers?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other:
5. Do you teach your students on how to do self make-up and hair?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other:

6. Is knowledge about Aharya a part of what you teach your students?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Other:
7. Which style of costume draping and hairstyle do you prefer for a performance of yours and your students? Why?
8. What factors do you consider while designing the Aharya for your themed choreographies?
9. Do you design your own costume or do you take the help of a costume designer?
 - a. Own
 - b. Costume Designer
 - c. Other:
10. What are some innovations that you have experimented with in Aharya and how was it received?
11. What fabric material do you prefer for your costumes?
 - a. Silk
 - b. Cotton
 - c. Silkcotton
 - d. Other:
12. Do you prefer Dance practice saree / Veshti or Salwar / Active wear for your classes/rehearsals?
 - a. Dance Practice Saree /Veshti
 - b. Salwar / Active wear
 - c. Other:
13. In a themed production or a dance drama, what is the role of lighting and stage properties in your work?
14. What kind of venues do you perform in and how do you interact with your stage help and lighting technician?

15. How important is stage setting and lighting for a performance?
16. How important is it for a lighting technician to understand the nuances of a dance production?
17. What are some stereotypes regarding Aharya that you feel the younger generation should break?
18. What is your take on modern / contemporary influence (such as body suits etc..) on Bharatanatyam Aharya
19. Where do you source your make-up, jewellery and accessories from?
20. How much do you spend on getting your costume stitched for a thematic production?
21. Do you prefer original kemp jewellery or artificial? Can you explain why?
22. On an average, how much money do you spend on the Aharya for a performance in total including costume, jewellery, make-up and stage setting?
23. Does cost play a role in your choice of Aharya?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
24. In your experience, how much has the Bharatanatyam Aharya evolved and do you consider it a good change?
25. Any opinion of yours on the Bharatanatyam Aharya (costumes, jewellery, hairstyle, make-up, stage setting, stage lighting) that you would like to share

APPENDIX - 3

Interview Schedule

1. Herambanathan Nattuvanar	- 02/02/2022 -	In-Person Interview
2. Muthukrishnan	- 09/02/2022 -	In-Person Interview
3. Swarnamalya Ganesh	- 09/12/2021 -	Zoom Meeting
4. Vasundra Thomas	- 31/01/2022 -	In-Person Interview
5. Thomas	- 31/01/2022 -	In-Person Interview
6. Ananda Shankar Jayant	- 24/01/2022 -	Telephonic Conversation
7. K. Dakshinamurti	- 05/01/2022 -	In-Person Interview
8. Ulaganathan	- 28/01/2022 -	In-Person Interview
9. Rukmini Vijaykumar	- 09/01/2022 -	Telephonic Interview
10. Jayachandran. S.	- 18/01/2022 -	Telephonic Interview
11. A. Sivakumar	- 01/02/2022 -	In-Person Interview
12. Sivakumar	- 14/02/2022 -	In-Person Interview
13. Krishnan	- 09/02/2022 -	In-Person Interview
14. Murugan (Make-up)	- 29/01/2022 -	In-Person Interview
15. Victor Paulraj	- 28/01/2022 -	Mail
16. Murugan (Lights)	- 03/01/2022 -	In-Person Interview
17. Krishnan Venkatesh	- 04/01/2022 -	In-Person Interview
18. Revathi Ramachandran	- 02/02/2022 -	In-Person Interview

Aharya Abhinaya in Text and Practice: A Study of the Bharatanatyam Aharya Pre and Post-Revival Period

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