

**PEDAGOGICAL STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY BHARATANATYAM
PRACTICES IN NORTH INDIA: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED
UNIVERSITY TRAINING SYSTEM**

A thesis submitted during 2025 to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment
for the award of a Ph.D. degree in the Department of Dance

by

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **Pedagogical Study of Contemporary Bharatanatyam Practices in North India: A Case Study of Selected University Training System**, submitted by **Urvashi Mohinani** bearing Registration Number **20SNPD01** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Sarojini Naidu School of Arts and Communication is a bonafide work carried out by him/her under my supervision and guidance.

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DECLARATION

I, **Urvashi Mohinani**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**Pedagogical Study of Contemporary Bharatanatyam Practices in North India: A Case Study of Selected University Training System,**” Submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Professor M.S. Siva Raju**, is a bona fide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET. A report on plagiarism statistics from the University Librarian is enclosed.

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Among 17 goals (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>), under which SDG the work incorporated in the thesis will be addressed:

This research directly contributes to **SDG 4: Quality Education**, which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and quality education while promoting lifelong learning opportunities. By focusing on the pedagogical study of contemporary Bharatanatyam practices in North Indian universities, the thesis examines how traditional knowledge systems are preserved, transmitted, and adapted within modern academic structures. The work investigates how Bharatanatyam, once confined to temple traditions, is being recontextualized in university settings, ensuring accessibility beyond hereditary lineages to students from diverse cultural, social, and religious backgrounds. This aligns with the SDG mandate of inclusive education by documenting how higher education institutions democratize access to classical arts and create spaces for intercultural and interdisciplinary learning.

Furthermore, the study analyzes curricular frameworks, teaching methodologies, and training practices adopted across selected universities, thereby assessing the quality, effectiveness, and challenges of performing arts education in North India. By identifying gaps in pedagogy and proposing innovative approaches, the research strengthens the linkage between traditional cultural heritage and contemporary educational practices.

Additionally, the thesis highlights how the integration of Bharatanatyam into academic systems fosters holistic development, including creativity, discipline, emotional intelligence, and cultural literacy, key components of lifelong learning. It also contributes to preserving intangible cultural heritage, ensuring that

Bharatanatyam pedagogy remains relevant in a globalized educational environment. In essence, this study supports *SDG 4* by reinforcing the importance of sustainable cultural education within higher learning institutions, advancing both artistic excellence and equitable access to India's classical heritage.

PREFACE

Dance, in its manifold manifestations, has always stood at the confluence of art, culture, and pedagogy. Among the rich tapestry of India's classical traditions, *Bharatanatyam* occupies a distinctive position both as an ancient cultural inheritance and as a contemporary practice of education, performance, and scholarship. Rooted in the sacred temple traditions of Tamil Nadu, this art form has long embodied the synthesis of aesthetic philosophy, embodied knowledge, and spiritual symbolism. Its migration beyond its original ritual and performative spaces, particularly into the cultural and academic landscapes of North India, has raised new questions of adaptation, pedagogy, and identity.

The study titled "*Pedagogical Study of Contemporary Bharatanatyam Practices in North India: A Case Study of Selected University Training Systems*" has been conceived as an inquiry into the evolving nature of Bharatanatyam pedagogy as it travels beyond its traditional cultural geography. Bharatanatyam, with its origins deeply rooted in the temples of Tamil Nadu and its subsequent transformation into a proscenium art form, has undergone remarkable shifts in practice, perception, and pedagogy over the last century. While the southern region continues to be the epicenter of its traditional schools and lineages, the northward movement of Bharatanatyam into metropolitan cultural hubs and academic institutions has created a fertile ground for new interpretations, teaching methodologies, and performance practices.

This research emerges at the critical juncture where continuity encounters change. It examines how Bharatanatyam, once nurtured through the intimate *guru-śiṣya paramparā*, has been transformed within the structured pedagogical environments of universities and training institutions in North India. The form, as it traverses linguistic, cultural, and regional boundaries, does not remain a static replication of its southern roots. Rather, it undergoes processes of cultural translation and recontextualization, adapting to newer audiences, academic frameworks, and institutional expectations, thereby creating distinctive pedagogical models.

The central focus of this study on pedagogy is deliberate and significant. Pedagogy is not confined to the mechanics of instruction; it is the very architecture through which knowledge is preserved, transmitted, and reimagined. In Bharatanatyam,

pedagogy transcends the teaching of *adavus* (basic steps), *abhinaya* (expressive language), or the *mārgam* (traditional repertoire). It embodies an integrated vision of training that weaves together aesthetics, rhythm, music, devotion, discipline, and cultural memory. When this mode of knowledge transmission enters the corridors of universities in North India, it encounters the rigor of curricular frameworks, evaluation methods, codification, and institutional validation. This encounter ensures the art form's continuity, yet simultaneously transforms its essence in profound ways.

The contemporary significance of Bharatanatyam in North India lies in this dynamic tension between inheritance and innovation. On one hand, it remains deeply rooted in a centuries-long tradition, with its foundations in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, temple sculptures, and oral legacies of hereditary practitioners. On the other hand, it addresses students and educators situated within cultural contexts distant from its Tamil origins. Pedagogy, thus, becomes an act of cultural mediation, navigating language barriers, adapting musical idioms, and reconciling spiritual underpinnings with secular academic structures.

The scope of this inquiry extends beyond the domain of dance studies alone. It speaks to broader intellectual questions: How do traditions negotiate survival in modernity? How do artistic practices sustain themselves across shifting geographies? How does pedagogy shape not only knowledge but also identity? In the case of Bharatanatyam, pedagogy functions both as preservation and as reinvention. It safeguards an artistic legacy even as it continuously reinvents the form for new learners and evolving cultural landscapes.

Methodologically, this work draws upon multiple layers of analysis: historical, theoretical, ethnographic, and pedagogical. The chapters move from the origins and philosophical underpinnings of Bharatanatyam, through its migration into Northern India, into explorations of *banis* (stylistic schools), and finally into the classroom practices of selected universities. The research is informed by critical discourses advanced by scholars such as Avanthi Meduri, Saskia Kersenboom, Janet O'Shea, Ananya Chatterjee, and Ketu Katrak, while being firmly grounded in fieldwork, institutional observations, and interviews with practitioners and educators.

This preface also acknowledges the gaps that give impetus to the present study. While considerable scholarship has addressed Bharatanatyam in its southern heartlands and

diasporic contexts, there remains a notable lacuna in sustained academic inquiry into its pedagogical adaptations in North India. Questions such as: How is Bharatanatyam absorbed into North Indian universities? How do educators and students negotiate linguistic and cultural distance? What models of pedagogy emerge as the form travels? And how do these models affect authenticity, creativity, and identity? form the nucleus of this work.

The journey of Bharatanatyam from South to North stands as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of Indian classical traditions. Despite centuries of socio-political transformations, shifts in patronage, and evolving cultural economies, Bharatanatyam continues to flourish not as a static relic of the past but as a living, adaptive practice. Its institutionalization in North Indian universities marks not only a chapter in its migration but also a new stage in its ongoing processes of cultural negotiation and reinvention.

This research, therefore, is not limited to documenting pedagogy; it seeks to illuminate broader processes of cultural survival and transformation. It invites readers to reflect on the interplay between tradition and modernity, embodied practice and institutional codification, regional roots and national identity. Above all, it recognizes dance as a profoundly human endeavor, an integration of body, mind, and spirit constantly evolving in dialogue with time and context.

It is my earnest hope that this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Bharatanatyam, addressing a crucial academic gap while also inspiring future researchers, practitioners, and educators to engage with Bharatanatyam as a living, adaptive, and pedagogically rich tradition. By foregrounding its contemporary practices in North India, this work aims to open new pathways for inclusive, dynamic, and culturally sensitive approaches to dance education in the years to come.

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CHAPTER- I

Introduction

At its core, dance is an embodied epistemology¹, a way of knowing and being in the world where the body is not merely a tool for expression but the site and source of artistic, cultural, and spiritual knowledge. The dancer engages with space, time, and emotion through movement, making dance a profound kinaesthetic² experience that transcends verbal language. This embodied act is personal, collective, aesthetic, functional, ephemeral, and archival. In this context, dance functions as both subject and medium, wherein the body becomes a living canvas that inscribes and enacts layered narratives. As scholars like *Adrienne Kaeppler (2000)* and *Judith Lynne Hanna (1987)* have emphasized, dance is not simply a mode of aesthetic expression; it serves as a vital repository of cultural memory, a moving archive that encodes the histories, values, rituals, and belief systems of the communities from which it emerges. Through bodily discipline, repetition, and performance, these intangible heritages are transmitted across generations, rendering dance a crucial medium of cultural continuity and identity. As a multi-sensory and multidimensional mode of communication, dance brings together movement, rhythm, facial expression (*abhinaya*), gesture (*mudra*), music, costume, and spatial dynamics to create meaning. It operates on both symbolic and affective levels, offering a richly textured experience that can be intellectually interpreted and sensorially felt. Unlike literary or textual traditions that rely on linguistic literacy, dance

¹ The theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion.

² relating to a person's awareness of the position and movement of the parts of the body by means of sensory organs (proprioceptors) in the muscles and joints.

engages the intuitive intelligence of the body and the emotional acuity of the viewer, making it an inherently inclusive and universally resonant medium.

Dance often serves as a cultural bridge, connecting oral traditions with performative expressions and ritualistic practices with artistic interpretations. In societies where oral histories and community memory are paramount, dance becomes a performative form of storytelling, often embodying myths, legends, and ethical paradigms. This makes dance an essential cultural artifact that entertains, educates, preserves, and politicizes, depending on its context. In the Indian context, especially within classical traditions like Bharatanatyam, dance is deeply rooted in philosophical and spiritual systems. The form is codified yet fluid, allowing the dancer to engage with sacred texts, theological concepts, and emotional landscapes through a rigorously trained yet expressive body. Dance thus becomes a *sadhana*, a spiritual discipline, and a pedagogical tool that bridges the ancient with the contemporary, enriching the cultural landscape. In sum, dance must be viewed as a form of art and a complex, embodied knowledge system. It functions simultaneously as a cultural performance, a communicative act, a mnemonic device, and a philosophical inquiry, anchored in the body but resonating far beyond it. Understanding this multi-layered nature of dance is crucial for any pedagogical or academic inquiry into dance studies, especially within institutional and intercultural frameworks. In these contexts, dance serves as a powerful tool for fostering cross-cultural³ understanding and dialogue, as traditional forms are continually reinterpreted and adapted to new cultural contexts.

³ relating to different cultures or a comparison between them

Across civilizations, dance has universally served as entertainment and a means of education, moral instruction, ritual practice, and social cohesion. In ancient Greece, *orchēsis*⁴ was integral to civic education and philosophical discourse. In African cultures, dance is vital to rites of passage, storytelling, and communal identity. Indigenous Australian and Polynesian dance traditions embody ancestral stories and cosmologies, passed down through generations via movement and chant (Kapeller, 2000). In the ritual context, dance becomes a profoundly transformative tool, shaping and altering the states of both performer and spectator. Whether in Sufi whirling (*Sama*), Native American pow-wows, Balinese trance dances, or Indian temple rituals, the dancer becomes a conduit between the material and the metaphysical, between the self and the divine.

As non-verbal communication, dance transcends the limitations of spoken language. It can express the ineffable, emotions, spiritual experiences, resistance, and collective trauma, and thus becomes a potent vehicle for socio-political commentary and resistance. In many post-colonial societies, dance has emerged as a powerful tool of decolonization, reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems and asserting cultural identity against hegemonic narratives. In India, spirituality, pedagogy, and performance are inextricably intertwined in dance. Rooted in the Indic philosophical worldview that conceives the universe as a rhythmic and aesthetic manifestation (*nāda Brahma*), dance is seen not merely as an art form but as a path to transcendence (*moksha*). The dancer's body is a sacred instrument through which the cosmos is mirrored and performed. This

⁴ “Orchesis” refers to the art of dancing, specifically in the context of a Greek chorus. It comes from the Greek word “orcheisthai,” which means “to dance.”

conceptual framework is meticulously articulated in foundational Sanskrit treatises such as the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, attributed to Bharata (circa 2nd century BCE-2nd century CE). Often referred to as the fifth Veda, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* posits dance and drama (*nāṭya*) as divine instruments to teach *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (purpose), *kāma* (desire), and *moksha* (liberation) to society. It outlines the technical and metaphysical principles of performance, including the *rasa* theory, emphasizing the emotional states experienced by the audience, and *abhinaya*, the nuanced art of expression. The body, in this context, is cultivated as a disciplined site of knowledge, capable of conveying a range of meanings through codified gestures (*mudras*), postures (*karanas*), and rhythms (*tala*).

In addition to the *Abhinaya Darpana*⁵, Nandikeśvara offers a comprehensive explanation of body dynamics, face emotions, and gesture language, as well as a performance and teaching guide. Together, these writings highlight dance's deep integration with Indian philosophy as a scriptural, ceremonial, and educational system. In traditional contexts, dance was not just about physical movement. It was a holistic educational system encompassing music, mythology, philosophy, ethics, and ritual practice. This rich and deep tradition was transmitted through oral pedagogy and experiential learning under the *guru-śiṣya paramparā*⁶ (teacher-disciple lineage). The model emphasized repetition, internalization, spiritual discipline, and bodily transformation over rote memorization or theoretical abstraction.

⁵ Abhinaya Darpanam is a Sanskrit treatise dedicated to Indian classical dances, offering a comprehensive exploration of dance movements and expressions.

⁶ Guru Shishya Parampara, meaning “teacher-student tradition” in Sanskrit, is a deeply ingrained Indian tradition of knowledge transfer through a lineage of teachers and disciples. It's a spiritual and intellectual bond, emphasizing the holistic development of the student by a mentor.

This embodied pedagogy continues to influence contemporary dance education in India, though it has also evolved under the pressures of modernity, institutionalization, and globalization. Today, universities and academies have introduced curriculum-based frameworks, where theory and practice coexist in structured programs. Yet, the tension between the deeply rooted embodied tradition and the emerging academic abstraction is a dynamic and complex aspect of the pedagogy of Indian classical dance, including Bharatanatyam.

Bharatanatyam, rooted in Tamil Nadu, was historically performed by devadasis in temples as an offering to deities, especially Shiva in his Nataraja form. The dance form was codified in texts like the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, articulating its components of *nṛtta*⁷, *nṛtya*⁸, and *nāṭya*⁹ (Vatsyayan, 1977). It combined movement, rhythm, gesture (mudras), and expression (bhava-rasa) to communicate complex philosophical narratives, such as the story of creation, the battle between good and evil, and the concept of divine love.

During colonial rule, Bharatanatyam and its practitioners were marginalized and labeled as immoral by Victorian morality and missionary ideologies. However, the early 20th century witnessed a revival and reformation of Bharatanatyam through nationalist discourse. This revival was mainly due to the efforts of key figures like Rukmini Devi Arundale, E. Krishna Iyer, and later Padma Subrahmanyam, who recontextualized Bharatanatyam as a respectable cultural heritage on proscenium stages and within institutional frameworks (Meduri, 1996; Srinivasan, 1985).

⁷ Pure Dance

⁸ Expressive Dance

⁹ Dramatic representation

Traditionally, Bharatanatyam was transmitted through the *guru-śiṣya paramparā*, a sacred, embodied, and deeply relational education system. This oral and physical lineage-based transmission emphasized bodily discipline, intuitive absorption, and spiritual surrender over codified instruction. Learning occurred through close observation, imitation, and years of immersive practice under the constant guidance of a guru, often within familial, temple, or hereditary contexts.

This model encompassed a holistic pedagogy that integrated:

- i. **Śāstra** (theoretical foundations): Primarily drawn from classical treatises such as Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra and Nandikeśvara's Abhinaya Darpana, which provided frameworks for rasa theory, gesture, expression (abhinaya), and aesthetic philosophy.
- ii. **Sādhana** (practice): Rigorous, repetitive physical training in adavus (basic movement units), rhythmic structures, and *nrtta* sequences designed to internalize movement as muscle memory.
- iii. **Bhakti** (devotion): Dance was inseparable from spiritual practice, offering art as prayer and aligning one's body with the divine through disciplined performance and mental focus.

As Saskia Kersenboom (1987) argues in *Nityasumangali*, the pedagogy of Bharatanatyam, particularly in the devadasi and nattuvanar traditions, was a living archive that resisted textuality, relying instead on embodied memory, kinaesthetic intuition, and oral interpretation of sacred and performative texts. The guru imparted steps and philosophical sensibility, teaching through experience, correction, and spiritual guidance.

The pedagogical core of this system was the Margam¹⁰ structure, standardized in the 20th century but rooted in older practice. This sequence includes:

- i. **Alarippu:** Rhythmic awakening and physical invocation.
- ii. **Jatiswaram:** Emphasis on pure dance and rhythmic complexity.
- iii. **Shabdham:** Introduction to abhinaya and narrative expression
- iv. **Varnam:** The most elaborate composition combining *nr̥tta* and *abhinaya*.
- v. **Padam and Javali:** Expressive pieces that explore emotional depth and narrative.
- vi. **Thillana:** Culmination in energetic, rhythmic finale. This structure formed a blueprint for aesthetic progression and pedagogical development, from the awakening of the body to the flowering of expressive depth.

The literal review of Bharatanatyam pedagogy refers to the modern shift from oral-embodied transmission to written and standardized instruction, a transformation accelerated in the early 20th century during the revivalist and nationalist reimagining of the form. As Bharatanatyam moved from temples to concert stages and eventually into dance academies and university departments, it underwent a process of codification, textualization, and bureaucratization (O'Shea, 2007).

This transformation involved:

¹⁰ In Bharatanatyam, “margam” translates to “path” or “way,” and it refers to the traditional, structured sequence of dance items that make up a Bharatanatyam recital. It represents a journey, both for the dancer and the audience, through various expressive and rhythmic elements.

- i. **Textual Documentation:** Choreographies and gestural meanings, once transmitted through oral demonstration, began to be written down in notation systems and catalogued in printed manuals and books.
- ii. **Standardized Syllabi:** Universities and institutions created degree programs, syllabi, and structured modules with learning outcomes and evaluation mechanisms.
- iii. **Curriculum Design:** The once-cyclical, intuitive, and context-dependent learning models were reshaped to fit semester systems, credits, and academic examinations.
- iv. **Dislocation from Ritual Context:** In becoming a secular stage performance and an academic discipline, Bharatanatyam was often divorced from its ritual-spiritual roots and reframed as a cultural artifact or aesthetic discipline.

Janet O'Shea (2007), in her influential book *At Home in the World*, emphasizes how this transformation not only redefined Bharatanatyam as a national cultural symbol but also subjected it to normative educational models that privileged clarity, uniformity, and replicability over the fluid, nuanced, and individualized pedagogies of the traditional system.

The transition from traditional to literal pedagogies is not merely historical. However, it continues to shape contemporary practice, particularly in North Indian universities where Bharatanatyam is taught as part of performing arts curricula. This gives rise to several critical tensions:

1. **Embodied vs. Evaluated Learning:** Traditional learning thrives on process and immersion, while institutional frameworks prioritize product, certification, and assessment.
2. **Devotional vs. Technical Emphasis:** Bhakti, once central, is often marginalized in academic spaces where secularization dominates.
3. **Local Lineage vs. Pan-Indian Standardization:** Institutional teaching often enforces a homogenized style, downplaying regional or individual variations from diverse lineages.
4. **Guru as Mentor vs. Instructor as Facilitator:** The intimacy and authority of the guru is replaced with the role of a trained faculty member bound by syllabus and schedule.

Despite these shifts, contemporary pedagogues negotiate innovative models that blend traditional insight with academic rigor, practice with theory, and spirituality with scholarship. Institutions are slowly beginning to reincorporate lived experience, encourage practice-based research, and honour contextual histories and aesthetics within the classroom.

Formal institutions like Kalakshetra and Sangeet Natak Akademi, as well as university departments that provided degrees and certifications in classical dance, emerged in post-independence India. An important pedagogical change was brought about by this institutionalization, which replaced oral tradition with classroom instruction that included written tests, theoretical modules, and organized exams. In this context, pedagogical construction refers to how Dance is conceptualized, transmitted, and assessed in academic spaces. It also includes curriculum development, teaching methodologies, interdisciplinarity, and evolving student-teacher dynamics. In North India, where Bharatanatyam is not

an indigenous practice, these processes are further mediated by regional aesthetics, linguistic diversity, cultural negotiation, and academic policy.

In recent decades, academic institutions in North India, such as M.S. University, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Bhatkhande University, Rabindra Bharati University, Bhatkhande University and Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (IKSV), among others, have emerged as significant spaces for Bharatanatyam pedagogy. These universities offer structured B.A., M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. programs in Dance, integrating performance with theory, history, aesthetics, and research.

Key academic interventions include:

- i. **Curricular Integration:** These days, philosophy, gender studies, theatre, literature, and cultural studies are all incorporated into dance and its practice-based component.
- ii. **Methodological Innovations:** Incorporation of somatic practices, notation systems, movement analysis, and interdisciplinary methodologies.
- iii. **Research Orientation:** Emphasis on archival study, ethnography, historiography, and critical theory in dance research.
- iv. **Technological Tools:** Use of digital archives, video analysis, online teaching platforms, and hybrid performance models.
- v. **Inclusivity and Accessibility:** Growing attention to caste, gender, ability, and regional representation within dance pedagogy (Chatterjee, 2004; Ghosh, 2010).

Despite these developments, challenges persist regarding resource availability, lack of trained faculty in certain regions, and the tension between tradition and innovation.

While a robust body of scholarship has emerged over the last few decades focusing on the revival, reconstruction, and dissemination of Bharatanatyam in the 20th century, particularly within the Tamil Brahminical milieu and institutions such as Kalakshetra, there remains a significant scholarly lacuna in understanding how this classical form is adapted, transmitted, and negotiated within university systems in North India. This proposed study, which is a novel exploration, aims to fill this gap. Pioneering scholars such as Avanthi Meduri (1988, 2005), Janet O'Shea (2007), and Saskia Kersenboom (1987) have critically analyzed the gendered, ritual, and institutional shifts of Bharatanatyam in its modern form. However, their analyses are often geographically and culturally anchored in South Indian contexts where the form is historically embedded.

This case study, therefore, seeks to interrogate the pedagogical transformations that occur when Bharatanatyam is taught outside its traditional geographies, particularly in North Indian universities. These are regions where Bharatanatyam is not organically rooted, culturally, linguistically, or historically, and yet where it continues to gain visibility as a curricular offering, a mode of cultural performance, and a site of artistic inquiry. The study's findings could significantly contribute to the field of dance studies by providing a nuanced understanding of the adaptation and transmission of Bharatanatyam in non-traditional contexts, thereby filling a significant scholarly lacuna and enriching the discourse on dance pedagogy and cultural transmission.

Questions to be Addressed

Given the form's migration from ritual temple spaces to proscenium stages¹¹ and subsequently into institutional settings such as classrooms and degree programs, it becomes imperative to study how Bharatanatyam is adapted and internalized in non-native terrains. The pedagogical shift from guru-śiṣya paramparā to university curriculum is not merely a structural change; it carries profound implications for aesthetic embodiment, philosophical transmission, and artistic authority.

Examining the lived reality of students, instructors, and institutional contexts is made possible by a contextual and practice-based perspective. By valuing embodied knowledge, localized experience, and cultural negotiation, this method goes beyond essentialist or static conceptions of “classical” dance. It opens up crucial questions about how tradition is taught, what gets preserved or modified, and how learners in North India interpret and inhabit a Southern form.

This study centres around a set of interrelated questions, each aimed at understanding the layered processes of pedagogy, translation, and institutionalization of Bharatanatyam in select North Indian universities:

1. How do university systems in North India shape Bharatanatyam pedagogy?

¹¹ A proscenium stage, also known as a proscenium arch stage, is a type of theatrical stage where the audience is on one side of the stage, and a frame or arch (the proscenium) separates the performance space from the audience. This creates a “fourth wall,” an invisible barrier between the actors and the audience.

1. What historical and policy-based decisions led to the inclusion of Bharatanatyam in their curricula?
2. How are courses structured, and what kind of academic legitimacy is afforded to the form?

2. What teaching methodologies are employed?

1. Are there hybrid pedagogies that combine textual/theoretical instruction with embodied training?
2. How are traditional repertoires like the Margam adapted in the classroom?
3. What is the balance between performance and research, or practice and theory?

3. How is cultural translation managed between the origin and the geography?

1. How do teachers and students negotiate linguistic and cultural distances, especially when working with South Indian languages, iconography, and religious themes?
2. What interpretive strategies are used to make Bharatanatyam legible and relevant in North Indian contexts?
3. Are new choreographies or thematic explorations being created that localize the form?

4. What role do students, faculty, and institutional policies play in shaping these practices?

1. How do student demographics and aspirations influence how Bharatanatyam is approached and practiced?
2. What kind of academic backgrounds do faculty members possess, are they traditionally trained dancers or academically qualified researchers?
3. How do institutional policies regarding funding, performance opportunities, guest lectures, or assessment models influence pedagogical direction?

Aims and Objectives

Aim

The primary aim of this in-depth study is to critically examine and analyze the pedagogical frameworks, methodologies, and institutional dynamics through which Bharatanatyam is taught, adapted, and practiced within selected university training systems in North India. It seeks to explore how this classical South Indian dance form is recontextualized in academic settings that are geographically and culturally distinct from its traditional roots.

Objectives

1. **To evaluate the impact of Bharatanatyam education in selected North Indian universities**

This objective seeks to critically assess how, in the contemporary time frame, university-level education in Bharatanatyam has influenced the form's evolution, practice, and reception among students and practitioners in North India. The study aims to explore both the tangible outcomes, such as skill

development, performance proficiency, and academic engagement, and the intangible effects, including learners' cultural understanding, artistic identity, and spiritual orientation.

2. To understand the teaching methodologies employed in Bharatanatyam pedagogy

This objective analyzes the instructional tactics employed by instructors in institutional environments. The objective is to examine the equilibrium between traditional oral transmission and contemporary classroom instruction, integrating theory and practice, utilizing notation and multimedia technologies, and embracing interdisciplinary or student-centered learning paradigms.

3. To ascertain the nature and extent of theoretical and practical knowledge imparted across different universities

This objective intends to analyze selected universities' academic curricula and syllabi to determine the emphasis placed on theoretical foundations (such as aesthetics, history, and Natyaśāstra) vis-à-vis practical training (including repertoire, choreography, and performance technique). It will assess how comprehensively these two dimensions are integrated and how they contribute to the holistic development of a Bharatanatyam practitioner.

4. To explore diverse pedagogical approaches adopted across different university training systems

This objective necessitates a comparative examination of the instructional philosophies, curricular designs, assessment models, and teaching formats of various institutions. The research will investigate the impact of regional,

institutional, and faculty-specific factors on these pedagogies and their impact on the learning experience of Bharatanatyam students in North India.

5. To analyze the structural elements of the education system as applied to Bharatanatyam

This objective investigates the broader academic and administrative frameworks that govern Bharatanatyam education within the university setting. It includes evaluating institutional policies, examination systems, accreditation norms, faculty qualifications, availability of performance spaces, and infrastructural support that contribute to or constrain the development of Bharatanatyam pedagogy.

6. To understand the differences in performance styles and practices between North Indian and South Indian Bharatanatyam dancers

This objective is to uncover and study the aesthetic, interpretative, and performative changes that arise when Bharatanatyam is practiced beyond its indigenous South Indian context. This study examines the impact of regional cultures, language variations, audience anticipations, and institutional contexts on the manifestation of the dance form, which may result in novel stylistic advancements, choreographic lexicons, and educational advances.

Hypothesis

This study hypothesizes that the institutionalization of Bharatanatyam within selected university training systems in North India has catalyzed substantial shifts in its pedagogical frameworks, diverging notably from its traditional transmission through the guru-śiṣya paramparā. It is posited that the academic adaptation of Bharatanatyam, mediated by the cultural, linguistic, and regional

particularities of North India, has reshaped how the dance form is taught, learned, performed, and perceived.

With the integration of Bharatanatyam into structured university curricula, several transformations have emerged, from the standardization of content and textualization of bodily knowledge to the introduction of theoretical modules, evaluative procedures, and formal classroom-based instruction. These shifts, while increasing accessibility and legitimizing the form within the domain of formal education, may also have led to the erosion of specific intangible dimensions of traditional pedagogy, such as spiritual embodiment, improvisational freedom, ritual context, and the relational intimacy of oral transmission, which are integral to the conventional guru-śiṣya paramparā.

It is hypothesized that the introduction of Bharatanatyam into North Indian academic environments expedited the dance form's progression and influenced national educational trends, resulting in a distinctive identity that is based on translation, adaptation, and appropriation. Shifts in musical accompaniment, linguistic translation of lyrics and texts, variations in body grammar and aesthetic sensibility, and the negotiation of regional cultural paradigms characterize this distinct identity.

Moreover, Bharatanatyam, in these contexts, is hypothesized to have transformed not merely in terms of form but also as a textual and performative language, creating new interpretive vocabularies and pedagogical practices that are contextually responsive and historically divergent from its Southern origins. This study aims to uncover how such transformations have contributed to constructing a regionally unique Bharatanatyam identity within North Indian

universities and what these reveal about the dynamic relationship between tradition, pedagogy, and institutional modernity, prompting further reflection and discussion.

Review of Previous Scholars

As it is practiced and perceived today, Bharatanatyam has undergone a significant transformation from its original socio-cultural and ritualistic context. Its traditional transmission mode, primarily through the devadasi tradition, was deeply embedded in temple culture, where dance functioned not as a secular performance but as a ritual offering to the divine. The guru-śiṣya paramparā (teacher-disciple lineage) was the cornerstone of this embodied pedagogy, rooted in orality, practice, devotion (bhakti), and spiritual experience. The devadasis, trained from a young age, acquired non-textual knowledge, lived, and transmitted it through experiential and intimate learning. This included śāstra (theory), abhinaya (expressive language), nāṭya (drama), and sādhana (discipline), a holistic system that could not be easily codified or mass-produced. The loss of this embodied knowledge is a matter of concern and calls for a deeper respect for the cultural heritage.

This form of knowledge transmission was fundamentally disrupted and reinterpreted during the colonial and nationalist periods of Indian history. The early 20th-century social reform movements and colonial moral scrutiny led to the stigmatization of the devadasi community, portraying them as symbols of decadence rather than custodians of sacred knowledge. In this socio-political climate, Bharatanatyam was reclaimed, restructured, and “sanitized” by elite,

often Brahmin, women and nationalist reformers as part of India's cultural revival.

In this regard, Avanthi Meduri's seminal work, "*Nation, Woman, Representation*" (1996), offers a feminist historiographical critique of how Bharatanatyam was redefined and appropriated within this nationalist framework. Meduri's critique brings to light the gender dynamics at play in the transformation of Bharatanatyam, fostering a deeper awareness and understanding among the audience. Meduri illustrates how the devadasi, once the central figure of temple dance, was replaced by the respectable modern woman who could safely represent national culture on the proscenium stage. The dance itself was re-contextualized: from temple rituals to stage performance, from sacred offering to aesthetic display, from lived tradition to curated heritage. Meduri's research is essential in uncovering the ideological impulses driving the transition, which favored particular caste, class, and gender identities, hence obscuring or marginalizing the embodied epistemologies of the devadasi lineage.

Janet O'Shea's "*At Home in the World: Bharatanatyam on the Global Stage*" (2007) builds on these arguments by focusing on the pedagogical implications of this transformation. She examines how Bharatanatyam's intimate, improvisational, and context-specific practices were gradually replaced with systematized and codified instruction, particularly in institutional settings. The *margam* structure, once a flexible repertoire shaped by the guru and occasion, became standardized into a prescribed sequence of items (*Alarippu*, *Jatiswaram*, *Varnam*, *Shabdham*, *Padam*, *Thillana*, etc.), often devoid of the ritual intentions that initially framed them. O'Shea emphasizes that this

detachment from the sacredness, spontaneity, and improvisational subtleties of previous pedagogies invokes a sense of loss and nostalgia among the audience, despite the wider access and institutional acknowledgment facilitated by this codification.

Furthermore, this shift also signalled a textualization of dance knowledge, where practice began to be supplemented (or in some cases replaced) by written syllabi, theory papers, and curriculum guides. The kinaesthetic wisdom passed from guru to disciple began to be mediated through institutional structures that valued objective assessments and academic validation, reflecting the broader alignment with Western educational models.

Hence, the transformation from devadasi to institutional dancer, as explored by Meduri and O'Shea, is not merely a shift in performance space but a deep-seated pedagogical and epistemological reconfiguration. This transformation laid the groundwork for the way Bharatanatyam is taught in modern universities, especially in North India, where the form is culturally non-indigenous and often enters academic settings as a translated, textualized, and regulated system rather than as a lived, embodied, and sacred tradition.

Saskia Kersenboom's work is one of the earliest and most in-depth ethnographic studies of the devadasi system, particularly focusing on the Isai Vellalar community and their role as custodians of a sacred, hereditary dance tradition. In *Nityasumangali*¹², she argues that the guru-śiṣya paramparā was not merely a teaching structure but an embodied epistemology, a lived, immersive

¹² In the context of the Devadasi tradition, "Nityasumangali" translates to "ever-auspicious woman". It signifies a woman who is eternally blessed and considered free from the misfortune of widowhood, as she is symbolically married to a deity.

experience that wove together ritual, aesthetics, music, theory, performance, and devotion (bhakti) into a single pedagogical continuum.

Learning in this system was gradual, intuitive, and deeply rooted in the lived environment of the teacher and student. It emphasized non-verbal transmission, kinaesthetic memory, and emotional resonance. The dance was not merely taught but imbibed through everyday life, practice, observation, correction, and repetition, often over decades. The dancer's artistic and spiritual development was directed by the *margam* format, which included pieces such as *Alarippu*, *Jatiswaram*, *Shabdam Varnam*, *Padam*, and *Thillana*. This format was constantly adjusted to each student's talents and development rather than being strictly specified.

However, Kersenboom notes that this organic form of transmission began to erode with the decline of temple patronage and the socio-political marginalization of the devadasi community. The subsequent nationalist and reformist reappropriation of Bharatanatyam led to its institutionalization, and centres such as Kalakshetra (founded by Rukmini Devi Arundale in 1936), which had a significant influence on changing the form's pedagogy.

Kalakshetra introduced structured syllabi, fixed repertoires, and written theoretical components that mirrored Western educational systems. While this shift was instrumental in preserving and popularizing Bharatanatyam nationally and globally, it also marked the beginning of a pedagogical rupture, from embodied lineage to codified curriculum, from spiritual transmission to aesthetic formalism.

In her 2013 study, Samarpita Mitra critically examines the design and delivery of Bharatanatyam curricula within Indian academic institutions. She interrogates how classical dance syllabi are shaped by institutional policies, evaluation mechanisms, and the need for accreditation, often at the expense of the organic, intuitive, and spiritual dimensions that traditionally define the form. Mitra argues that university syllabi prioritize measurable learning outcomes, technical execution, historical knowledge, and textual interpretation over embodied practice, emotional depth (*bhāva*), and improvisational skill (*manodharma*).

Moreover, Mitra's work reflects on how the "one-size-fits-all" approach to curriculum design can be especially problematic when dealing with forms like Bharatanatyam that rely on regional specificity, linguistic fluency (particularly in Tamil and Sanskrit), and culturally rooted metaphors. In the context of North India, this disjunction becomes even more pronounced as learners, teachers, and institutions grapple with translating a southern performative tradition into the pedagogical idioms of a different cultural landscape.

Ananya Chatterjee's seminal work, particularly her 2004 reflections on decolonizing dance pedagogy, offers a critical framework for evaluating how Indian classical dance is taught in postcolonial and diasporic settings. She argues that many institutional models of dance education continue to operate under colonial and nationalist frameworks, which emphasize codification, discipline, and canonical purity, thereby sanitizing and depoliticizing the more dynamic, resistant, and heterogeneous aspects of traditional performance cultures.

Chatterjee highlights the urgent need to reimagine dance pedagogy through feminist, postcolonial, and embodied epistemologies, emphasizing that dance should be taught not merely as a technique or spectacle but as a living, breathing archive of memory, resistance, and cultural identity. Given the introduction of Bharatanatyam into institutions in North India, her demand for a “pedagogy of inclusion and reflexivity” becomes of significant relevance. Students are expected to absorb the spiritual and artistic subtleties of the genre even though they might not share its cultural environment. Chatterjee’s work encourages the development of adaptive, culturally responsive teaching methodologies that allow for both rigor and rootedness, cultural negotiation, and creative autonomy.

In “Contemporary Indian Dance: *New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora*” (2011), Ketu Katrak shifts the lens to hybrid and diasporic pedagogical contexts, providing valuable parallels for understanding Bharatanatyam in non-native environments such as North India. Katrak observes how diasporic dancers and teachers often engage in acts of translation and reinterpretation, adapting Bharatanatyam to suit local tastes, audience expectations, and institutional constraints while retaining its cultural integrity.

Katrak’s concept of “pedagogical hybridity” is instrumental in the North Indian university context, where Bharatanatyam education may involve the interplay of multiple languages (e.g., Hindi, English, Sanskrit, Tamil), musical systems, and aesthetic sensibilities. In these institutions, the dance form is not merely taught as a repertory of gestures and movements but as a multi-layered cultural text, requiring translation at every level, linguistic, affective, philosophical, and performative.

According to her research, transcultural education can facilitate a dialogic process in which teachers and students jointly develop new identities, meanings, and aesthetics rather than necessarily involving dilution. However, this process demands pedagogical flexibility, curricular innovation, and institutional openness, elements that are not always embedded within the rigid structures of university programs.

P Anita, a research scholar, dedicated a portion of her essay to the specializations within Bharatanatyam. Her 2001 thesis, presented to the University of Madras, titled “The Semiosis of Classical Dance (Bharatanatyam) in Tamil Culture, from 1930,” has sections that concentrate on elements such as *Kuravanji*¹³ dance dramas. She examines the conventional perspective on mythological themes in contrast to the contemporary viewpoint. She also discusses the incorporation of secular elements. She also examines the impact of urbanization, institutionalization, and Westernization, which are all contemporary phenomena. Similarly, she examines trans culturalism and interculturalism within the context of Bharatanatyam, analyzing the causes and repercussions of these influences. This study does not evaluate the *bani*’s¹⁴ of Bharatanatyam or its salient features. It does evaluate several aspects of the Bharatanatyam narrative, including the quick evolution of the art’s applicability and the shifting demographics of artistic engagement.

Scholar V.S. Radhika’s 1996 doctoral thesis at the University of Hyderabad comprehensively analyzes Bharatanatyam’s evolution over the past

¹³ Kuravanji, a Tamil folk dance-drama, is a unique blend of classical and folk-art forms. It’s often incorporated into Bharatanatyam performances, adding a distinct narrative and thematic element

¹⁴ In Bharatanatyam, “bani” refers to a specific style or tradition within the dance form, often named after a guru or village. It encompasses unique techniques, nuances, and interpretations of the dance

three centuries. Her work examines the cultural contributions of the Marathas, Nayaks, and Cholas, drawing extensively from Modi documents on Bharatanatyam, Serfoji's court dance, and Sadir's methods and structure. Additionally, she draws comparisons between the adavus that are practiced today and those that are detailed in the Sangeeta Saramrta. Radhika's research contributes greatly to our understanding of Bharatanatyam's historical evolution and continuity.

Theoretical Framework

The pedagogical study of contemporary Bharatanatyam practices in North India requires a multifaceted theoretical approach to understand the complexities involved in transforming, adapting, and institutionalizing this classical dance form within academic spaces. This theoretical framework is constructed from several interconnected theories, drawing from performative Theory, educational pedagogy, cultural migration theory, institutional Theory, feminist Theory, and decolonial perspectives. By weaving these theoretical strands, the research aims to investigate how Bharatanatyam is taught and practiced in Northern Indian universities and its role in shaping dance pedagogy in the contemporary time frame.

Performative Theory and Classical Dance

Performative Theory provides the foundation for understanding Bharatanatyam as an embodied, performative practice transcending textual knowledge. Richard Schechner's concept of restored behaviour (1985) emphasizes that performances, including classical dance, involve repeated actions that retain their traditional forms while also being subject to reinterpretation and

recontextualization. Bharatanatyam, a classical art form codified by texts like the Nāṭyaśāstra, demands a nuanced pedagogy that balances performance tradition with individual creativity and innovation.

Additionally, Victor Turner's (1982) work on ritual and performance complements this by highlighting the concept of *communitas*, where dance becomes a performance for an audience and a ritualistic act connecting dancers and spectators. For Bharatanatyam in academic institutions, this performance model serves as a means of individual expression and a conduit for cultural transmission.

Furthermore, Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra (2005) remains a core text for understanding Bharatanatyam's performative principles. The Theory of *Rasa* (aesthetic emotion) and *Abhinaya* (expression) outlined in the Nāṭyaśāstra plays a critical role in how Bharatanatyam is taught, guiding the dancer's emotional and expressive capabilities. This research builds upon these traditional principles while exploring how they are interpreted and modified in contemporary pedagogical practices.

Pedagogical Theories in Performing Arts

To understand how Bharatanatyam is taught in Northern Indian universities, examining educational theories that inform arts pedagogy is essential. Jerome Bruner's spiral curriculum theory (1960) provides a relevant framework for the progressive development of Bharatanatyam skills. Bruner posited that learning is most effective when concepts are revisited over time, gradually increasing in complexity. In the context of Bharatanatyam, this is reflected in the step-by-step

progression from basic footwork (*adavus*) to complex choreography and expressive dance sequences.

Howard Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983) proposes that people have a range of cognitive abilities, including bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, which is essential in Bharatanatyam training. This research explores how Bharatanatyam pedagogy in universities incorporates these intelligences by emphasizing physical movement, emotional expression, and musicality, while accommodating diverse student needs and learning styles.

Additionally, David Kolb's *Experiential Learning Theory* (1984) informs the understanding of Bharatanatyam as an experiential, embodied practice. Bharatanatyam is learned through practice and performance, rather than solely through theoretical knowledge, making Kolb's model, which stresses learning through reflection on doing, particularly relevant to dance pedagogy. The study aims to analyze how these pedagogical models are applied in the training systems of selected universities in North India.

Institutional Theory and Curriculum Studies

Understanding how Bharatanatyam is institutionalized in Northern Indian universities requires insight into Institutional Theory. John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan's (1977) work on institutional isomorphism provides a framework for analyzing how educational institutions standardize practices, including dance pedagogy. This is particularly pertinent in the case of Bharatanatyam, as universities strive to establish standardized syllabi, courses, and evaluation mechanisms that balance tradition with contemporary academic standards.

The influence of government bodies like the University Grants Commission (UGC) and institutions such as Sangeet Natak Akademi on Bharatanatyam education further necessitates an examination of curriculum studies. Michael Apple (2004) and William Pinar (2004) have critiqued how cultural, political, and institutional forces shape curricula. This research draws upon their theories to investigate how Northern Indian universities design Bharatanatyam syllabi, which often reflect artistic criteria and the larger socio-political context in which they exist.

Cultural Migration and Transmission Theory

Bharatanatyam's migration from its traditional South Indian roots to Northern India has necessitated its cultural adaptation and integration within a different socio-political and cultural context. Arjun Appadurai's concept of "ethnoscapes" (1996), which explores the flow of culture and people across geographic and cultural boundaries, offers a valuable lens for understanding how Bharatanatyam is not merely transplanted but reinterpreted in Northern Indian academic settings. Appadurai's Theory of "ideoscapes" is also useful in this context, highlighting how ideas about culture and tradition evolve as they move across regions.

Homi Bhabha's *Theory of Cultural Hybridity* (1994) suggests that the interaction of diverse cultures creates new, hybrid identities. Bharatanatyam's incorporation into North Indian universities represents a hybridization of Southern classical traditions with Northern academic frameworks. Bhabha's work informs this research by providing a way to conceptualize how

Bharatanatyam has been adapted to align with the cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical sensibilities of the North.

Feminist and Decolonial Perspectives

Feminist Theory offers a critical perspective for analyzing the gendered dimensions of Bharatanatyam education. Historically, Bharatanatyam has been associated with the female body, primarily through the *devadasi* tradition, which has led to complex gendered readings of the art form. Scholars like Ananya Chatterjea (2004) and Ketu Katrak (2011) have critiqued Bharatanatyam's traditional portrayal of femininity, exploring how contemporary practitioners negotiate gender within performance and pedagogy. This research considers how university training systems address or reinforce these gendered narratives.

The decolonial framework (Spivak, 1988) also influences this study by questioning the dominance of Eurocentric educational paradigms and advocating for recognizing indigenous knowledge systems in dance education. *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986)* calls for the decolonization of the mind, urging the reassertion of indigenous practices and philosophies in educational systems. This theoretical perspective informs the study's inquiry into how Bharatanatyam as an indigenous art form is redefined in university contexts that often privilege Western pedagogical models.

Decolonial Theory

Decolonial Perspectives, particularly those shaped by influential scholars such as Walter Mignolo (2007) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, serve as a powerful critique of Eurocentric frameworks. These perspectives have long marginalized indigenous and non-Western knowledge systems. The focus is on how

Bharatanatyam pedagogy either challenges or perpetuates colonial legacies within academic institutions, particularly through curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and aesthetic validation.

This lens critiques the hierarchies between textual knowledge and embodied practice, the privileging of Western theoretical models over indigenous epistemologies, and the exoticization or sanitization of Bharatanatyam in institutional settings. It raises the question: Can Bharatanatyam pedagogy in North India potentially offer a decolonized, inclusive, and culturally rooted education model?

Synthesis and Application

By weaving together these theoretical strands, the research aims to construct a rich analytical framework that captures the complexities of Bharatanatyam's pedagogical presence in North Indian universities. Each theoretical lens illuminates a different dimension of this transformation- performative, cultural, institutional, gendered, or epistemic.

Together, these frameworks converge to facilitate a critical reading of *how* Bharatanatyam is taught (through methods, movement vocabulary, and theoretical integration), *why* confident pedagogical and aesthetic choices are made (based on institutional goals, cultural politics, or resource limitations), and *whose values* and worldviews are being perpetuated or challenged in the process (classical canon, nationalist narratives, feminist perspectives, or regional adaptations).

This theoretical synthesis is beneficial for understanding the implications of institutionalizing Bharatanatyam in North Indian universities. It

prompts inquiry into whether these educational systems enable genuine creative expression and cultural continuity or risk diluting the art form under academic formalism and cultural commodification pressures. It also allows us to assess whether current pedagogical models are inclusive and reflexive enough to accommodate diversity in student demographics, learning styles, regional sensibilities, and evolving aesthetic aspirations.

Furthermore, the framework emphasizes that pedagogy is not a neutral act; broader historical, political, and cultural currents inherently shape it. In addition to adding to the body of knowledge on Indian classical dance, this thorough examination of Bharatanatyam pedagogy advances the conversation on embodied learning, cultural transmission, and the politics of arts education in a constantly evolving Indian society.

Ultimately, this theoretical integration underscores the central thesis of the research: that contemporary Bharatanatyam practice in North Indian universities is not merely a replication of traditional form, but a dynamic pedagogical and cultural process, simultaneously rooted in classical ethos and responsive to contemporary educational, social, and artistic imperatives.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, practice-based, and interdisciplinary methodology, drawing upon both primary and secondary sources to examine the pedagogical frameworks of Bharatanatyam as practiced in selected North Indian universities. The study is framed within the broader lens of performance studies, dance pedagogy, cultural anthropology, and education theory, integrating ethnographic methods, content analysis, and institutional review. The research

seeks to foreground the lived experiences of teachers and students and the academic, cultural, and institutional dynamics shaping Bharatanatyam pedagogy in regions where it is not natively embedded.

This research employs a qualitative, practice-based, and interdisciplinary methodology, drawing on both primary and secondary sources to critically examine the pedagogical frameworks through which Bharatanatyam is taught and internalized in selected North Indian universities. Grounded in the intersecting fields of performance studies, dance pedagogy, cultural anthropology, and education theory, the study integrates ethnographic inquiry, content analysis, and institutional review to comprehensively understand how the form is adapted within academic contexts beyond its native cultural geography.

Central to this approach is the foregrounding of lived experiences, of both educators and students, alongside the institutional, cultural, and linguistic mediations that inform the transmission of Bharatanatyam in North India. Given its focus on curriculum, pedagogy, and practice, the research design is anchored in content analysis. Additionally, it uses descriptive qualitative and historical methodologies to place the current moment in the larger framework of Bharatanatyam's development. The selection of participants and institutions will be guided by a purposive sampling technique, guaranteeing relevance to the study's goals and allowing for in-depth, nuanced analysis.

This researcher's primary source of information and insights was the interviews with senior dancers and professors from the chosen universities. The researcher has meticulously captured most of these interviews in audio and

video formats. The interviews addressed information, pedagogy, interpretation, perspective, and methodology inquiries. Intermittently open-ended interview questions allowed the subject to express a more complex and unique point of view. The data gathered from these interviews has been categorized and used based on a comprehensive understanding of the interviewees' social backgrounds and areas of expertise. Before the interview, the informants were fully aware of the researcher's aims and objectives.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources play a pivotal role in this research, providing a rich historical, theoretical, and comparative backdrop to the evolution of Bharatanatyam pedagogy. They are particularly valuable in tracing the transition of the dance form from traditional, lineage-based transmission to its contemporary institutional forms. These sources are essential in contextualizing the transformation of Bharatanatyam within academic environments, especially in North India, where the form is practiced outside its indigenous cultural and linguistic geographies.

This study draws upon an extensive array of secondary materials spanning multiple disciplines, including scholarly literature, archival records, institutional publications, curriculum documents, policy frameworks, published interviews, academic theses, and visual media resources. This interdisciplinary approach facilitates a critical exploration of how Bharatanatyam's pedagogical structures have been reimagined and reshaped to align with the protocols of formal education systems, especially in regions where the dance form is not culturally embedded.

A core component of the secondary research involves the systematic review of academic texts authored by seminal scholars such as Saskia Kersenboom, Avanthi Meduri, Janet O'Shea, Ananya Chatterjee, Davesh Sonaji, and Ketu Katrak, whose works examine the sociocultural, feminist, and institutional forces that have influenced Bharatanatyam's historical repositioning. These texts allow for an in-depth understanding of the shifts from embodied, devotional, and ritual-based learning within the guru-śiṣya paramparā to the codified, secularized, and standardized modes of classroom-based instruction.

In addition to textual analysis, archival materials and institutional records from universities, dance academies (such as Kalakshetra, BHU. MS University, Indra Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Bhatkhande University and Rabindra Bharati University), and government cultural bodies (such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Ministry of Culture) are examined to trace the curricular frameworks, assessment models, and accreditation mechanisms that structure Bharatanatyam pedagogy today.

The study also incorporates audiovisual materials, including recorded performances, lecture demonstrations, documentaries, and digital dance archives, to examine how Bharatanatyam is visually and performatively represented within institutional and public domains. These materials serve as tools for comparative stylistic analysis and as windows into pedagogical environments where movement, aesthetics, and ideology converge.

By synthesizing these diverse sources, the research aims to uncover the multilayered narratives surrounding Bharatanatyam's migration into North

Indian academic settings. It offers a grounded understanding of how dance education intersects with issues of tradition, translation, cultural politics, and identity formation, thereby providing a nuanced framework to analyze contemporary pedagogical practices.

Brief Chapterisation:

This work comprises six chapters. They are:

- i. Introduction.
- ii. A brief history of the Origin, Growth, and Continuity of Bharatanatyam.
- iii. Bharatanatyam Migration and Practice: A Comprehensive Overview of Its Journey from Southern to Northern India.
- iv. A Pedagogical Study of Different Bani of Bharatanatyam.
- v. A Pedagogical Study of Bharatanatyam in Selected Universities.
- vi. Conclusion.

This introduction chapter provides a detailed review of the thesis and establishes the context for subsequent topics. It delineates the foundational framework by specifying the primary objectives of the research, the guiding hypothesis, and the justification for conducting this study. Additionally, it critically engages with existing scholarship in the field, identifying key contributions and gaps that this research seeks to address. The chapter also outlines the methodology employed, providing insights into the approaches and tools used to investigate the subject matter.

Functioning as a conceptual roadmap, this chapter orients the reader to the structure and intellectual trajectory of the thesis. It highlights the key themes, questions, and analytical frameworks explored in subsequent chapters. In doing

so, it not only introduces the scope and significance of the research but also prepares the reader for the detailed arguments and findings that unfold in the ensuing sections.

The second chapter, titled “A brief History of Origin, Growth and Continuity of Bharatanatyam”, provides a comprehensive overview of Bharatanatyam. This classical dance tradition holds significant cultural value in India. The chapter traces the origins of Bharatanatyam from the temples of Tamil Nadu to its current stature as a global performance art, examining the historical, cultural, and socio-political currents that have shaped its evolution. The chapter’s academic depth is highlighted by its exploration of the foundational principles of Bharatanatyam, its religious and philosophical underpinnings, and its journey through periods of decline and revival. The chapter is structured around three key themes: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence.

The third chapter is titled, “Bharatanatyam Migration and Practice – A Comprehensive Overview of its Journey from Southern to Northern India”. This chapter offers an in-depth exploration of Bharatanatyam’s geographical, cultural, and pedagogical journey from its traditional roots in South India to its widespread acceptance and practice in Northern India. It traces the complex pathways through which the form migrated, the key practitioners who pioneered its establishment in the North, the strategies and work that enabled its growth, and how Bharatanatyam eventually became an integral part of the institutional and academic framework in Indian dance education. The chapter is divided into two major sections: the first addresses the migration and early establishment of the form in Northern India, and the second analyzes its popularization and integration into mainstream pedagogy.

The fourth chapter is titled, “A Pedagogical Study of Different Banis of Bharatanatyam”. This chapter presents a comprehensive pedagogical analysis of Bharatanatyam’s major Banis (styles or schools). The term *bani* refers to the distinctive aesthetic, stylistic, and technical approach adopted by different lineages or schools of Bharatanatyam that have evolved over centuries. Rooted in the traditional guru-śiṣya Paramparā (teacher-disciple tradition), each *bani* reflects the unique interpretation, choreographic preferences, rhythmic intricacies, and expressive nuances developed and propagated by specific families, regions, or institutions.

While the foundational grammar of Bharatanatyam, anchored in *nṛtta*, *nṛitya*, and *natya*, remains intact across all Banis, each school brings its own emphasis, innovations, and movement vocabulary that distinguish it from the others. The pedagogical approach, training structure, choreography, repertoire, and performance aesthetics differ subtly but significantly. Therefore, the study of Banis is not just important, but vital in understanding the multidimensional nature of Bharatanatyam.

This chapter focuses on six prominent Banis that have had a lasting impact on the practice and transmission of Bharatanatyam: *Thanjavur*, *Pandanallur*, *Vazhuvoor*, *Kalakshetra*, *Melattur*, and *Mysore*. Each section examines these schools’ historical background, stylistic characteristics, major exponents, and pedagogical frameworks.

The fifth chapter is titled “A Pedagogical Study of Bharatanatyam in Selected Universities”. This chapter gives a thorough look at the ways that Bharatanatyam is taught and the performances that come from them, focused on

university programs and major cultural institutions in India. The aim is to examine how formal and non-formal institutions have contributed to the dissemination, standardization, and evolution of Bharatanatyam pedagogy, particularly in Northern India.

The study considers the nuanced shifts in training methodologies, curriculum design, and performance-making practices across selected institutions. It also explores how these centres have produced seminal Bharatanatyam productions that have significantly influenced the contemporary perception and reception of the form.

The chapter is divided into two major parts: (1) an overview of pedagogical practices in selected institutions and their landmark productions, and (2) a focused study of Bharatanatyam pedagogy and performance in North India.

The final chapter of this work is the Conclusion. This chapter has offered a detailed exploration of the pedagogical frameworks governing contemporary Bharatanatyam practices within selected university systems in North India. It has highlighted this classical dance form's significant transformation and its remarkable adaptability as it traverses geographical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Initially rooted in the temple traditions and aesthetic milieu of South India, Bharatanatyam has evolved into a vibrant academic and performative practice within Northern universities, thanks to structured training modules, innovative teaching methodologies, and a balanced integration of theoretical and practical components.

The research underscores how these academic institutions have not only upheld the classical integrity of Bharatanatyam through the rigorous teaching of

adavus¹⁵, nr̥tta¹⁶, abhinaya¹⁷, repertoire pieces, and music but have also created space for contemporary discourse, experimental choreographies, and interdisciplinary collaborations. This harmonious blend of tradition and innovation has allowed a distinctive pedagogical identity to emerge, reflecting North India's regional sensibilities while remaining connected to the form's traditional grammar.

Furthermore, the responsiveness of these pedagogical models to diverse student backgrounds, linguistic variations, and socio-cultural realities points to a progressive shift in how Bharatanatyam is understood, taught, and performed in today's academic context. These universities play a crucial role in preserving and promoting Bharatanatyam, ensuring its continued relevance and vitality as a dynamic cultural and educational practice within the modern Indian performing arts landscape.

¹⁵ In Bharatanatyam, adavus are the fundamental, basic dance steps that form the foundation of both Nr̥tta (pure dance) and Nr̥tya (expressive dance). These steps are rhythmic and precise, building the dancer's skill and creating patterns on the stage.

¹⁶ In Bharatanatyam, Nr̥tta refers to the pure, abstract dance form, focusing on rhythmic movements and footwork, without any storytelling or emotional expression

¹⁷ In Bharatanatyam, abhinaya refers to the art of expressive storytelling, crucial for conveying emotions and narratives through the dance.

CHAPTER- II

A Brief History of the Origin, Growth, and Continuity of Bharatanatyam

2.1 Introduction

The term “culture” is a portmanteau that refers to a confluence of several factors that influence how people live and how their civilization has developed. The world’s many people can be identified by their respective cultures. It includes language, dress, attitude, music, dancing, other performing arts, and many others. Dance, as a fundamental component or element, aids in identifying people’s culture, preferences, and attitudes. According to Ellwood, “culture includes on one hand the whole of man’s material civilization, tools, weapons, a system of industry and the other, all non-material or spiritual civilization such as language, literature, art and morality.” In a big, multilingual nation like India, culture does not reflect a single, unified collection of values or ideas; instead, it is multidimensional in nature and depends on the interaction of the beliefs, ideals, and systems that exist in the many regions of the nation. India and Indian culture are regarded as the quintessential instances of unity in variety. We refer to this as a community’s or society’s culture, comprising tangible and intangible elements like art, music, dance, sculpture, etc. As a result, culture transforms into a whole social inheritance that man acquires as a member of society. It influences human behaviour since it is prevalent and has specific forms (patterns). ‘Dancing is believed to be one of the most important cultural practices in many societies. Dancing is the first and the earliest impulse that takes an outward embodiment in human being’ (Umlin:2002). On a spectrum from non-verbal to verbal, movement, dance music, and ritual can all be considered forms of human communication. ‘All four modes can express ideas that bring together spheres of human activity: social, political, economic, religious, and so on’ (Blacking J, 1985:64-65). Dance’s social function can be understood as identity maintenance, cultural practice, and transmission of emotion. Humans migrate from one place to another, carrying cultural practices like dance.

According to the History of Dance (2023), archaeological evidence, such as 10,000-year-old murals in India's Bhimbetka rock shelters, shows that dance existed in ancient times. One of the oldest performing arts is believed to be dance (Shetty 4). Although it is mainly secular art, it has been effectively utilized, particularly in India, in temples and rituals. Indian dance has intellectual and theological significance for this reason. Dance is regarded as a unique style of living and an excellent study of life. Indian dance has endured internal and external disasters. It has persisted in holding its life force, ancient content, in its bosom, which nobody could check, dispute, or change. Dancing appears to have been a part of human nature since its inception.

Numerous classical dance styles from India have undergone numerous significant and minor changes over the years. Various factors have influenced changes, which include both peaceful and turbulent times. Peacetimes allowed for experimentation and the stabilization of the dance form. It contributed to an increase in dancers, teachers, and performance possibilities. Conflicts and wars, regime changes, and the influence of religious and cultural ideas were all examples of difficult times. Natural disasters occasionally have long-lasting effects, and sociopolitical conditions fuel migrations away from home. Significant changes in dance styles, modes of presentation, themes, and levels of social acceptance resulted from such periods. These frequently led dance instructors, dancers, and musicians to leave the mainstream and adopt philosophically, thematically, and morally incompatible behaviors with their initial training. They changed to fit the rules of survival, sometimes taking on various types of paid jobs unrelated to dancing. Despite these ups and downs, it is nevertheless a truth that hundreds of years of quiet practice in basements and alleys and careful transmission from one generation to the next have resulted in the survival of numerous dance traditions. These serve as evidence of their intrinsic strength and power in these dance traditions, as well as the physical yearning of the body to communicate thoughts and feelings through movement.

It would not be an overstatement to claim that Bharatanatyam¹⁸ plays a significant role in Indian culture. One must travel far back in time to find the beginning of this art form, which is intricately linked to myth and religion. It's challenging to research the history of Indian classical dance. The earliest evidence of an Indian dance can be found in the Mohenjo-Daro ruins, where a statue of a dancing female has been discovered. This is the earliest evidence of 6000 B.C. However, it is impossible to determine from this sculpture what type of dancing was practiced at the time or what customs or methods were common.

The Vedas¹⁹ are believed to be the earliest known period in Indian history for which we have written evidence, and dancing was popular throughout this time. Throughout Vedic literature, dance is mentioned. The references show that, in addition to being a part of the ritual, which was so frequent in early cultures, dance was also a well-liked technique of production and a highly sought-after achievement. Early legal texts like the Laws of Manu and the Arthashastra²⁰, as well as references to dance and dancers in the Rig Veda, emphasize the secular nature of dance. There is no connection between dance and religion in Rig Veda's description of dawn as a dancing girl putting on her jewelry (Rg Veda I. 92). The Laws of Manu do not address any potential religious associations. Still, they do establish guidelines to control dancers in a public space. It is advised to the king that "Gamblers, dancers, and singers- let him banish them from his town" (Manu IX. 222). The advice has been mostly disregarded. Due to their achievements, dancers frequently held respectable positions in society. The Arthashastra, written by Kautilya in the fourth century BC, is the first work on stagecraft. From it, we can infer that when it was written, the State was in charge of maintaining professionals in various artistic disciplines, including acting, singing, playing musical instruments, dancing, and painting. The era of the two major epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, marks a turning point in early Indian history. We also have a tonne of evidence

¹⁸ Bharatanatyam is an Indian classical dance form that originated in Tamil Nadu. It is one of eight Indian classical dance forms recognized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi and expresses South Indian religious themes and spiritual ideas, particularly of Shaivism and, in general, of Hinduism

¹⁹ The Vedas are a large body of religious texts originating in ancient India.

²⁰ The Arthashastra is an Ancient Indian Sanskrit treatise on statecraft, political science, economic policy and military strategy. Kautilya, also identified as Vishnugupta and Chanakya, is traditionally credited as the author of the text.

to support the presence of dance as a pastime, an art form, and a part of ceremonies.

The Puranas²¹, whose compilation lasted from roughly the 10th century AD to 1000 years before Christ, are the subsequent most significant work. Even in the era of the earliest Puranas, dancing was a highly developed and organized art. The Matsya Purana is quite evident in its instruction that dancing is required to remove an unfavorable atmosphere and create an advantageous or auspicious milieu (Shetty, p. 5). It was so believed to be highly regarded that the Vishnudharmottara Purana contains a narrative that states that to be a sound sculptor or carver, one must first have a firm understanding of painting, and to be a good painter, one must first master dance (Vatsyayan, p. 2). Important Puranas that mention dance include the Skanda, Bhagavata, and Brahmavaivarta. The theme of Rasa Lila is described in the Bhagavata Purana in a prosperous and colorful way. The two-fold purpose of dance is also discussed in religious histories (puranas), with several of them advocating the consecration of young women to temples (Altekar 1962: 83). The Vamana Purana pokes humor at the difficulties of trying to maintain one's piety while making the pilgrimage to Banaras: "Where the Vedic accents of great Brahmans, mingled with the sounds of the girdles of sportive women, are transformed into the sounds of great Sanctity" (Vamana Purana 3.36.31).

The fifth Veda, believed to be the Nāṭyaśāstra, was proposed by the sage Bharata. It is a colossal work devoted to drama, dance, music, and other allied arts and crafts and aesthetics. It is one of the first texts on the entirety of Indian literature. This book, probably written in the second century AD, has 37 chapters and provides in-depth information on nearly every facet of performing arts technique, appreciation, and presentation. The information has all been thoroughly organized, systematized, and subjected to scientific analysis. The arts of dance, theatre, and music must have advanced to perfection and

²¹ Purana is a vast genre of Indian literature about a wide range of topics, particularly legends and other traditional lore. The Puranas are known for the intricate layers of symbolism depicted within their stories. There are 18 *Mukhya Puranas* (Major Puranas) and 18 *Upa Puranas* (Minor Puranas), with over 400,000 verses. For more details, one can refer to Puranas. (2023, June 27). In *Wikipedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puranas>

standardization in India before the Nāṭyaśāstra was written, as this certainly implies. (Khokhar, Bharatanatyam- The dance of Bharat India)

The Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra is the most comprehensive treatise on all facets of music, dance, and theatre, as well as being the oldest. Because of Bharata's enormous effect on all later writings on the performing arts, many have substantially borrowed from his work, and none of the numerous treatises on dancing have attempted to define dancing without adhering to the framework of discussion he established. The Nāṭyaśāstra's profound and enduring influence can be attributed to its integration of theory and practice, which shapes notions of dance while detailing its methods. Since they continue to be at the center of every conversation about dancing, these ideas need to be carefully considered.

By observing the position that Bharata gives to these arts in the societal structure, these ideas can be placed in the framework of Bharata's all-encompassing perspective on theatre, dance, and music. He claims that the drama/Play is the fifth Veda, composed by Brahma for the classes who were not able to read the original Vedas:

**“na vedavyavahāro'yaṃ saṃśrāvyaḥ śūdrajātiṣu | tasmāt sṛjāparaṃ
vedaṃ pañcamam sārva-varṇikam || evamastviti ...”**

(NS. 1. 12- 13)

Transliteration

“The Vedas [lit: the use of this Veda] are not to be heard by [lit:in] the Sudra castes. Therefore [please] create another Veda, the fifth, meant for all the varṇas. “Let it be thus,” [said]. . . .”

“Bharata calls this fifth Veda the nītyaveda: nītylikhyam pañcamam vedaṃ ..”
(NS. 1. 15).

For Bharata, dance serves as an introductory act to theatrical performance. As an added touch of beauty, he claims that Siva recommended including dancing in the preliminaries of a theatrical play.

“mayā’pīdaṃ smṛtaṃ nṛttaṃ²² sandhyākāleṣu nṛtyatā |
 nānākaraṇasaṃyuktairāṅgahārairvibhūṣitaṃ ||
 pūrvaraṅgavidhāvasmiṃstvayā samyak prayojyatām |”

(NS. 4.13-14)

Transliteration

“And I have also propagated this [art of] dancing embellished with āṅgahāras consisting of several karaṇas while performing dances in the evening. Apply this art (i.e., dance) in an appropriate manner in the rites of these preliminaries of [a drama]”.

While there are sporadic allusions to dancers and dance in ancient literature²³ Bharata was the first to approach dance methodically, characterizing it as an art form made up of exquisite body motions performed to instrumental music, vocal, rhythm, or both, and with the potential to be mimetic or purely decorative. The five main concepts that form the basis of this definition are nṛtta, tandava, pindibandha, abhinaya, and sukumaraprayoga.

Following were technical treatises such as Dasarupaka, Sangeeta Ratnakara, and Abhinaya Darpana. In his *Malavikāgnimitram*, Kalidasa, who flourished about the 5th century AD, outlines how a dancer should perform, including her demeanor, sense of timing, connection with the portrayal, and communication with the viewer. In the second act of *Malavikāgnimitram*, he mentions *Chhallika*²⁴ nṛtya, a dance performed by Malavika. Vasantasena, a courtesan also a dancer by trade, is the main character in one of Sudraka’s plays, *Mṛichchakatika* (The Little Clay Cart). When commenting on the root nṛtta (to dance), Panini (700–600 BC), the author of the first grammar manual, referred to Silalin and Krisasava, who are thought to have been the creators of several crucial and formalized postulates of dance. For instance, Amrapali, a courtesan

²² Nṛtta is the term, not nṛtya, that Bharata uses consistently throughout his work to denote dancing. The term nṛtya appears only twice in the G. O. S. edition of the NS (4.13 and 30), and seems to have been a scribal error. See Bose, 1970, p.8; Vanna, 1957, p.21. The Kāsi edition has nṛtta, which supports this view. Nṛtta and nṛtya are different concepts and the latter did not become current till the tenth century A.D.

²³ See Bose, 1970, pp. 1-4.

²⁴ Ramanathan N, “Malavika’s Dance in the *Malavikāgnimitram* of Kalidasa, by N Ramanathan,” *MusicResearchLibrary*, accessed July 25, 2023, <https://musicresearchlibrary.net/omeka/items/show/2343>.

in the Buddha's day, was regarded as one of the jewels of the city of Vaishali (Horner 1930: 89–90).

Theatrical plays from the classical era are another source of information. A dancer is frequently one of their principal characters, which adds to our understanding of the dancers' social standing in temples and courts. Not just Hindu temples hosted dance performances. Buddhists and Jains, the other two indigenous religions of the subcontinent, allude to its practices in their places of worship. Dance is mentioned in a Buddhist shrine in an inscription from Gaya dating from AD 1270: "Worship is here (offered) three times a day by means of instrumental music in the highest key (Panchama gata, which is said to be erotic) and Rambha-like (a celestial dancer) Bhavanis (dancing girl attached to temples) dancing round wonderfully" (Sircar 1963:197).

Three authors, Somadeva from Kashmir, Jinavallabha from Rajasthan, and Al-Beruni, a foreign observer of life in northern India, mentioned dancers at temples in the eleventh century (Gatson 1996: 27). All provided some indication of the extent of dancing and demonstrated that it had both ritual and secular purposes at the period. These writers are all from northern India, as are the writings.

2.2 Dance in Early Tamil Literature and Sangam Epics: Tracing the Origins of Bharatanatyam in South India

As we turn our attention to the south, Tamil, the earliest of the Dravidian languages, has literature that predates the birth of Christianity. Between 500 BC and 500 AD was known as the Sangam Age. The Sangam Literature in Tamizh, which was formerly dated from 2 B.C. to 2 A.D., is the earliest South Asian literature that is currently known. Now, however, it is situated between 4 and 6 A.D.) Dance was referred to as attam, adal, kuttu, and kunippu throughout the Sangam period. Paripadal, Tolkappiyam, Pattupattu, and Yettutogai are literary works that contain references to dance. The three dance categories are Sama Kuttu, Vanmai Kuttu, and Menmai Kuttu. Vanmai is stern and has Tandava connotations. Menmai, which means soft, is related to Lasya. Tolkappiyam uses the name Vallikuttu in honor of Valli, Muruga's consort (Sunitha, pg 13). According to Tolkappiyam, "Nāṭaka vazhakinum ulgagiyal vahakinum pādal

sāndra pulaneri vazhakam” (Tollkapiyam Agattinayyial 53). According to Natya Shasta, ulagiyal vazhakam and nāṭaka vazhakam are Lokhadharmi (realistic style) and Natya dharmi (conventional or theatrical style). As a result, we learned that nāṭakam predated the Tolkappiyam era. The dancers are referred to as nataka magalir in Perumpānāṭṭu Padai. (Perumpānāṭṭupadai 55). Other dances are revealed in the Kuruntogai, and Kalitogai, almost all of which are believed to be ritualistic in character.

The classic epic Silappadikaram²⁵ and its sequel Manimekalai are from the same period. One of the Yimpermkappiyams (five literary works) of the Tamizh Sangam Literature is Silapadikaram. Between 2 B.C. and 2 A.D., a royal ascetic named Ilango Adigal, the older brother of King Sengutuvan of the Cera dynasty, wrote the Silapadikaram. The thirty chapters in Silapadikāram are divided into Pugārkaṇḍam, Madhuraikāṇḍam, and Vāncikāṇḍam. Both contain references to dancing, with the former doing so frequently and touching on every facet of the discipline, technique, instruction, presentation, and repertoire. The wealthy merchant Kovalan’s obsession with the dancing girl Madhavi is the central theme of the Silappadikaram narrative. In front of Karikal Cozhan during her arangetram²⁶, Madhavi, the second heroine and anya nāyika of Silapadikaram, performed Padinōrādal (Padinonru + Adal = Padinōrādal). The words “adal” and “padinonru” both signify dance or dance-related terms. The commentary of Adiyārku Nallār²⁷ provides a clear explanation of the Padinōrādal of Madhavi. (Sunitha, p. 36).

Additionally, during the Sangam era, works like the Silapathikaram (about 450 A.D.) describe the characteristics of classical dance. Koothu was the name for a dance. “Santhi Koothu (classical dance) and “Vinoda Koothu” (popular dance) were used to categorize them. Vinodakoothu refers to popular dancing, while Santhi Koothu refers to the classical style. Santhi koothu comprises four different types of koothus: Chokam, Mei koothu, Abinaya, and

²⁵ Cilappatikāram, also referred to as Silappathikaram or Silappatikaram, is the earliest Tamil epic. It is a poem of 5,730 lines in almost entirely akaval meter.

²⁶ Arangetram is the debut on-stage performance of a former student of Indian classical dance and music that follows years of training in classical music and dancing.

²⁷ Adiyarkku Nallar (12th / 13th century AD), renowned commentator, covers the entire work of Silappadikaram and cites the ancient Tamil works on verse, prose, and drama in his commentary.

Natakam. Chokam, often referred to as “Suddha Nr̥ttam,” is made up of “108 Thandava Karanas.” Mei koothu consists of silly performances with gestures and typical posture. Abhinaya embodies the emotions and experiences that a person would experience and that are expressed in the song lyrics through action and positions. Rasa-abinaya and Vachika-abinaya are both included in abinaya. Natakam refers to a lengthy narrative or epic. There are numerous moments of poems and discussions throughout the play. Sanskrit and Tamil literature served as the foundation for Natakam. Vinotha koothu, which focuses on entertainment, enjoyment, and play, includes some artistic trickery and juggling, such as balancing on a rope, puppetry, and balancing layers of pots on one’s head. Kuravai koothu, Kallai koothu, Kuda koothu, Karanam, Nokku, Thodpavai Koothu, and Vinotha koothu are only a few of its seven variations²⁸. The second epic, known as the Tamil-Buddhist²⁹ epic Maimkalai, also written as Manimekhalai or Manimekalai and meaning “jeweled belt, girdle of gems,” was written by Kulavika Seethalai Sataar most likely between the second and sixth centuries. The Silappatikaram, the oldest Tamil epic, serves as a foundation for Manimekalai’s characters. In 30 cantos, it tells the tale of Manimekalai, the stunning child of Kovalan and Madhavi. Regarding concentration, aesthetics, and propaganda in the two epics, the Manimekalai is the antithesis of the Silappatikaram. A tragic love story that eventually turns supernatural is The Silappatikaram. An anti-love narrative with otherworldly beginnings is The Manimekalai. According to Kamil Zvelebil³⁰, the Manimekalai is Buddhist propaganda that “attacks and ridicules Jainism,” while the Silappatikaram develops on human emotional issues and contains certain portions complimenting Jains³¹. Bharatanatyam originated in Southern India, as evidenced by the sculptures and carvings in its temples. In addition to being places of worship, temples in earlier times served as a venue for inter-human

²⁸ <http://know-your-heritage.blogspot.com/2016/12/dance-and-drama-of-ancient-tamils-part.html>

²⁹ Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, ed. (2009). *A Social History of Early India*. Jointly published by CSC and Pearson Education for the Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture. p. 238.

³⁰ Kamil Zvelebil (1974), *Tamil Literature*, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, ISBN 978-3-447-01582-0 pp. 130–132, 141–142, Quote: “Manimekalai preaches the Buddhist ideal of serving all living beings with detachment at the expense of Jainism which is attacked and ridiculed..

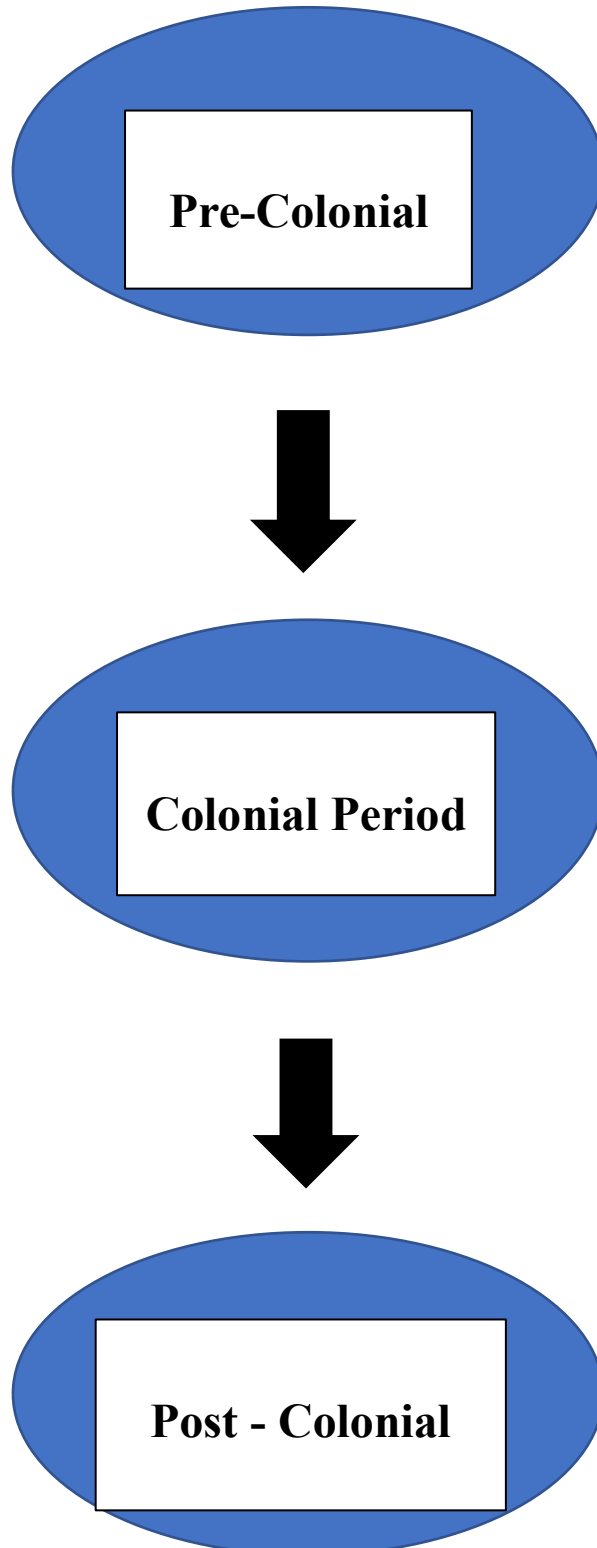
³¹ (Manimekalai. (2023, June 6). In *Wikipedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manimekalai>)

contact. Its origins can be traced back more than 2,000 years to the local temples of antiquity. (Khokhar, Bharatanatyam- The dance of Bharat India)

India's ancient history has always placed art before religion (Rao, p.101). However, contemporary studies have always used a biased approach, dividing the followers and practitioners of this sacred art between the higher and lower castes, the rich and the poor, the elite and the common. Such studies have done more harm than good for our nation and its history by pretending to favor a specific group and demonizing opposing viewpoints as nationalist and anti-poor. Stalwarts of Music and Dance were immune to religion.

Even though Baiju Bawra and the well-known classical singer Tansen were Hindus and Muslims, respectively, by birth, their ragas continue to captivate listeners. Saint Tyagaraja was a Brahmin, Saints Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa belonged to lower castes. Saint Kabir was a Muslim, but all three of these artists produced works considered timeless classics that are revered and even worshipped by both Brahmins and non-brahmins. Both Vedantam Lakshminarayan Sasthry and Minakshisundaram Pillai have made significant contributions to Bharatanatyam and, without any discrimination, have taught many students from various castes. The Bharatanatyam community has valued Mylapore Gowri Ammal and Jatti Thayamma equally for their renowned Abhinaya and dance performances in the Pandanallur and Mysore styles of Bharatanatyam, respectively. Many political scenarios have established a caste-based division in our thinking. This dissection has reduced Bharatanatyam to its lowest possible state, even more so than the Nautch ever could. Several factors contributed to Bharatanatyam's degradation throughout the colonial era, leaving a legacy for further moral contamination in studies of this sacred art.

2.3 Periodisation of dance into three periods



Three eras can be distinguished in the history of Bharatanatyam: pre-colonial, the colonial period, and the post-colonial period.

The situations of many nations in our world that we have labelled “third-world countries” are due to imperialism and colonialism. However, a closer examination reveals that similar elements have also permeated the colonization victims’ culture and way of life. Indian classical dance, Bharatanatyam, is rooted in Tamil Nadu. Even though Bharatanatyam is a form of art, colonialism stigmatized and denigrated it just like any other art form. The British effectively divided the castes even further throughout the Victorian era. Similarly, to how white supremacy is one of the most pervasive systems in the United States, the caste system in India is employed as a justification for discriminating against members of each caste. This destructive system was established by the United Kingdom’s imperialist control over India (formerly Bharat), which is regrettably no closer to disintegrating than when it was originally established, since it is so deeply embedded in Indian culture. While the British wiped out the Indian population and used up all of the country’s natural resources, colonialism also affected Bharatanatyam.

Sadir was the name given to the contemporary Bharatanatyam form until the early 19th century (Rao, p. 101). The struggle of the Indians for self-sufficiency and independence, on the one hand, and their search for a revival of their social, religious, and ethical mindsets, on the other, pushed them to embrace change for a constrained social order. A resurgence is underway for “Sadir Nautch” and its stale notion. The present thesis follows dance as a practice before it labels itself as Bharatanatyam. This periodisation will briefly peek into the journey from Sadir to Bharatanatyam.

2.3.1 Dance during the Pre-Colonial Period

The classical dance developed well by the 11th and 12th centuries and was now well-liked over most of South India. The Chola and Pallava kings (4th to 12th century AD) supported and developed the dance. Some talented dancers were

occasionally well-paid, well-known, and respected. The South Indian rulers of the Pandya, Nayaka, and Maratha families maintained this profound awareness and respect of the classical dance tradition until the end of the 19th century.

Dynasty of Pallava and Pandya

From the 4th to the 9th century AD, the Tamil territories of the subcontinent were ruled by the Pandya kings of Madhurai and the Pallava kings of Kanchi. Their religious consciousness and commitment to serving the gods gave rise to the Bhakti Movement (devotional type of worship), which led to the emergence of saint poets, including Naayanars like Maanikkavachakar, Appar, and Sundarar, as well as Aalwars like Nammaalwar, Periyalwar, and his daughter Aandal (Eshwar, P. 6). Lord Vishnu and Shiva, respectively, were worshipped by the Aalwars and the Naayanars. Image worship was highly beneficial for fostering devotion and advancing religious music and dance. The sculpture produced during the Pallava Period was further impacted by this method. Their temple carvings emphasized legendary subjects and depictions of Gods in various dancing postures. The Kailashnatha Temple in Kanchipuram, which was devoted to Shiva, is one of many Pallava temples in Tamil Nadu that feature sculptures of dancing figures in various attitudes.

The Pallava district of Kanchi is renowned for the growth of temples and the encouragement of the arts³². There has been a remarkable streak of consistency in dance, both in terms of consumption and performance. Dance needed to transform into ever-more-concrete and compact forms gradually. Numerous bass reliefs from the Pallava era feature dancers, musicians, and other performers. “In the Pallava time, there were singers named Tirupadiyampaduvor, Adigalmar, and Pidarars who sang for Devadasis³³. These evidences suggest that Tirupadiyam hymns were popular from the days of Nandivarman I Pallavamalla.”³⁴ The Pallava period marks the beginning of the field of dance forms, which is discussed extensively throughout the Chola era.

³² C. Meenakshi, Administration and Social Life under the Pallava, Madras. 1977

³³ In the context of dance, a Devadasi (also spelled Devadasi) refers to a female temple dancer who is dedicated to the service of a deity. The term, which translates to “servant of God” in Sanskrit, signifies a woman who is essentially married to the temple deity and performs various rituals, including dance and music, as part of temple worship

³⁴ South Indian Inscription VOL III No.43

Because this is a blatant break from the practice established during the Sangam era, the presence of Devadasis and their intimate ties to the temple are significant. But the SOLO dancing form had impressively advanced by the end of the Pallava era.

Dynasty of Chola

The Chola kings of Thanjavur were ardent Saivism adherents and solid religious enthusiasts. This period is marked from the 9th to the 13th century AD. Their intrinsic love for the fantastic arts reflected their self-control, devotion, and service to God. As a result, their artwork displayed beauty and divinity. By offering complete financial assistance to cover all of the needs of the artists and so encouraging the dance to develop, the kings prolonged their patronage to safeguard the work of art. In Ancient India, devotees fostered the arts of dance and sculpture with divine inspiration. Therefore, this gave the temple's activities an additional impetus. With Rajaraja I's support, the arts of dance and music flourished. As a result, the history of the Chola dance dates back to Rajaraja (985 CE- 1014 CE). "Appointment of singers, dancers, and nattuvanars in the temple continued to be in the Chola Period. In the Brihadeshwara Temple at Tanjore, Rajaraja I appointed forty-eight pidadars to recite the Tirupadigam."³⁵ These recitals were accompanied by udukkai and kottimattalam.



Plate - 1.1: Devadasi Recital in Temple³⁶

³⁵<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/how-art-devadasis-was-appropriated-create-world-bharatanatyam-38808>

³⁶<https://www.thenewsminute.com/features/how-art-devadasis-was-appropriated-create-world-bharatanatyam-38808>

The king's directives controlled the dancers. Some dancers were experts in various facets and styles of dance. Each of them had a designated time to perform in the temple and court. Another intriguing element in this situation is the nomination of the nattuvanari. The nattuvanars carried forth dance presentations in an inherited manner. There were nattuvanars, or male dancers, who were appointed to the Thiruvidaïmarudur temple regularly. The king selected a second dancer who could do Abhinaya in the temple. Only a few male dancers in the temple could do the Agamarga dance. The dancer for Abhinaya received the same compensation as the dancer for Agamarga. A plot of land known as nattuvakani served as payment to the nattuvanars. "The Brihadeshwara temple inscription speaks of assignment of shares in temple lands and income from lands transferred to aetists like devaradiyar, kottimalam players, mutthuraisanghu, moriviyam, padaviyam players etc. It is interesting to find that the maximum was paid to the first-grade ganapadi (singers)."³⁷ The currently available evidence points to a consistent pay scale for these musicians. Solo and group dances of countless sorts, are done at this time. Only the names of the several dance styles are known; the methods for performing these dances are unclear.

"The text Panchamrabu describes agamargam as a complete repertoire consisting of sixteen varieties of dance items. They are adi, anu, prakasam, pitam, Pushpanjali, puyangam, desi, desideyottu, nidi, nilal, vaiu, vaguppu, kautuvam, tunukku, and dandapadm. Some of these items have Sanskrit names like pushpanjali, kautuvam, desi and dandapadam which were continued in the dance repertoire of the late centuries."³⁸ The Nayaka era was characterized by movement, invention, and swift cultural development. "The courtesan in the Nayaka period has become a paragon of power, piety, magnanimity and faithfulness. Dancers were made use of and generously rewarded for procuring strategic information from the enemy camp. The fostering of artists shifts the gravity of patronage from the temple to the theatre."³⁹

³⁷ <http://rashtriyaaawaz.com/?p=540>

³⁸ <http://serfojimemorialhall.com/portraits3.html>

³⁹ <http://serfojimemorialhall.com/portraits3.html>



Plate - 1.2: Brihadeshwara Devadasis⁴⁰

Raghunatha Nayaka lived from 1600 until 1634. During his reign, the Nayaka rule was at its height. He was a renowned musicologist, versatile composer, musician, and Telugu and Sanskrit language expert. Ramananda Tala and Raga Jayantsena are two of his own creations. He is the creator of numerous honourable kavyas, including Shri Rukmini Krishna Vivaha Yakshagana, Parijataharana Prabandha, Gajendramoksha, Valmiki Charitra, and Achutendrabhyudam. The 24-fretted Vina was given the name “Raghunatha Mela Vina” in honor of the King and is extensively discussed in most of his works, along with other technical elements of the instrument. One of the many kavyas the king wrote is called Valmiki Charitra, which in Telugu denotes the king’s extensive mastery of dance theory and practice.

The magnificent dances of the celestial nymphs Rambha and Urvashi are described in this text, along with the technical elements of dance like Hastabhinaya, Sharirabhinaya, Padabhedas, etc. It also thoroughly explains many musical instruments, including the Mukhavina, Kinnari, and Tambura. This demonstrates the royal composer’s care and attention to dance’s intricate nuances, technical aspects, and other allied disciplines. He was further praised as “AbhinavaBhoja,” “Bharata Vidyadhurandhara,” and “Danavinoda” by the many illustrious scholars, knowledgeable poets, singers, and dancers who graced his court since he had given countless Brahmin villages to them. The

⁴⁰ <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/360710251376228966/>

legendary padas composer “Kshetravya” visited his court during his reign (Dekhane, 2020).

From 1634 to 1673, King Vijayaraghava Nayak lived. This ruler, Raghunatha Nayak’s son, preserved Tanjore’s cultural flavor. King Vijayaraghava was a former master in the study and application of the arts of music and dance, as shown by the numerous Yakshagana that he wrote. A few illustrious poets who graced his court were Cengalvakala Kavi, author of Rajagopala Vilasmu, and poet Venkatamakhi, The Chaturdandi Prakashika and creator of the 72 Melakarta system. Depending on their skill level, many dancers, musicians, and other artists received royal honors during his reign. Among those who earned royal honors are the poet Kshetravya and the dancers Rupavati, Shashirekha, and Bhagirathi. These royal privileges typically included a stunning palace and agraharas (residences). A significant portion of this King’s prodigious compositions are the Telugu Yakshaganas. Pralhada Charitam, Putanaharanam, Raghunathabhyudayamu, Raghunathanayakabhyudayamu, and Vipranarayan Chatirtra are a few of his notable works. The fact that dance is explicitly treated in most of his works only highlights his passion for the discipline. This King’s Yakshagana work is distinctive in that it substitutes prose dialogues for traditional metres like Ardhachandrika and Dhavala and instead uses dance musical forms called darus. Such a discovery made by this King’s inventive intellect has influenced later Yakshagana compositions.

The art was also well-supported by Vijayaraghava Nayak. Many of the writings created by the court poets and the monarch himself depict the musical and theatrical events held under his direction regularly. Like his father, Vijayaraghava was an accomplished student of Sahitya and Sangita and a poet and composer. The striking characteristic of this time was the specialization in many forms of dancing. William Hickey makes some intriguing findings in his book ‘The Tanjore Maratta Principality.’ “Of the Maratha dynasty of Tanjore, we have no authentic records. It lasted about six hundred and seventy-six years.... The country they obtained through easy treachery had wealthy people to rule over and a rich province to support them; in the process of time, they

sank into listlessness and luxury.”⁴¹ In the Nayak era, this was the nature and standard of art.

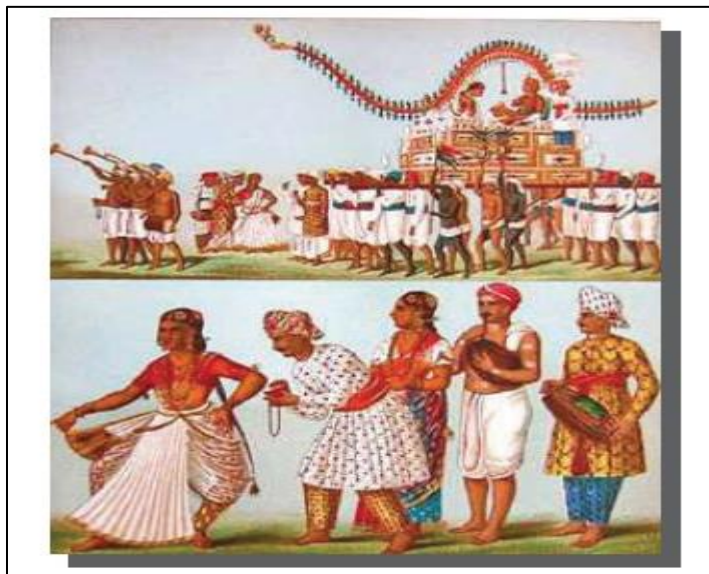


Plate - 1.3: Tanjore king’s royal wedding procession and dance performance during procession⁴²

Maratha Period (Marathi): 1676 AD to 1855 AD When the Nayak dynasty came to an end, Tanjore saw the illustrious Maratha dynasty rule there under the leadership of King Venkoji/Ekoji I, Chhatrapati Shivaji’s older brother. The Marathas carried on the tradition of royal support for literature and the arts. The Maratha kings’ achievement in mastering the South Indian language and becoming accomplished artists and writers is remarkable. Most Maratha kings were musicians and academics, and the dazzling literary renaissance age was primarily attributed to the outstanding writings of Shahji II, Tulaja I, Pratapsimha, and Serfoji II. Dasiattam, currently known as “Bharatanatyam,” was formerly known as “Sadir” during the Maratha Empire. The Sadir performed at temples, and the court rapidly improved, particularly during the reign of King Serfoji II (1798–1832) (Dekhane, 2020).

After his father’s passing, Shahji II, Ekoji I’s eldest son (AD 1684–1712), was crowned as king. For the time mentioned above, Thanjavur was under the control of Shahji II. At the young age of twelve, he was crowned as

⁴¹ William Hickey, The TanjoreMaratta Principality in Southern India, II Ed madras 1874, P.76

⁴² A procession is an organized body of people walking in a formal or ceremonial manner
<https://rashtriyaaawaz.com/?p=540>

king. His two younger brothers, Sarabhoji and Tukoji, respectively, controlled Mahadevapattanam and Kumbhakonam, both of which were located close to Kumbhakonam. Shahji II, a scholarly man, showed a keen interest in promoting the arts and literature and, over time, proved to be a capable administrator who worked to make his kingdom prosperous. His close ties to revered musicians like Sadashiva Brahmendra and Bodhendra Saraswati demonstrate his keen interest in spiritual matters. His close ties to revered musicians like Sadashiva Brahmendra and Bodhendra Saraswati demonstrate his interest in spiritual matters. By giving villages as tokens of appreciation and encouragement to academics who provided credit to literary works, he continued the historical practice of patronage. His court was home to many eminent individuals fluent in Telugu, Marathi, and Sanskrit. Shahji was a renowned musicologist and one of the greatest royal composers. He was also fluent in Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit, Marathi, and Hindi, as evidenced by his prolific literary and creative output. His creations include the Panchabhasha Vilas Nataka, Chandrashekhara Vilas Nataka, Tyagaraja Vinoda Chitra Prabandha, and Pallakiseva Prabandha.

The fact that the Panchabhasha Vilas Nataka was written in five languages demonstrates that he was a multilinguist and thoroughly understood literature. His distinctive works include several lovely padas of his own deity, Tyagesha. In Sanskrit, Marathi, and Telugu, he has penned over 208 padas on various subjects, including bhakti, shringara, hasya, vairagya, bhava, mangala, and niti. Every single pada perfectly combines music and thematic content and inspires dancers to express a range of feelings and thoughts and the many states/avasthas of the Nayika and Nayaka. He was the first royal composer of the Marathi musical plays Sita Kalyanam, Sri Krishna Vilas Nataka, and RadhaBansidhara Vilas Nataka at Tanjore. He had received the honorific “AbhinavaBhoja” from the devotees of art. He was praised as the “heart and soul of the muse of learning.” He received numerous honorary titles to recognize his skill as a scholarship judge, including “Sarvadyna Chudamani.” Many Marathi saint poets founded various mutts in Tanjore and spread “Harikatha Kalakshepa” art, kirtana paddhati, and bhajan during his rule. Tanjore naturally evolved into a bilingual and multicultural community. At the age of 40, he passed away, leaving no heir to the kingdom. (Dekhane, 2020)

Sarabhoji I, who reigned from AD 1712 to 1728, also gave art and literature genuine favor. He was a kind and devout man. He had also given Agraharas to Brahmins. There were still many of the academics and ministers who graced Shahji II's court during Sarabhoji's rule. The king demonstrated excellent military skills by preventing the Madura King from destroying the Kaveri dam. He was praised as "Vidyabhoja" and was a renowned scholar. He left no heirs when he passed away in 1728. Tukoji/Tulaja I, his brother, seized the throne.

Tulaja I, the author of Sangita Saramrita, lived from AD 1728 to 1736, a significant work on music theory and practice. Nṛttaprakarnam, the chapter devoted to dancing, is also included. It is unnecessary to point out that Tulaja-I was a brilliant musicologist and a talented Yakshagana composer. Rajaranjan Vidya Vilas Nataka and Shivakamasundari Parinay Nataka demonstrate their expertise in the dance world. The Telugu-language Yakshaganas, which are intermingled with erudite darus, let readers visualize the emotional essence of the theme because they achieve the ideal balance between lyrics and melody, demonstrating King Tulaja's prowess as a playwright. Vilas Rajaranjan, the drama Nataka, is founded on the philosophical idea that overcoming six enemies, lust, money, anger, infatuation, miserliness, and intoxication will allow an individual soul to merge with the sublime. The names of the ragas are perfectly matched with the characters appearing in the darus⁴³, which is a very distinctive aspect of this drama. Ex: Daru performs a raga version of Moha. Anandbhairavi, joy. This demonstrates his ability to choose ragas quickly and effectively to convey the significance of darus. Additionally, he has written several padas in Marathi, Telugu, and Sanskrit. Another outstanding quality of the King was his solid understanding of various academic disciplines and his authority in various domains, including politics, Jyotish, Ayurveda, and Dharmaśāstra.

⁴³ In Bharatanatyam, Daru (also spelled Dharu or Dhruva) refers to a specific type of composition, often used in dance dramas or musical plays, that combines musical notes (swara) and lyrics (sahitya) to tell a story or depict a character. It typically includes a pallavi, anupallavi, and charanas, along with jathis (rhythmic patterns) and sahitya.

He supported the arts and culture in the same way as the Nayakas. Shahaji II (A.D. 1684–1712) came to power while still young. He was a Sahitya and Sangita scholar. There may have been a need for these rhymes to be danced to, as evidenced by the fact that hundreds of poems/padas were produced in Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada during this time. The Saraswati Mahal Library in Tanjavur has palm-leaf manuscripts of about 500 Marathi Padams that King Shahaji (1684–1711) wrote at Tanjavur using the Telugu script. The Sangitasaramrita, a key technical book on adavus, was authored by King Tulaja II (1763–1787). This is more evidence that the dance form was progressing so successfully that providing teachers and students with a technical manual was deemed necessary. (Dekhane, 2020).

The eldest son of Tulaja was Ekoji II, who lived in AD 1736–1737, notwithstanding the unrest and unstable circumstances caused by the internal throne battles. Ekoji II maintained the cultural aroma of Tanjore. He was a generous patron, and his court was decorated with talented dancers. One of them who consistently held the crowd transfixed was Muddumanga. She greatly delighted the king, who showed his admiration for her abilities by giving her a pearl necklace each time she performed. He was a royal artist of distinction himself. Sanskrit, Marathi, and Telugu were all languages he was proficient in. His classic works include the Tyageshwar Kamalamba Parinava Nataka and the Vigneshwar Kalyanam. There are 86 *padams* in total, all of which are exceptional and have themes like Shringara, niti, and bhakti. He, too, was unable to conceive a son and passed away after one year in power.

Pratapsimha lived from 1739 to 1763. He was a man of unwavering will and the finest courage and intelligence. He was the one who rescued Thanjavur from being destroyed by egotistical measures to allow pretenders to the throne to rule over ineligible people. He supported the Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, and Sanskrit languages, and his court was filled with erudite men and composers. His court poets wrote several sallamdarus in his honor. He was a renowned Marathi scholar who contributed substantially to the language's literature. His best Marathi works include Krishnamanjari, Ramadinacharya, Madanasanjivani (a treatise on sexology), and Uma Samhita. He passed away in 1763, just as Thanjavur began to decline due to English rule over India.

Son of Pratapsimha, Tulaja II, held the position of authority from 1763 to 1787. Despite the dismal situation that worsened because of the British/East India Company, there was no shortage of royal backing for the fine arts. He had supported several Telugu, Sanskrit, and Marathi poets. As the musical trinity of Sri Tyagaraja, Sri Shayamasastri, and Sri Mutthuswami Dikshitar lived during this time and generously contributed to the lakshana and the lakshya of Carnatic music with their divine compositions, the time of Tulaja and his son Serfoji was an Augustan age of Carnatic music. He had given numerous artists 30 acres of land. Subbaraya Oduvar, the father of the Tanjore Quartet, was awarded a prestigious position among his court musicians by Mahadeva Annavi. Both King Tulaja and Serfoji II gave Bhagavatamela Natakas their complete support. There were various Bhagavatamela troupes affixed to the court. These artists' maintenance costs were paid for out of the royal purse. Tulaja II wanted to adopt a son after losing both of his sons at an early age. He rechristened the adoptive son, who was of the Bhosla dynasty, as Serfoji II. (Dekhane, 2020).

In the history and evolution of Sadir dance, currently known as Bharatanatyam, Maharaja Serfoji II has a crucial role. King's era saw a fresh impetus in socio-cultural and literary activity despite having limited authority and financial resources amid a foreign invasion. He greatly supported literature and the arts and inspired many academics and poets to produce their best work. He was a renowned king who was a scholar in practically every field and was endowed with such profound and comprehensive knowledge in various areas that the Muse showered him with study. His scientific knowledge, genius as a musician, ability to speak multiple languages, and creation of a well-known library provided him an extra achievement in his journey. The "Thanjavur Maharaja Saraswati Mahal Library" is a scholarly treasure trove, housing the most extensive collection of countless manuscripts of exceptional merit, as well as valuable treatises and books on a wide range of subjects, including music, dance, literature, grammar, medicine, ethics, astrology, yoga, the Kama Sutra, math, philosophy, and architecture in Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, and Marathi. He oversaw the construction of this library. (Dekhane, 2020)

The Sanskrit masterpieces Kumara Sambhava Tika, Mudrarakshasachaya, Smriti sangraha, and Smritisarasamuchya are just a few

of his well-known compositions. His mythological-themed Marathi writings include the Ganesha Lilarnava Nataka, Ganesha Vijaya Nataka, Ganga Vishveshwara Parinay Nataka, Radha Krishna Vilas Nataka, Shivratri Upakhyaana Nataka, and many others. He has given immense support to both dance and music. The kirtankaras of Harikatha Kalakshepa extensively used Marathi musical forms, such as ovi, abhang, sakhi, dindi, and nirupanas. All of the nirupana roles were performed by a single dancer or occasionally by two or three dancers, making Serfoji-II's nirupana special. This demonstrates the continued use of the "solo" dancer technique in Bharatanatyam today.

All 18 of Serfoji's nirupana's components have been arranged to a single raga and tala of Carnatic music, which is another distinguishing quality. These nirupanas demonstrate excellent coordination and a seamless fusion of the Marathi language with Carnatic music. The King's goal in developing this synthesis was to make art more compelling and understandable, foster a deep appreciation for it, and foster the correct attitude towards dance, which the Maratha people formed in the south, encouraging the widespread dissemination of exquisite art, preventing it from remaining a specialty of South India. Uma Maheshwara Parinaya, Kumara Sambhava Nirupana, Kiratarjuniya Nirupana, Dandaniti Kalpita Katha, Suladi Nirupana, and others are only a handful of his nirupanas. His other composition, Vividha Karnataka Raga Ragini, features dance routines set to various ragas and Suladi tala that is modelled around ragamalika and talamalika. Such artistic creations were notable for their diversity and richness but need to receive more attention. If they are revived, these dance pieces will be a valuable contribution to modern Bharatanatyam. These royal compositions can be considered turning points in the evolution of Sadir's thought and practice.

The King also wrote a Kuravanji Nataka and a Lavani. The central theme of Kuravanji is simply the portrayal of the heroine's lovelorn illness towards her accomplice. The King or the temple deity is typically the lover. Devendra Kuravanji, on the other hand, is written by King and deals with a different subject: the world's geography, including descriptions of other nations' mountains and rivers. Kuratti educationally narrates the book with the aid of straightforward yet lovely Marathi songs. When he returned to Tanjore, he

ordered the court poets and academics to copy these manuscripts for the library so that future generations could utilize them effectively and extensively. Many temples in and around Tanjore are credited to him for building and renovating them. (Dekhane, 2020).

Serfoji-II has played a crucial role in the evolution of the Sadir dance. His court was notable for the confluence of numerous accomplished Nattuvanars, composers, musicians, and dancers whose creative energy aided Sadir's development and characterized the time as one of the most original and illustrious in Bharatanatyam history. The Tanjore Quartette enhanced the aesthetic and intellectual ambiance of the Tanjore court. They should receive the most praise for organizing the Sadir attam format. The Tanjore brothers pioneered new approaches to education through improvisation, development, and establishment of the Sadir pedagogy and the systematization of its presentation sequence and format through an aesthetically graded succession of dance pieces.

The Telugu word “Caduru = Sabha” and a dance performance held at special events like weddings may have given rise to the term Sadir during the Nayak era. The term Caduru/the square dais is equivalent to Sabha or court. Since kings were typically seated in spacious chambers or Darbars to watch court dance performances, the term Sadir, possibly coined during the Maratha period—seems more believable. Sadar is also the Urdu word for this type of dance performance. Sadar attam refers to the court (Sadir) where the dance (attam) was performed. With time and tongue-twisting, the pronunciation of Sadar-Sadir changed significantly, and Sadir attam was eventually used. Consequently, Dasiattam's name, Sadir, came to be known during the Maratha era. (Dekhane, 2020)

Contributions of Tanjore Quartet

The Nattuvanar⁴⁴, who was often a man, played a crucial role in how well a *dasi*⁴⁵ performed. As a senior teacher, he directed the dance while simultaneously supervising the group. He was an expert in both music and choreography. His *nattuvangam* included singing, playing the cymbals, and leading the dance's *laya*. Numerous Nattuvanars and Devadasis developed their own styles into *Banis*. The Tanjore quartet invented one of the first Bharatanatyam *banis*. They established a strong and extensive line of dance instructors and masters. They never wed into households having devadasis as ancestors. These four brothers were brilliant and gifted in spades. Their compositions were primarily responsible for setting the standard and defining the *Margam* of Bharatanatyam performances. The four brothers and a few others, including Sabhapati, Gopala Narayana, and Shivarama Subbaya, recomposed *Sadir's* single-theme *Ekartha Prayoga* (different but linked combinations of *Nr̥tta* and *Nritya*) style in *Serfoji's* court in the early 19th century to create the unconnected *Pritagartha Prayoga* structure, or '*Margam*,' which displays multiple themes and runs from *Alarippu* to *Thillana*. The Tanjore Quartets were made up of four brothers who were well-known performers of dance and music. They were Chinnaiya (c. 1802–1856), Ponnaiya (c. 1804–64), Vadivelu (c. 1810–1847), and Shivanandam (c. 1808–1868). They were descended from a line of Nattuvanars musicians who, in the 19th century, performed for the Nayaka and Maratha courts of Tanjore, a princely state. Gopala Nattuvanar (b. 1638), who worked in the Rajagopalasvami temple in Mannargudi and served as the court's prominent musician during the 17th century, is their first discernible progenitor.

“At the decline of the Nayaka rule in Tanjore, this family moved to Madurai, and later to Tirunelveli. During the rule of King Tulaja II (r. 1763–87), three descendants of the family, the brothers Mahadevan (1734–91), Gangaimuthu (1737–98) and Ramalingam (dates unknown) were invited back

⁴⁴ Nattuvanars are traditionally the primary teachers of Bharatanatyam, imparting the intricate techniques, vocabulary, and philosophical aspects of the dance form. They also create new compositions and choreograph dance sequences.

⁴⁵ In the context of Bharatanatyam, “*dasi*” and “*devadasi*” are related terms referring to women dedicated to temples, often associated with dance and other artistic expressions. Devadasis, meaning “servants of the gods,” were women devoted to temple worship and service, including dance, music, and other rituals. The term “*dasi*” is sometimes used more broadly to refer to these temple dancers or their lineage.

to the Tanjore court. The present home of K.P. Kittappa Pillai on West Main Street in Tanjore was gifted to the family by Tulaja II. Gangaimuttu had two sons, Subbarayan (1758–1814) and Chidambaram (dates unknown). Subbarayan's sons were the Tanjore Quartet.”⁴⁶ The son of Gangaimuthu, Subbaraya Pillai, served as a dance instructor during the durbar. Subbarayawa was in charge of the female dancers who performed in the royal court back then. Their father, Subbaraya Pillai, and Muthuswami Dikshitar (1776–1835), a member of the Trinity of Carnatic music, provided the four of them with the fundamental training. They spent some hours in the Tanjore Durbar. The dancer and instructor were Gangaimuthu. This Tamil family of Ouvar descent was transported to Tanjore from Tirunelveli to coordinate temple dances and recite Tēvāram (devotional music).

The four brothers received special training in Carnatic music from Muttuswami Dikshitar for seven years before debuting in Tanjore's royal court. They wrote several *Tana Varnams*, *Kirtanas*, and other *Kritis* with their signatures. After being well-versed in music, they received Bharatanatyam training from their father, Subbarayan, and grandfather, Gangaimuthu. They developed the dance's performance pattern after learning the finer points of the art's theory and practice. After their debut, the brothers were granted the title “Bharata Shreshtar” and were complimented and blessed by their master, Muttusvami Dikshitar. They received various gifts from the king and were named the court musicians. The Tanjore Quartet (TanjaiNalyar) rose to fame in Raja Sarfoji II's (A.D. 1798–1832) palace, where they served as the Masters of the Highest Order. The various kings' courts were decorated with them.

⁴⁶ Krishnan, Hari. 2008. “Inscribing Practice: Reconfigurations and Textualizations of Devadasi Repertoire in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century South India.” In *Performing Pasts: Reinventing the Arts in Modern South India*, ed. Indira Viswanathan Peterson and Devesh Soneji.



Plate - 1.4: Shri Mutthswami Dikshitar⁴⁷

Of the four, Sivanandam excelled as a mridangist and nattuvanar, Ponnaiah was a composer and vocalist, Vadivelu was a composer and violinist, and Chinnaiah was a choreographer. These brothers used to lead dance performances and recite the Tevaram at the Brihadiswara shrine.

The eldest of the four, Chinnaia (1802–56), was an excellent dance instructor. He was one of the rare men who danced while wearing a woman's attire. During the Mattu Pongal, he instructed men in dance. Then, he relocated to Krishnaraja Udaiyar III's Mysore palace (1811–68). A handful of the Quartet's pieces have Krishnaraja Udaiyar III's name. Most of those are Chinnaia's original works. He rewrote Nandikeśvara's Abhinaya Darpana, which his father had previously related to him, and published it as Abhinaya Lakshanamu in Telugu. Later, Chinnayya was present at the Mysore durbar of Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar (r. 1895–1940). In appreciation of his benefactor, he wrote some Kirtanams and Varams. He is believed to have contributed to the systematization of dance routines in the Durbar. Chinnaya's time in Mysore is unclear in terms of the precise duration.

One of the brothers, Ponnaiya (1806-64), was a talented composer. He's credited with organizing the Sadir Kacheri. He is credited with writing most of the brothers' compositions for Brihadishvara and some Nṛtta pieces (Jatiswarams, Thillanas).

⁴⁷ <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-sundaymagazine/Thanjavur-through-the-ages/article15941242.ece>

The younger Vadivelu was a skilled musician, singer, and songwriter. He played the violin by himself. Three well-known female dancers- Sarasammal of Tanjore, Kamalamuttu of Tiruvarur, and Mannargudi Meenakshi- who danced at Serfoji's court put his and his brothers' musical prowess to the test. Vadivelu spent four years studying under Muthuswami Dikshitar in Tanjore. Even Thaygaraja would summon him to listen to the violin since he had learned it and had become so skilled at it.

Vadivelu, who was 22 then, was chosen to serve for eight years as the Asthana vidvan of the Travancore court. Swathi Thirunal was intrigued by his skills as a violinist, singer, and dance specialist. Swathi Thirunal was drawn to the vocalist, violinist, and dancer. Vadivelu was also an expert in Tamil and Telugu. His apparent skill on the violin was unrivaled. Together with Swathi Tirunal, Vadivelu transformed, codified, and popularised Mohiniattam, giving female dancers chances. Up until that point, Kerala's dance culture was dominated by the male-only art form of Kathakali. It is well-known that Vadivelu has reviewed and criticized Swathi's musical and dance creations. Vadivelu was accompanied to the Travancore court by the Tanjore sisters Sugandha Parvathi, Sundara Lakshmi, and singer Kamakshi Ammal. With Vadivelu, Swathi Tirunal created many Swarajathis, Varnams, Padas, and Thillanas. Vadivelu was a talented singer and a great choreographer in his court. They arrived in the Travancore palace in January 1832 after departing from Tanjore. Along with them were their father, Subbarayan, and Chidambaram (uncle). Vadivelu passed away in 1846. Even today, the ivory violin Swathi Tirunal gave the Quartet is on display at their ancestral home, which is located at 1818 West Main Street behind the Brihadeswara Temple in Tanjore. Although Vadivelu himself never got married, the other brothers' offspring continued the task and produced many outstanding Bharatanatyam dancers.

Vadivelu made a significant contribution to dance. Ponnayya wrote numerous well-known kritis honoring Brihadeswara. The brothers propagated the Pandanallur Bani. The trio established Navasanthi Kauthuvam, a highly traditional kriti. They were all called "Eka Chanda Grahi" since they could all repeat what they had previously heard. Due to certain problems, the foursome left the Tanjore court in 1830 and went to Swathi Tirunal's court in Travancore.

After Serfoji died in 1832, Shivaji II took over, and it was at this time that Ponnaiya and Sivanadam, at Shivaji II's invitation, returned to Tanjore.

The *Varnams* are the Tanjore Quartet's best pieces. With *Nṛtta* sequences intermingled, they portray the joy and agony of romantic love and representations of stages of spiritual bliss. The Tanjore Quartet's dance works are considered the pinnacle of Bharatanatyam's classical canon. "The *Alarippu*, *Jatisvaram*, *Shabdham*, *Varnam*, *Padam*, *Javali*, and *Thillana* are among the seven primary genres that the Tanjore Brothers separated into for the solo female court dancer. Both abstract dance technique (*nṛtta*) and textual interpretation (*abhinaya*) were well-represented in these balanced ways. Three well-known female dancers from the era, Kamalamuttu of Tiruvarur, Sarasammal of Tanjore, and Minakshi of Mannargudi, who most likely performed at the Maratha darbar, tested the brothers' artistic experiments, particularly those of Ponnaiya and Vadivelu. The Quartets temporarily relocated to Travancore after being exiled from Tanjore in 1834 due to an encounter with King Serfoji II."⁴⁸

Compositions by Tanjore Quartet

The Tanjore Quartet officially codified Bharatanatyam into a set performing repertoire. The Tanjore Quartet imbued the repertoire with the spirit of their spiritual dance. However, magnificent compositions that are drenched in holiness, such as Pancha Murthi Kavituams and Navasandhi Kavituams, totally reflect the splendor of the temple ceremony. They were the first to codify the *adavus* and formalize the *Margam*. They created a performance structure and organized the order of the various repertory pieces. They wrote several *kritis* for each category, mainly in Telugu, their own tongue, set to different ragas and talas. They were addressed to the family gods, as well as a few other gods and their patron monarchs. These things gained popularity and reputation through performances. The royal sponsors of Thiruvananthapuram and Mysore extended an invitation for them to disseminate the art. Additionally, the rulers scheduled concerts in the temples.

⁴⁸ The Dance Compositions of the Tanjore Quartet. ed. K.P. Kittappa and K.P. Sivanandam. Ahmedabad: Darpana Publications, 1961.



Plate - 1.5: Tanjore Brothers⁴⁹

Ponniah wrote several Tanavarams, Kirtanams, Melapraptis, Alarippu, Jatiswarams, Shabdams, Swarajatis, Chauka Varnams, Ragamalikas, Padams, Javalis, Thillanas, Dharus, and Swarapadams among the brothers. Some temples are devoted to different gods, while others are in honor of Thanjavur Maratha kings such as Serfoji Raja II, Pratapasimha Bhonsle, and Amarasimha Bhonsle. Sivanandam wrote music for Sivaji Raja and was renowned for being a talented instructor to many aspiring dancers. In honor of his patron, Krishna Raja Wodeyar, the King of Mysore, Chinniah wrote several similar compositions.

The four brothers had a significant student following and were master conductors (nattuvanar). Pandanainallur Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai and Chennai Nelliappa Nattuvanar, two renowned nattuvannars, were sons-in-law

⁴⁹ <https://alchetron.com/Thanjavur-Quartet#->

and disciples of Mahadeva Nattuvanar, the son of Sivanandam. The compositions of the Tanjore Quartet constitute a substantial body of work; numerous Varnams, Javalis, and Padams are typically credited to them, usually without individual differentiation. Although they are currently frequently performed in Ragamalika, Shabdams were primarily composed in Kamboji. They created many well-known and often danced Thillanas, Tanas, and PadaVarnams. Their initial composition was tuned in Mayamalavagoulai, just like their Guru Muthuswami Dikshithar, which makes it unique. Additionally, several of their works have Ponniah Pillai and vice versa incorrectly credited.

A few of the compositions attached to the Tanjore quartet

Shanmukhakauthuvam (Shanmukhapriya - Adi)

Jatiswaram (Saveri - Rupaka)

Varnam: Sakhiyeindavelaiyil (Anandabhairavi - Adi)

Varnam: Sarasaninnu (Kapi)

Varnam: MannaviChekona (Shankarabharanam - Adi)

Chelinenetlu – Paras

Satileni – Purvikalyani

AmbaNeelambari – Neelambari

Muttavaddura – SaveriJavali

Bhakta palana – Keeravani

Mayateetha – Mayamalavagowla

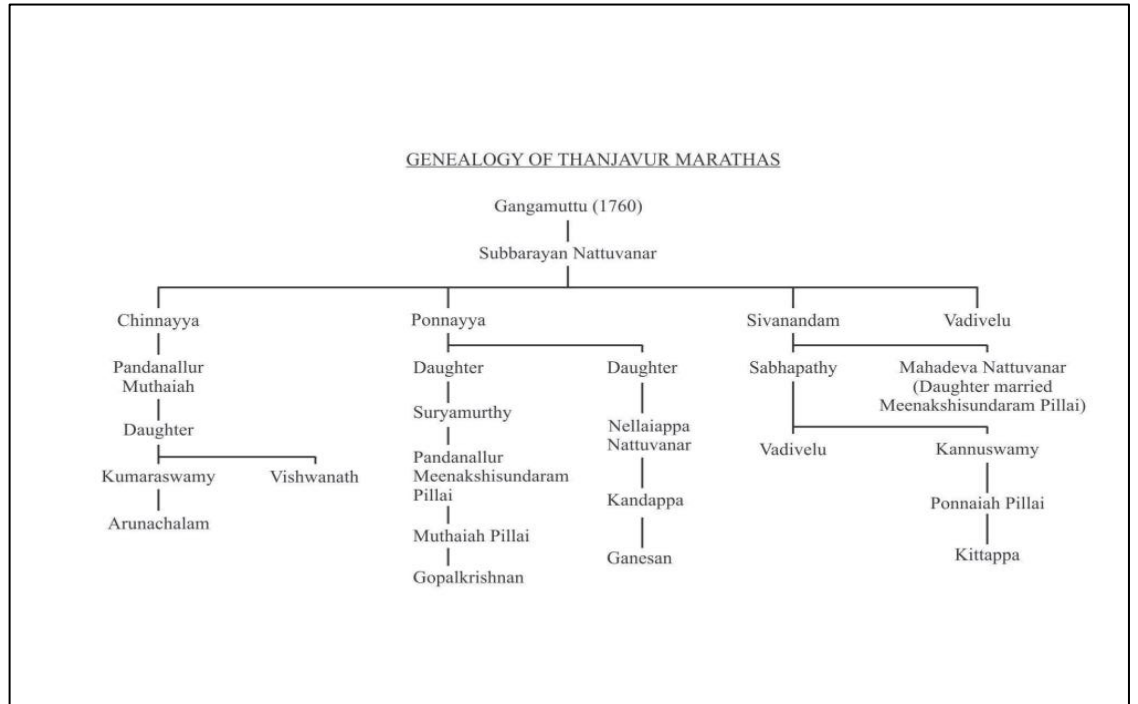
Gokulambadishabdam

Thillana – Mandari

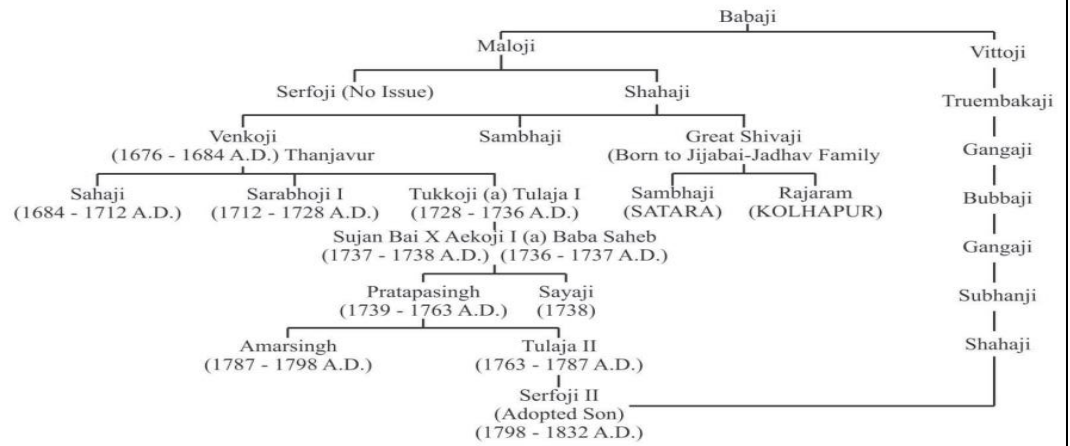
List of kritis of a margam of the tanjore quartet

1. *Thodayamangalam/Pushpanjali/Mallari/Kautuvam/Allaripu (in one of the 5 main Jatis)*
2. *Jatiswaram*

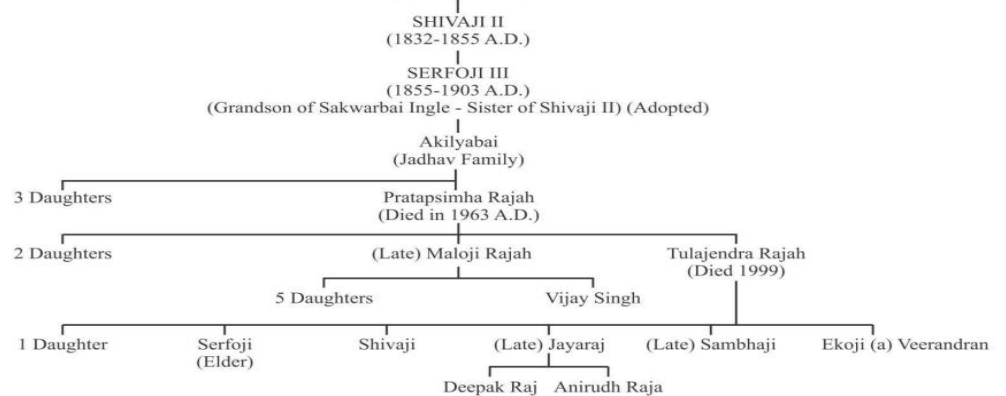
3. *Shabdam*
4. *Varnam/Swarajati*
5. *Padam/Javali*
6. *Astapadi*
7. *Kirtanam*
8. *Thillana*
9. *Shlokam, Mangalam*



APPENDIX I
GENEALOGY OF THANJAVUR MARATHA ROYALS



APPENDIX II
GENEALOGY OF SERFOJI II
(1798-1832 A.D.)



Dancing before colonialism in India was ingrained in the nation's social, religious, and cultural fabric. It included various traditions, each with its own unique components and traits, and was essential to maintaining and transmitting India's rich cultural history. Their mystic aspects have roots in Indian culture, history, and mythology and include ritual and sacred significance, costumes and jewelry, rhythmic percussion, narrative storytelling, and regional diversity. During the colonial era, Bharatanatyam underwent alterations relating to feudality, royalty, and, ultimately, orality. This metamorphosis involved several important qualities and innovations. The key characteristics that influenced Bharatanatyam during this transitional period are as follows:

- i. **Temple to Court Patronage:** Bharatanatyam's function changed as Indian civilization did. During the Chola dynasty, the art form moved from temple rites to royal courts from the ninth to the thirteenth century. Bharatanatyam acquired patronage from kings and nobles, and it was more widely accepted in the royal courts. The dance developed throughout time and featured refined and sophisticated features.
- ii. **Patronage and Secularisation Changes:** During the colonial era, patronage shifted from surroundings focused on temples to more secular ones. The colonial authorities and the new elite class inspired the secularisation of Bharatanatyam. It consequently shed its mainly religious and feudal associations.
- iii. **Transition to Orality:** Although Bharatanatyam initially changed from being a dance focused on temples to one with royal and colonial elements, it kept its connection to oral traditions. The traditional repertoire of the art form's songs, lyrics, and stories was preserved by continuing oral transmission of these materials.

2.3.2 Bharatanatyam in the Colonial Period

According to legend, India's ancient and medieval eras began and ended between the fifth and sixth centuries A.D.⁵⁰ Beginning during this time, specific

⁵⁰ R.S. Sharma, 'Problem of transition from Ancient to Medieval in Indian The Indian Historical Review' (henceforth I.H.R), Delhi, Vol. I, No. 1.

economic circumstances were critical in opening the door for new political, social, and religious developments. Early in the Middle Ages, a feudal economic structure began to take shape, and its most significant aspect was the system of extensive land transfers to various types of political, military, and religious personnel who had previously received monetary payments.

The situations of many nations in our world that we have labelled “third-world countries” are due to imperialism and colonialism. However, a closer examination reveals that similar elements have also permeated the colonization victims’ culture and way of life. The Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British were among the European colonial powers that exerted influence and control over India throughout this time, which roughly runs from the 16th century to the middle of the 20th century. These colonial nations significantly influenced many facets of Indian culture, such as dance styles like Bharatanatyam. Bharatanatyam dates to between 300 BCE and 300 CE, according to some colonial Indologists and contemporary authors who claim it is a descendant of an old Devadasi (literally, servant females of Devas) civilization. The lack of direct literary or archaeological evidence has made modern researchers doubt this notion. Early colonial Indologists claimed that the dancing girls depicted in historical sculpture and writings were courtesans and prostitutes, but these claims have since been refuted. They also depict dancing girls and temple rooms specifically for women. According to Daves Soneji, ‘a careful analysis of the available data indicates that courtesan dancing dates back to the late 16th or early 17th century, during the Tamil Nadu Nayaka period, and is a feature of the modern age’.

Despite being an art form, Bharatanatyam was not exempt from colonialism’s stigmatization and denigration. The British effectively divided the castes throughout the Victorian era and set them against one another. Similar to how white supremacy is one of the leading systems in the United States, the caste system in India is sometimes used as an excuse to discriminate against members of different castes. This harmful system, which tragically is no closer to disintegrating than when it was initially founded since it is so embedded in Indian society, was strengthened by the United Kingdom’s imperialist control over India (formerly known as Bharat). Colonialism also impacted

Bharatanatyam, even though the British wiped out the Indian population and used up all of the country's natural riches.

Devadasi culture during the colonial period

In Tamil, the words “Devaradiyal” or “Devadasi” both imply “servant of God.” They were dancers who dedicated their lives to serving God in temples. In-depth research reveals that the method was standard in Asia, Africa, and Europe. It is thought that this institution originated in Mesopotamia⁵¹. It was mentioned in the first Babylonian dynasty as early as 2090 BC. According to Khokhar, the studies reveal that the Indus Valley Civilization in India is the system's original home. Devadasis were employed as part of the religious services in the temples. Temples were a crucial component of medieval life. During this time, temples grew to be enormous organizations with extensive lands, properties, and a large workforce of both religious and secular functionaries. The number of ceremonies and festivals held at the temple increased as its financial resources grew. Devadasis' participation in the temple was financially advantageous to both the state and the temple. The Devadasi dance presentation in the temple or at the royal court also had a clear structure. The music was needed to evoke a sense of devotion and good fortune, just like the dancer's ritual performance in the temple glorifying the resident temple god. Mangala-isai or Mangala-vadyam were the names given to this. The custom of playing the Nagasvaram and Taval is still a crucial part of Tamil Nadu's temple culture. Music plays a significant role in temple rites.

Mythological mention of Devadasis

According to Khokhar, the Rig Veda contains the first reference to a dancing girl, where the goddess of Usha (dawn) is likened to a sumptuously attired dancing girl. The pumchalis, often called the sacred courtesans, were significant figures in the rites. They were a gift from the kings to the Rishis. They were referred to as Gandharva-grihitas in the Atharva Veda and were said to possess Gandharva's traits. The ladies' court attendants who assist the king in grooming and entertaining him are mentioned in the Upanishads. Tantric literature holds

⁵¹ Mesopotamia is a historical region of West Asia situated within the Tigris, Euphrates river system, in the northern part of the Fertile Crescent.

that women and religion are inextricably linked. In the esoteric rites of the Tantra, courtesans were crucial. According to Nāṭyaśāstra, Bharata required female players and dancers when he was asked to direct a dance drama to appease the Gods. As a result, Brahma produced Apsaras, the dancing nymphs that served as the devadasis' forebears. It eventually became one of the most essential socio-religious organizations in medieval Tamil Nadu.

The literature and inscriptions shed light on this system's origins, expansion, and evolution. The Sanskrit author Kautilya, who lived in the fourth century BC, references the Devadasis, who perform religious duties. King Ashoka's cave inscriptions at Ramgarh mention a little girl named Satmuka, a godly servant. In Kashmiri literature from the 12th century, devadasis are mentioned. It says that King Jalanka, the son of Ashoka, presented 100 of his country's musically and dance-talented girls to the Siva temple. Rupinika was a dancer who worked in the Mathura temple. The Somnath Temple in Saurashtra had a large dancing female population. Many girls served as devadasis in the temples of Assam and Bengal. In his writings, Kalidasa mentions the dancing girls' ankle bells ringing at the Mahakali temple in Ujjain. The Jain Temple in Karnataka employed Patras (dancing girls), according to an 8th-century AD citation. The dancers devoted to temples in Orissa were known as Maharis. At the Sangam Age (c. 600–1800 AD), this practice was common in Tamil Nadu in one way or another, gaining popularity at that time. It is believed to be clear from historical accounts that dance and music played a significant role during the Sangam era and the Chola empire. The first recorded accounts of Devadasis date back to the Sangam period, which arose in the second century, demonstrating the existence of Bharatanatyam. Kovalan, the main character of the well-known Tamil epic Silappathikaram, written during the Sangam era, is the son of a successful businessman. Madhavi, Kovalan's mistress, was a Devadasi woman treated with the same respect and deference as Kannagi, Kovalan's wife. Madhavi was treated honorably even though violating monogamy was considered wicked (Shankar, 1994). In writings by Kalidasa, ankle bells of dancing women are referenced at the Mahakali temple in Ujjain. An 8th-century AD text claims that the Karnataka Jain Temple hired patras (dancing females). In Orissa, dancers who performed for temples were referred

to as Maharis. This custom was widespread in Tamil Nadu throughout the Sangam Age (c. 600–1800 AD), and it rose in popularity at that time. The Devadasi system has a very lengthy history, as is evident. Depending on the local environment and culture, it was practiced in various ways around the world. The Siva Temples in India seem to be where it is more visible. Following that, it won favor in Vishnu temples as well.

The Devadasi system spread throughout Tamil Nadu with the help of the liberal assistance of the Cholas and the later Pandyas around the end of the 5th and beginning of the 6th centuries, when the Pallavas and Pandyas, who were influenced by the Bhakti movement and Agamic tradition, were in power. Despite suffering during the Muslim invasions, the institution flourished again under South India's Vijayanagar and Maratha rulers. It persisted in this area until the start of the 20th century.

The mysterious devadasi occupies a crucial place in the history of Bharatanatyam. Devadasis, typically organized in guilds called melams, have worked as temple servants and secular courtesans from the fifteenth to the early twentieth centuries. On the one hand, women in these cultures had some social agency because they were free from patrifocal familial standards. They were literate at a time in history when the majority of South Indian women weren't; they interacted sexually with upper-caste men, and they lived in matrilineal houses. These documents prove that courtesans were frequently traded as commodities with the court's assistance. In other circumstances, as the mistresses or 'second wives' of South Indian aristocracy, they were involved in a broader realm of slavery centered on satisfying male wants. Vocal social reform campaigns in South India started in the middle of the 19th century, intending to free communities of professional dance women from their inherited performance customs. For the next 100 years, their non-marital sexuality, which reformers mistook for prostitution, was used to justify the criminalization of their lifestyle. The Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act, enacted in 1947, officially prohibited devadasis's social, religious, and aesthetic practices (Sonaji, pg. xii).

Before the arrival of the British, India's society was divided along economic and labor lines. The difficulty of understanding India's intricate social structure continued to be a significant issue in colonial and postcolonial politics. For instance, William Methwold, an English writer of the 17th century, used the term "cast" to refer to what he called "tribes or lineages"; the cast is derived from the same root word as chaste, Casta, in Portuguese. He included Boga Waro as part of his broad classification of tribes, which also had Bramene (Brahmin), Committy (Komatti), and Campo Waro (Telugu: Kapu Warn), and referred to them as "Whoores Tribes."

According to Sanjay Subrahmanyam, the Orientalist, the Western perspective feeds on the notion that Boga Waro is nothing more than whores. The more significant issue, however, is "the ambiguity with which caste is used as a framework under which to organize society" (Subrahmanyam, 1990). Antonio Schorer and other authors used endogamy and hereditary occupation, or passing a trade down from father to son, as a different idea to explain caste (ibid.). Interestingly, the Devadasi community practiced the hereditary system through birth and mobility by adoption and assimilation, making them both inside and outside these caste markers of endogamy. They became a community as a result, making it more challenging to categorize them strictly according to caste. As early as the 10th century, devadasis musicians, dance instructors, and instrumentalists were included in the wider Vellalar (agrarian) caste. They had a significant role in the caste system's hierarchy of Kaikkolars (artisans and weavers), serving a variety of socioeconomic functions

Questions are inevitably raised during the system study. They could be as follows:

1. Did the Devadasis constitute a distinct caste in society?
2. Were they born Devadasis?
3. Was the system inherited?
4. Were there any more causes for the system?

The responses to the questions above reveal that the dancing girls were from various castes, including Lingayats⁵², Telugu Banajigas, Gangdlkara Okkaligas, and Kurubas (shepherds). Therefore, it is evident that there was no distinct Devadasi caste; instead, the girls who entered that profession came from several castes.

They did, however, constitute a standard class in society with their etiquette codes, inheritance laws, and panchayats⁵³. A girl's circumstances made her a Devadasi rather than her birth. To ensure a healthy delivery, for instance, expecting mothers from different castes would frequently swear to commit their child, if a girl, to the service of God. In other cases, the oldest-born girls in various tribes would be consecrated similarly. Thus, a line of hereditary Devadasis would be descended from the family's oldest-born daughters. We may observe the system in the Kalkolans, who are primarily found in the Chamarajanagar district's Kollegal Taluk. According to custom, when the Tamil-speaking people of Kanjivaram became issueless, the group's ancestors prayed to the goddess and promised that should they be blessed with sons and daughters, they would dedicate the oldest girl from each family to such service as music and dancing at the time of mangalarthi in the temple to the accompaniment of violin and drum [mridung] played by the male members of the group. They had faith that their prayers had been heard and their promises had been kept. So, we have a group of Devadasis that could be considered hereditary.

Devadasi women had the right to dedicate their daughters to temples from the moment they were born. Between the ages of six and nine, they performed this activity. Girls entered the system through a temple marriage ritual when they were bound with a Tali around their neck in front of the temple's idol but not to a male but to a sword or a god⁵⁴ instead, or occasionally by a priest from their caste⁵⁵. The male residents of that hamlet supported

⁵² Nanjundayya H.V. and Anantha Krishna Iyer L.K.: *The Mysore Tribes and Castes*, Volume IV, [Mysore: 1931], p. 423.

⁵³ Hidananda Murthy M: *Grammena*, [Bangalore: 1977], p. 79.

⁵⁴ Sheshadri Iyer: "The Devadasis of India" in *Quarterly Journal of Mythic Society*: Volume XIII, p.689-691.

⁵⁵ "Devadasi System Jayakarnataka", 1952, p. 249.

themselves by providing music for the women performing dances and instructing young girls and boys in music and dance. They were known as Nattuvanars⁵⁶, a social class based on occupation rather than caste. We all understand that the groom ties the “Mangala Sutra.” The bride, however, is required by Hindu tradition to wear two “A fangaia Sutras,” one tied by the groom and the other presented by the girl’s mother. Probably, the Devadasis linked that “Mangala Sutra.” Tying the Mangal Sutra would prevent the bride’s widowhood because the Devadasis are considered Nitya Sumangalies, or people who never become widows. Due to their higher exposure than other women in society, these ladies’ mastery of the fine arts and understanding of the Catholic faith are likely to have contributed to their social status due to their economic situation, primarily a result of their landholdings.

The three-day wedding ritual would cost money, which would come from the temple treasury. The girl would permanently have the temple’s emblem inked on her upper arm, capping off the wedding ritual. After that, the young woman would perform to showcase her talent. Salangai Puja, Gajja Puja, and Arangetram are performed by her if she is a dancer. A Kutchery Arangetram, or formal professional concert, will be given by her if she is a musician. Although it is typical for the priest to have first dibs on the daughter, the girl is frequently supported by a wealthy merchant from the community. The Pottu (the bride) is taken away and held in a secure location until she reaches adulthood, which is followed by a lavish feast. She would learn the Panchakshara if she belonged to a Siva temple, and Om Namo Narayana if she belonged to a Vishnu temple. Her teacher, the Guru, would get gifts of flowers, fruit, cash, etc. She developed her artistic talent with much help from the Guru. It is made public after she reaches puberty. A ten-day festival would be held to honor this occasion. The priest gives her a sword or spear, which would be used in a traditional wedding. With this emblem, she would go to her own chamber and declare her connection with God. She would conduct her official dance *arangetram* at the temple and then offer the Kumba Aarthi to the goddess. She gave public performances for the entire ten days while donning various outfits. This tradition has been upheld in several illustrious temples by legendary dancers. To name a few, Sekizhar’s

⁵⁶ Dubois Abbe J: Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, [Oxford: 1906], p. 588

(12th century A.D.) Periapuranam praises Paravai Nachiar, Sangali Nachiyar, and Manikka Nachiar of the Tiruvarur temple.

South India was entirely overtaken by the Saivaite and Vaishnavaites' spiritual revolution between the 7th and 9th centuries A.D. Saivaite Nayanmars and Vaishnavaites Alvars promoted the Bhakti movement alongside music and dance. Music and dance effectively spread religious doctrine to the general public. The agamas outline the music and dance ceremonies that take place at temples. The Agamic and Bhakti movement significantly altered society. Devotees were proud to dedicate their daughters to the temple ceremonies to serve God and receive a particular way of salvation. Princes, priests, and the general populace were persuaded by their fervor and determination, and they joined them in their quest to bring about a socio-religious revolution in the society. In Tamil Nadu, this alteration gradually sparked the growth of the devadasi's community. The responsibilities of the devadasis are outlined in the Agamas. Helping the priest perform the temple ceremonies was regarded as a highly significant responsibility. Neglecting to follow rituals was seen to be the beginning of bad luck. The well-being of the devotees was thought to depend on proper worship. There was a broad conviction in the system's benefits since the Devadasi cult had social acceptance. Strong adherents of these Agamic customs, the Pallava rulers who governed South India in the eighth century A.D., set the groundwork for ceremonial worship in the temples.

According to the Agamas, the Devadasis' responsibilities aligned with the daily time cycle. The Devadasis participated in each of the four religious rituals that were conducted in the temple. The temple was cleaned, songs and dances were performed in honor of God, and the lamps were ignited at the appointed times. Only the devadasis in the temple will light the pot-shaped lamp during the Kumbha Aarti. It was required to dance during this Aarti to the sounds of the nadaswaram and tavil (drums). Rudraganikas or Rudrakanyas were the names of the female performers at Siva temples. The Agamas specify that Shuddha nr̥tta be carried out throughout rites. Rudraganikas were skilled at executing Shuddhanrttam. The two classes of Rudraganikas, as well as their origins and responsibilities in the temple, are mentioned by Kamikagamas.

Their families were referred to as Rudrakanigakulam, and they were thought to be the offspring of Apsaras.

As early as the 10th century, devadasis, musicians, dance instructors, and instrumentalists, were included in the wider Vellalar (agrarian) caste. They had a significant role in the hierarchy of Kaikkolars (artisans/weavers) under the caste system for several socioeconomic reasons. The devadasis practiced matrilineal kinship. To obtain mobility, any member of society from any other caste might also pledge their sons or daughters to the system. Despite being caste-based, they continued to be a community with opportunities for social advancement. In that regard, it included some aspects of democracy (non-exclusivity). However, individuals born into the community, the biological sons and daughters of devadasis or those of nattuvanars, also had the option of hereditary lineage membership. However, persons born into this community did not necessarily inherit the profession or line of work of court or temple service.

Both the monarchy and nobles regarded girls being dedicated to temples as praiseworthy during the medieval era. According to Chola tradition, the monarch, queen, and their offspring were supposed to have long lives because of this. According to inscriptions, the Tanjore Brihadeswara temple received the devotion of 400 dancing females. An inscription at Siddalingamantapam shows that musicians read sacred melodies, and dancers performed their choreography and hereditary duties. According to this inscription, the custom of dancing before the processional deity should continue after the performer's passing, either by her descendant or a skilled dancer from her family. If no one is competent, the nyayathar (temple supervisors) may choose a suitable candidate to participate. Symbols were used to identify the dancing girls as belonging to the temple. During the reign of Kulotunga I, the temple dancers in the Banapuram Siva temple were marked with sulams (a Siva emblem).

According to inscriptions, the top performer was known as talaikoli (prima donna). After various rituals, the dancer would receive Talaikol, the sacred stick that stands for Jayanta. The gifted prizewinner is now a talaikoli. Classification and categorization based on merit have also gained popularity.

Mummudi Chola Talaikoli is mentioned in an inscription that dates to the time of Parantaka I (10th century A.D.). It is clear that trade associations like nanadesi had taken an interest in promoting the art in addition to the royal court and had given the title of “best dancer” to Asnanadesitalaikoli. Temples took a particular interest in promoting the work and bestowing onto the creator their own preferred titles. For instance, the temple Iyarappan has long been associated with the term Iyaran Sundara Talaikoliiyara. It was given to rudraganikayar, who did the sokkanṛtta in front of Lord Shiva (sokkan), according to a commentary in Takkayagapparani. The skilled dancer was referred to as talaikolarivai, and the professional dance master was given the highest accolade, tallaikolasan. To go before their names, the dancers were given titles like nakkan. In the court of Rajaraja I (A.D. 1001), a dancer by the name of Nakkan Thillaialagiyar, also known as Panchavan Mahadeviyar, held a prestigious position. His son Rajendra I constructed a pallipadai (temple) in her honor.

Tradition and Inclusiveness of Devadasi Paramparā

The Matsyapurana, which was composed somewhere during the Gupta era, contains the first mythological evidence of the devadasi system. According to the myth, thousands of Lord Krishna’s wives were kidnapped, seduced, and soiled by the dasas after the Yaduvamsis were destroyed during the devasura sangrama, leading to their conversion to prostitution. They once questioned Dalbya, a wise man, regarding their obligations (dharma). The educated sage encouraged them to take up prostitution as their occupation and reside in state capitals and temples⁵⁷. The kings and princes, they were assured, were just like their husbands, and for a fee, they could also appease others. Interestingly, if these women visited the Brahmanas on Sunday to satiate their sexual urges, they were expected to extend special favors to them. Some Puranas even advocate for buying gorgeous ladies to devote to the Sun temple⁵⁸.

According to the eighth-century Jain text Kuvalayamala, devadasis, known as Vilasinis, were affiliated with the Avanti temple. In addition to performing musical concerts, they were tasked with acting as morchals or

⁵⁷ Matsya Mahapurana (Hindi tr. by R.P. Sastri Tripathi), Prayag, Ch. 70, p. 187.

⁵⁸ Padmapurana, Sristikhanda, cf. A. S. Altekar, The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization (3rd edn.), Delhi, 1962, p. 183.

chauris and holding umbrellas⁵⁹. It also describes the musical performance of the dancing females in the temple to the sounds of the drums⁶⁰. Huen-Tsang had observed numerous dancing females at Multan's Sun Temple in the seventh century⁶¹. The data above implies that the practice originated in Madhya Pradesh, in northern India, during the Gupta era and then expanded to other regions of the nation. This terrible practice was used to the fullest extent possible with the help of Puranic mythology, which supplied ideological support. The Puranic tales and stories were once again depicted in sculpture and painting to make the Hindu religious system appealing to the general populace. The South followed the same pattern as the North, where temple-centered bhakti led to the conversion of Brahmanism into Hinduism. The Puranic philosophy of bhakti was pre-located to the South through the temple centered Brahman settlements, where the study of holy and quasi-sacred literature was taken up as a religious duty⁶².

Devadasi system was introduced in the south along with bhakti ideology, and by the seventh century, devadasis were active in the temples of the Tamil nation. Sambandar, a seventh-century Saiva saint, observed dance and music at Saiva temples during his lifetime. We know Sambandar's references to the practice from the *Devaram*, a collection of Saiva hymns. The religious practises are described in the *Devaram* hymns. A lot of them discuss songs sung in front of deities. The songs were written so that they might be performed by a group of people, some of whom would be playing instruments, and others would be dancing⁶³.

The dance that the devadasis performed was called Kootu, Cinna Melam, Sadir, and Dasi-attam, especially in Tamil-speaking regions. These names were used to identify the dancing style that the people performed socially or ritualistically at temples or courts. Apart from Tamil, their dance repertoires freely incorporated dances from the Maharashtrian, Sanskrit, Telugu, Persian, Islamic, Christian, British, Dutch, Danish, English, and French cultures. They

⁵⁹ M.R. Kale (ed.), *The Meghaduta of Kalidasa*, (8th edn.), Delhi, 1974, *Purvamegha*, vs. 38.

⁶⁰ *Kuvalayamala*, Vol. I, p. 50, cf. Motichandra, *op.cit.*, p.208.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 209

⁶² Thomas Waiters, *On Yuan Chuang's Travels in India*, Vol. II, London, 1905, p. 254

⁶³ Narayanan, *op.cit.*, p. 197

also encouraged cultural assimilation. Even though they were firmly rooted in the Tamil (Desi) culture, their music, dance, and costumes were profoundly multicultural in nature. Sadir was a democratic, secular art, and its democracy was ingrained in its structure and repertoire.

India engaged in passionate discussions on the morality of the female performing class during the early 20th century, all the while battling for independence from the British and civil liberties. During that time, reform ideals were also developed, including the desire to rid society of passionate women and prostitutes and democratize the arts so everyone could study and practice them. However, the devadasi actually became entangled in a labyrinth of conflicting political goals. Everyone, including missionary colonialists, Tamil Dravidianists, Hindu-Sanskritists, and nationalists, jumped on the Devadasi bandwagon to further their political objectives. As a result, the women were reduced to a means to an end and seen as the core of the issue⁶⁴.

However, the so-called Crusaders' organization provided support and acceptance for the community's male members. These men serve as new, non-hereditary performers' guides to the Sadir art. However, these new customers (learners and patrons) were eager to see this appropriation under a new name, Bharatanatyam. They were taught the existing repertoires of music and dance. These new students and supporters did not invent or develop the term "Bharatanatyam."⁶⁵ However, Bharatanatyam deprived women of their inherited privilege, source of income, and vocation by using a term that had not yet gained popularity and by ceremonially renaming the dance style under a nation-state social reform effort. It was handed over to patriarchy, presenting it as a liberal, democratic, and patronizing cultural identity. It was handed over to

⁶⁴ See Bayly (1999) for a discussion on how caste has been perpetuated by postcolonial politics. Many of its so-called traditional markers took shape as part of the regional state-building exercise. Also see Ganesh (2015) for a specific discussion on the caste politics of Tamil Nadu, the Dravidian movement and its impact on the Prohibition of Dedication Act, 1947.

⁶⁵ There are references in the compositions of Purandaradasa, the 15th century composer, where he mentions the term Bharatanatyam 'Rambe Urvashi Bharatanatyagalu...' Therefore, the term is not new. However, the term was not in use when it was merely reintroduced in the 20th century to replace Sadir. The other association with Bharatanatyam is attributed to Sage Bharata and his work on dramaturgy. This new name implied the direct spiritual connection of the dance form to Natya Sastra in a very covert manner, disengaging it from its immediate social context.

patriarchy, presenting it as a liberal, democratic, and patronizing cultural identity.

The “respectable” women of patriarchy were given this art form, which they used to enhance their social identities and play decorative roles in their families and communities rather than pursue it as a career or source of income. It is praised for democratizing art to assist in accomplishing this to the exclusion of an entire population. Has Bharatanatyam, though, been more inclusive due to this democratic approach? Since this reform, it has been transferred into the hands of an exclusive class order, namely the top and middle classes, which include members of several castes united by some shared or similar economic factor. Through its repertoire, Sadir demonstrates its inherent secular relevance through relics of the past. This social reform was a nationalistic “classicalizing” process and a prime example of slant socialism because of its relationship with female hereditary performers, which was despised.

Transitions of Devadasi Paramparā

Devadasi and their artistic presentation were typically inseparable. The devadasi’s capacity to perform was crucial to their way of life. According to Frederique Apffel Marglin, the dance was highly similar to devadasi⁶⁶. However, the early 20th century’s abolition and stigmatization processes called into doubt the devadasi women’s existence. Strong opposition to the Devadasi system led to widespread disapproval of Devadasi women’s societal roles. Reformers, radicals, missionaries, medical professionals, journalists, and social workers believed that the practice severely threatened the community and society. The dasi and her art could not be accommodated by the moral and sexual economy of nationalist modernity, according to Sundar Kaali, an art historian⁶⁷.

When we investigate the reasons for the decline in the status of the Devadasis, we find that the first factor was the 1831 handover of authority from Krishna Raja Wodeyar III to the British, which harmed both the Devadasi

⁶⁶ Marglin, Frederique Apffel. *Wives of the God- King: The Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985: 28.

⁶⁷ Kaali, Sundar. “Disciplining the Dasi: Cintamanai and the Politics of a New Sexual Economy.” *Bioscope* 4, no. 1. (2013): 52.

system and society at large. The King's loss of authority caused his court to deteriorate, which led to a decline in the status accorded to the Devadasis. Lack of governmental influence and accountability resulted in the creation of a group of heedless, pleasure-seeking feudal lords. They used the Devadasi system as a useful tool to satisfy their sexual desires. Devadasis were eventually reduced to being prostitutes.

The artistic qualities of the Devadasi dance performance were fine with the Self-Respecters. In addition, they considered the exploitation of the feminine body through the performance. Devotees' minds will be disturbed by devadasi's performance during the puja hours, according to Kudi Arasu.⁶⁸ Younger dasis were reportedly singing and dancing during the wedding procession for payment, according to Kuppusami, a journalist for Kudi Arasu.⁶⁹ However, they did not consider modesty or social propriety, and their performance attempted to seduce the audience. Kudi Arasu criticized the behavior of devadasi. It was claimed that although the devadasis were devoted to performing dances in temples, they invited the devotees to their homes and stole their money by dressing nicely and baring their bodies.⁷⁰ These types of performances entice our young pupils and damage the reputation of the nation.⁷¹

The attitude of the masses towards polygamy and loose relationships between men and women was changing due to the influence of Western education, Western ideas, and the emergence of a national spirit in India, and the princely and Southern parts of India could not avoid its effects. Over time, there was a tendency to judge persons with extramarital affairs negatively. Social reformers in various parts of India initiated the arti-nautch movement, or movement against the system of girls entertaining men with dance and music, in the late 19th century to stop the decline of the Devadasi system. This long-standing practice was actually outlawed by law. On the occasion of Sri Bhoganandishwara Swamy's automobile festival in Nandi in February 1892,

⁶⁸ Swamikalum Devadiyalkalum (Gods and prostitutes) (in Tamil). 04/09/ 1927. Kudi Arasu.

⁶⁹ Kuppusami, P. Bharathamadhavin Puththirikal Nam Sagotharikalallaraa? (The daughter of our mother country are they not our sister?) (in Tamil). 14/ 04/1929. Kudi Arasu.

⁷⁰ Engum Suyamariyathai Sathyakirakam (The Non-Violence Protests for Self-Respect Everywhere) (in Tamil). 06/11/1927. Kudi Arasu.

⁷¹ Kuppusami, P. Bharathamadhavin Puththirikal Nam Sagotharikalallaraa? ((The daughter of our mother country are they not our sister?) (in Tamil). 14/ 04/1929. Kudi Arasu.

the government eliminated the employment of professional women due to the social degradation of Devadasis.⁷² The muzarai superintendent and secretary instructed that the allowance due to the dancing girls born on the temple establishment should be continued during their lives and that the vacancies left by their deaths should not be filled during the revision of the tasdik patti of Sri Srikanteshwara Swamy Temple at Nanjungud in 1899.

However, they were not permitted to perform service in the temple.⁷³ Whatever the original purpose of the institution of Devadasis in temples, it was noted in the government order of April 1909 that the action taken to bar the Devadasis from all types of service in temples was fully justified by the state of immorality in which these temple servants were found.⁷⁴ The government forbade the performance of the gejjie-pooje ceremony, or ceremonial introducing of a female to that profession, in the muzarai temples in 1910 because it was closely connected to women's dedication to the prostitution trade. But many who had followed such customs could only give them up after a while.

Tulasi, the sister of Hanumantha, a worker at the Sri Anjaneya Swami Temple in Mulbagal, filed a petition with registration number D.728 dated January 28, 1909, asking for permission to perform gejjie-pooje to her sister Lakshmi in that same temple.⁷⁵ However, under the Government Order of 1910, the Government rejected approval.⁷⁶ Therefore, it is evident from the restrictions mentioned above that by the end of the 19th century, the institution of Devadasi had degenerated and had turned into an immoral system.

The uncommon social tradition mentioned above permitted: i) a specific type of woman who served in an exclusive religious office. The rigors of domestic asceticism in the form of the widow and of spiritual asceticism in the form of the Jain and Buddhist nun were tempered for the devadasi by the conscious theological rejection of the harsh, puritanical ascetic ideal for Women in the Bhakti sects; ii) a particular community or "caste" that was a necessary

⁷² U. Kamath Suryanath (Ed): Karnataka State Gazetteer, Ibid, p. 11,766.

⁷³ U. Kamath Suryanath (Ed): Karnataka State Gazetteer, Ibid.

⁷⁴ D.V. Gundappa: Kalopasakaru , Op. Lit., p. 19-20.

⁷⁵ R.K. RajUi (Chief Editor): Selection from the Records of the Mysore Palace, Volume 1, Divisional Archives Office [Mysore: 1993], p. 161.

⁷⁶ R.K. Raju, (Chief Editor): Selections, Ibid.

corollary to the institutionalization of both celibacy and sexuality in the devadasi's person. The devadasi was the progenitor of a relatively distinct and specialized caste of temple artisans whose internal structure showed how pragmatism, competition, and economics encouraged intelligent, professional, and creative activity.

The advances that autonomous female professionals brought to the community contrasted favorably with the more traditional male profession, which was also worse economically. The masculine component of Hinduism is seen as "passive," and the female component is "active," according to the abstract sectarian beliefs of that religion. Cosmologies appear in this context to be validated on a sociological level. The characteristics of the devadasi institution that were most repugnant to the reform lobbyists, missionaries, doctors, journalists, administrators, and social workers, who were heavily affected by Christian morality and religion were precisely these ones. The devadasi system was presented as prostitution to promote the moral repugnance of the target populace for political purposes. It must be noted that reform efforts had ideological benefits for those who backed imperialism because of its "civilizing" role. The movement calling for eliminating all rituals and practices that saw young girls make the vow of devadasi in Hindu temples was initially framed as an anti-Nautch campaign. The smear campaign that was to come was hinted at by the very use of the name "nautch," which is a distortion of the Hindi word "nach" and was used to describe a lower class of northern dancing girls.

The anti-Nautch supporters, mostly educated professionals, and Hindus, started attacking the devadasis dance in 1892, using their rhetorical and journalistic abilities. If the wealthy did not follow the request to boycott the dance during private gatherings, then collective public action took the form of rallies and marches to their homes. The Viceroy of India and the Governor of Madras were given memoranda at the official level requesting legislative action and a ban on the dance. They were informed that these performances were "... of women who as everybody knows are prostitutes and their Excellencies hereafter at least must know to be such..." The government finally consented to take sides after intense pressure and criticism from the missionaries and lobbyists, and by 1911, a despatch was released, calling for widespread action

to be done against these performances. Before formal law was passed against temple dedication in 1947, the Anti-Nautch campaign's fervor completely eliminated the sadir and its secular performance.

Contrarily, a movement calling for the "revival" of the devadasi dance appeared almost simultaneously with the reform movement. Since the beginning of the anti-Nautch movement, concerns have been expressed about the ban's potential impact on the classical dance performed exclusively by devadasis. However, if we may ask, the devadasi's dance was a sacred tradition that needed to be preserved, so why did the devadasi have to leave when the legislation, which was justified on the grounds of anti-prostitution, was only applied to her specifically? Some solutions can be found by looking at the dance's colonial setting.

Their politicization led to concurrent, equally vociferous reform and revival groups centering on the devadasi dance. Their organizational structure reflected the so-called "reformist" and "extremist" approach that marked native political engagement in the second half of colonial rule. The anti-Nautch movement had a close relationship with the Dravidian movement's communal politics by the 1920s. As part of the broader Self-Respect campaign launched by Ramaswami Naicker in 1925, eradicating the practice of female dedication developed into a potent political and legal cause supported by the Backward non-Brahmins.

The Self-Respect Movement advocated for limiting the devadasi women's performance. The Isai Vellalar Youth Conference in Chidambaram passed resolutions in 1928, declaring the Devadasi musical system to be inferior and urging its modification.⁷⁷ In 1930, the Women's Conference urged people to refrain from attending nautch gatherings and urged devadasi performers to forsake their demeaning line of work, such as prostitution.⁷⁸ The musicians and other artists were encouraged to maintain dignity by the Musical Conference of

⁷⁷ Isai Vellala Ilainarkal Manadu (The Youth Conference of Isai Vellalar) (in Tamil). 04/11/1928. Kudi Arasu.

⁷⁸ Mathar Mahanattil Niraiveriya Thermanangal (The Decisions which made in the Women's Conference) (in Tamil). 18/05/1930. Kudi Arasu.

Erode, which took place on May 12 and 13, 1930.⁷⁹ These performances denigrate our nation and entice our young kids.⁸⁰ Women turned to prostitution in the name of the deity.⁸¹

The men of the Devadasi group were given a potent ideology by the aggressive anti-Brahminism and anti-ritualism of the Backward Classes Movement of the South that allowed them to rise above the humiliation of the Anti-Nautch campaign and fight for dominance both within the family and in the larger political society. It was entirely predictable that the Brahmin-dominated Congress and those in favor of Indian cultural and political nationalism would push for the revival of the dance in a more ‘correct’ society given the increased politicization of Brahmin-non-Brahmin cleavages in Madras State. The imposition of a colonial framework of formal confrontation, which I) significantly accelerated the politicization of the Indian people and II) provided the very rhetoric and the facts on which political action was based, caused these enmities to surface in the form they did at the same time.

British officialdom’s interest in fostering regionalism and racial and cultural division connected them to those pushing for its outlawry. Indians increasingly relied on the strength of “facts” and arguments based on Western rationality and reason, rather than the authority of the Sanskrit shastras, to bring about sociocultural change, even in touchy areas like women’s reforms. The Hindu temple-dancer reform campaign persisted on the scientific level, building on the “civilizing” justifications advanced earlier (with less success) on the religious level by the missionaries and the British government. The Backward Classes Movement’s atheist program strongly emphasized the advantages of ‘rationalism’ and Western education in achieving desired social reform.

Towards the end of the 20th century, the persona of the female missionary/doctor became utterly entwined with science, religion, and the politics of reform. Missionaries attempted to criticize upper-caste practices and habits on humanistic grounds by sensationalizing and selectively publicizing the

⁷⁹ Tamil Mahana Sangita MahanaduThermanangal (The Resolutions that made in the Tamil regional Music Conference) (in Tamil). 01/06/1930. Kudi Arasu.

⁸⁰ Kuppusamy, P. Bharathamadhavin Puththirikal Nam Sagotharikalallaraa? ((The daughter of our mother country are they not our sister?) (in Tamil). 14/ 04/1929. Kudi Arasu

⁸¹ Iniyavathu Puththi Varuma? (Will awareness come after this?) (in Tamil). 05/10/1930. Kudi Arasu.

medical “facts” of immature sex. Pre-pubertal marriage and the support of temple dancers were both condemned as abhorrent. Despite official civil affairs neutrality regulations, the reputation of science provided missionary interference a fresh legitimacy. The fact that a professional, Dr. S Muthulakshmi Reddy, led the legislative fight to ban temple dedication despite direct community involvement is remarkable.

{Despite these restrictions and allegations, Devadasis still exist today and are referred to as “Guddis” in the Mahadeshwara temple in Kollegal, Chamarajanagar District. They are revered in their community and regarded as the daughters of God (The Sudhamani, Institution of Devadasis)}.

To restore the Indian people’s waning sense of identity, the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century nationalist movement against British rule in India promoted a reassertion of traditional values and an awakening of awareness for the nation’s rich cultural heritage. This political revolution and the sociocultural transformations it sparked included restoring and reconstructing various creative dance traditions in India. The colonial public rebuke of the devadasi tradition of temple dancing, supported by the Tamil Brahmin elite who were Western-educated and colonially influenced, initially sparked this process of artistic dance from revival and reconstruction.

By the middle of the 1930s, the remaining hierarchical dance traditions had significantly transferred from the devadasis’ domain to the elites’ care. This change led to the emergence of state-sponsored dance festivals in independent India starting in 1955 to showcase the various regional creative forms on a shared national stage and restore the religious, social, and cultural sanctity within which these forms arose. These celebrations serve as national gathering places where social memory is invoked and local and societal identities are debated and rebuilt by presenting regional dance styles.

2.3.3 Cultural Scenario in Post-Independence

In the post-independence Indian setting, culture and hegemony are easily convertible. Culture and tradition are a fabrication; truthfully, it is solely derived

from an affluent, Brahmanical viewpoint. The Indian elite began to orchestrate a deliberate transition from experienced histories to imagined pasts in the later half of the 19th century (Anderson, 1983), which sparked the emergence of Indian nationalism and national identity. This change, which was carried about by redefining the embodied practices that India currently takes pride in, namely Bharatanatyam, disenfranchised the enigma and mystery that underpinned many of our procedures and turned puritanical morality into a critical determinant of Indian culture.

You say that the devadasis are bad people and affect the morality of the people who see them dancing. What about all those who practice the art of dance, those family women who dance for two hours, sometimes practically naked? Are you improving the morality in Madras by allowing this art to be cultivated more and more by the so-called fashionable ladies right from A to Z?

--P. Natesan, Question to Legislative Assembly members, during the debate on the Devadasi Act, 1947.

Sir, you know there are many amateurs who are taking part in the art of Bharatanatyam. It has a peculiar feature in Tamil Nadu and people coming from Tamil Nadu are adept in this art; I can tell you that our ancient culture had developed certain arts which even today Western nations might very well envy. ... I am one of those who feel that this art should be developed and maintained in this land. It has been said that the Kalakshetra in Adyar and other institutions are doing excellent work in this direction.

--P. Subbarayan, (Speaker), Reply to P. Natesan's 'flippant remarks'; Legislative Assembly debate on the Devadasi Act, 1947.

Production produces not only an object for the subject but also a subject for the object-**Marx, Grundrisse.**

A spiritual dance “aesthetic” and the concept of an “aesthetic” distinct from the traditions and practices of the form came into life when the consensus that maintained Sadir collapsed, ending the easy cohabitation of eros and art. The dance was hailed as “divine,” “revived” in accordance with this aesthetic, and assimilated into the projects of cultural nationalism at the very moment that

the magical, propitiatory, ritual, and priestly functions (taken both literally and symbolically) of the devadasi were rendered obsolete by a new moral order. The cultural nation-building process further aided the reception of the changed dance, which supplied an ethos and an audience.

In Indian culture, sexuality has traditionally been explored through the arts and literature. This liberal philosophy applies to all of India's flourishing religions and is not only limited to Hinduism. The nurturing of such passionate fantasies revitalizes our creativity. This was a theme in the devadasi's artwork. According to social anthropologist Martha Nussbaum, Nehru prioritized science because he believed that people would eventually lose their desire for poetry and religion. Therefore, he was not responsible for creating a pluralist.⁸²

2.3.4 The Revival of Classical Dance with a focus on Bharatanatyam

To accomplish its goals sustainably, the reform movement used the British apparatus of regional party politics and empiricism discourse. On the other hand, the revival movement purposefully deviated from Western scientific traditions and state political systems to achieve its own goals. Theosophical Society's interest in Indian Home Rule and its well-known anti-official stance tied them to the dance's resurrection. The reformers and revivalists strongly disagreed. At the Madras Music Conference in 1932, reformist C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar came under fire. He claimed that the anti-naught party's goal was to outlaw prostitution, which was common among those of the class who were involved in the practice.⁸³ He continued by saying that reformers were making a concerted effort to end it. However, the process of abolition did not stop the practice of prostitution. So, it made it clear that dancing had nothing to

⁸² Chatterjee (1993), while speaking on nationalism, states that nationalists forefronted what they perceived as the spiritual domain of India such as women, religion, caste, peasants, etc., and made a clear distinction between this domain and material domains, such as the nation-state and scientific processes. He further states that by normalising the individual aspirations of various groups of the spiritual domain, nationalists readied ground for a political battle. I add to this argument by identifying artistes and their art as part of that spiritual domain, whereby they were neutralised and considered unproductive in the nation-state building. Chatterjee, Partha. 1993. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁸³ "The Madras Music Conference 1932." *The Journal of the Music Academy* IV, no. 1-4. (1933): 121.

do with prostitution.⁸⁴ The colonizers and radicals' pressure forced the conservatives to oppose reform efforts. The conservatives, including Brahmins and revivalists, attempted to bring back their cultural and religious components. Ideologues from the Music Academy of Madras and Theosophical Society mostly agreed with their arguments.⁸⁵

The devadasi dance form was renamed Bharatanatyam due to colonial politics' overall impact on devadasi practices. Typically, the revivalists declared that the devadasi art had been "sanitized" and "revived." Kaali Sundar observed that the so-called respectable upper caste-well-read Brahmin men and women took on the mission of resurrecting the devadasi dance heritage.⁸⁶ The practice and politics of Bharatanatyam, according to art historian Daves Soneji, "make tangible both realist and utopian visions of culture, nation, religion, and aesthetics."⁸⁷ The Devadasi statue occupied the core of the conversation on Bharatanatyam.⁸⁸ According to Frederique Apffel Marglin, the nationalist elite who were concerned with the 'revival' of Indian arts were able to resolve a contradiction by viewing devadasis as morally degenerate women and the royal courts and kings as the agents of this degeneration. The West had brought about this contradiction.⁸⁹

Dance, viewed at least by a portion of society as another form of engagement with decorative exercise, was considered another form of engagement with decorative movement. Suppose we were to apply this statement of the nationalist wing about poetry and its relevance or imagined irrelevance in modern, independent, industrial India to dance. In that case, we might infer why to dance, and the crucial discourse on the economic status of hereditary dancers was never an agenda on national reform forums. India was struggling with colonialism, poverty, strife at the time, and the immediate effects of industrial development. The national agenda did not think it was

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Natarajan, Srividya. 1997. *Op.cit.*, 14

⁸⁶ Kaali, Sundar. 2013. *Op.cit.*, 52.

⁸⁷ Soneji, Daves. Ed. *Bharathanatyam: A Reader*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010: xi

⁸⁸ Ibid., xiii

⁸⁹ Marglin, Frederique Apffel. 1985. *Op.cit.*, 29

essential to address the concerns of a community of women, allowing for the complete dislodging of their identity.

2.4 Renaming from Sadir to Bharatanatyam

The renaming of Devadasi's dance sparked a heated debate. It is challenging to identify the precise person who coined the term "Bharatanatyam." Art historian Kimiko Ohtani noted that "Bharatanatyam" was first used sixty years ago.⁹⁰ She believed that the word "Bharatanatyam" first appeared in use around 1935 and had gained widespread usage by 1940.⁹¹ Generally speaking, the revivalists took credit for it. The key figures in the process were E. Krishna Iyer, V. Raghavan, a musicologist, and Rukmini Devi. Earlier articles frequently referred to Rukmini Devi dancing as Indian classical dance and seldom used the term Bharatanatyam.⁹²

Gowri Ramanarayan, however, claimed that Rukmini Devi was the one who first used it. She contended that E. Krishna Iyer originally referred to his dance as *Natya*, which is Sanskrit for "drama." According to Rukmini Devi, the name Bharata is a compound word made up of the letters *bha* from the Sanskrit word *bhava*, *ra* from the Sanskrit word *raga*, and *ta* from the Sanskrit word *tala*.⁹³ Rukmini Devi acknowledged her contribution to the rebranding of the devadasi dance genre. She said that, as far as she was aware, Rukmini Devi was the first person to give the dance its (new) name after she started dancing in the early 1930s, and that ever since, the term "Bharatanatyam" has been accepted in everyday speech.⁹⁴

The close friend of Rukmini Devi, Sarada, was unsure as to whether Rukmini Devi was the first to use the word "Bharatanatyam."⁹⁵ According to

⁹⁰ Ohtani, Kimiko. "'Bharata Nâmyam', Rebirth of Dance in India." *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* T. 33, fasc. 1/4. (1991): 305.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 305-306

⁹² *Ibid.*, 306

⁹³ Ramanarayan, Gowri. "Rukmini Devi: A Quest for Beauty." Part. 1. *Sruti*. Issue. 8. (June, 1984): 17-29.

⁹⁴ "The Renaming of an Old Dance: A Whodunit Tale of Mystery". *Sruti*. Issue. 27/28. (December, 1986-January, 1987): 30.

⁹⁵ The personal communication of Kimiko Ohtani with S. Sarda in 1989. (Ohtani, Kimiko. 1991. *Op.cit.*, 20.)

Ramasubramaniam, E. Krishna Iyer initially used the phrase in the 1920s to honor the fabled name of Bharata, the Nāṭyaśāstra's author.⁹⁶

The Music Academy's Madras Music Conference adopted a resolution in 1932 rebranding Sadir as Bharatanatyam. The goal was to eliminate the derogatory associations that the names Sadir, Dasi Attam, etc., had in the past. The 'depraved' sadir entered a respectable Brahmin aristocratic family. It was reported in the Krishna Iyer Centenary Issue that the publication had a new name and a fresh lease of life.⁹⁷ It was clear that the dance's association with its previous image had been greatly aided by adopting the new name.⁹⁸

The term "Bharatanatyam," according to Sangeet Natak Akademi president V.K. Narayanan Menon, was coined by Raghavan to honor the dance and improve people's perceptions of it.⁹⁹ Additionally, according to Sruti magazine, Raghavan coined the term "Bharatanatyam" in his 1933 article, Bharatanatyam Classical Dance-South Indian Nautch (In the Background of the Controversy over the Art), which appeared in the Madras-based journal Sound and Shadow, Vol: II, Issue 6, 1933.¹⁰⁰

2.4.1 Contribution of Rukmini Devi Arundale and E Krishna Iyer

Rukmini Devi was one of the notable women in the renaming of Bharatanatyam. Ananda Vikatan hailed Rukmini Devi as a Bharatanatyam revivalist.¹⁰¹ Rukmini Devi was born in Madurai to a Brahmin family and an engineer father. Her family moved to Madras when she was a teenager as a result of their parents' participation in Theosophical Society activities. She was engaged and worked for the Society's president, Annie Besant. There, she met George Sydney Arundale, an English theosophist who had taken over as the Society's president following the passing of Annie Besant (1878–1955).

⁹⁶ Ramasubramaniam, V. "Anti-Nautch Movement." The Bulletin of the Institute of Traditional Culture. Reports of Seminars: Problems facing Bharata Natyam. (1967): 300

⁹⁷ Krishna Iyer, E. Centenary Issue. Chennai: Music Academy, August 9, 1997: 11

⁹⁸ Ohtani, Kimiko. 1991. Op.cit., 306

⁹⁹ "The Renaming of an Old Dance: A Whodunit Tale of Mystery". Sruti. Issue. 27/28. (December, 1986-January, 1987): 30.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 31

¹⁰¹ Adal Padal (Dance and music) (in Tamil). March 22, 1936. Ananda Vikatan. p. 30.

Rukmini Devi and George Sydney Arundale got married in 1920. She gained international recognition through the marriage and had the chance to attend the 1924 Covent Garden performance of renowned Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova. Rukmini Devi was motivated by Anna's performance to travel to Australia to see her and study her troupe's dancing moves. Anna instructed Rukmini Devi to focus on bringing her nation's creative forms back to life.¹⁰² Sadir Attam was taught to Rukmini Devi by devadasis and nattuvanars.¹⁰³ Rukmini Devi's first sadir instructor was a devadasi named Maylapore Gauri Amma (?-1970). Later, she received training from renowned Panthanainallur Nattuvanar Minakshi Sundaram Pillai (1869–1954).¹⁰⁴ However, Minakshi Sundaram hesitated to provide training to a young woman from another community. But in 1934, she was able to convince him to accept her as a pupil with the support of Krishna Iyer.

The first performance by Rukmini Devi took place in December 1935 at the Adyar Theatre in the Theosophical Society's grounds. She insisted that the performance was not a private event but rather a component of the Society's annual convention. It mostly caught people's attention. Specifically, the Rukmini Devi performance was regarded as the first Bharatanatyam performance in front of a general audience.¹⁰⁵ A varied crowd, including whites and blacks, judges, lawyers, secretaries, nationalists, government workers, and kids, saw the dance in a large hall. The large crowd witnessed the evolving situation within Bharatanatyam.¹⁰⁶

Rukmini Devi's performance served as a significant catalyst for the resurrection of the ancient tradition, according to R. Krishnamurthy¹⁰⁷ (also known as Kalki; born September 9, 1899; died December 5, 1954), who published the column Adal Padal (Dancing and Singing) in Ananda Vikatan.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Ramnarayan, Gowri. "Rukmini Devi: A Quest for Beauty." Part. 1. *Sruti*. Issue. 8. (June, 1984): 17-29.

¹⁰³ Nattuvanars are the dance teachers. They are belonged to the devadasi community

¹⁰⁴ Ramnarayan, Gowri. "Rukmini Devi: A Quest for Beauty." Part. 1. *Sruti*. Issue. 8. (June, 1984): 17-29.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Adal Padal (Dance and music) (in Tamil). March 22, 1936. *Ananda Vikatan*. pp. 27-28.

¹⁰⁷ Krishnamurthy was a prominent Brahmin novelist, journalist, and nationalist. He was actively engaged in the discourse of dance and music. Usually, Krishnamurthy wrote columns in *Ananda Vikatan*, the Tamil weekly under the pseudonym of Adal Padal

¹⁰⁸ Adal Padal (Dance and music) (in Tamil). March 22, 1936. *Ananda Vikatan*. pp. 27-28.

Between 1936 and 1937, Rukmini Devi's dance activities were covered in Theosophical Society journals, which supported her art. However, her first arangetram (first public stage performance) did not satisfy her guru, Minakshi Sundaram.

In his article Bharatha Natyam, Minakshi Sundaram criticized the dance form's evolution and questioned the skill of contemporary dancers who were typically performing ancient dance. He stated that the modifications were unnecessary and should not have been incorporated into the devadasi tradition's traditional dance. He was also concerned about their inappropriate training and choice of western clothing and ornaments.¹⁰⁹ Rukmini Devi started an institution named the International Academy of Arts right after her arangetram. It was formally registered under the Charitable Societies Act in January 1936.¹¹⁰ At first, the school chose its students from among its friends and Society members. She changed the institution's name to Kalakshetra later. The Theosophical Society provided financial support for Kalakshetra up till 1945.¹¹¹

2.4.2 E. Krishna Iyer (August 9, 1897-1968)

The incorporation of Sadir dance into Bharatanatyam was revitalized in large part through the efforts of E. Krishna Iyer. He was one of Kailasa Iyer and Ananthalakshmi's fourteenth child to be born in Tirunelveli. He had dance and musical training. He first learned Sadir from renowned devadasi Madurantakam Jagadambal in 1925, and subsequently, Melatur Natesa Iyer taught him how to dance.¹¹² He participated actively in the Home Rule League under Annie Besant's leadership as a law graduate.¹¹³ Later, he became involved in a number of Gandhian political activities. He spent two years in prison for his activism in 1930 and 1932.

¹⁰⁹ Pillai, Meenakshisundaram. "Bharatha Natyam." 28th Conference Souvenir. Madras: The Music Academy, 1954: 14.

¹¹⁰ Ramnarayan, Gowri. "Rukmini Devi: A Quest for Beauty." Part. 1. Sruti. Issue. 8. (June, 1984): 17-29.

¹¹¹ George Arundale was died in 1945

¹¹² Venugopal, S.V. "Facts about the Renaissance in Bharata Natya." Sri Krishna Iyer's Shashtiabdapurthi Commemoration Volume. Madras: Bharathiar Sangam, 1957: 22

¹¹³ The Shashtiabdapurthi Celebration Committee. Sri E. Krishna Iyer's Shashtiabdapurthi Commemoration Volume. Madras: Bharathiar Sangam, 1957: 19

In the 1930s, E. Krishna Iyer became associate editor at the fledgling nationalist news organization Free Press News.¹¹⁴ After that, he became more seriously involved in journalism and started writing about art for publications like *The Mail* and the *Indian Express*. However, his later life was dominated by artistic pursuits.¹¹⁵ He supported the devadasi prohibition but was worried about the resurgence of the dance styles. Reformers' efforts to discourage the devadasi habit were acceptable, according to E. Krishna Iyer.¹¹⁶ He put up a fierce fight against the anti-nautch troop, and he did not stand up for the system. He acknowledged the flaws in the system but nevertheless made a strong case for retaining the dance form.¹¹⁷ He opposed the anti-nautch campaign through his performances, writing, and lectures. He also supported and encouraged other dancers. 1932, Krishna Iyer and Muthulakshmi Reddi engaged in a pivotal newspaper war on eliminating the devadasi system.

The Music Academy of Madras was one of the pioneers in contribution to Bharatanatyam. Bharatanatyam and the Music Academy were inseparable from one another. Stan Harding encouraged the Academy to begin studying dance.¹¹⁸ The Music Academy was regarded as one of South India's first-rate music academies in its early years. The Academy was founded in the middle of the 1920s. The Music Academy was founded in 1928 and addressed the nautch issue.¹¹⁹ The well-wishers and music enthusiasts were enthusiastic about starting a group to promote the development of musical culture in South India. The well-wishers and music enthusiasts were eager to start a group that would encourage the development of musical culture in South India. Following the Conference of the Indian National Congress, the All-India Music Conference took place in Madras in 1927. The All-India Music Conference suggested the creation of a music academy in Madras to preserve and promote the traditional arts. The organization later significantly impacted the resurgence of Indian classical dance.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Krishna Iyer, E. Centenary Issue. August 9, 1997. Op.cit., 5

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁸ "School of Dancing." *The Journal of the Music Academy* V, no. 1-4. (1934): 120.

¹¹⁹ Natarajan, Srividya. 1997. Op.cit., 14.

According to Srividya Natarajan, the Music Academy is a crucial organization for the advancement of classical music and dance.¹²⁰ The Music Academy's members often belonged to the Indian National Congress' cultural wing and identified as "pro-art progressives" while portraying Devadasi as a Bharatanatyam artist.¹²¹ According to Avanthi Meduri, the Music Academy participated in the political reformulation of Bharatanatyam, which contributed to elevating the dance's stature.¹²² Sathyamurthi commended the Academy for bringing Bharatanatyam back to its impeccable, honorable state.¹²³ The managerial and scholarly works of the Academy created the groundwork for saving Bharatanatyam from extinction and restoring it, according to the Centenary Issue of E. Krishna Iyer.¹²⁴

The Academy greatly aided the rebirth of the devadasi dance. The Music Academy of Madras and E. Krishna Iyer, according to the Centenary Issue of E. Krishna Iyer, acted as a knight in shining armor and entered the fray to save the dance in peril and considerably aid in the transformation of the tainted Sadir into blessed Bharatanatyam.¹²⁵ The establishment of the Music Academy was in India's best interests. The Academy was founded to support South India's Brahmanical art legacy. It is primarily focused on supporting and promoting Hindu culture. The elite Brahmins and traditional Hindus want to create the national artwork. The main driver for the rebirth of Tamil areas' dances and music was nationalism.¹²⁶ Krishnamurthy observed Sadir's performance at the Congress sessions.¹²⁷ These performances were typically staged on the Congress' premises.¹²⁸

2.5 A new dimension to Bharatanatyam

¹²⁰ Ibid.,

¹²¹ Ibid., 13.

¹²² Meduri, Avanthi. 1988. Op.cit., 12.

¹²³ "The Seventh Session of the Madras Music Conference, 1934." The Journal of the Music Academy VI-VIII. (1935-1937): 150.

¹²⁴ Krishna Iyer, E. Centenary Issue. August 9, 1997. Op.cit., 11

¹²⁵ Ibid., 1.

¹²⁶ Adal Padal (Dance and music) (in Tamil). January 19, 1936. Ananda Vikatan. p. 19.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Between 1930 and 1935, the Music Academy's interest in dancing saw a boom. The devadasi dance tradition was attempted to be revived by the Music Academy. The Music Academy began to plan the Devadasi dance performances. The academy observed that criticizing and disliking Indian nautch had virtually become fashionable in recent years. They believed that this censure was not warranted at all. They hoped that in the coming days, public opinion would change and accord abhinaya its rightful place.¹²⁹ Later, Sadir Attam's revival was highlighted by the Annual Music Conference of the Music Academy in 1932.

The Nautch Question was the topic of debate on the Conference's sixth day (December 28, 1932). On the dance, E. Krishna Iyer wrote a resolution. The Bharatanatyam art form was supported and encouraged by the resolutions. It claimed that Bharatanatyam was a magnificent, timeless form of art. It made a plea to the general public and artistic organizations for the support needed to promote Bharatanatyam. The Conference asked the Music Academy to take action to spread accurate information about the art and aid the general people in developing a proper appreciation for it. It resolved to start the action with women's organizations, which should establish a course of instruction to provide suitable training in the artwork. It implied encouraging public performances before decent gatherings were required to make dance respectable.¹³⁰ Devadasis were to be reformed, and the necessity of a different line of work was stressed in the resolution.¹³¹ Krishnamurthy influenced public opinion by emphasizing the benefits of preserving Sadir dancing.¹³²

Under the new name of Bharatanatyam, the Academy's executive officials kept promoting the dance form. The dancer was permitted to perform their dance, and the Academy provided the necessary space, a considerable number of devadasis performed in the Academy between 1930 and 1940. The Academy supported the staging of great devadasi dances. In March 1931, the Music Academy hosted the first Kalyani Daughters of Thanjavur musical

¹²⁹ "The Academy's Concerts." *The Journal of the Music Academy* II, no. 1. (1931): 78.

¹³⁰ "The Madras Music Conference 1932." *The Journal of the Music Academy* IV, no. 1-4. (1933): 113, 123

¹³¹ Krishna Iyer, E. Centenary Issue. August 9, 1997. Op.cit., 5

¹³² Ibid., 18.

recitals.¹³³ Despite the small audience, the performance was an essential milestone in Tamil culture's history of dance.¹³⁴ The academy focused on the performance and the splendour of the art during the concert rather than trying to change people's minds about criticising Indian nautch.¹³⁵ The message also praised the public's shifting attitudes towards dance.¹³⁶

According to E. Krishna Iyer, the second recital by the Kalyani daughters at the Academy on January 1, 1933, can be considered the start of the Bharatanatyam revival. The Music Academy's goal to reform dancing was evident at its 1934 Annual Conference.¹³⁷ Sathyamurthi commended the Academy for working to return Bharatanatyam to its pristine, honorable position.¹³⁸ Until 1936, performers from families who saw dance as an inherited vocation predominated on stage. Balachandra, a Brahmin girl about whom little is known, performed as the Academy's first non-professional dancer in December 1938.¹³⁹

A new element entered the South Indian dance culture after 1935. The dance was being taught by a group of Brahmin women who were members of the Theosophical movement. The dance was blended with the values of the Brahmin upper caste.¹⁴⁰ The Music Academy gave these "new" dancers a stage.¹⁴¹ The devadasi's performance's involvement in the Academy began to decline. Twenty-one dance performances had been held since the beginning of the Music Academy by the end of 1940, according to Douglas M. Knight Jr. He noted that thirteen devadasi dance performances took place between 1931 and 1937. But, between 1938 and 1940, he saw an increase in the number of non-devadasi performances.¹⁴²

¹³³ "The Academy's Concerts." *The Journal of the Music Academy* II, no. 1. (1931): 78

¹³⁴ Krishna Iyer, E. Centenary Issue. August 9, 1997. *Op.cit.*, 4.

¹³⁵ "The Academy's Concerts." *The Journal of the Music Academy* II, no. 1. (1931): 78.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Krishna Iyer, E. Centenary Issue. August 9, 1997. *Op.cit.*, 11.

¹³⁸ "The Seventh Session of the Madras Music Conference, 1934." *The Journal of the Music Academy* VI-VIII. (1935-1937): 150.

¹³⁹ Krishna Iyer, E. Centenary Issue. August 9, 1997. *Op.cit.*, 13.

¹⁴⁰ Natarajan, Srividya. 1997. *Op.cit.*, 14.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Knight Jr, Douglas M. Balasaraswathi: *Her Art and Life*. Chennai: Tranquebar Press, 2010: 117-118.

Around 1930, when Bharatanatyam was being revived by its revivalists, the Margam, a structured 7-8 item-based recital, was reorganized. This traditional, secular recital's linear structure, which was built around the stems of *Pushpanjali*, *Mallari*, *Todaymangalam*, *Alarippu*, *Jatiswaram*, *Shabdam*, *Varnam*, *Padam/ Javali/ Kirtanam*, *Thillana*, and *Sloka*, reflects a beautiful aesthetic development plan that also gives adequate consideration to physical endurance. The late T. Balasaraswati summed it up best in her talk at the Tamil Isai Sangam in Madras. An in-depth reading of the same makes it clear that Balasaraswati firmly believed that Bharatanatyam was founded in bhakti and that "it is justified in being called a yoga because it is a spiritual discipline perfecting the mind to thought-free serenity." The text of this lecture, which was translated from Tamil by the late Shri S. Guhan and published in the book 'Bala on Bharatanatyam' by the Sruti Foundation, is as follows.

"I believe that the traditional order of the Bharatanatyam recital... is the correct sequence in the practice of this art, for revealing the spiritual through the corporeal ... The greatness of this traditional recital-pattern will be apparent even from a purely aesthetic point of view. In the beginning, Alarippu, which is based on rhythm alone, brings out the special charm of pure dance. The movements of Alarippu relax the dancer's body and thereby her mind, loosen and coordinate her limbs, and prepare her for the rest of the dance. Rhythm has a rare capacity to concentrate. Alarippu is most valuable in freeing the dancer from distraction and making her single-minded. The joy of pure rhythm in Alarippu is followed by Jatiswaram where there is the added joy of melody. Melody, without word or syllable, has a special power to unite us with our being. In Jatiswaram, melody and movement come together. Then comes the Shabdam. It is here that compositions, with words and meanings, which enable the expression of the myriad moods of Bharatanatyam, are introduced. The Bharatanatyam recital is structured like a Great Temple: we enter through the gopuram (outer hall) of Alarippu, cross the ardhmandapam (half-way hall) of Jatiswaram, then the mandapam (great hall) of Shabdam and enter the holy precinct of the deity in the Varnam. This is the space which gives

the dancer expansive scope to revel in the music, rhythm and moods of the dance. The Varnam is the continuum which gives ever expanding room to the dancer to delight in her self-fulfilment, by providing the fullest scope to her own creativity as well as to the tradition of the art. Pada-s now follow. In dancing to pada-s, one experiences the contentment, cool and quiet of entering the sanctum from its external precinct. The expanse and brilliance of the outer corridors disappear in the dark inner sanctum; and the rhythmic virtuosity of the Varnam yield to the soul-stirring music and abhinaya of the Padam. Dancing to the Padam is akin to the juncture when the cascading lights of worship are withdrawn and the drum beats die down to the simple and solemn chanting of sacred verses in the closeness of god. Then, the Thillana breaks into movement like the final burning of camphor accompanied by a measure of din and bustle. In conclusion, the devotee takes to his heart the god he has so far glorified outside; and the dancer completes the traditional order by dancing to a simple devotional verse.”

“Balasaraswati brought Bharatanatyam to the public’s attention via the grace and eloquence of her dancing rather than by conscious efforts to be a torch-bearer or reformer. Others were expected to combat ignorance and prejudice, conduct study, and dive into history. However, Balasaraswati made us aware of the living miracle that is Bharatanatyam, which may be witnessed and enthralled.”¹⁴³

Around the time of Indian Independence, this kind of Margam experienced a dramatic increase in popularity, which persisted for about 50 years. A standard Margam performance by an individual dancer would take approximately three hours. Nowadays, though, with less time available to the audience, dancers have started to find creative ways to get past the Margam. As a result, relatively few seasoned dancers currently perform the entire Margam. But even today, the Margam is still the preferred format for arangetram performances because of the way it is laid up, which enables the young dancer to showcase to the audience their abilities in all facets of the dance discipline.

¹⁴³ Menon, N. Balasaraswati. New Delhi: International Cultural Centre, p.29.

The art has been preserved and enhanced over the years by several notable artists. The Tanjore Quartet introduced unparalleled musical breakthroughs and adjustments to the heritage. Their compositional achievements are revered and unmatched in the worlds of classical music and dance. This family's legacy grew and was passed down with their subsequent eight generations.

The post-colonial setting of Bharatanatyam has intersected with the idea of temporality, or the way time is perceived, experienced, and represented, in several crucial ways. In the post-colonial era, Bharatanatyam, a traditional art form with extensive historical origins, has dealt with difficulties relating to time, change, continuity, and identity. The path was prepared by contemporary themes, tradition preservation, various time expressions, and historical narratives. The efforts to preserve and revive this art form were extensive. The word "revival" is a dramatically simplified language explanation of a complicated process that represents a conscious choice among numerous options and begs to be looked at from several angles.

While there was a re-verification or bringing back of South Indian dance, there was also a re-population (one social community appropriating another's practice), re-construction (altering and replacing elements of repertoire and choreography), re-naming (from nautch and other terms to Bharatanatyam), re-situation (from temple, court, and salon to the public stage), and re-restoration (as used in Schehner 1985:69). The term "revival" has been given preference in discussions of South Indian dance to the exclusion of other terms that are as descriptive, hiding the intricacy of the process and drawing attention to a straightforward, joyous interpretation of the creation of new life.

CHAPTER - III

Bharatanatyam Migration and Practice:

A Comprehensive Overview of its Journey from Southern to Northern India

3.1. Origin

Music is divine and transformative in its nature and purpose. The divine elements have been integrated into the finest form of music. During the origin of the universe, it was the sound that had its representations that manifested holistically. It is the function that connects us with the supreme consciousness. It is organic as it organizes our personal, professional, and social lives. The purpose and meaning of life become more transparent and more authentic with music. It gives solace and harmony. It gives mental peace as it eradicates human worries. It provides happiness and completeness of living, which can never be accomplished by any other human invention. When sound resonates in a particular wavelength, it has transformative effects on the human soul and living – instills inspiration and courage. Music has various forms and representations that are as complex as human emotions. The music can be a voice of human emotion, and it can effectively blend with humans as it is objective as well. The effects could heal a person from disease and ensure spiritual wellness and prosperity. A holistic, integral purpose of life could be known and lived with musical life. This journey has inspired millions of human lives as it has touched them personally. Music can integrate any human living form on earth as it can provide directive and personal association. This divine transformation function could be brought in with instruments like Tabla, Piano, and various organs. The same music could also be represented vocally, which can provide mental solace, comfort, and happiness. The same music with human emotions could also be effectively portrayed in dance forms. Dance is an integral part of human life as it blends the entire physical living, which can create divine focus, perspective, meaning, and interpretations. This dance can change a man and transform human societies. Human societies, with their nature and extent of evolution, have chosen and represented many dance forms, which has transformed human nature also. The Indian culture, traditions and values have been effectively

personified with Bharatanatyam. This dance form is an effective blend of subtle human emotions, personalities, human living as social issues, problems and challenges are effectively represented with it. This dance form has varied representations as it is commonly done with Carnatic instrumental and vocal support¹⁴⁴ (Bajaj & Vohra, 2015).

This has its unique representation in South Indian cultures with Carnatic music which makes it more traditional, orthodox and unique in its form and representations. It is a glorious art which has magnified human life and living as it has ensured human transformation for centuries. The dance becomes graceful unique representation with the blend of a dance master who is elevated as guru who is symbolic and purposive in representations during the program. The musical instrument provides various beats &, sounds in various forms for which the dancer responds with entire physical body movements and associations. This is called Rhythm¹⁴⁵ – sound which graces the entire occasion with profound intensity and beat. This also adds new conceptual and mental orientations for the audience as they become totally absorbed and engaged in this new world. They also forget the present form of living and associated issues as they blend and merge with music along with physical movements which makes it so special and miraculous. In the entire process, the dancer is accompanied with a team which gives special meaning and orientation as they also tend to display their specialised skills during the program. Flute, Veena, violin could be similar associated instruments which brings grace and divinity to the entire occasion with dance, which makes it so memorable. The dancer represents the Divine form Shiva through this, as it symbolic cosmic connectivity and associations. Such profound mystical and deep secrets are communicated to the audience in the most subtle and personalised way which makes this dance forms a unique art in itself. The introductory note by these supporting musical artists determines the nature and form of musical representation which would be given dance form with emotions, feelings and humane personification. It is this fact of human personification and ideal representation makes this dance journey memorable and ideal. They begin the

¹⁴⁴ Bajaj, T., & Vohra, S. S. (2015). *Performing arts and therapeutic implications*. Routledge India.

¹⁴⁵ Time configuration of beats or strokes

music in a particular note with scale and modalities which determines the function and output also. So, these musicians set the tone and pace for dancer to perform and show its pinnacle with grace. The music is given a specific form with musical note, which also prepares the audience and dancer for the performance. The dancer shows the artistic & melodious representation of this music which makes it a fusional Jugalbandi¹⁴⁶. This invokes new thoughts, concepts and mental orientation in the audience as they feel elated and transformed to new heights. The touch of dance provides magic to the supporting music as we could feel that new heights of living with happiness and solace with comfort are possible¹⁴⁷ (Zubko, 2014).

As the troubles and problems of human living erode away during the dance performance, the social relativity and change becomes possible naturally with the integrated fusion of supporting musicians. The lyrical words sung by these musicians add colour and flavour to the audience as they feel that they had feast which has satisfied them holistically as all their senses have been made happy – which is possible only with a dancer. If there is no lyrical word and there is only instrumental representation, the dancer adds more taste with their dance movements which ensures effective indulgence and engagement of audience. The dancer represents the instrumental music with their body movements which gives language, tone and meaning to the instrumental. The dancer and her performance could also engage with music, instruments and words which gives special effects and contrast to the audience who could experience divinity during the program. This Bharatanatyam dancer is a special artist who could effectively combine music and lyrical representations to give body manifestations which creates sensual transformation and control of audience. In this way this artist is special as audience engagement is totally ensured. A profound and holistic understanding of music, ragas, and their expressive manifestations is essential for Bharatanatyam artists to engage and resonate deeply with their audience. Bharatanatyam dancers uniquely improvise movements, rhythm, tempo, and expressive representations, creating distinctive

¹⁴⁶ Jugalbandi- in the context of Indian music, refers to a duet or a performance where two musicians, often with different instruments or styles, collaborate and engage in a musical conversation.

¹⁴⁷ Zubko, K. C. (2014). *Dancing bodies of devotion: fluid gestures in Bharata Natyam*. Lexington Books.

performances that immerse and captivate audiences. Such improvisations enrich the traditional form and offer audiences fresh and transformative experiences.

Effective coordination between dancers and accompanying musicians is crucial, as their unified collaboration elevates the performance to an enchanting and impactful experience. The subtle and often non-verbal communication, cues, and symbolic exchanges between dancers and musicians add layers of meaning and aesthetic beauty, enriching the overall presentation. Musicians play an integral role by intuitively invoking phrases and providing a harmonious backdrop, seamlessly integrating various performance elements. This synergy between dancer and musician not only ensures smooth progression of the performance but also profoundly enhances audience engagement and appreciation.

The sequence and major parts of the dance program is rehearsed with the supporting artists which provides a flow. However, in live performance, the dancer introduces new forms of manifestations and representations as per the music which makes it awesome. As per the music with melodious inflow, the dancer provides new impetus and professional presentation which engages the audience totally. The special unique nature of this Bharatanatyam artist is that this artist represents a core inherent character in her holistic movement which makes us feel the person and the performances live. This is the nature of these artists who have become world famous.

The mythology and characters from the Hindu religion, gods and goddesses, demons, and manifestations with a story would be beautifully presented by Bharatanatyam artists. This story element is presented with an emotive mood, which creates a cathartic effect among the audience. We could see that the Bharatanatyam artist is in communication with the audience through character and its representation which gives a new height. They could also manifest various characters and legendary phenomena through their dance performances. The songs which are sung by the supportive artists during the show are poetic and meaningful, with a religious message and meaning for the audience. The artist does the role in the most effective way as the audience is able to commune with God through the Bharatanatyam dance manifestations. The songs sung by

the supporting artists could vary in languages from Sanskrit to Telugu or Tamil, which could also suit the audience's taste and liking. They represent Hindu deities, which could be Ram, Sita, Krishna, or Ravana. Bharatanatyam dance, by nature, has dominant Hindu-oriented representations, which could be called fundamental orientation and thinking, which have evolved over a period of time. The Indian culture, tradition, and Hinduism have been additional aspects that have given the seeds of this dance tradition to emerge, flourish, and sustain along with Indian Hindu civilization. This tends to address the larger audiences of Hindus in this country, as the other groups and sects have been conveniently ignored in this art form. The cultural challenges in representing varied cultures with intensity and their issues have been a real problem in this Bharatanatyam art form as legends have balanced it in the most effective way. It is also evident that although Hindus do represent their folklore stories to epics in this form of dance, other religions and communities also do use it adequately depending on need and purpose. This tradition has been largely followed in South India in which this dance form has been more prevalent, represented in a profound, artistic, mystical and cultural way. The audience are also aware of the legendary tales and its representations in Bharatanatyam dance form which has been done elegantly and effectively involved. The songs, melodies, tone of the singer, supporting music and artists do play a commendable role in effective representation of Bharatanatyam as a dance form. The dancer exhibits the traditions, culture and mythical outlook in the most emphatic way which impresses the audience to the core, beating all odds.

This dance form could be watched by one and all, it has been watched to a larger extent by the elite group who have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the myths and epics along with Bharatanatyam dance. Other audience could find it very difficult to understand and relate the dance form which could be seen as more complex and integrated in its music and in delivery of Bharatanatyam dance. The cultural social barriers and its lesser understanding could be the issue in watching Bharatanatyam dance. This form of dance has been exemplary and effective as it has represented Indian culture, traditions and epics in the most elegant way. This has attracted & retained a global audience who remain as loyal to this greatest dance form at all times.

This dance form is an effective combination of music, dance and theatrical representations, which could reach the elite and educated masses of this country.

This dance form is a part of Indian socio-cultural heritage, tradition and living. It is a part of our living as it represents our way of life, and it also induces social transformation and mental change. This is a holistic tradition of India which associates and blends artistic, musical movements which give a story, meaning and effective impressions on the minds of the audience. It is skilful and practised for years, where a dancer achieves mastery and perfection. This cultural heritage treasure – Bharatanatyam has been called Sadir, which has been very common since 30s in Indian history. It has been a globally acclaimed dance form which has millions of fans and lovers who adore this treasury, which is traditionally Indian in outlook and representations¹⁴⁸ (Thobani, 2017). This popular phrase, which has been in use for decades, originated from Tamil culture and tradition, an integral part of South India.

This place was earlier noted historically as Madras. This has a lot of cultural and social value as it has effectively represented Indian traditions and dance forms with elegance and clarity. The origins of this dance form could be seen in the scriptures & documents which have been sculpted as evidence in the Tanjore temple. This dance form was practised earlier by a group of women who served the community, as their role was to please and make people happy always. They performed dances that were unique and classical, which had the stampede of Tamil religions, gods, and way of life. This has been clearly stated in the dance history records¹⁴⁹ (Puri, 2004)

This art form evolved from a particular sect of women who were a part of the elite dancers in the Kingdoms of Tamil Nadu. They served the kings, pleased them, and made them happy. They also performed during special occasions, which gave them more acclaim and social respect. This cultural form of dance, Bharatanatyam, has a unique training system as it has been inculcated

¹⁴⁸ Thobani, S. (2017). Indian classical dance and the making of postcolonial national identities: dancing on empire's stage. Routledge

¹⁴⁹ Puri, R. (2004). Bharatanatyam performed: a typical recital. *Visual Anthropology*, 17(1), 45-68.

and trained since childhood. Earlier, it was a domain of women, and later, we could find men also eagerly participating and representing them in this dance form. This dance has a single noble intention of pleasing the audience and giving them total satisfaction, as it also makes them forget their worries and miseries. The dancer represents a historical, social, or religious event or story, as it also represents colonial issues. This cult of dance became more popular and famous during the post-colonial period, as it has a global reach and outlook also.

This dance form is intricately and intensively associated with Hinduism, the famous tradition and cultural archive of India. This has also spread the Indian national spirit as it has strongly emotionally connected millions of Indians during war, crisis, and natural disasters. This personified and glorified dance form has cultural synthesis, which has given a new blend, form, and taste in the modern context. It also gives unique representations and views on the latest issues, which gives a new perspective and thinking to the audience. This dance spreads a message that is nonverbal, as it is heard strongly by the global audience, and it is communicated with elegant, nice dance movements. This has given new shape and thinking on modern issues, as it has also been elegantly given across the audience as a treat in the post-modern society. The dancer is traditional and ritual in following the rules, regulations, and frameworks that are prescribed in this dance form, and yet the dancer is able to exhibit novel movements and postures that add colour, flavour, and new taste to this dance as it holds the audience breathless. The dance form also provides adequate space and novelty for the dancer to represent new possibilities which vary with the time horizon and locations. Thus, we can see that this dance form, Bharatanatyam, is ever-evolving, changing, and organic in its form and originality as the dancer provides a new platform and new flourish to global audiences forever. It is a standard dance form that upholds traditions, cultures, values, and tastes, and it explores in itself the scope and directions that are endless, as millions of dance forms and representations emerge on a day-to-day basis. Thus, it could be claimed that it is a cultural synthesis with a modern outlook as the dancer explores and explodes into a new dimension and plane, which makes the audience dumbstruck.

This dance form has been very popular, prominent, functional, and active for thousands of years, as it carries a rich tradition and Indian values in itself. This has been very popular among South Indian states, as it has been modified and represented in other forms, like Kuchipudi in North India¹⁵⁰ (Patel, 2019).

Ancient Indian scriptures have documented the origins and development of this artistic form, which has evolved from Hindu gods and goddesses. Lord Shiva is believed to be in a cosmic dance, and Goddess Parvathi has always engaged with her totally in this artistic representation. The dance form originated from the Lord, the creator of human civilisation – Brahma, which was given to sages and saints who had given this form of dance in Sanskrit. The description and management of this dance have been clearly and lucidly explained in the first important Bharatanatyam text called Nāṭyaśāstra, an authoritative document on this dance form, which was made a cult and practice later. The South Indian cultural monuments and preservation of Hindu unity – the temples were also developed by Kings, which was parallel and supportive to the development and spread of this dance form. The historical origins of South Indian temples could be dated from 300 BC to 300 CE, which could be noted as the dominant origin and spread of this popular iconic dance profession. Dancers usually performed in temples and before the Kings, which also helped in the spread of the state tradition, cultural unity, and transformation with historical inputs, which also made a positive emotive connection with the audience. These dance performers in the temple had shown elegance and grace as they spread this profession across the state, country, and globe, and their contributions still remain strong in the historical events of this dance form.

This dance tradition has a unique blend and flavour as it has become a special cuisine for a retreat with a classical blend of music. This classical blend of music has made this dance form so very popular and special, which has been traditional in its outlook and representation, called Carnatic music. Musical instruments that accompany this dance tradition could vary according to the concert and performer. This gives a special choice of musical instruments and

¹⁵⁰ Patel, D. (2019). *The changing dynamics of a traditional art form case study of on Bharatanatyam Margam* Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (India)

supportive artists, which adds special elegance and grace to it. Various South Indian holy traditional verses and Sanskrit are used by supportive artists with instruments, which gives a new form of dance representation in itself, which has cultural communion also¹⁵¹ (Pattnaik & Samantaray, 2017).

3.1.1. Evolution of Bharatanatyam

The iconic and glorious representation of Rukmani Devi and her dance forms can be found in ancient Indian texts. These texts have been in Sanskrit as they are original and novel in nature and approach. The Indian Vedas and sastras also have mentioned the development of this dance form, which has given a new uplift to Indian society and its well-being¹⁵² (Juhi, 2021) It could also be known that there have been several texts that have led to the intensive development of this dance form, which has been predominantly in Sanskrit. These texts of knowledge and embodiment of dance form could be evident till the 19th-century era. Most of the texts are evolutionary as they reference Lord Shiva, as he has been considered the originator of dance forms in human civilisation. He has also been the God who controls the entire functioning of the universe as he creates, manages, and destroys at his will and mercy. So divine meanings, representations, and thoughts have been manifested from which this supreme dance form has been created and instilled for human happiness in this universe. Ancient representations also state that this dance has emerged from the cosmos, the universal origin that has given the cosmic representation in its form and meaning, which has been conveniently conveyed to the whole world with true culture and spirit.

Rukmini Devi could be assigned as the historical pioneer in this dance form who added grace and uniqueness to represent this dance form to the world. The textual form of dance and its meanings in Sanskrit had real-time value and significance in her dance of grace. She had mastered many texts as she engaged her students and transformed them into poetic, elegant representations of these dance texts and their importance to the world. It could be inferred that this dance form has cultural and traditional impetus and value which can never be ignored.

¹⁵¹ Pattnaik, S., & Samantaray, S. P. (2017). Comparative study on classical dances: Odissi & Bharatanatyam. *World Wide J Multidiscip Res Dev*, 3, 147-150.

¹⁵² Juhi, T. (2021). Bharatanatyam: A Reflection of the past and Evolving Embodiment of the Times

She also gave new dance forms with global acclaim and respect, as they were unique and special, as always. She had learned this art from various teachers and schools, as her representations to a global audience had made her the iconic Bharatanatyam dancer of the world. She was also the originator of the Kalakshetra institution, which teaches millions of students this special dance form to date¹⁵³ (Juhi, 2021).



Plate - 3.1: Rukmini Devi¹⁵⁴ (DEVIKA, 30 March, 2024)

She articulated and blended global dance forms in her traditional Indian dance of Bharatanatyam. She incorporated ballet into the Indian dance form and gave it a global outlook and outfit, making it easier to reach global audiences, as they loved it with awe and enthusiasm. Meanwhile, she also strongly upheld the Indian traditions in this dance form, as this blend has been loved by everyone. She invented new and modern methods of this classical dance as she preserved Indian tradition and culture. So, Rukmini Devi, the legend of Indian Bharatanatyam dance, has preserved the cultural blend of dancing with integrity and honesty. She contributed a unique combination of this dance form and ballet, which gave it new impetus and form. This could be seen as the growth and development of the Indian dance tradition, which was given a new facelift in the global arena. It can also be seen that the tradition and value of Bharatanatyam as an art form is more historical and longer than ballet, which

¹⁵³ Juhi, T. (2021). Bharatanatyam: A Reflection of the past and Evolving Embodiment of the Times

¹⁵⁴ DEVIKA, V. R. (30 March, 2024). Rukmini Devi did not sanskritise Bharatanatyam. She created the Kalakshetra instead. <https://theprint.in/pageturner/excerpt/rukmini-devi-did-not-sanskritise-bharatanatyam-she-created-the-kalakshetra-instead/2020671/>.

has been a cultural representation of the West. In this, we can see that Rukmini Devi has brought a rich blend and flavour to the Indian classical dance tradition, which has seen new heights with her and has also been acknowledged by her global audience. It can be understood that ballet has given a new outlook and thinking on Indian traditional Bharatanatyam, which has been following Indian traditions and customs^{155, 156} (Juhi, 2021) (Meduri, 2004). Cross-cultural and global communication is inevitable in modern times as Devi understood this transition and brought in a new facelift for Indian traditional Bharatanatyam. She deeply understands global traditions and dance forms as she has been communicating with international dance students and teachers on their representative dance forms.

She had given a new outlook and representation of Bharatanatyam dance as she brought in the fusion of the modern British dancer Isadora Duncan. This multi-cultural blend of dance has been new to dance traditions worldwide, as it has been welcomed by all. She fine-tuned Indian dance forms with new elements on stage, representations, expressions, and body movements, making this dance experience magical and transformative. In her dance, she challenged the colonial notions and interpretations of dance as she gave freedom and liberation to the Indian cultural dance tradition – Bharatanatyam, which has a new blend of its own and has also won global fame. Students from all over the world come and learn this global dance form at Kalakshetra School. As she serves relentlessly for this dance form, she has also merged global culture and traditions, which has given global iconic teachers. These teachers who were taught in this school had returned to European nations, as they had spread the modern Indian fusion blend of Bharatanatyam in their style and form. This has indeed spread the multicultural and transformational diaspora in the Indian traditional Bharatanatyam as a dance form and its representations.

Transformations in this dance form are evident as we can see that this has given new focus, dimensions, and approaches toward the struggle for independence. This dance form effectively spread the message for all Indians to

¹⁵⁵ Juhi, T. (2021). Bharatanatyam: A Reflection of the past and Evolving Embodiment of the Times

¹⁵⁶ Meduri, A. (2004). Bharatanatyam as a global dance: some issues in research, teaching, and practice. *Dance Research Journal*, 36(2), 11-29.

remain as Indians and collectively participate in the national struggle. Thus, this dance form has been modern in its representation and outlook as it has transformed and modified its role in contemporary affairs. It had ceased to exist as a traditional dance form as it also emerged as the representative of contemporary Indian problems and issues. This dance form gave solace, comfort, and emotional upliftment to all Indians as it had been a strong Indian communicator for the masses to spread awareness of the independence struggle and the need for participation. The national identity could emerge effectively with the Indian masses as they synthesised themselves with this traditional dance form and its message. This gave a common Indian identity for all, as they identified as one, they could merge with this dance form and the independence struggle as well. We could see the spread and popularity of this popular dance form during this period all over the world. This dance form has been seen as an iconic representation of Indian identity, form, and value, as it has also blended with international cultures and dance traditions effectively and purposefully.

It is an art form that has no regional, cultural, or language boundaries, as it has transcended all these outlooks and emerged as the universal dance form of the world. Bharatanatyam in itself stands as a proud representation of India, and yet it has retained a global outlook also. It has emerged as the most popular dance form in the world, reaching its pinnacle of glory with modern impetus and a Diasporic innovative identity of its own. It has become the most respected, popular, and modern dance form in this modern world¹⁵⁷¹⁵⁸ (Juhi, 2021) (Bhanumathi, 2019).

There has been a transition and a transformative role of this popular dance form in the twentieth century, as global icons have contributed to this. Ruth St. Denis brought in cross-cultural integration for this dance form with a merger of American tradition and Indian values. He started the Natya School of Dance in the early 40s, which has global acclaim and popularity. This Western infusion with Bharatanatyam has given new scope and possibilities for this Indian traditional dance form. He merged cultures and religions which also

¹⁵⁷ Juhi, T. (2021). Bharatanatyam: A Reflection of the past and Evolving Embodiment of the Times

¹⁵⁸ Bhanumathi, K. N. (2019). *Bharata Natyam training at The Temple of Fine Arts: Pre arangetram, arangetram post-arangetram/Bhanumathi K Nadson* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Malaya).

spread the voices to the world. Russian Ballet dancer Anna Pavlova had been totally immersed and impressed with this dance tradition as she brought in a collaboration between these two. This ensured cultural and dance synthesis between the two countries, traditions, and outlooks, which has given modern living and outlook across the world. She was fascinated with this Indian dance tradition, and she collaborated with Uday Shankar to develop it as a modern blend of two countries and dance traditions¹⁵⁹¹⁶⁰ (Lightfoot, 2017) (Sarwal, 2019). The modern blend of this classical dance form with collaborative efforts of innovation by dancers made it truly majestic and traditional. It has become the most valuable dance form with glory and a traditional blend, which has led to a plethora of dancers across the globe¹⁶¹ (Juhi, 2021).

Tamil Nadu – the state of South India and its demographic, social, and economic changes have contributed to the growth and development of this dance form. The historical Aryan invasion and its effects, the trading era of the British, national emotive association, and progress have given new forms and approaches to this traditional dance form. This dance form has shaped the Indian identity as it has given cultural impetus, shape, and directions which have given socio-religious and economic outlook with prosperity. Gender development, inclusive growth, and progress of women have been made possible with this dance form, as it has ensured gender equality and social representation in India¹⁶²¹⁶³ (Sarathi & Selvaseelan, 2023) (Jayakrishnan, 2011).

The traditional Indian orientations and representations of this dance form have been retained since pre-medieval times, which has given a positive outlook on this continent. The cultural outlook of various Indian religions has been adequately personified in this dance form as we could find new styles, forms, and mannerisms have emerged with it. The patronage of this dance form has contributed to different schools of thought in Indian classical dance

¹⁵⁹ Lightfoot, L. (2017). *Louise Lightfoot in Search of India: An Australian Dancer's Experience*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

¹⁶⁰ Sarwal, A. (2019). *The Dancing God: Staging Hindu Dance in Australia*. Routledge.

¹⁶¹ Juhi, T. (2021). Bharatanatyam: A Reflection of the past and Evolving Embodiment of the Times

¹⁶² SARATHI, P., & SELVASEELAN, I. (2023). A Perspective On The Educational System In Medieval Thagadur Nadu, Tamilnadu, India. *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture*, 33, 4705-4731.

¹⁶³ Jayakrishnan, K. (2011). *Dancing architecture: The parallel evolution of Bharatanatyam and South Indian architecture* University of Waterloo.

Bharatanatyam, as it has included regional aspects and dimensions. So, there is an inherent need to study and understand to interpret the various socio-political structures and their impact on modern Bharatanatyam as a dance form. As these aspects and dimensions have not been explored or researched, this research is an evaluative and interpretative attempt for the first time. This dance form has been the effective link, coordinator, and associative factor between tradition and modernity in its form and representation of this continent and its diverse culture. This dance form in itself has evolved and progressed from an expressive mode of Indian culture and religion to an aspect that satisfies the audience and infusion of modernity for the future. The next section will explore and investigate the role and impact of architecture as an important coordinate with this dance form, which has ensured cultural integrity and social popularity. This infusion has been made possible with a merge of different aspects of dance, music, and cultural representations for communal harmony and peace¹⁶⁴ (Mahadevan, 2023).

Historically we could see a new form of total increased awareness on Bharatanatyam had allowed the musicians and supporting artists to train a number of people in this field of pursuit. This dance form gained its popularity as the supporting artists and musicians gained name, fame and glory. The villages from these musicians and supporting artists became famous worldwide along with their glory and reach. The desire of Devi was to restore spirituality in dance which has been effectively restored at ease by her dance school Kalakshetra and her students. The infusion of spirituality into the dance form of Bharatanatyam had acquired a new trend as this became a world-renowned form of dance. This dance form is now recognized and acclaimed as the best of Indian value oriented treasured contribution to global dance culture.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Mahadevan, D. (2020). *The Bharatanatyam Body: Spectacularization as a Style in Bharatanatyam Aesthetics, 1930 to 2020*. University of California, Davis.

¹⁶⁵ <https://paipa.in/history-of-bharatnatyam.html>



Plate - 3.2: Tanjore Balasaraswati performing in Delhi in 1970. Photo: Marilyn Silverstone¹⁶⁶ (Sai, 17 Jun 2017)

This popular dance form came into prominence and recognition some 150 years before. This origin had taken place in Vadodara. The event that led to the formation of this dance school - was the search for a bride for the prince of Baroda. Royal representatives were sent across the country in search of an intelligent and beautiful girl for the king. The search ended in Tanjore. Such an eminent, beautiful, lovable, and intelligent girl was found. As a part of tradition, two girls from Tanjore were sent to North India who were prominent dancers. The dancer Rukumani gave this dance a new form, fame, and glory as Bala Saraswati has been respected as the queen of this dance all over the world, who has made lot of efforts to spread its wings in the global arena¹⁶⁷ (Jeevanandam, 2016).

Historically we could find Indian kings were so devoted to music and traditional dance of Bharatanatyam. They decide to support and spread this dance form all over the world. The King of Baroda took the first initiative in this direction by establishing a college and allocating sufficient funds for its activities and development along with sustenance. The King decided that institutes of excellence and prominence had to be established that could spread Indian education and culture across the globe. The Indian first music and dance college was established in Baroda, MSU - Maharaja Sayajirao University. It also had a fine arts department where various musical instruments and vocal singing

¹⁶⁶Sai,V.(17Jun2017).Tanjore Balasaraswati: The empress of Bharatanatyam. <https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/JYrbu0aBExY2O1BbNMliEN/Tanjore-Balasaraswati-The-empress-of-Bharatanatyam.html>

¹⁶⁷ Jeevanandam, s. (2016). exploring bharathanatyam: a reformulated dance form of devadasi tradition in the 20th century. proceedings of the indian history congress

were taught. Painting was taught under NS Bendre, as the dance department was headed by Mohan Khokar. These courses, which were established and run, are functional till now, which shows the keen interest and development perspective of stakeholders in this region¹⁶⁸ (Shah, 2005). Professor Mohan had come from Punjab all the way to this college to spearhead its operations and functions. He is a legend in the Indian dance cult as he established the traditional Bharatanatyam and ensured its prominence and development all over the country. He was a versatile master as he was skilled in making documents and analyzing the historical sequence of dance and music with his writing fame. He was indeed impressed with the dance forms, representations, and versatility of Ram Gopal and Uday Shankar. Lahore was a small town near Delhi before partition, which became very famous with the Ram Gopal, Mohan Khokar, journey to Madras to learn this art form – Mohan also travelled from Punjab to Madras Kalakshetra¹⁶⁹. He saw the cultural amalgamation of the Indian dance form in South India as he became the first male student from North India. This denotes his passion and love for this dance form which he learnt with eagerness and attention. He never came back to his own hometown as it ceased to exist after partition as Lahore became a part of Pakistan, which ceased to exist on the Indian map and geographical boundary.

The resemblance of Bharatanatyam could be found in other forms of Indian classical dances like Kuchipudi, which operates with Jathi and Swara fine-tuned with musical instruments, which adds elegance and significance¹⁷⁰ (Bhanumathi, 2019). The Kuchipudi dance, by its nature, could be seen to have similarities in its origin, like Bharatanatyam, which had originated with temple orientations and representations. This dance form, Kuchipudi, had taken postures and forms from traditional temples, which had given cultural orientation and idealistic representations. In Odissi dance, no such resemblances or models were derived from the existing dance forms. This form of classical dance has its origins based on various dance forms that were there as it was

¹⁶⁸ Shah, R. (2005). *Movement in Stills: The Dance and Life of Kumudini Lakhia*. Mapin Publishing Pvt Ltd.

¹⁶⁹ <https://www.sruti.com/articles/newsnotes/mohan-khokar-centenary-celebrations>.

¹⁷⁰ Bhanumathi, K. N. (2019). *Bharata Natyam training at The Temple of Fine Arts: Pre arangetram, arangetram and post-arangetram/Bhanumathi K Nadson* University of Malaya].

combined to give this new form with elegant postures. This dance form used Bharatanatyam to a larger and greater extent with a blend of Oriyan culture and social forms. It could be found that all south Indian classical dance forms had emerged with Bharatanatyam, the primordial base and foundation on which the entire south Indian dance culture was built with. Mohini dance form was another culmination of Bharatanatyam in effective combination with Kathak and an effective local dance form of Kerala gave this new form and ideologies in Indian dance culture and effective representations¹⁷¹ (Shah, 2002). The Indian classical dance has a long periodical history with tradition, culture and values which have added new forms and content to it. The dance forms in India have its emergence and effective presentation from art forms of Mohenjo-Daro which is as old as 2000 years only. There is an archive historian who has passionately collected on anything and everything on Indian dance, culture and heritage Mohan who has been consistent in his passion as he has achieved what he had aimed for. He is also an eminent dance historian & living legend in the field of Indian classical dance and heritage.

How did he do it?

This musical legend had his origins from Quetta, the town in Baluchistan. After the partition of India, this place has become a part of Pakistan. He was the son of commander in Military. He never had any acquaintance with dance as he came to India. He had seen the dance of Ram Gopal as he soon became his life time inspiration as the interest with music & dance became his life time hobby, passion and living. Ram Gopal and his dance team came to Lahore for dance performance which he witnessed and soon he got mesmerised, impressed and attached with it.

In this dance team, Baby Saroja as an artist came for the program. It was destiny that he would marry her later as it was the wish of the divine which was executed. Ram Gopal and his inspirational dance became his life time goal for Mohan. The rest is history as he learnt this profession with dedication and

¹⁷¹ Shah, P. (2002). Where they danced: patrons, institutions, spaces: State patronage in India: appropriation of the “regional” and “national”.

devotion. He was also the first north Indian to have enrolled for this dance cult with Kalakshetra in 1940.



Plate - 3.3: Mohan Kakkar¹⁷² (Shetti, 2021)

He was a dedicated and professional dancer, and he soon got acclaimed and world-renowned. At the very tender age of 24, he became the HOD, which offered dance programs for students at the graduate level at MS University. He got special recognition from the central government, and he got a loan from the Education Ministry as well. He was the special officer for dance during a period of time. He also served for Sangeet Natak Academy for 18 long years. In this duration of 18 years, he served as the secretary of this association for 5 years. During this period, his contributions were noteworthy as he gave support and assistance to young dancers to achieve professional recognition. It is history with his support and attention that we could find the gems of the dance profession, namely Kathak, Serai Kella Chhau, and Koodiyattam, had gained global recognition and fame. For two decades, from the 1960s to 1989, he gave these wonderful, dedicated, noteworthy services, as we could find the dance profession by nature revived and achieved new glory, prosperity, and global recognition and fame. He also saw to it that this profession of dance survived as the ancestral dancer's sons and daughters were given support with jobs so that this legendary service of dance could be spread across the world. He has written more than 5k articles that spread the knowledge and intelligence of dance to global communities. He also gave 7 7-volume compilation on dance, which is still treated as a specialized professional body of knowledge equivalent to the Encyclopaedia on Dance.

¹⁷² Shetti, N. (2021). Evolution of bharatnatyam: From the dance of gods to the dance of glory. *IJCRT*, 9.

He went abode in 1999 as he left this body of divine dance knowledge with the custody of his third child, Ashish Khokar¹⁷³ (Shetti, 2021).

3.2 Stalwarts and their contribution to Bharatanatyam to the promotion and propagation of Bharatanatyam

Mohan had received his early mentorship, guidance and support in classical dance at a very early age in Lahore. These classes of inspiration and professional guidance from Zohra Sehgal made him passionate and devoted to this divine representative form of dance¹⁷⁴. He has contributed to this profession with a huge collection of knowledge and a repository on dance, types, representations, and manifestations. He is also a traditional collector of dance forms and their uniqueness, which he holds as a historical collection since the Britishers left India after Independence times. He has his proper documentation on the existence of dance forms in India during European times when India had been colonized and chained. He could be acclaimed as an iconic, passionate contributor to Indian dance and its documentation, which could make any person in the profession breathless, as it is so significant and noteworthy. His wife and sons contribute to this tradition by preserving this treasury for Indian professional dancers and their love for it. They had given this collection, which could be worth crores for the preservation of national heritage – dance and its effective, sustainable engagement towards the future also. This documentation has been made digital as this could be accessed by one and all over the globe, which ensures a free, smooth flow of dance knowledge to every nook and corner of this world. Sonal Mansingh and Padma Subrahmanyam took the professional and effective management of the dance profession as their lifetime contribution as it reached new heights and acclaim. This family has made a remarkable contribution to Indian dance, which could be sustained towards 2030 – as and now the hope lingers positively in every Indian mind across the globe¹⁷⁵.

This classical dance form – Bharatanatyam, had its slow and steady inflow into the Northern part of India as it established its strong foundations and

¹⁷³ Shetti, N. (2021). Evolution of bharatnatyam: From the dance of gods to the dance of glory. *IJCRT*, 9.

¹⁷⁴ <https://www.sruti.com/articles/newsnotes/mohan-khokar-centenary-celebrations>

¹⁷⁵ <https://www.sruti.com/articles/newsnotes/mohan-khokar-centenary-celebrations>

roots there also. This dance form had a new form of representation, which has been ideally and positively infused into the cultural heritage and common living among North Indian citizens. 5 decades have passed since Bharatanatyam and its traditional entry in North India – today, we can see thousands of people learn this with passion, love, and affection more than ever for any other profession in this world. With the central government's support, the process of spreading this culturally iconic dance form – Bharatanatyam, was much easier as it was also strengthened. The world-renowned artists like Swarna Saraswati, Venkata, Govindrajan, Indrani Rahman, MK Saroja, Yamini Krishnamoorthi, and Sonal Mansingh became very famous and popular along with it¹⁷⁶ (Rao). It is now known and evident that Bharatanatyam has had its effective inroads and dominance in India's administrative capital – Delhi. The elite and middle class of Delhi across socio-economic classes and differentiation could now know this dance profession with a positive and passionate outlook. Guruji Govindarajan, the renowned dance professional, had come from this town as he was also a traditional singer. Along with this, he was also known for his choreography and his artistic picturization with the camera. For him, his mother was his first guru, and she sowed the proper seeds for the development of passion and interest in this profession. His other famous, accomplished, and dedicated teachers include Vidwan Narayanaswami, T. V. Namasivayam, Sikkil Ramaswami Pillai, and Kripasamudra Swamigal. At the early age of 26, he came out of Delhi to accomplish himself as an artist with his mentor, Sikkil Ramaswami to Delhi. This dance combination as a duo classical gave new impetus and outlook as they created professional Bharatanatyam dancers in Triveni Kala Academy. He also became very renowned at a later stage as he soon established his own dance school of repute and class on classical dance - Bharata Natya Niketan. He created and crafted new compositions and forms of Bharatanatyam, which also created goodwill and image. he trained a number of dance legends like Jamuna

¹⁷⁶ Rao, B. S. Jatti Thayamma-New References on Her Art and Life and it's Significance on Bharatanatyam History. *International Journal of New Technology and Research*, 4(4), 263087.

Krishnan, Jaya Shankar Menon, Radha Marar, Rasika Khanna, and Kiran Segal¹⁷⁷ (Rao).

The illustrious spread of classical dance traditions has been significant, culminating with the contributions of Geeta Chandran and Rama Vaidyanathan. They have notable achievements as they have also trained thousands of dancers from Delhi with versatility and class. She has been continuing her spread of the Bharatanatyam dance and its glory for more than the last 2 decades. She has been involved with this dance profession with ethical integrity, artistic sense, crafty orientations, good costume options, and global reach. She has done this with dedication, passion, and integrity, which has made her reach this level of elegance and excellence. The global standards of this dance form and its supremacy have been achieved in her dance school as she has united in this profession with her nobler and humbler husband. She has crafted her own unique mix of classical dance, offering a mix of Jain tradition, outlook, and philosophies in her dance expressions. These are vivid caricatures of dance and its oriental form, which provides realistic truth and expressions of Jain philosophy, tradition, and religious outlook. The musical sense provides even more elegance with costume designs, making it more attractive. This has been done with the dedicated spread of students who have given miraculous performances on stage with this Anekanta – lesser-known Bharatanatyam form and expressions. This could be called the benchmark contribution in this dance profession, which has added grace and substance to it¹⁷⁸ (Shetti, 2021).

Sudhamahi Ragunathan is a ferocious writer of intensity and varied themes that provide organic, sustainable pathways for the future. She has attempted various noteworthy works with orientations on religion, culture, customs, and philosophical themes. She has also attempted to portray the culture, philosophy, social outlook, and temperament in Jainism. They have contributed the work called Natya – the Shastra, which continues to be the leading significant book in this field of study. This book is vivid, natural, and

¹⁷⁷ Rao, B. S. Jatti Thayamma-New References on Her Art and Life and its Significance on Bharatanatyam History. *International Journal of New Technology and Research*, 4(4), 263087.

¹⁷⁸ Shetti, N. (2021). Evolution of bharatnatyam: From the dance of gods to the dance of glory. *IJCRT*, 9.

fluid in her style and approach, as she gives various approaches that bring new dynamism and functional pathways to Bharatanatyam. The functional approaches are derived to the core with attitudes that really transform and integrate the same. The book has shown remarkable conceptual clarity, approaches, and functional pathways to any learner, as it has been rightly called the Shastra in Bharatanatyam.

As she has immense clarity on functions and approaches in Bharatanatyam, she can provide a futuristic and transformational approach to the subject with immense clarity, which has gained immense popularity also. Her contributions could be seen as the important pivotal point in the development of this classical artistic dance form as traditions and culture have been given a new outlook and outfit with modern implications¹⁷⁹ (Patel, 2019).

Legends arise from nowhere, making their place of origin, birth, and contributions famous worldwide. A true legend by living, a master with grace and humility, an ardent devotee and child of Andal, and the singer and music composer Zahir Hussain has shown his class and stature in these professions. He could be seen as the image of Ram Gopal on-stage performances, as he resembles the dance form, style, mannerisms, and expressions like him. Zahir is shorter and plumper than Ram, yet his vivid and intense movements reflect the grace and dance elegance of this tradition. He has unique and self-made expressions that are crafted and originated with dedication and interest, which inspire and excel everyone. He also does various dance programs on the theme of Lord Vishnu, which has global acclaim and following. He has transcended his birth religion, performing these themes with intense love and affection for the profession. “Panchkanya of Srirangam” is a magical and ardent performance that attracted thousands of audiences to his stage, which he did during Nalli’s 75 years of centenary celebrations. The program The Panchkanyas - Tara, Mandodri, Ahalya, Draupadi, and Kunti has already been chosen and given on-stage performances by legends already – but Zahir’s poetic and intense

¹⁷⁹ Patel, D. (2019). *The changing dynamics of a traditional art form case study of on Bharatanatyam Margam* Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (India).

representation of this classical dance form is truly a class apart as he has mastery skills and intense love for it which has given unique representations¹⁸⁰.

This nature of Zahir has been less followed in the classical dance tradition as he has worked for the progress and development of this profession, which has given him a global name, fame, and glory. The global impact of Bharatanatyam as a profession has been classical in itself, like this dance form, which has been artistic all over the world. It has been a traditional Indian form of emotive expression that has reached global continents and taken new forms and avatars. This has also used social media and other forms of digital impetus, making it more popular and classical to trespass any other dance form or cult. The traditional forms of art like Photography and its excellent colors have retained their traditional outlook, and yet still, Bharatanatyam has imbibed new social media forms, which have given it new outlook and representations. Ram Gopal has given a new shape and form of representation in Bharatanatyam and its cult by combining the photographic elements and creating a new infusion, which has a progressive impact on this profession and its preoccupation for these legends towards the future with new experiments and outlooks.

It is also evident that these modernization attempts have provided progress and development for this artistic dance profession. It is also known that old traditions and cultural outlooks have been carefully and strictly followed by Uday Shankar and Rukmini Devi Arundale, which is often debatable¹⁸¹ (Srivastava)

This traditional dance form has grown leaps and bounds beyond boundaries as modernity in its form and presentation has adapted this traditional form to new reaches and milestones. The individual and his personification, cult, and experiments really shape this profession towards the future, which has made the most cultural dance have modern forms and identity also. The issue still lies in the aspects and dimensions of the star or artist, which have to prevail for the benefit of this profession and need to be researched and evaluated. This classical, traditional value-oriented artistic dance representation, which

¹⁸⁰ <https://www.dailyo.in/arts/bharatanatyam-delhi-classical-dance-chennai-kalakshetra-13987>

¹⁸¹ Srivastava, A. Bharatanatyam in Lucknow: The Role of Cultural Enterprise, Mobile Telephony, and SNS Networks in Reframing a Parampara.

originated from Tamil Nadu, the state, and, specifically, its temples, has been given new focus and attention in the modern days. The foot and hand movements provide an intense rhythm for the artist to perform with supporting music and artisans in the background. This dance form had a problem of connectivity and growth during colonial times, and slowly and steadily, it progressed after that with a new outlook and thinking. The rich, crafty, and elegant modern outlook and themes of innovation have made this profession a legend. E. Krishna Iyer and Rukmini Devi Arundale's contributions in this direction are intense and more passionate, which has given new progressive pathways towards the 2030 future. This has made this profession contribute towards the art form globally with millions of followers and dancers who work passionately for it, always and ever.

3.2.1 Self-Fashioning the Artist: The Dancer and the Image

The classical, traditional form of dance has provided a new impetus with imagination and explorations of the mind. This has given rise to new ideologies in dance forms as it has determined outcomes. When these two aspects combine in the traditional dance, it provides a new engagement and involvement that transcends all traditional expectations but confirms traditions, culture, and cult. Digitisation has modified and provided a glorified outlook for traditional dance, which has led to a new outlook and outfit that is modern yet preservatory in its function and focus. Naved has given new inspirations and forms to this traditional art form as he has been a Muslim by birth and has skilfully learned this profession. He had faced much opposition in learning and representing this dance form in Old Lucknow. In order to continue with this profession, which he loved with passion and intensity – he took digital transformation mode to propagate and renovate it. He is now the single dancer left in this town, and Gyanendra Bajpai has gone to Tokyo to teach dance classes. He landed with Saroja Vaidyanathan as his beloved master, guide, and inspiration for dance, with Google searches. He left for Delhi to learn this art despite severe opposition from his kin, kin, relatives, and family, who were dumbstruck by his choices and pursuit of life for a living. Amrit had just started his academy on dance as he was slowly evolving as an international icon of Bharatanatyam dance in its whole glory. He also intensely used digital technology, which gave new

pathways for progress in this direction, which also transformed this traditional dance form to the core with the most incredible intensity. The Indian dancers were given a new facelift as they were allowed to perform in the 2010 games show held in Delhi. On this occasion, Amrit met Naveed, his guru, and he was transformed as he became totally engrossed with this traditional dance form and its intense pursuits towards happiness. This brought new vistas and transformative effects to Lucknow, with a slow and steady impetus for digital techno impact. The traditional dancers in this profession still used studios for song recording and rehearsal as the usage of digital technology was limited in itself. The merge of two songs and its impact has to be crafted and designed in the studio only, which was not possible in any other way¹⁸² (Srivastava).

3.2.2 Impact and the way to present

In modern times, the influences of language and its immense personification have adapted this traditional dance form. We can see that the traditional holy language of Sanskrit has had remarkable and subtle influences of dominance and representations in this dance form. This also has transformed into a more urbane way of representing modern culture, tradition, and values. The Indian culture has been effectively represented with new Flavors and aura with this repute and excellence dance tradition. This traditional cultural dance form was given a classical touch during the 1930s. This has been handcrafted with new sketches and forms by elite Hindu families of repute who made it an elite recreation¹⁸³ (Mahadevan, 2023). This has been an elegant and dominant reply to modern artistic outcomes, such as cinema, which has become more prevalent as it has overshadowed this profession with time and reach. We could also witness some glimpses and episodes of Bharatanatyam and its representations in the modern cinema, which has also added a new outlook and personality to it. The rise of the Indian independence struggle, national patriotism, and other cultural factors transformed the nature and methods of representation of this traditional dance form, which has become more classical, belonging to the elite

¹⁸² Srivastava, A. Bharatanatyam in Lucknow: The Role of Cultural Enterprise, Mobile Telephony, and SNS Networks in Reframing a Parampara.

¹⁸³ Mahadevan, D. (2020). *The Bharatanatyam Body: Spectacularization as a Style in Bharatanatyam Aesthetics, 1930 to 2020*. University of California, Davis.

class only today. New imaginative art and artistic representation of this dance also evolved over some time, which gave it a new shape and prospects (Mahadevan, 2023). The elite class made it a national pride of representation as it provided cultural shape to national development. The classical form of this modern dance has been given a new shape with modernity and its outlook, which was welcomed with an engrossed attention and enthusiasm. New texts for references, reformatory teaching methods, and practices that could institutionalise this traditional dance form were put into practical implementation, which gave it a standard benchmark as it could be learned and practised worldwide.

Table 1: Architects of Indian traditional dance – Bharatanatyam

Dance master	Year	Form of dance and its significance
Vallathol Narayanan Menon	(1879–1958)	Kathakali, Kudiyaattam, and Mohiniyaattam Established Kerala Kalamandalam in the 1930s
Rukmini Arundale	(1904–1986)	Institutionalise the transmission of Bharatanatyam. Kerala founded Kalakshetra (1936)
Vishnu Digambar Paluskar	(1872–1931)	Gandharva Maha Vidyalaya (1901) Lahore Hindustani music
Vishnu Narayan Bakthande	(1860–1936)	North India Music systems with notations founding members of a music department at Maris College in Lucknow, 1926
		standardising pedagogy and methods of knowledge transfer, enabling an uninterrupted process of transmission of the arts.
		Classical dance with modified, abstracted versions of indigenous, hereditary art forms ¹⁸⁴ (Mahadevan, 2023).
		Female hereditary practitioners danced in the courts, temples, in ritual and non-ritual contexts, in the homes of people, at community festivals, and on other occasions of importance and grandeur.

¹⁸⁴ Mahadevan, D. (2023). When Bharatanatyam Moved from the Popular to the Classical. *South Asian Dance Intersections*, 2(1).

So, we could see the transition and development of Indian dance, which has come far beyond its origins as it has been shaped to modernity in its outlook and personification due to various social events and factors.

This classical dance form and representation had found new locations, like concert halls, where the elite class came and witnessed it. This also gave new touches, approaches, and methods which formalised its pedagogy and delivery mechanisms. The functional delivery of dance as an art form has progressed and approached effective synergy, but it has been done very purposefully among selective audiences. This gave new methods and mechanics in Bharatanatyam as we see today. Rukmini Arundale had been a classical dancer throughout her life, with formal presentations, as she totally rejected its presentation in Indian movies. But it has to be acknowledged that the movie, the most powerful platform, gave a global spread with wings as it could reach anywhere and everywhere. She was the founder of Kalakshetra, and her contributions have been specific and clear on the classical front of dance and its representations in India and all over the globe. Critics commented and opined on the shift and transformation of the classical dance form, which moved from physical movements and representations. This moved to higher, smaller, and emphatic moves, which gave special meaning, significance, and stature to the audience and the dancer. (Amanda Weidman, *Creative Spirit Journal*, 1940). The minor movement of the tiny finger as a dance movement conveyed 1000 meanings and interpretations, which was never possible with the turns and twists of a gymnast in a circus or in a movie¹⁸⁵ (Sharma, 2017). She had multiple teachers who had given her the necessary training and elevation in this Indian classical dance form, which has now become a globally acclaimed noble profession. (Kattumanarkoil Muthukumaran Pillai & Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai). They were traditional Indian dancers who had been given new horizons, pathways, and mechanics in this classical dance form of representation (Mahadevan, 2023). Kamala also made some contributions to Indian movies, which gave a real facelift to the Indian classical dance form – Bharatanatyam. Her contributions to Indian cinema were unique and special as she focused on

¹⁸⁵ Sharma, K. (2017). How to Dress a National Elite: The Case of the Kalakshetra Sari. *International Quarterly for Asian Studies*, 48(1-2), 33-53.

the aesthetic aspects of the effective representation of Indian dance forms with classical and cultural impetus. She had been an effective contributor to Indian cinema for two decades from the 1940s, which gave a new facelift to this dance and its representations in the global arena. As she had been born into the elite class of Indian society with Hindu culture and pride, many elite families started taking this profession, which gave new progressive pathways for it. She could combine the national spirit with Hindu mythological orientation, which has succeeded in itself. She had ensured that her portrayal in the movies was confined to dance and its effective presentation only. So, this could highlight the narrative, and the representative voice of her dance could be heard more clearly than the character or following the flow of the plot. She had been characterized most dignified as a sister or motherly role, which could be clearer and more functional.

Table 2: Essence of Bharatanatyam in Movies

Movie	Year	Role
Nam Iruvar (1947)	1947	Protagonist- Character
Sri Valli (1945) and Meera (1945).	1945	Deity - Divinity
Kumari Kamala.”	1940 to 1950	Contributions to patriotic movies. Giving an appearance for a specific dance sequence and no contribution as a character artist in movies.
		Patriotic symbolism unmarried, nature, Brahmin portrayal, dancer with sister role; or deity with mythical representation of the middle class and their orientations in these movies
	Impact on public and their mental orientation towards dance and its meaning as a dignified social obligation as it contributes to values of India as a nation	Dignified portrayal of women’s representation in national problems, issues and challenges

Choreography of Kamala in movies		Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai and later by K. N. Dandayudapani Pillai, P. S. Gopalakrishnan With aesthetic impetus, learning contributions and future directions
Chori Chori (1956),	Item genre – Thillana dance form and representations	The Bharatanatyam impetus has given new presentation method as a really successful art form
Kamala dance form	nattuvanars, K. N. Dandayudapani Pillai and P. S. Gopalakrishnan in Chori chori movie	teachers Muthukumar Pillai and Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai.

In the movie, we find that the artist has been wearing a formal artist costume, which adds value to the Bharatanatyam dance and its representations. The four-minute special representation and presentation in the movie could give a lot of impetus and glory to the profession, which has got global fame and attention due to this performance. In this way, we could credit her with her magical spells of dance, which had spellbound global audience as they wished to replicate and learn from every nook and corner of this world, which is phenomenal¹⁸⁶ (Puri, 2004). Her body movements during the dance performance have been legendary, unique, and special, and they spread this dance form across the world. We could also find that she exhibits a range of physical movements and postures, which would be difficult for anyone to replicate or copycat as she had been traditional and sublime with emotive representations.

Her nature of physical body and form had added a new way to her representation of dance form, which has remained unparalleled with any other modern dancer of today and for the time to come as well. Kamala has been different in her body structure, which has made her be identified in this profession due to her dedication, commitment, and hard work.

¹⁸⁶ Puri, R. (2004). Bharatanatyam performed: a typical recital. *Visual Anthropology*, 17(1), 45-68.

Dance performers should be erect as they must also have spine extensions, which could make them successful in this profession by nature and default. However, if we could see her spine, it is rounded, which contradicts the shape required for the dance profession, and yet she succeeded, which had redefined the role of physical shape and appearance and its relation to success. She never had the pile position, which is expected by most of the dance teachers, which makes learning and commitment to this dance profession very easy and simple. Dancers could also excel in this profession by having bent knees, and yet they could still exhibit superior performances as they would also maintain a specific height. This redefined the nature and performance of this dance as we could find that physical restrictions could no longer bind a person from achieving excellence in this profession. She moves either way, to her choice up and down, which could be categorized as less effective and efficient by dance standards, which she beat consistently over a period to gain name, fame, and global recognition. Her effective and structured body movements do not arise from the organized pelvic region or its movements – yet still, she has been popular and prominent in her profession, demonstrating that she has unique talents. She permanently moved her weight constantly to one side as she bent her dance movements with her sides, which also gave her rhythm and effectiveness, which was transformative and divine¹⁸⁷ (Pattnaik & Samantaray, 2017). With casual and formal interactions with her sister Radha, it could be understood that the dance movements were specific and purposive as they also emphasized aesthetics, and this requirement was also satisfied in her cinematic portrayal¹⁸⁸ (Thiagarajan, 2020). Natural presentation of dance and its art form could be seen in her movie characters which symbolised dance as the most prominent feature. In the movie Chori Chori, we can see that their dance movements, her elegant presentation, and her attire were beyond comparison, which gives a more sensual outlook to her outfit. Her body movements and representations were characteristics of Bharatanatyam dance, which she never compromised, although her attire could have been more sensual in outlook as it

¹⁸⁷ Pattnaik, S., & Samantaray, S. P. (2017). Comparative study on classical dances: Odissi & Bharatanatyam. *World Wide J Multidiscip Res Dev*, 3, 147-150.

¹⁸⁸ Thiagarajan, P. (2020). Bharatanatyam in Malaysia. In *Sharing Identities* (pp. 130-147). Routledge India.

was more prominent also. her body movements were natural and free-flowing to the core, which inspired a lot of audiences from across the world as we could find mesmerizing effects also.

The other prominent dancers of her time had erect spines as they were able to hold their body movements with swiftness and elegance, but grace and subtle representation of emotions and feelings made her more loveable on stage and off stage. they could do an acrobatic style of representation and features which was not appreciated or welcomed by the traditional onlookers of Indian cinema and its outcomes¹⁸⁹ (Varghese, 2008).

Actress	Movie And Year	Choreography	Transformations And Presentations
Sayee & Subbulakshmi	Dr. Savithri (1955),	Muthuswamy Pillai was trained by Muthukumaran Pillai and Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai Teacher of Rukmini Devi	Scenes of a typical Bharatanatyam dance performance Erect spine orientation, thinking, and display are challenged by legendary dancer Rukmini.
			Dance is in praise of a male deity or god dancer's body is not held tall or erect Evidence of soft leg and comfortable posture in this movie Knee movement is subtle and fluid Hand gestures do not extend fully as in modern dance classrooms nor in an angular way but Rukumani has a unique way of presentation, which makes it vivid and awesome

The modern dancer, Bala Saraswati, and her dance performance do not display or show the erect spine feature or representation done with Kalakshetra dancers, and yet she has been successful and glorious in her profession. She has been representing an angular form, which has shown a unique way that differs

¹⁸⁹ Varghese, M. (2008). Ascending the Canadian stage: Dance and cultural identity in the Indian diaspora

in intensity and representation from Kamala and Sayee and in mannerisms. Kamala & Sayee's way of representing Bharatanatyam dance has been movie-oriented, but Bala Saraswathi had been doing a stage performance that has direct connectivity and response from the audience, per se.

It is evident that there has been a greater extent of fluidity, which can be seen in film dancers as their medium and content are different from stage performances. In the era between the 50s and 60s, we do find that the body position and its requirements had indeed changed to a larger and greater extent. Supple body position was never regarded as a requirement, nor was it considered to be a classic part of Bharatanatyam dance and its main stage performances. It is known that Kamala is much younger than Bala Saraswati, as she has been an artist since childhood. Under the tutelage of her teacher, Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, she found another alternative career in film.

During this time, Bala Saraswati was aged as she was in her thirties. She never had any form of athletic effect in her body movements or in her dance movements. She did indeed have some supple body form, which was typical to the period of 40s to 50s¹⁹⁰ (Mahadevan, 2023). This supple body could enable elegant dance movements, which could be done with more elegance and swiftness with erect postures – a new trend in dancing that has been given as a contribution to the dance world by Kalakshetra. Beryl de Zoete was born and raised in Sweden and wrote many ethnographic books, documents, and writings. She had travelled throughout South Asia, which she recorded in his travel log. She came to India during the 50s and has given a separate chapter on Saraswathi, her dance dedication, interest, and contributions. She has also given Kamala dance and her representations other than Saraswathi. Kamala danced in the public sphere, which almost 7000 elite audiences have watched¹⁹¹ (Narayanan, 2007).

¹⁹⁰ Mahadevan, D. (2023). When Bharatanatyam Moved from the Popular to the Classical. *South Asian Dance Intersections*, 2(1).

¹⁹¹ Narayanan, V. (2007). Performing arts, re-forming rituals: Women and social change in South India. *Women's lives, women's rituals in the Hindu tradition*, 177-198.

Zoete had opined on Kamala's elegance and subtle dance movements, which could be seen in her Abinaya- the intense, varied dance movements. She ascribes Kamala as a born dancer with versatility and variety, which can be seen from a very early age. She never used acrobatic techniques that could bend the body, but they could never provide ease and comfort for dance, especially classical dance like Bharatanatyam, which has been liked by everyone all over the globe. The acrobatic movements of classical dance have been categorized as vulgar and non-expressive, which has been totally condemned. Snake dance is very popular in Indian cinema as she feels that there are commercial elements and aspects included in this form of classical dance as we could have vulgar elements and elegant features and expressions in it. The dance movements of this commercial snake dance could be attributed to having taken place with Ballet – as body movements of bending, coiling like a snake and whole movement of hands do not form a part of Bharatanatyam and its Shastra as they are out of context from it. This infusion of ballet dance movements had profound implications on the representation and content of Bharatanatyam and its representation to the world as it has been more diluted in its aesthetic sense, form, and presentation. When Kamala performed the snake dance as her feet touched the back of her head – the crowd went mad and crazy as they enjoyed – but the aesthetic lookers at the dance would confirm that this was not classical. Zoete also noted the disgrace of using acrobatic dance movements, which are not classical but indeed the popular dance form at that time.

The classical dance artist Kamala, during her cinematic performances, was supported as a companion by Ramaiah Pillai, who was also a teacher and guide during this performance. This also marked the significance and approval of these dance and body movements as a part of Indian cultural dance heritage and its representation to the country and globe. These dance movements also received severe criticism because they had never been a part of the classical dance of India, although they had been choreographed by Ramaiah Pillai. In the same book, Zoete gives a lot of praise and positive appreciation to Saraswathi for her elegance and simple nature, which is mixed with style and unique body representations. She had also kept some of the dance movements that had been

choreographed and approved by her beloved teacher and guide, which could be considered emotive and erotic in content and form.

The hereditary group of classical dancers had stayed away from these new dance forms and representations – acrobatics, by nature, was shunned by Kamala. She felt that dance and its representation in Indian cinema, in its content and form, must have an erotic flavour, which could add more taste, colour, and sensuality to it. We could also see that Saraswathi had come from a traditional dance community that had been practised for generations. She also shunned and stayed away from these acrobatic classical dances and their representations. The classical dance and its outlook shunned both the erotic element of Saraswati and the acrobatic element in Kamala as new aesthetic spaces, elements, and forms have to emerge with new dance movements that could sustain this classical dance form for the future. This could also keep in touch with the mainframe and foray of this Classical dance, Bharatanatyam, towards elegant practices for the future¹⁹² (Ling & Arunkumar, 2016).

This acrobatic representation of the Indian classical dance form was represented with a new impetus by cinematic dancers like Kamala, who gave a new perspective and orientation to it. Female dance has continued to inspire millions of cinema fans as they have become ardent followers and lovers of this new cult and practice of Indian Bharatanatyam form and its representations. Kamala gave this classical dance form a new outlook, which had a cinema representation, reach, and positive impact. Women dancers had become the visual treat for the audience. As they enjoyed this dance and its artistic presentation, they welcomed it fully. Sayee and Subbulakshmi had taken new roles and forms in this classical dance format, as they had performed the role of sisters to the main character in the movie. This also redefined Indian cinema as these dance artists also performed character roles and contributions. In the Tamil Movie Malai Kallan, the veteran and CM of the state, MGR, the global icon who had made unique contributions, had no glamorous representation of women and their nature. These women were given decent roles of repute and

¹⁹² Ling, K., & Arunkumar, S. (2016). Araimandi and Arabesque. *Scripting Dance in Contemporary India*, 93.

recognition, adding them fame and fortune. Their gender-oriented identity with their representation has been transformed as we could have new dignified roles and characters. They also performed classical dance movements in this movie, which were swift, faster, elegant, glorious, and lovable, which captured millions of hearts as ardent followers. This could hardly be compared to the movements of Kamala and her dance presentations. This acrobatic dance form of tradition and its representation continued in Indian cinema, which added value and performance-oriented outcomes. They were called twins who propagated this art form with elegance and supremacy – they were categorised as spinners, who spun in dance and reached glory and pinnacle¹⁹³ (Jeevanandam, 2016). The dance movements were swift, faster, and integrative, which provided a new facelift to Indian cinema, as it had a huge fan following also. The acrobat dance tradition, although it achieved prominence and respect as a dance form, did not have a place in the traditional form of classical dance like the snake version of movies, which had become a part of dance tradition with a modern outlook and significance. Arundale brought significance and glory to this profession, as we could find she provided a unique aesthetic representation and orientation on it, which has been unparalleled as it has left people speechless. The dance methods have taken a new form with more subtle reflexes and movements with Kalakshetra, which added to the aesthetic beauty of this form and representation, which has also gotten global acclaim.

It can be concluded that the history of this traditional dance form has its impeccable inputs from the Kalakshetra school of dance as the historical significance of its origin from Tanjore temple tradition can never be ignored or leftover as such, this tradition of Kalakshetra has its legacy and contribution which is traced in the next section which provides a new outlook on Indian traditional dance form - Bharatanatyam¹⁹⁴ (Mahadevan, 2020).

¹⁹³ Jeevanandam, S. (2016). EXPLORING BHARATHANATYAM: A REFORMULATED DANCE FORM OF DEVADASI TRADITION IN THE 20TH CENTURY. Proceedings of the Indian History Congress,

¹⁹⁴ Mahadevan, D. (2020). *The Bharatanatyam Body: Spectacularization as a Style in Bharatanatyam Aesthetics, 1930 to 2020*. University of California, Davis.

3.3 Phase one: Contributions of Kalakshetra and Indian classical Bharatanatyam and its representations

Bala had clearly positioned and distinguished herself as an elegant and feminine artist, which brought her name and fame in contrast to Rukumani. She was determined and clear in her ambitious pathway to cleanse and clear these pathways of classical dance and its disorientations as she aimed for a total transition and transformation in itself. She had a clear and genuine, authentic view of classical dance and its orientation as a representation of God, as it had healing and transformative powers and diverse orientations. This had really given a new uplift to the classical dance as its forms and ways had totally changed for the future. The transformation and changes in this classical form of dance and its representations, as we can find it, are already spiritual and holy in their aims and pursuits. They both had immensely contributed to this profession, which has become nobler and more honourable in its pursuit and its ambitious pathways. They both were determined to remove the torments and tortures during feudal lordship and colonial orientation, which had to be erased from India altogether.

The spirit and form of nationality had taken a new form and shape with this classical dance form, as it also contributed to its integrative and progressive pathways, which continue till now. This really had its more admirable and more elegant representation in the classical dance form of Bharatanatyam, which had taken a new shape and form during this period of development and growth in phase one. This spiritual form of orientation and establishment of traditional mold in this classical dance form changed its entire outlook and perspective, which was in contrast to the material orientation and outlook of the Westerners.

The classical orientation of Indian dance had acquired a new shape and form, which was given a new facelift with movements of the knee, various back bend movements, acrobatic orientation, and emphasis, and bending of the lower hip, which could provide an erotic and sensual outlook, shoulder movement to display displeasure – were all determined outcomes of new modern outlook, thought and thinking. These dance movements were emphatic, strong, and sensual, which brought in a new outlook and thinking on Indian classical dance

towards transformation as it evolved as a phenomenal representation of new dance movements, material orientation, and sensuous outlook. This also provided a new dance sentiment that beat all odds in its way of pursuit of this dance profession in India as it paved the way for progressive global outreach. Kalakshetra had redefined and modified the directions and purpose of this Indian classical dance as it was made more physical and sensuous, which had given new forms of pleasure and pursuit to the global audience. It is also evident that Rukumani had overshadowed the physical form of classical dance and its orientation as she made it more elegant, formal, and versatile in content, form, and representation. For her, the true nature and purpose of classical dance form is to represent spirituality to its core, and any other aspect or dimension would be a total distraction that has to be avoided. The spiritual aspect, form, and content have given a new elegant and progressive pathway for Indian classical dance as it has taken global prominence. Western thinking and mental orientations have given new impetus also to these classical dance representations, which have modified and taken new realms and opinions¹⁹⁵ (Burt & Huxley, 2019).

3.3.1. Phase two: Indian Bharatanatyam and its developmental phase, orientations, perspectives and thinking

This second prominent developmental phase and orientation of Indian Bharatanatyam was prominent during the 60s. This phase ended with the new millennial phase of growth, which has made it progress further. The period of the 50s to 60s shaped Indian cinema with new impetus and growth from Indian classical dance as artists and supportive persons made phenomenal progress. The socio-cultural exchange with an inclusive orientation was made possible with a flourish of artists from South and North India being exchanged with mutual benefits. New genres, terms, cultural and spiritual exchange, new forms and representation, and new body movements were generated, which gave a new facelift to this classical dance towards a global future. It is also evident that during this period we could see the culmination of artists and supporting artists who had the entire Indian platform as they could move and exhibit their latent

¹⁹⁵ Burt, R., & Huxley, M. (2019). Dance and modernism: Transnational currents. In *Dance, Modernism, and Modernity* (pp. 53-70). Routledge.

talents, which were given India recognition and fame now, which was next to impossible in the previous decades of Indian dance and progress¹⁹⁶ .

Vanjikottai Valiban (1958) was a famous Tamil movie that had achieved commercial success and reach. In this movie, we can find dance as the central integrative aspect, which is a part of the story plot. The dance sequences were phenomenal as they gave new interest and hope to the entire dance profession and its performances. The audience was impressed by the dance sequences as it was an important contributing aspect to its commercial success. Hiralal was the choreographer in the movie who organised the dance sequence, as it had an effective reach all over the Indian cinema landscape. The dance sequences were performed by the famous dancers, Padmini and Vyjayanthimala, who were professional dancers as well, which added a feather to the crown.

The dance movements were in total synchronisation with the movie plot, events, and it was the central aspect which gave twists and turns in the entire movie. This also ensured that this classical dance form had gained immense popularity and reach across every nook and corner of Tamil Nadu. The reach was beyond the Tamil industry as it spread its wings across the country and had cornered global fame.

The dancers in these movies propagated feminism and independence, freedom, and innovation as the major trendsetters, which also saw massive changes in Tamil movie production and performances. The feminine dancers were given liberty of expression and exposition, which was greeted with commercial success, as it ended as an aesthetic retreat for the audience. Till the 1950s, we could see that this dance profession had been, by and large, curtailed with Indian cultural values and orientations with Hindu cult representations. These actresses were professionally managed as they were able to have control of the sensual and erotic expressions during movie dance sequences also¹⁹⁷ . The objective representation and sensual retreat were possible with feminine dancers and their contributions, which changed the directives and orientations in the Tamil movie industry. Various Tamil movies were made in this feminine

¹⁹⁶ <https://cinemanrityagharana.blogspot.com/2011/04/vyjayanthimala-and-padminis-dance-off.html>

¹⁹⁷ <https://cinemanrityagharana.blogspot.com/2011/04/vyjayanthimala-and-padminis-dance-off.html>

dance genre, and they have been really popular as it has also been a commercial success. Parthiban Kanavu (1960) was another commercial success, along with Konjum Salangai (1961), as the dance sequences were effectively done and represented by Vyjayanthi mala Bali. Thillana Mohanmbal (1968) is another commercial success of the age we could say as it stands unparalleled even today. In all these movies, the dance sequences have been properly highlighted with glamorous representation of women in their dressing and outfit, which gave new pathways for Tamil cinema and its progression. The personification and glorification of these dancers as elite women had given new perspectives and thinking as it also infused a modern, respectable image among the people of this country. The female physical form and its presentation have been considered of paramount importance rather than the dance sequence as it had been less projected. This also provided a sort of engagement and pleasure for the audience as they experienced this glorification and visual retreat, which was fabulous. The purpose was to stabilize the Indian classical dance form towards nationalistic, cultural, and social objectives, which were partly achieved as sensual gratification and enjoyment were the prime orientation of representation in Indian cinema to a larger and greater extent. It could also be seen that in this traditional classical dance form – we could see that the sensual and erotic representation had been carefully hidden with socio-economic status, education, and caste – which put these problems under the carpet conveniently as national preservatives.

The classical dance form had been given a new odour, uplifted with sensual colour and paint of spirituality, which has been used very effectively to give a classy and classical outlook that followed Indian traditions, customs, and practices. E. V. Saroja, Kuchala Kumari Sayee, and Subbulakshmi, the traditional dancers, have to become accommodated to these colourful changes and feminine representation through classical dance form, as they also contributed to this. Vyjayanthimala, Kamala Lakshman, and Padmini could retain the classical aspects of Bharatanatyam as a dance form and yet be popular and commercial which was achieved by very few in Tamil cinema¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹⁸ <https://cinemanrityagharana.blogspot.com/2011/04/vyjayanthimala-and-padminis-dance-off.html>

The spiritual orientation and representation of the Indian classical dance form have largely been derived from Sanskrit texts and documents. The dance movements, rhythm, and style, form with content, have originated from Hindu religious orientations and outlook. The stature and grandeur of this classical dance form inspired many young Indians to explore it as they found it to be a decent profession to settle down with. The singers and supportive artists during these dance performances also created their own image and reputation as they became strongly intertwined with this professional dancing and effective representations. Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai was an eminent supporting artist who gained name, fame, and recognition as he entered Tamil cinema as early as the 1940s. He slowly and strongly disassociated from it as he was very aesthetic and ethical in the representation of this dance form¹⁹⁹ (Lightfoot, 2017). He had a typical fan following, as many joined as his students, who became very popular. Supportive artists like K. N. Dandayudapani Pillai and Muthuswamy Pillai aligned their supportive contribution with this classical dance and orientation, which has changed and revived its perspective totally, which was indeed transformative and sustainable²⁰⁰ (Mahadevan, 2023).

3.4 Early practitioners

This classical dance form, Bharatanatyam, which emerged from Tamil Hindu temples, has reached the global arena with sensual orientations and effective body movements. It is one of the effective representations of the classical dance form of modern India as it has coupled tradition, values, and spiritual orientations to it. This dance had been performed in South Indian temples by 1930s as it slowly and steadily gained popularity all over India and abroad²⁰¹ (Harishankar & Priyamvadha, 2016). The temple dancers had practiced this cult as it slowly spread across the state and country. These dancers from Tanjore had the tradition of marrying the Lord Shiva as they are united to the spread of the grandeur of this profession as they would remain truly attached and passionate

¹⁹⁹ Lightfoot, L. (2017). *Louise Lightfoot in Search of India: An Australian Dancer's Experience*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

²⁰⁰ Mahadevan, D. (2023). When Bharatanatyam Moved from the Popular to the Classical. *South Asian Dance Intersections*, 2(1).

²⁰¹ Harishankar, V. B., & Priyamvadha, M. (2016). Exploitation of women as devadasis and its associated evils. *Submitted to National Commission for Women. New Delhi*.

towards it. They are like public property for the temple as their duty is to please the audience and mould them towards spiritual interest and affairs, with their dance performances. On various occasions of prominence, importance and repute they would give special dance performance which was impressive and elegant. This has been given to the prominent and popular social and public figures in the region. A few such passionate and legendary dancers served the king for happiness as the kings were considered representatives of God living on earth as it was their prime duty to make them happy always. They were given accommodation, money as all their wishes were fulfilled by the King directly as they had direct personal access to Kings. They were also having an indirect hold on Royal court affairs, administration and public. During the British times these dancers were given a nick name such as girls who dance and entertain, which was their prime duty and occupation. A social movement was started in 19th century to end this dancing community as it got slowly eradicated as it is no longer functional in Indian society as a whole²⁰² (Belkin, 2008). Miss Tenant, who had come to India from England as she lived here & found these atrocities done for dancers she vehemently saw to it that it had a total full stop on the commercialization and misuse of these professional dancers and their community. This profession by nature was considered as immoral as the public patronage, support slowly eroded away. This classical dance form now stands tall among the global masses as an effective representative of Indian culture, values, norms, and social behavior. The traditional outlook and treatment have changed as the mistreatment of these dancing women has slowly eroded away, which could be seen in the Tamil cinema industry as well²⁰³ (Harishankar & Priyamvada, 2016).

The emergence of this century had a long and standing impact on this classical dance form and its contributions to Indian society. This has changed radically and diversely, and we can see that professional contributions have come to a greater extent as sensual pursuit and outlook have diminished. National spirit got its firm footing and elegant representations in Indian classical

²⁰² Belkin, E. C. (2008). Creating Groups outside the caste system: the Devadasis and Hijras of India.

²⁰³ Harishankar, V. B., & Priyamvada, M. (2016). Exploitation of women as devadasis and its associated evils. *Submitted to National Commission for Women. New Delhi*

dance form as we could see that a sense of common pride and oneness emerged among Indians. This has been the significant contribution of Indian classical dance form Bharatanatyam during this colonial era.

The educated masses had extended their fight against colonial treatment and injustice, which had been spearheaded by dancers, musicians, and artists. They spread the value and belief of Indian culture and social appraisal, which was made more substantial with the culmination of Indian classical dance, which provided new impetus directives and pathways²⁰⁴ (Zubko, 2014). The study of dance as a subject, its practice as a profession, and its upliftment had been done during this time, which also spread the national spirit across the country²⁰⁵ (Williams, 2004). The spread of this classical dance form has been more purposive, progressive, and developmental in the last two decades. We could see its massive spread across urban and rural India. The performances were done in temples, theatres, and prominent places, which also ensured its spread in full intensity. They still uphold the traditional temple dance practices, although it has been given a new shape, form, and content altogether, which could be seen as the revival of this classical dance form and its practices²⁰⁶ (Puri, 2004). The spread of this classical dance profession has been immense and intense as we could see many stage performances and theatrical, which has given new forms of entertainment to the Indian community at large. These theatres are functional as they are commercial in their outlook as these dance performances are seasonal in nature – they accommodate for specific periods only. The temporary structures for dance performances are also built with curtain cloths as the dance performance could be seen on the floor as well (in rural parts of India). These stages are more casual and informal in their nature and representation, which has the cultural spirit of India as a whole to a larger extent. To a greater extent, there is no scenery or background accompanied by the dancer as it could also be portrayed or personified with the dancer's movements and gestures (Puri, 2004). World-famous dancers like Bala

²⁰⁴ Zubko, K. C. (2014). *Dancing bodies of devotion: fluid gestures in Bharata Natyam*. Lexington Books.

²⁰⁵ Williams, D. (2004). In the Shadow of Hollywood Orientalism: Authentic East Indian Dancing. *Visual Anthropology*, 17(1), 69-98.

²⁰⁶ Puri, R. (2004). Bharatanatyam performed: a typical recital. *Visual Anthropology*, 17(1), 45-68.

Saraswati have spread this glorious classical dance form – Bharatanatyam, across the globe, which has given it special repute and respect. Cultural, values, and religious orientations have transformed this art form, which has become more functional as it has been accepted by global communities at large²⁰⁷ (Bhargava & Srinivasan, 2017). The infusion of local culture and its transformative effects on this dance form has made it trans-local in its purpose and direction. The contributions of Rukmini Devi Arundale and Bala Saraswati are laudable in these aspects and dimensions, which have given a new facelift to Bharatanatyam dance and its sustainability for the future.

Specifically, Rukmini Devi contributed to the development and international repute of this classical dance form as she made it prominent by traveling across the globe, which has also increased the fame of Kalakshetra and its contributions²⁰⁸ (Meduri, 2005). Multi-cultural and regional influences have also led to the growth and development of this classical dance form as it has become a multi-cultural representation of repute all over the globe. The perspectives and orientations of these dancers have been strongly influenced by their teachers and living practices, which have created new cults and forms in this classical dance form, Bharatanatyam. The Chola dynasty had sown the early seeds of this classical dance form in Tamil Nadu, and it has transformed into an artistic retreat for global communities today. It will also continue to inspire millions of global fellow beings in the future. The dancers and their perspectives, orientations and mindset towards this profession are explained in detail and in depth in the following section.

3.5 Dancers- Perspectives

Anita Ratnam is a famous Indian dancer who has mastered this classical art form as she has been recognized for her immense contributions all over the world. She is a versatile master as she is also a choreographer, she has created a new

²⁰⁷ Bhargava, V., & Srinivasan, P. (2017). Classical Indian Dance and the Dancer: Engaging with Tradition and Modernity. *Resistance in Everyday Life: Constructing Cultural Experiences*, 247-259.

²⁰⁸ Meduri, A. (2005). *Rukmini Devi Arundale, 1904-1986: A visionary architect of Indian culture and the performing arts*. Motilal Banarsidass Published

style of dance called – neo-Bharatha Natyam form, which has been flourishing across global continents. She feels that film dance is the most compelling contemporary form of classical dance, which could reach countless audiences across the nook and corner of India²⁰⁹ (Katrak, 2008). She was instrumental in the development of the Arangham Trust, which contributed to the development of this classical dance form. She has ensured the effective reach of this dance through various programs and events which has sparked inspiration and interest among the global public²¹⁰ (Katrak, 2011).

Priyadarsini Govind is another globally acclaimed Indian Bharatanatyam artist who has sprung into global repute and recognition. She has won several awards which adds to her fame and reputation. She feels that music must be integrative as it must hold the audience with bhajans and simple spiritual famous songs, whereby she could connect with them immediately²¹¹. Multi-cultural orientations, tastes, and interests have influenced this classical dance form as it has become more modified, contemporary, and intense in its representations like the Tyaag -the Yoga and Art Group in Delhi²¹² (Prickett, 2018) The teaching practices have also been modified with learning by seeing mode and approach which has changed the dynamics of teaching this popular universal dance form and its reach²¹³ (Prickett, 2004) Shanthi Pillai says that the local cultural and value influences are bound to modify this dance as it could be altered and changed over a period which has a lot of impact and influences on its traditional mode of practice²¹⁴ (Shankar, 2019).

²⁰⁹ “Katrak, K. H. (2011). Beyond Tradition: Contemporary Choreography by Masters of Traditional Indian Dance and Emerging Innovators. In *Contemporary Indian Dance: New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora* (pp. 84-122). Springer.

²¹⁰ “Katrak, K. H. (2011). Beyond Tradition: Contemporary Choreography by Masters of Traditional Indian Dance and Emerging Innovators. In *Contemporary Indian Dance: New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora* (pp. 84-122)”. Springer.

²¹¹ <http://www.kutcheribuzz.com/kb-special/kb-interviews/1110-priyadarsini-govind>

²¹² Prickett, S. (2018). Post Millennial Choreographic Challenges: Survival, Celebration and Critique. *Shifting Corporealities in Contemporary Performance: Danger, Im/mobility and Politics*, 275-292.

²¹³ Prickett, S. (2004). Techniques and institutions: The transformation of British dance tradition through South Asian dance. *Dance Research*, 22(1), 1-21.

²¹⁴ Shankar, K. (2019). Tracing minor gesture in Maya Krishna Rao’s kathakali-influenced performance. *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, 29(2), 125-145.

The aesthetic factor also has a prominent effect on this traditional dance form, which has changed it to provide a contemporary outlook and temperament, which can be seen now²¹⁵ (Kang, 2020). Although we could categorize India as a patriarchy-oriented and value-based culture that prevails – this dance form has its representations of only women to a more significant extent. This could be seen across the globe, even in the US. So the Indian culture has preserved and has categorized certain elite professions exclusively for women, like this classical dance form – Bharatanatyam²¹⁶ (Kothari, 1989).

Since the majority of the dancers are women, we can see the teachers are also women who continue this tradition with pride and elegance. The modern problems of exploitation of women do not prevail as it is taught by women for women – this has given the exclusive women zone for Bharatanatyam dance across the globe²¹⁷ (Srinivasan, 2020). The local Indian learners lag in the presentation as they have to book a hall and exhibit their talent, which would become possible with an NRI student who could afford it. The NRI has added flavour and interest, leading to global acceptance of this traditional dance form in all aspects²¹⁸ (Pillai, 2002). This has also given major impetus and orientation for spiritual form of representation of Gods and goddess which has given new dimensional perspective and reaches to the classical audience as ever.

²¹⁵ Kang, M. K. (2020). Bharatanatyam as a Transnational and Translocal Connection. A Study of Selected Indian and American Texts. *Review of International American Studies*, 13(2), 61-86.

²¹⁶ Kothari, S. (1989). *Kathak, Indian classical dance art*. Abhinav Publications.

²¹⁷ Srinivasan, P. (2020). Indian Dance in Diaspora: US and Australian Contexts. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*.

²¹⁸ Pillai, S. (2002). Rethinking global Indian dance through local eyes: The contemporary Bharatanatyam scene in Chennai. *Dance Research Journal*, 34(2), 14-29.

Table 3: Bharatanatyam dancers' Journey from Southern to Northern India

S.No	Dancer	Time Period	Legacy	Themes
1.	Padma Subrahmanyam, Madras, India	1956- present	Padma Shri (1981) Padma Bhushan (2003) Padma Vibhushan (2024)	Natya Sastra developer and founder of the dance form Bharata Nrithyam
2.	Alarmel Valli, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India	1966- present	Padma Bhushan(2004) Padma Shri (1991)	Blends traditional and innovative Bharatanatyam approaches Dipasikha Dance Foundation Chennai
3.	Leela Samson, Coonoor, The Nilgiris District, Tamilnadu, India	1961- present	Padma Shri (1990) Sangeet Natak Akademi Award Kalaimamani (2005) Former Director of Kalakshetra	Special talent and skills and a Shriram Bhartiya Kala Kendra teacher in Delhi for many years
4.	Yamini Krishnamurthy, Madanapalli, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh	1957- present	Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri	She imparts dance lessons to younger dancers at her institute, Yamini School of Dance, Hauz Khas, New Delhi
5.	Rukmini Devi Arundale, Madurai, Madras Presidency, British India	1910- 1986	Padma Bhushan (1956) Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (1967) In January 1994, an Act of the Indian	Founder of Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai. Worked for the re-establishment of traditional Indian arts and crafts.

			Parliament recognised the Kalakshetra Foundation as an 'Institute of National Importance	
6.	Mrinalini Sarabhai, Madras, Madras Presidency, British India.	1928 – 2016	Padma Bhushan (1992) Padma Shri (1965)	She was the founder and director of the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, an institute for imparting training in dance, drama, music and puppetry, in the city of Ahmedabad
7.	Anita Ratnam, Madurai, Madras State, India	1960- present	Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (2016) Kalaimamani (1998)	New form of dance "Neo Bharatam" Arangham Trust, Chennai.
8.	Adyar K. Lakshman, Chennai, India	1944- 2014	Padma Shri (1989) Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1991)	Founded the Bharatha Choodamani Academy of Fine arts on 22 August 1969, Chennai
9.	Bala saraswathi, Madras, Tamilnadu, India	1930 - 1984	Padma Bhushan in 1957 Padma Vibhushan in 1977 Sangeetha Kalanidhi by the Madras Music Academy Sangeetha Kalasikhamani	She was artistic director of Bala Music and Dance Association in the United States and the Balasaraswati School of Dance in India
10	Shobana Chandrakumar Pillai, Trivandrum, Kerala, India	1980- present	Padma Shri (2006) Kalaimamani (2011)	Currently runs a dance school, Kalarpana, in Chennai.

This table titled “Bharatanatyam Dancers Journey from Southern to Northern India” aims to communicate the geographical, cultural, and institutional spread of Bharatanatyam, a classical South Indian dance form, through the life and work of prominent dancers who originated in the South but contributed significantly to its national and even international recognition, especially in Northern India.

3.6 In-depth Analysis- artistic endeavours, and the socio-cultural milieu

This dance form has been very popular as it has influenced generations across the country since the 2nd century CE, and it has global active followers. The spiritual aspects have given it more shape, content and form with new orientations and thinking to it. This has given new contemporary form of meaning and intent to this classical dance form which has become more modern and updated now²¹⁹ (Iyengar & Smith, 2020). The Indians who live in abroad also follow closely in their families as a continuation of this tradition which has given a real Diasporic orientation and perspectives which has shaped it to new forms and representations also²²⁰²²¹ (Iyengar & Smith, 2020) (Harvey, 2005). It also provides a personal deep emotional connect with the audience and performers as it unites them towards a new spiritual embarking experience, which is possible only with Bharatanatyam dance and its representations.

3.6.1. The Bharatanatyam Dance for All Faiths

This common form of dance is more prevalent across communities, groups cut across the barriers of language, religion, society, customs, and practices.²²² (Bajaj & Vohra, 2015; Booth, 2016; Unni, 2016). It also provides a nostalgic appreciation of Indian culture and values with a modern orientation, which makes it more integrative and holistic in its faith and approaches.

²¹⁹ Iyengar, K. M., & Smith, H. L. (2020). The Sacred Bharatanatyam Dance: Transcendental Aesthetics. *South Asian Review*, 41(1), 69-86.

²²⁰ Iyengar, K. M., & Smith, H. L. (2020). The Sacred Bharatanatyam Dance: Transcendental Aesthetics. *South Asian Review*, 41(1), 69-86.

²²¹ Harvey, R. (2005). *Preserving digital materials*. Walter de Gruyter–KG Saur.

²²² Bajaj, T., & Vohra, S. S. (2015). *Performing arts and therapeutic implications*. Routledge India.

3.7 Bharatanatyam's Cross-Cultural and Interfaith Reach

The rich Kathak, Hindustani music, and Urdu poetry traditions of North India promoted cross-cultural exchange. In this area, Bharatanatyam artists often collaborated with artists from other traditions to produce choreographies that mixed Carnatic and Hindustani music or juxtaposed Kathak and Bharatanatyam in jugalbandi styles. These exchanges highlighted the form's adaptability and broadened its appeal to audiences unfamiliar with South Indian aesthetics.

Secular and Global Appeal

Bharatanatyam has gained widespread acceptance beyond its traditional Hindu context, with performers and audiences from various backgrounds embracing it for its aesthetic, philosophical, and performative richness (Booth, 2016).

1. In multicultural societies, Bharatanatyam has become an important vehicle for cultural expression, education, and artistic dialogue.
2. Non-Hindu practitioners have used Bharatanatyam to express themes of universal spirituality, human emotions, and contemporary narratives.

Intersections with Other Faiths

Although Bharatanatyam's symbolism and narratives often derive from Hindu scriptures, its underlying philosophy of universal human experiences (Rasa theory) allows for interfaith and intercultural adaptations (Unni, 2016).

1. Christian and Islamic themes have been explored through Bharatanatyam, with performances integrating Biblical stories or Sufi poetry.
2. Cross-faith collaborations have emerged in the form of fusion works, where Bharatanatyam is combined with elements of Western classical, Persian, and East Asian traditions.

3.8 Bharatanatyam as a Modern Cultural Expression

3.8.1. Nostalgia and Cultural Identity

For the Indian diaspora, Bharatanatyam serves as a nostalgic and emotional link to Indian heritage, reinforcing cultural values while adapting to modern sensibilities (Bajaj & Vohra, 2015).

1. It allows second and third-generation Indian-origin individuals to connect with their roots while participating in a globalized artistic landscape.
2. Institutions worldwide, including in the US, UK, Canada, and Australia, have integrated Bharatanatyam into academic curricula and cultural festivals, making it an essential part of multicultural arts education.

3.8.2. A Holistic and Integrative Artistic Approach

The modern practice of Bharatanatyam has expanded beyond its ritualistic and devotional origins to incorporate:

1. Contemporary themes such as environmental consciousness, feminism, and human rights.
2. Innovative storytelling that includes reinterpretations of mythology and history from multiple perspectives.
3. Therapeutic applications in fields such as dance therapy, yoga, and wellness studies reinforce its universal appeal (Unni, 2016).

3.9 Growth and reach of Bharatanatyam

This dance form has been influential and popular as a literacy form, as it educates and imbues culture and value orientations across millions all over the globe. It makes people educated as it also transforms their thinking and behaviour also²²³²²⁴²²⁵ (Iyengar & Smith, 2020) (Banerjee, 2013) (Srinivasan,

²²³ Iyengar, K. M., & Smith, H. L. (2020). The Sacred Bharatanatyam Dance: Transcendental Aesthetics. *South Asian Review*, 41(1), 69-86.

²²⁴ Banerjee, S. (2013). Adaptation of Bharatanatyam dance pedagogy for multicultural classrooms: questions and relevance in a North American university setting. *Research in Dance Education*, 14(1), 20-38

²²⁵ Srinivasan, P. (2009). A 'Material'-ist Reading of the Bharata Natyam Dancing Body: The Possibility of the 'Unruly Spectator'. In S. L. Foster (Ed.), *Worlding Dance* (pp. 53-75). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230236844_4

2009). Cultural literacy involves understanding and engaging with the traditions, narratives, and artistic expressions of a community. Bharatanatyam plays a crucial role in transmitting:

- **Mythological and historical knowledge:** The dance form narrates stories from epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, making them accessible to diverse audiences.
- **Linguistic literacy:** Since Bharatanatyam compositions are often in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, or Kannada, practitioners develop an understanding of classical and regional languages (Banerjee, 2013).
- **Musical and rhythmic literacy:** The integration of Carnatic music and complex rhythmic cycles (Talas) fosters aural learning and pattern recognition.

Literacy extends beyond reading and writing, it also includes embodied cognition, where learning happens through physical movement and sensory experiences (Srinivasan, 2009). Bharatanatyam, through its gestural language (Mudras), postures (Bhargas), and expressive techniques (Abhinaya), enables:

- **Kinaesthetic intelligence:** The body's movements become a medium of meaning-making, reinforcing memory and comprehension.
- **Moral and ethical literacy:** By portraying characters and emotions, dancers internalize and reflect on themes such as dharma (righteousness), bhakti (devotion), and karuna (compassion) (Iyengar & Smith, 2020).
- **Cognitive and emotional development:** Bharatanatyam enhances cognitive flexibility and deepens emotional intelligence, fostering greater self-awareness and empathy.

3.9.1. The Bharatanatyam Dance as Trans Mediation

Bharatanatyam, one of India's most revered classical dance forms, transcends its role as a mere artistic expression and serves as a medium of trans mediation. It is a transformative and multisensory experience where meaning is

constructed, communicated, and transformed across multiple semiotic and cognitive layers. Through its intricate body movements, rhythmic patterns, and facial expressions (abhinaya), Bharatanatyam not only facilitates an immersive experience but also carries profound spiritual undertones. The audience enters into a deeper trance experience, which is also felt by the performer and could be seen as a magical, divine performance²²⁶²²⁷ (Iyengar & Smith, 2020) (Kalpana, 2015). In semiotics and performative studies, trans mediation refers to translating and transforming meaning across different sign systems, from text to movement, music to visual form, or emotion to bodily expression (Suhor, 1984; Siegel, 1995). Bharatanatyam embodies this concept by serving as a multi-layered communicative medium. It integrates narrative storytelling through the use of mudras (hand gestures) and facial expressions, spiritual philosophy through the portrayal of mythological stories and characters, and embodied cognition through the physical and mental discipline required for the performance, thus evoking both aesthetic and transcendental experiences.

3.9.2. Regional reach and Education

This dance form has achieved its universal grace and acceptance as it has been taught by legends who have transformed Indian generations and their mental outlook with transformative thinking practices. These legendary teachers imbibed aesthetics as an important aspect in their dance movement which has transformed global students in this artistic representation also²²⁸²²⁹ 230 (Mahadevan, 2023) (Gaston, 1991) (Gaston & Gaston, 2014) Media and its influences have taken this dance profession across the globe as it has got its reputation, honor, and practice across all countries²³¹ (Mahadevan, 2023). The

²²⁶ Iyengar, K. M., & Smith, H. L. (2020). The Sacred Bharatanatyam Dance: Transcendental Aesthetics. *South Asian Review*, 41(1), 69-86.

²²⁷ Kalpana, I. M. (2015). Bharatanatyam and mathematics: Teaching geometry through dance. *Journal of Fine and Studio Art*, 5(2), 6-17.

²²⁸ Mahadevan, D. (2023). When Bharatanatyam Moved from the Popular to the Classical. *South Asian Dance Intersections*, 2(1).

²²⁹ Gaston, A.-M. (1991). Bharata Natyam: A Classical Indian Dance in Transition. *South Asian Studies*, 7(1), 127-140.

²³⁰ Gaston, A.-M., & Gaston, T. (2014). *Dance as a way of being religious*. Oxford University Press New York.

²³¹ Mahadevan, D. (2023). When Bharatanatyam Moved from the Popular to the Classical. *South Asian Dance Intersections*, 2(1).

pedagogical approach to regional dance forms extends beyond mere performance training to holistic transformation. The inclusion of narrative expression (Abhinaya), rhythmic precision (Laya-Tala), and philosophical introspection (Bhava-Rasa synthesis) in dance education helps students to Develop Emotional Intelligence, engage in Transdisciplinary Learning, and strengthen Cultural Identity while Embracing Global Perspectives (Gaston & Gaston, 2014).

3.10. The growth of Bharatanatyam practice in India

While Bharatanatyam remains rooted in Indian tradition, its evolution has been influenced by cross-cultural exchanges with both Eastern and Western artistic sensibilities. The expansion of Bharatanatyam beyond Tamil Nadu has integrated regional influences, with elements of Kuchipudi, Odissi, and Kathakali influencing its choreographic complexity. In the modern era, interactions with ballet, contemporary dance, and theatre arts have led to experimental choreographies, making Bharatanatyam a globally relevant performance art. The growth of this dance profession, Bharatanatyam, across the country has been phenomenal and exclusive. It has provided balanced regional development and sustainability in the country as the value of cultural mindset has been imbibed in all Indians as a heritage due to it. In the modern era, interactions with ballet, contemporary dance, and theatre arts have led to experimental choreographies, making Bharatanatyam a globally relevant performance art. Using multimedia, digital technology, and theatrical storytelling has enabled Bharatanatyam to reach new audiences, further cementing its position in contemporary global performance spaces. With a growing presence in international festivals, academic conferences, and artistic collaborations, Bharatanatyam continues to transcend geographical boundaries, establishing itself as a universal language of movement and expression (O'Shea, 2005).

The yogic cult and practices shaped it during the 16th and 17th centuries, which has made it more artistic with subtle, unique body movements and representations. The East and West cultural orientations have shown new progress and development of this dance towards the future. The acrobatic forms

and their inclusions have given new forms and shapes that would continue to inspire millions across the globe towards 2030, also²³²²³³ (O'Shea, 2005) (Mahadevan, 2020). By 2030, the dance form is expected to Leverage digital platforms and online education to reach new generations of learners and practitioners worldwide. Engage with interdisciplinary fields, including artificial intelligence, motion capture, and virtual reality, to create immersive dance experiences. Continue to be a medium for social commentary, addressing contemporary themes such as gender equality, environmental consciousness, and mental well-being. Foster more incredible collaborations with international artists, expanding Bharatanatyam's influence across cultural and artistic boundaries. As Bharatanatyam continues to inspire millions of artists, scholars, and audiences, its trajectory towards 2030 remains one of growth, adaptation, and unparalleled artistic excellence. (O'Shea, 2005; Mahadevan, 2020).

²³² Mahadevan, D. (2020). *The Bharatanatyam Body: Spectacularization as a Style in Bharatanatyam Aesthetics, 1930 to 2020*. University of California, Davis

²³³ O'Shea, J. (2005). Rukmini Devi: Rethinking the Classical. *Rukmini Devi Arundale: a visionary architect of Indian culture and the performing arts*, 225-245

CHAPTER- IV

A Pedagogical Study of Different Banis of Bharatanatyam

4.1 Origin

Bharatanatyam, an illustrious emblem of classical artistry, has traversed the annals of time, sculpting its narrative across the epochs. Like the endless ocean that envelops the Indian subcontinent, which, inside the boundaries of Bengal, takes on the name of the “Bay of Bengal” but changes its name to the magnificent Indian Ocean when it reaches the southern coast of Kanyakumari. In its essence, Bharatanatyam embodies a unified continuum, a tapestry interwoven with the threads of form, language, melodic cadence, and visual allure.

However, beneath this veneer of uniformity lies a treasure trove of nuanced variations, meticulously crafted by the adept hands of gurus and the rich tapestry of regional influences. Upon closer introspection, each enclave reveals its distinctive hues, manifesting in bespoke attributes and idiosyncratic motifs. Thus emerges the mosaic of Bharatanatyam, bearing the imprints of its progenitors and the landscapes whence they hailed.

It is through this kaleidoscopic lens that the dance form finds its appellations, be it the venerable monikers of Pandanallur and Kattumannarkoil, bestowed in reverence upon the villages that nurtured its inception, or the hallowed symbols of Kalakshetra and Kalamandalam, symbolic of the esteemed institutions wherein its legacy is enshrined. Each name is a testament to the enduring legacy of Bharatanatyam, wherein tradition intertwines with innovation, and the dance perpetually evolves, mirroring the ebb and flow of the tides of time.

Amid the tapestry of Bharatanatyam’s evolution, numerous luminaries, gurus, dancers, musicians, and educators have contributed to its enrichment. Within this spectrum of influence, specific individuals have etched their

legacies in distinct styles or “*Banis*”²³⁴,” a term imbued with significance beyond its literal translation to “schools” in English. Here, “school” denotes not an institution for learning but rather a unique stream of practice, each characterized by its own definitive traits and stylistic nuances.

Numerous revered gurus have emerged from rural enclaves like Kaattumannarkoil²³⁵, Vazhuvoor²³⁶, and Pandanallur²³⁷, bearing the rich heritage of their respective locales. These luminaries have, in turn, lent their expertise to esteemed institutions such as Kalakshetra²³⁸ and Kalamandalam²³⁹, thereby imparting their distinctive stylistic imprints to these revered establishments. What delineates these streams, or banis, are the unmistakable hallmarks and distinctive attributes that permeate their execution.

The Kalakshetra bani, or style, may inherently encompass elements reminiscent of the Pandanallur tradition, albeit augmented by supplementary embellishments and nuanced variations. This synthesis of influences reflects the dynamic evolution of Bharatanatyam, where traditional foundations intertwine with contemporary innovations, perpetuating the legacy of each lineage while fostering a continuum of artistic expression. While each guru, teacher, musician, and dancer has played a role in the evolution and advancement of Bharatanatyam, specific individuals have significantly shaped its trajectory, leaving an enduring mark on the art form and establishing their own distinctive “Bani” or style. Consequently, these sui generis styles have emerged, sometimes through serendipitous means, as pioneering gurus imparted their artistic vision, thereby perpetuating their legacy across successive generations.

Thus, the essence of Bharatanatyam remains immutable yet infinitely malleable, a canvas upon which practitioners imbue their unique sensibilities, thereby shaping its myriad manifestations. Within the dynamic dialogue between tradition and innovation, individual style boundaries are a testament to

²³⁴ In Bharatanatyam, “Bani” refers to the distinct style or lineage of the dance form, often associated with a specific guru, school, or region.

²³⁵ Kaattumannarkoil is a panchayat town and taluk headquarters in Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu

²³⁶ Vazhuvoor is a village in the Kutthalam taluk of Mayiladuthurai district of Tamil Nadu

²³⁷ Pandanallur is a village in the Tiruvidaimarudur taluk of Tanjavur district

²³⁸ A Chennai based dance and cultural academy that is now synonymous with the Kalakshetra Bani

²³⁹ A center of learning set up near Trissur by poet Vallathol Narayana Menon

the limitless creativity and steadfast commitment of those who infuse vitality into this enduring artistic expression.

4.1.1. What elements define the essence of a Bani within the context of Bharatanatyam?

Significance and Distinctive Features

In the context of Bharatanatyam, the emergence of distinct Banis or schools during the last century can be attributed primarily to four key factors or circumstances. Firstly, individual gurus' geographical origins or residence played a pivotal role, as their teachings often bore the imprint of the villages from which they hailed or established their artistic foothold.

Secondly, influential and ambitious networks comprised of students and parents wielded significant influence, leveraging their connections to elevate certain gurus above others, thereby shaping the landscape of Bharatanatyam pedagogy.

Thirdly, discernible divergences in stylistic nuances, including variations in torso movements, hand gestures, and postural dynamics, contributed to the delineation of distinct banis, serving as markers of artistic identity and aesthetic differentiation.

Lastly, the popularity and proliferation of a particular guru's teachings, as evidenced by the number of students drawn to their teaching, profoundly influenced the establishment and perpetuation of specific banis within the Bharatanatyam tradition.

A plethora of Practitioners

While sheer numerical superiority alone cannot fortify the essence of a Bani, it undeniably facilitates the consolidation of pedagogical principles within a school or stylistic tradition. Given Bharatanatyam's intrinsic reliance on oral transmission, a guru who attracts many students and oversees a bani with a substantial following inherently establishes a distinct presence, leaving an indelible mark on the collective consciousness.

The lineage from which a dancer originates and the foundational principles instilled under the tutelage of their guru emerge as pivotal determinants in shaping the trajectory of their artistic journey and fostering their development as practitioners.

Even in the presence of exceptional talent and unwavering dedication from both the dancer and the guru, the trajectory of artistic evolution may encounter obstacles if the underlying bani or stylistic tradition lacks depth, coherence, or richness. The distinctiveness of each bani arises from the unique way dance elements are intertwined, the nuanced interpretation of technical facets, and, significantly, the aesthetic sensibilities, ideals, and artistic vision of the gurus who have shaped and guided their respective banis.

The richness and integrity of a bani stem from the meticulous weaving together of dance alphabets and the precise interpretation of technical intricacies. Moreover, the ethos and artistic vision imparted by gurus serve as guiding beacons, imbuing each bani with its distinctive character and elevating its artistic merit. Thus, while individual talent and diligent mentorship are essential, the strength and depth of the band play a crucial role in nurturing the dancer's artistic growth and shaping their creative identity. Furthermore, the distinctiveness of a bani is intricately linked to how it interprets the technical dimensions outlined in the sastra²⁴⁰. This interpretation, however, is separate from the aesthetic principles, artistic ideals, and visionary guidance imparted by the gurus who meticulously mould their banis and oversee their progression. As articulated by the eminent proponent of the Pandanallur tradition, Smt. Alarmel Valli, "In the realm of dance, each Banni embodies the grandeur and resilience of a magnificent Banyan tree." Like its branches, the gurus extend myriad roots to nurture the tree, ensuring its sustained growth and vitality.

Bharatanatyam encompasses approximately five principal schools or banis, including the Pandanallur, Vazhuvoor, Kalakshetra, and Mysore traditions. These Banis trace their lineage back to the seminal Tanjore bani, which serves as the foundational source for their evolution. While the study of each bani may be approached from various perspectives, pivotal aspects warrant

²⁴⁰ The science and theory of dance

meticulous examination, comparison, and contrast. These include delving into its historical antecedents, analyzing its technical intricacies, and scrutinizing the repertoire that defines the essence of the bani. Through the interplay of these three elements, a bani acquires its distinctive form, structure, continuity, and artistic originality.

4.2 History of Tanjore Bani

4.2.1. Background

Tanjore, renowned as the ancient bastion of music and dance, held sway over centuries as a preeminent cultural and political hub in South India. Its historical significance as both the artistic and administrative epicentre of the region underscores its profound influence on the development of art forms. Situated amidst the fecund lands nourished by the bountiful Kaveri River, Tanjore flourished as the rural heartland, fostering an environment conducive to the patronage of arts and culture. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that this vibrant locale emerged as the cradle of classical arts, particularly Bharatanatyam and Carnatic music, their roots deeply intertwined with the rich tapestry of Tanjore's cultural heritage.

The renowned Tanjore Quartet, which consists of Chinnaiah (1802-1856), Ponniah (1804-1864), Sivanandam (1808-1863), and Vadivelu (1810-1845), lives in the lively cultural environment of Tanjore and rose to fame during their distinguished time in Serfoji II's courts (1798-1832)²⁴¹. Renowned for their virtuosity as musicians, they wielded unparalleled influence in the realm of dance, effecting transformative changes that crystallised and standardised prevailing dance practices.

The enduring legacy of the Tanjore Quartet is evidenced by their pioneering contributions, which bestowed upon posterity the foundational frameworks of the abhyasa routine and the Sabha maargam, essential components that continue to shape contemporary dance pedagogy. Their ingenuity and artistic prowess codified dance conventions, laying the groundwork for the evolution of Bharatanatyam as we recognise it today.

²⁴¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanjavur_Quartet

Moreover, the familial ties and matrimonial alliances forged by the quartet and their descendants within kindred circles of musicians and artists further fortified their stature as formidable arbiters of dasiaattam or sadir²⁴², a testament to their enduring influence and indelible imprint on the cultural landscape of their era.

The Tanjore bani stands as a foundational pillar in the pantheon of Bharatanatyam traditions, serving as the progenitor from which various distinct banis have emanated²⁴³. While Pandanallur and Vazhuvoor Banis are recognized as distinct entities today, their roots can be traced back to the Tanjore bani, cultivated and nurtured by nattuvanars²⁴⁴ who hailed from this venerable tradition but settled in other locales such as Pandanallur and Vazhuvoor.

This seminal bani birthed a multitude of luminaries in both music and dance, among whom stand towering figures such as the legendary Veena Dhanammal²⁴⁵ and T Balasaraswati²⁴⁶. Their mastery and innovation enriched the Tanjore tradition and propagated its influence far and wide, cementing its status as a crucible of artistic excellence and innovation.

4.2.2. History

In delving into the historical lineage of the Tanjore bani, it is essential to examine the crucial role played by the illustrious Tanjore Quartet in its inception and evolution. Born into a lineage steeped in the traditions of nattuvanar families, the quartet's musical education was cultivated under the tutelage of esteemed masters, including Muthuswami Dikshitar, a luminary of the Carnatic music trinity. Consequently, their proficiency extended beyond the realms of dance to encompass a deep understanding and mastery of classical Carnatic music.

²⁴² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanjavur_Quartet

²⁴³ <https://psbt.org/films/the-journey-from-sadir-to-bharatanatyam/>

²⁴⁴ Nattuvanars were the male gurus and teachers of dance. Many nattuvanars were singers and composers too

²⁴⁵ Veena Dhanammal (1867-1938) was a highly accomplished musician and veena artist.

²⁴⁶ Tanjore Balasaraswati, also known as Balasaraswati, was an Indian dancer, and her rendering of Bharatanatyam, a classical dance style that originated in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, made this style of dancing well-known in different parts of India and many parts of the world.

The quartet's compositions demonstrate their deep knowledge of Carnatic music and their unwavering dedication to their master, which is evidence of their artistic ability and respect. Notably, in their Mayamalavagowla kriti "Mayateeta swaroopini," Ponniah Pillai pays homage to his revered guru with the poignant phrase "guruguha swami ki ne daasudaithi,"²⁴⁷ thus underscoring the profound influence of their guru-disciple relationship on their artistic oeuvre.

The Quartet's unparalleled command over South Indian musical traditions ensured that the repertoire they curated for Bharatanatyam, then known as *Sadir*, remained deeply rooted in Carnatic music's aesthetic sensibilities and structural frameworks, preserving its authenticity while enriching its expressive depth. This enduring connection persists today as an unbroken link between Bharatanatyam and its musical heritage

Their pioneering contribution to the Margam²⁴⁸, the structured sequence of items presented in a Bharatanatyam performance, epitomizes their meticulous approach. Beginning with the Alarippu²⁴⁹ and culminating with the Thillana, their codification bestowed a refined structure upon the *sadir* dance form, rendering it suitable for the concert platform. In addition to delineating the margam, the Quartet also composed an extensive array of foundational compositions, including alarippus, jatiswarams²⁵⁰, shabdams²⁵¹, pada varnams²⁵², keerthanas²⁵³, and thillanas²⁵⁴. Many of these compositions remain distinguished within contemporary Bharatanatyam repertoire, underscoring the enduring legacy of the Quartet's artistic legacy.

While Bharatanatyam boasts a rich lineage predating the Quartet, their contribution ushered in modifications of unparalleled elegance and refinement, elevating the art form to sublime heights. Their innovations imbued

²⁴⁷ I am a servant of Shri Dikshitar

²⁴⁸ A suite of items that typically constitutes Bharatanatyam recital.

²⁴⁹ Typically, the first item performed in a Bharatanatyam recital

²⁵⁰ Typically, the second item performed in a maargam, it has swara passages

²⁵¹ A simple item that has both expressive and abstract dance interwoven

²⁵² The main item in a Bharatanatyam maargam. It is possibly the longest and most challenging piece in the maargam.

²⁵³ Short songs with almost no nrta in them.

²⁵⁴ It is the concluding piece of any bharatanatyam recital and is purely a nrta number ending with a short line of Sahityam.

Bharatanatyam with a transcendent quality, infusing it with sophistication and allure.

Despite their quest for artistic excellence, the Quartet remained mindful of ensuring accessibility to a broader audience. Their meticulously designed Margam, or sequence of items, struck a delicate balance, ensuring that even lay audiences could appreciate and derive joy from the performance. Dr. Swarnamalya Ganesh, a scholar and dancer, highlighted, “*The Margam crafted by the Quartet was not the sole creation of its kind, as similar structures existed as early as the Nayak period.*”²⁵⁵ This acknowledgement underscores the Quartet’s role in refining and popularising the Margam while acknowledging its historical antecedents.

Nonetheless, the Margam formulated by the Quartet has emerged as Bharatanatyam’s most widely recognized and celebrated structure. Despite the myriad transformations that the dance form has undergone over time, the compositions crafted by the Tanjore Quartet have remained perennially relevant, a testament to their enduring brilliance and timeless appeal.

The repertoire of the Quartet predominantly revolves around the themes of shringara (romantic love) and madhura bhakti (devotion expressed through sweetness). This thematic focus provided dancers with ample opportunities to showcase Bharatanatyam’s captivating allure and diverse range in all its splendor.

Many dancers and nattuvanars, stemming from the lineage of the Tanjore Quartet, ascended to prominence and represented illustrious courts and kingdoms across the Indian subcontinent. In doing so, they disseminated the essence of the Tanjore Bani far and wide, enriching the cultural landscape and perpetuating its legacy across generations.

Tanjore Kittappa Pillai (1913-1999)²⁵⁶ hailed from a lineage steeped in the rich tradition of the Tanjore Quartet, making him one of the most renowned nattuvanars of the post-modern era. Son of the esteemed scholar and nattuvanar,

²⁵⁵ Stated by her in the Natya Kala Conference of 2018- Gondhali to Gujili

²⁵⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K._P._Kittappa_Pillai

Ponniah Pillai, Tanjore Kittappa Pillai inherited a legacy of profound musical and artistic expertise.



Plate - 4.1: Tanjore Kitappa Pillai²⁵⁷

Despite his illustrious lineage and multifaceted talents in singing and playing the mrdangam, Tanjore Kittappa Pillai encountered considerable familial resistance when he chose to pursue the art of nattuvangam, or conducting dance recitals, and assume the mantle of a dance instructor. Despite these challenges, he persevered, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to his

²⁵⁷ <https://www.sruti.com/artist/kp-kittappa-pillai>

passion for dance and an unwavering determination to uphold and propagate the legacy of his lineage.

4.2.3. Methodology and Approach

The Tanjore bani embodies a distinctive approach to dance, akin to the expression of visual music. Here, the importance of music is evident, dictating the tempo and rhythm of movement. Characterised by a leisurely pace, the execution of adavus involves graceful, curved motions that accentuate the inherent allure of this bani.

Kittappa Pillai, in particular, revolutionized the composition of jatis within this tradition. His method combined intricacy and precision with an accessible simplicity, ensuring that the jatis flowed seamlessly despite their complexity. Musicality and expression converge in the sanctuaries within the choreography, imbuing them with a luminous vitality. Moreover, a unique “audio-visual” synergy exists, where the movements are meticulously composed, choreographed, and imparted to disciples, resonating harmoniously with the accompanying music and fostering a captivating union of sound and movement.

Within the Tanjore Bani, Natyacharyas adhere steadfastly to the principles of Shastra and Sampradaya, recognizing their paramount importance in preserving tradition. However, they also espouse the belief that individualized instruction is essential for each student. As such, modifications are made to the choreography to accommodate each disciple’s unique physicality and emotional disposition. This approach ensures that the teachings are tailored to each learner’s needs and capabilities.

Smt emphasised this philosophy. S Rajeswari, who provided vocal accompaniment to Shri Kittappa Pillai’s ensemble. Her advocacy for personalised instruction underscores the commitment of practitioners within the Tanjore Bani to nurturing each student’s artistic growth with sensitivity and attentiveness²⁵⁸.

²⁵⁸ Interview conducted by Smitha Madhav on 20.03.2022 at Chennai

In the Tanjore Bani, the rhythmic intricacies and lyrical nuances of song compositions are of paramount importance. It is firmly believed that each song possesses its inherent laya²⁵⁹. Therefore, all embellishments and sorkattus²⁶⁰ must be seamlessly woven together to respect and complement this underlying rhythm.

Masters of this Bani demonstrate an impeccable sense of laya, ensuring that their artistic expressions adhere faithfully to the prescribed kala pramanas²⁶¹ or standards of tempo and rhythm. Tanjore Kittappa Pillai, for instance, possessed an innate ability to intuitively discern the ideal tempo for each song, thereby maintaining a harmonious balance between musicality and movement²⁶².

Within this tradition, the composition of jatis is characterized by a reasonable balance, where neither excessive length nor brevity detracts from the overall aesthetic appeal. Infused with captivating sorkattus, these jatis eschew unnecessary mathematical complexities, allowing the rhythmic elements to sparkle vibrancy while preserving their inherent elegance.

Kitappa Pillai adeptly utilized the madhyama kala²⁶³, striking a harmonious balance that rendered the dance experience equally delightful for both performer and audience. Employing unexpected variations in duritha kala²⁶⁴ sequences, he infused the performance with impact and exhilaration, captivating the audience with moments of unexpected brilliance.

In his choreographic compositions, Kitappa Pillai orchestrated a captivating interplay between sollus (mnemonic syllables) and adavu patterns, creating a seamless dialogue that enhanced the aesthetic appeal of the dance. Despite their apparent simplicity, the jatis within the Tanjore bani harbor intricate complexities that reveal themselves when performed in conjunction with tala.²⁶⁵ This duality, where the compositions sound soothing and effortless

²⁵⁹ Rhythm

²⁶⁰ Oral renditions of rhythmic structures

²⁶¹ Tempo

²⁶² As stated by Smt S Rajeswari in an interview with Smitha Madhav on 20.03.2020

²⁶³ Medium paced tempo

²⁶⁴ Fast tempo

²⁶⁵ Stated by Priya Murle in the Natya Kala Conference 2018- Aneka

to the ear yet reveal their actual intricacies when executed, epitomizes the genius of Kitappa Pillai.

Central to Kitappa Pillai's philosophy was the belief that dance's beauty should be seen and heard. By marrying technical precision with aesthetic expression, he embodied the quintessential complete nattuvanar, leaving an indelible mark on the legacy of Bharatanatyam.

4.2.4. Echoes of the Tanjore Tradition: A Melodic Odyssey

Many of the priceless gems in the Tanjore bani's repertoire have been carefully compiled in the publication "Tanjai Naalvarin Adi Sangeetha Bharata Kala Manjari." This book, written by Smt. Vyjayanthimala Bali, a loyal follower of Shri K.P. Kitappa Pillai, provides deep understanding of some of the rare and beautiful Tanjore compositions.

The publication illuminates several rare compositions of the Tanjore Bani. Reflecting on its contents, she remarks²⁶⁶:

"As their disciple, I am keenly interested in maintaining Bharatanatyam's pure and pristine form, and I strictly adhere to the Tanjore Bani. My grandmother, Smt. Yadugiri Devi was instrumental in getting the book called Bharata Kala Manjari published by my dance academy in 1964"

Within the Tanjore Bani, a meticulous adherence to kala pramanam, or tempo, is observed, typically maintaining the madhyama kalam as the standard pace. However, occasional deviations to vilamba²⁶⁷ and madhyama kalam are introduced strategically to infuse diversity and enhance artistic expression. In the execution of jati portions, a noteworthy technique is employed wherein sollus are recited in duritha kalam while adavus are executed comfortably in madhyama kalam. This approach captivates the audience while ensuring that the dancer's performance remains poised and effortless.

²⁶⁶ <https://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/dance/rare-gems-of-thanjavur-quartet/article4833894.ece>

²⁶⁷ Slow paced tempo

Moreover, the nattuvanars of the Tanjore Bani emphasized the importance of matching specific adavus with suitable speeds, a principle elucidated and exemplified by Shri Kitappa Pillai in a documentary film chronicling his lineage and contributions²⁶⁸. This insightful demonstration serves to underscore the meticulous attention to detail and nuanced understanding of rhythm inherent within the Tanjore tradition.

4.2.5. The Practise of Dandikaa Grahanam:

This ancient ritual finds its roots in King Tulaja's Sangeeta Saraamrta, specifically within the Shrama Vidhi segment, serving as a ceremonial tradition within the Tanjore Bani. As elucidated by Guru Shri Herambanathan, this practice holds significant importance at the onset of a student's learning journey.

During this ritual, the student, typically a child, is entrusted with holding a dandika or silambam, a traditional stick, grasped firmly in both hands. Adorned with flowers at both ends, the dandika symbolizes auspicious beginnings and artistic endeavors. A bed of paddy is then spread upon the floor, upon which the child stands, poised to embark upon their dance education.

Guided by the hands of two senior female family members, the child ceremoniously stamps out their first adavus upon the paddy's bed. This act symbolizes not only the initiation of the student into the art of dance but also serves as a rite of passage, a sacred moment marking the beginning of their journey toward mastery and expression through movement.

Within the Tanjore Bani, one encounters a repertoire of distinctive compositions, including notable compositions such as Daayam and Soolaadi. Within her comprehensive work titled "BONDING," Smt. Vyjayanthimala Bali meticulously catalogues the pieces she imbibed under the tutelage of her guru, Shri KP Kittappa Pillai. This compilation serves as a compendium of the cherished treasures encapsulated within the Tanjore Bani, offering a glimpse into its rich heritage and artistic legacy. The compilation comprises:

²⁶⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1gI5EFvFeI>

Alarippu:

1	Rupaka Talam	3 Aksharas
2	Chaturashra Jati Ek Talam	4 Aksharas
3	Khanda Chapu	5 Aksharas
4	Mishara Chapu	7 Aksharas
5	Sankeerna Chapu	9 Aksharas

Jatiswarams:

1	Saveri	Tisra Ekam
2	Kalyani	Tisra Triputa
3	Ragamalika	Misra Chapu
4	Todi	Tisra Ekam
5	Vasanth	Tisra Ekam
6	Bhairavi	Tisra Ekam
7	Chakravakam	Tisra Ekam
8	Poorvi Kalyani	Adi (Sankeerna Nadai)

Shabdams:

1	Srikara Sugunakara	Misra Chaapu
2	Saami Ninne	Misra Chaapu
3	Sarasijakshulu	Misra Chaapu
4	Gokulaambudhi	Misra Chaapu
5	Vennuda	Misra Chaapu
6	Niratamu	Misra Chaapu

7	Aayar Sheriyar	Misra Chaapu

Pada Varnams:

S. No.	Song	Ragam	Talam	Language
1	Sami Ninne	Navaragamalika	Rupakam	Telugu
2	Sakhiye	Anandabhairavi	Adi	Tamil
3	Manavi Chekonara	Sankarabharanam	Adi	Telugu
4	Ye Maguva	Dhanyasi	Adi	Telugu
5	Suma Sayaka	Kapi	Rupakam	Telugu
6	Saamiyai	Khamas	Adi	Tamil
7	Mohalagiri	Todi	Adi	Tamil
8	Mohamana	Bhairavi	Rupakam	Adi

Taana Varnams:

S. No.	Song	Ragam	Talam	Language
1	Chalamela	Sankarabharanam	Khanda Jati Ata	Telugu
2	Chalamu	Purvi Kalyani	Khanda Jati Ata	Telugu
3	Karunaakaruda	Atana	Tidra Jati Ata	Telugu

Swarajathis:

S.No.	Song	Ragam	Talam	Language
1	Kaana Aaval	Kambhoji	Rupakam	Tamil
2	Sadaya	Chakravakam	Aadi	Telugu
3	Ye Mayalaadera	Husseini	Rupakam	Telugu

Thillanas:

S.NO.	Ragam	Talam
1	Adana	Adi
2	Bilhari	Rupakam
3	Kapi	Misra Chapu
4	Kanada	Adi
5	Hamsadhwani	Rupakam
6	Dhanashree	Adi
7	Behag	Misra Chapu

Keertanams:

S.No.	Song	Ragam	Talam	Language
1	Amba Neelambari	Neelambari	Aadi	Telugu
2	Yekkaalatthilum	Purvi Kalyani	Adi	Tamil
3	Sri Raja Rajeswari	Ramapriya	Aadi	Telugu
4	Tarunam	Gowlipanthu	Adi	Tamil
5	Krupa Joodu	Anananda Bhairavi	Adi	Telugu
6	Mangalapradambu	Madhyamavati	Rupakam	Telugu
7	Kalyani	Ragamalika	Rupakam	Telugu

Distinctive Renditions/ Ritualistic Creations

1. Todayamangalam
2. Melaprapti
3. Navasandhi kautuvam
4. Panchamurthy kauthuvam

5. Geetham
6. Kaivara prabandham
7. Tayam
8. Sooladhi
9. Daru
10. Srivilliputtur Nachiyar Kautuvam
11. Tiruvalangadu Kali Kauthuvam
12. Vanambadi kauthuvam

4.2.6. Tanjore Bani: Balasaraswati/ Kandappa Pillai's Artistry

Kandappa Pillai (1899-1941), despite sharing lineage with Kitappa Pillai, distinguished himself by introducing stylistic innovations into his pedagogy, thus establishing his own unique artistic path. As the son of Nellaippa Nattuvanar, a revered guru who instructed numerous dancers of earlier generations and hailed from the lineage of the Tanjore Quartet, Kandappa Pillai inherited a rich tradition deeply rooted in classical dance.



Plate - 4.2: Kandappa Pillai²⁶⁹

His close association with the esteemed family of Veena Dhanammal, renowned as Dhanam, endowed him with an unparalleled musical sensibility. Both Kandappa Pillai's ancestors and those of Dhanam had served the royal courts of Tanjore, fostering a rich exchange of artistic ideas between their lineages. This collaboration resulted in the creation of exceptional music and dance compositions.

Kandappa Pillai's father notably imparted music lessons to Jayammal and Lakshmiratnam, the daughters of Dhanam, despite their mother's esteemed status as a leading figure in Carnatic music. This musical and dance heritage intersection further enriched Kandappa Pillai's artistic upbringing, shaping his distinctive approach to Bharatanatyam.

Kandappa Pillai received his training in the art of nattuvangam from his paternal grandfather, Kannusami Nattuvanar, who notably accompanied Maharani Chimnabai to Baroda. Additionally, he learned from his uncle,

²⁶⁹ <https://kalyanikalamandir.com/guru-kandappa-pillai/>

Ponniah Pillai, further enriching his understanding of the craft. While Kandappa Pillai's style remained closely aligned with the traditional Tanjore Bani, he introduced several distinctive elements.

One notable departure from convention was his insistence that all musicians maintain continuous accompaniment, both playing and singing, throughout the rendition of jatis and sorkattus. This departure from the norm, where only the nattuvanar typically recites these rhythmic patterns, underscored Kandappa Pillai's innovative approach to Bharatanatyam accompaniment.

The legacy of Kandappa Pillai's ideas and innovations found enduring expression through his star disciple, T. Balasaraswati, who achieved widespread acclaim and played a pivotal role in popularizing the distinctive style of her nattuvanar and his family. Balasaraswati, the granddaughter of Dhanammal and a direct student of Kandappa Pillai, belonged to a lineage deeply rooted in the traditions of Bharatanatyam, tracing back to Chinnaya Pillai of the Thanjavur Quartet.

Renowned for her exceptional abhinaya skills, Balasaraswati garnered international recognition for her contributions to the art form. Her singular achievement of being conferred the title of "Sangeetha Kalanidhi" by the Madras Music Academy underscores the profound synergy between music and dance within her artistic expression. This prestigious honour celebrated her mastery of dance and acknowledged her profound command over music, a testament to her unparalleled skill and dedication as a world-renowned dancer.

4.2.7. Method and Approach

As per insights shared by Nandini Ramani, an esteemed senior disciple of Balasaraswati, it is noted that Balasaraswati held a nuanced perspective on the terminology used in Bharatanatyam. Unlike the conventional term "Margam," she preferred to refer to the dance repertoire as the "kutcheri."²⁷⁰ Additionally, Ramani emphasizes that Kandappa, Balasaraswati's guru, underscored the importance of seamlessly integrating body orientation and interpretive

²⁷⁰ Stated by her in an Instagram interview in 2020

expansion within the dance, ensuring a continuous and cohesive flow rooted in a singular tradition.

Balasaraswati, affectionately known as Bala, was deeply committed to the concept of the margam-based performance. She regarded the prescribed sequence of items delineated by the Tanjore quartet as the epitome of order and coherence in dance presentation. Drawing an analogy between the margam and a temple, she perceived the performance as a gradual unveiling of the spiritual essence through the physical form.

Balasaraswati maintained a disciplined yet dynamically paced approach to nṛtta in her artistic practice, diligently adhering to the prescribed adavu groups. Her adherence to tradition and spirited rendition reflected her profound reverence for the classical form and its inherent spiritual dimensions.

The rhythmic components of Balasaraswati's dance performances exhibited a deceptively simple structure yet inherently demanded rigorous precision from the practitioner. While the jatis themselves possessed an accessible auditory clarity, they offered ample scope for intricate footwork, should the nattuvanar choose to explore such complexity. An intriguing aspect of Bala's choreography was her adept linking of adavu patterns with musical segments, demonstrating a seamless fusion of movement and melody.

In contrast to the trend of flashy poses and ostentatious movements, Balasaraswati prioritized a serene visage and eschewed exaggerated expressions, firmly believing that maintaining a solemn demeanor preserved the depth and gravitas of the classical tradition. She underscored the significance of upholding a refined form, promoting an erect posture, and exacting precision in movement execution. Her uncompromising standards extended to her students, whom she instructed to embody anga shuddha²⁷¹, maintain proper aramandi²⁷² stance, ensure precise distribution of hand and foot gestures, and adhere to well-defined adavu structures.

²⁷¹ Neatness of the limbs

²⁷² Also known as aayatam or the ardha mandalam, it is the basic half sitting posture of Bharatanatyam

Furthermore, Balasaraswati's stylistic finesse was characterized by an understated elegance devoid of overt theatrics. Her rhythmic compositions were marked by meticulous adherence to *kala pramana shuddha* (temporal precision), with intricately layered rhythmic patterns that conveyed nuanced intricacies without resorting to outward display. Each *adavu* was expected to be distinctly articulated, with foot movements executed with just the right amount of energy and emphasis.

In her approach to dance, Balasaraswati exhibited a penchant for improvisation, even within the structured framework of *jatis*. Renowned dancer and scholar Rajika Puri recounts a memorable performance by Bala in 1965 in New York, where she showcased her improvisational prowess alongside her brothers. Demonstrating her mastery, Bala seamlessly transitioned between different rhythmic cycles, effortlessly shifting from *khanda nadai* to *tishra nadai* and back to basic *rupaka tala* within moments. Puri highlighted this remarkable feat during the Natya Kala Conference 2019, underscoring Bala's ability to infuse spontaneity and dynamism into her performances.

In adhering to Bala's artistic ethos, the *nattuvangam* technique was characterised by a notable absence of unnecessary embellishments or theatrical flourishes. Her *abhinaya*, imbued with subtlety and depth, eschewed overt theatrics in favor of a more understated expression. Even in portraying the heroine's emotions in *shringara padas*, Bala employed metaphors steeped in poetic symbolism, avoiding directness to maintain an air of elegance and sophistication.

A distinctive aspect of Bala's stage presence was her deliberate pacing back and forth, allowing for a dynamic utilisation of space and enhancing the overall visual impact of her performances. Her hand gestures were executed with measured precision, while her portrayal of *sthaiya bhaava* exuded a sense of poised composure and completeness. Bala established herself as one of her time's most refined and sophisticated artists through these nuanced artistic choices.

The hand gestures are seamlessly integrated with the musical accompaniment, creating a harmonious fusion of movement and

melody. Balasaraswati notably expressed the belief that abhinaya, or expressive interpretation, cannot be imparted through instruction but must emerge organically from within the dancer²⁷³. She intended to convey the idea that the dancer's physical response should instinctively align with the nuances of the music, such as gamakas, karvais, and brighas. Alarmel Valli, who was not a direct disciple of Bala but learnt how to sing padams and javalis from Balasaraswati's cousin T Muktha, echoes this feeling in his views.



Plate - 4.3: T. Balasaraswati²⁷⁴

As stated by Balasaraswati's highly regarded disciple Smt. Nandini Ramani,

"Each hand gesture remained fluid and adaptable, while the expressive segments of the performance were never subjected to rehearsal beforehand. The focus of rehearsal sessions primarily centered on refining the technical choreography, specifically the rhythmic patterns, typically conducted only a day before the actual performance, mainly to synchronize with the mridangam accompaniment."

Balasaraswati's versatility was evident in her choreography and performance of Kuttrala Kuravanji, a departure from her usual adherence to the margam tradition. In this production, she played the gypsy woman, while her student Hemamalini Arni (formerly Vijayaraghavan) took on the role of the princess. This was confirmed by Smt. Hemamalini Arni in her December 2017 lecture

²⁷³ As per the statements of her family including daughter, son in law and grandson

²⁷⁴ Source- <https://harukugo.wordpress.com/>

demonstration at the Music Academy, as documented by historian V Sriram on his blog. Aniruddha Knight, her grandson, Nandini Ramani, and Priyamvada are among the devoted followers of Bala who continue the tradition of her Bani.

4.2.8. Pattai Kattardhu's Art

According to Smt. Nandini Ramani, a long-time follower of Balasaraswati, the Tanjore Bani included a special technique that involved applying a four-inch pattai or band at the lower back or crotch. She explains her guru's teachings and credits her own guru with starting this practice. Among other physical benefits, this exercise was believed to increase stability, protect and stretch the spine, decrease unnecessary hip movement, and strengthen the core muscles. It was also thought to facilitate a higher energy flow from the mooladhara chakra. Notably, this approach was used with students five years of age and up, underscoring its significance in teaching the Bani.

4.2.9. Repertoire Offerings of Bala's Bani

Balasaraswati frequently performed alongside her family members, each playing a vital role in the musical ensemble. Her mother, Jayammal, offered vocal accompaniment, while her brothers, T Viswanathan and T Ranganathan, demonstrated their mastery of the Mrdangam and the flute, respectively. These collaborative performances were marked by a leisurely tempo, evoking the traditional kutcheri style. The seamless harmony achieved in these renditions can be credited to the extraordinary musical abilities present within Bala's familial and troupe circles, with Bala herself contributing significantly to this musical synergy.

Douglas Knight, Balasaraswati's son-in-law and her brother's disciple, played the Mrdangam for her in her senior years. She developed a close personal relationship with every member of her musical group. Her reliance on her guru to play the Nattuvangam during concerts was typical for many dancers of her time, and this historical context added depth to her performances. The quality and artistry of Bala's performances were substantially enhanced by the close relationship and understanding that existed between her and her musicians.

Balasaraswati's performances were marked by an exquisite meditative essence, where dance and music intertwined seamlessly, elevating even the shringara pieces to a refined and subtle level. The synchronization between the dancer's abhinaya and the vocal nuances provided by the nattuvanar or vocalist was impeccable, casting a spellbinding aura on stage. Abhinaya unfolded spontaneously, guided by the musicality rather than purely by visual cues. Alarmel Valli aptly captures this harmonious blend of poetry and melody in Bala's dance. She recalls a moment when Bala portrayed the Trivikrama Avatara, achieving the essence of the divine form with a simple yet profound gesture, just a gradual lifting of the gaze. Devoid of elaborate movements, Bala encapsulated the entirety of the avatar in that single, poignant motion.

A remarkable instance highlighting the seamless fusion of music and dance in Bala's artistry was recounted by Smt. Alarmel Valli. In 1973, during a rendition of the Ghanam Krishna Iyer padam "Unnai Thoodhu Anuppineyn" in Raga Saveri, she sang the line "vaari mudindha koondhal" with exquisite skill. As a proficient vocalist and the esteemed recipient of the year's Sangeeta Kalanidhi, she embellished the phrase with multiple sangatis while simultaneously expressing the abhinaya with diverse variations. Smt. Valli vividly recalls the experience, where the interplay between the music and movements was so harmonious that it was nearly impossible to discern which was guiding the other, a testament to Bala's mastery in intertwining melody and motion.

In a poignant reflection, she articulates a moment of profound unity where disparate elements converged harmoniously. This convergence manifested as a seamless coordination among the artists, characterized by a natural flow of expression and mutual understanding. Such synchronicity transcended verbal communication; instead, it emanated from a deep-rooted camaraderie and friendship among the performers. Within this shared bond, the dancer and musicians effortlessly complemented each other's movements and rhythms, intuitively picking up where the other left off. Consequently, this

synergy transported the audience beyond mere excitement, ushering them into a realm of serene contentment, or “sowkyam.”²⁷⁵

Insightful blog article “Hemamalini Arni: A Lecture-Demonstration and a Sanjay Subramanyam Concert” is written by historian V. Sriram. He explores a lecture demonstration given by Smt. Hemamalini Arni is a prominent disciple who carries forward the legacy of the famous Balasaraswati. In her demonstration, Arni highlights several compositions that she considers classic Balasaraswati repertoire pieces, thus showcasing the continuity and evolution of our art form.

1. Mogadocchi²⁷⁶
2. Adhuvum Solluvaal²⁷⁷
3. Tiruvottriyur Tyagarajan²⁷⁸
4. Neela Mayil Vaahanano²⁷⁹
5. Theruvil Varaano²⁸⁰

The ageless and incredibly popular song “Krishna Nee Begane” was also mentioned throughout the discussion. It is relevant to note a passage from T. Balasaraswati’s 1973 speech at the Music Academy on presidential addresses. (Presidential address given at the Music Academy of Madras’ 47th Annual Conference):

“I am fortunate to have been born into a family deeply rooted in the rich traditions of music and dance, which have been cherished and nurtured across generations. While it is widely acknowledged that my ancestry traces back to Kamakshiammal, who adorned the court of Tanjore with her dance and song, it is essential to underscore the significant musical legacy of my great-

²⁷⁵ Ease

²⁷⁶ A romantic poem alluding to the arrival of the heroine.

²⁷⁷ A sarcastic song in which the defiant nayika flaunts her romance

²⁷⁸ In reference to lord siva of Tiruvottriyur

²⁷⁹ A poem about Muruga atop a blue hued peacock

²⁸⁰ A song in which the heroine longs for a glimpse of Lord Siva if and when he were to pass by his street

grandmother Sundarammal, as well as the musical prowess of my grandmother Dhanammal and my mother Jayammal.”

This significant address was subsequently published in the academy’s journal in 1974.

4.3 Tanjore Bani - A Study of the Bombay/Tiruvidaimarudur Variation: Background and Context

Renowned researcher and dancer Lakshmi Viswanathan illuminates a crucial juncture in Tanjore’s history, the early 19th century, that was characterised by political unrest and succession issues. A parallel court was set up at Tiruvidaimarudur in response to these issues. Amarasimha took charge here, and his son Pratapasimha followed. A thriving cultural environment was fostered by the emperors’ well-known patronage of the arts, especially dancing and music. Notably, numerous compositions by Ghanam Krishna Iyer²⁸¹ and Pada Varnams were dedicated to these royal figures, immortalizing their patronage in the annals of art.

The genesis of the Bombay School of Dance can be traced back to the lineage of nattuvanars who served in Tiruvidaimarudur. Hence, this distinctive style is often called the “Tiruvidaimarudur Bani.” However, the decline of traditional patronage systems, coupled with societal changes, led to a shift in the fortunes of the artistic community. As dedication to temple service waned and disenfranchisement became widespread, many female members sought solace in anonymity through marriage, while male counterparts pursued diverse paths.

Some male artists adapted by transitioning into roles as choreographers for the burgeoning film industry, contributing to the evolution of cinematic dance forms. Others opted to relocate to different regions of the country, where they established dance schools, preserving and propagating their artistic

²⁸¹ Ghanam Krishna Iyer (1790-1854) was a Carnatic composer famous for his padams

heritage. This period of transformation underscores the resilience and adaptability of the creative community in the face of shifting socio-political landscapes.

Shri at Govindaraja Pillai (1914-1984) emerged as a pivotal figure in the dissemination of Bharatanatyam to Bombay, epitomizing a legacy deeply rooted in the illustrious lineage of Nattuvanars. His ancestry traces back to Shri Venkatakrishna Nattuvanar, who enjoyed the patronage of Serfoji II of Tanjore, a testament to the esteemed pedigree of his family within the realm of classical dance.

Panchapakesa Nattuvanar, who served as Asthana Vidwan in the Tanjore and Ramanathapuram courts, succeeded Venkatakrishna Nattuvanar's lineage, which had been carried on by Veeraswamy Nattuvanar and his sister Chinnammaal. By receiving praise from the palaces of Mysore and Baroda, Panchapakesa Nattuvanar's fame transcended regional boundaries and demonstrated how widely his craftsmanship was acknowledged.

Shri Kuppiah Pillai, son of Panchapakesa Nattuvanar, assumed the role of mentor at Sri Raja Rajeswari Bharatanatya Kala Mandir, an institution established by his son-in-law, Shri Govindaraja Pillai, in 1945 and supported by his wife, Smt. Karunambal, Shri Govindaraja Pillai diligently nurtured and expanded the school's reach. The family's dedication to the art form prompted Shri TP Kuppaiah Pillai, Govindaraja Pillai's father-in-law, to relocate to Bombay in order to offer his support to his daughter and son-in-law's endeavors. Through their collective efforts, the school flourished, serving as a beacon for Bharatanatyam in Bombay and beyond, perpetuating a tradition of excellence established by generations of revered Nattuvanars.

What started as a modest school with only four students has become a significant force in the Bharatanatyam industry. The sons of Shri Govindarajan Pillai, T.K. Mahalingam Pillai (1960-2002) and K. Kalyanasundaram Pillai (1932), have carried on this tradition as nattuvanars and natyacharyas. The Raja Rajeswari gurus, respected leaders in the Tanjore Bani and renowned Bharatanatyam specialists, have taken on a heritage that spans three centuries. The dynasty of Natyacharyas has been able to preserve its art form cleanly and

unaffected due to its unique location, which is away from the bustling Chennai dance scene.

4.3.1. Technique and Musical Values in the Repertoire of Sri Raja Rajeswari Bharatanatya Kala Mandir

Rooted in the rich and comprehensive tradition of the Tanjore Bani, the Gurus at Sri Raja Rajeswari Bharatanatya Kala Mandir adhere to this heritage with pride. They possess unique features such as the “Kamala Chakram,” a lotus-wheeled compendium that illustrates the complex 108 talas based on matras, beyond the commonly known 35 talas. This compendium is invaluable to all music and dance students.

The adavus, or basic dance steps, including Tatta Adavu, Natta Adavu, and Visharu Adavu, stand out for their distinct aesthetic touch throughout the vast expanse of the limbs. Although these movements are crisp and exact, they are performed in a delicate, feminine way. Symmetry and beauty are meticulously observed in each movement. One school specialty that is especially elegant, accurate, and well-timed is the kulukku nadai²⁸². By avoiding awkward torso bending, the Gurus make sure that no region of the body is ever overextended. The head and neck movements are performed with fascinating grace, which enhances the performance’s overall elegance, they are neither overly rigid nor loose.

The school boasts a rich repertoire of adavus and an extensive collection of nrtta pieces, including Thillanas and jatiswarams, which are captivating and free from redundancy or monotony. Using various nrtta hastas in innovative and engaging patterns enhances the viewing experience. The overall presentation is measured and not overly heated. Movements below the waist are executed with power, while those above the waist are performed gracefully. The abhinaya emphasizes the Natyadharmi aspects, favoring subtle expression over overt display. The objective is to let the audience envision and interpret the dancer's suggestion rather than to provide it to them directly. This Bani’s unique subtlety makes it incredibly aesthetically attractive to see.

²⁸² A signature gait of Bharatanatyam. Kulukku may be loosely translated as a pretty jerk

The use of Dandikaa Grahnam, an ancient technique, to support the student's practice is a noteworthy aspect of this tradition. This entails placing the student in araimandi, a semi-squat position, as explained by Guru Kalyanasundaram Pillai. After that, a stick known as the dandikaa or silambam is gently compressed above the knees. This method makes it easier to stretch and open the inner thighs. To increase the exercise's efficacy, it is performed again with the student in a supine position.

The current torchbearer of this Bani, Shri Kalyanasundaram Pillai, has transcended the traditional Margam, crafting memorable thematic productions. These productions are inspired by the compositions of revered figures such as Purandaradasa, Adi Sankara, Mahakavi Bharathi, and Tyagaraja. Additionally, their ekaharya²⁸³ pieces stand out as significant contributions. Shri Kalyanasundaram Pillai has also delved into the realm of dance dramas, creating works such as "Vasantavalli," "Thyagabrahmanjali," "Sri Andal," "Charanapaduka," "Skanda Leela," "Pancha Kanya," and "Sri Krishna Leela."

Shri Kalyanasundaram Pillai's predecessor, Shri Marudappa Pillai, was renowned as a superb vocalist and a distinguished Mridangam Vidwan. Another foundational figure of this school, Shri Govindaraja Pillai, was acclaimed for his exceptional vocal prowess. His brief raga essays preceding each dance piece captivated audiences, leaving his orchestra in awe. These concise alapanas effectively set the mood for the ensuing performance, supporting the dancer significantly. As the adage goes, "Well begun is half done."

In order to demonstrate their talent and commitment, vocalists at this esteemed institution are urged to emphasise bhava, or expressive emotion, in addition to singing clearly. Like their forebears, the natyacharyas (dancing masters) of this school command respect and admiration for their exceptional singing abilities as they lead the musical ensemble. A May 13, 2013, YouTube video features excerpts of Shri Kalyanasundaram Pillai's nattuvangam performance, a clear demonstration of his liveliness and joie de vivre. The video

²⁸³ Solo acts

also highlights his skillful integration of Hindustani music, which he employs with great finesse. The dance, rooted in traditional Tanjore style, seamlessly blends with the Hindustani music, a testament to his extensive experience in northern India and exposure to various musical styles. The jatis (rhythmic patterns) are typically brief but occasionally feature Jaati variations, adding to the complexity and richness of the performance.

Despite their complexity, these pieces are performed with ease and elegance. Generally, the kala pramaanam²⁸⁴ (tempo) is relaxed, favoring the madhyama kala²⁸⁵ (medium tempo) over vilamba (slow) or duritha kala (fast tempo). The Mridangam is expected to align with the Nattuvanar and the sollukattus (rhythmic syllables) rather than vice versa. This approach stems from the fact that the natyacharyas of this school belong to the hereditary Nattuvanar Paramparā (tradition).

The usage of musical preludes before padams and javalis was notable and was first introduced by this school, especially under the direction of Shri Kalyanasundaram Pillai. These preludes give the audience an overview of the song, its tone, the character's characteristics, and the sthayi bhava (dominant emotion). Since the Raja Rajeswari school was situated in Bombay, where the local audience frequently needed assistance in comprehending the Telugu or Tamil lyrics of the songs featured in the performances of the Tanjore Bani (style) offered by this school, this practice most likely emerged. Poets' original works have been featured in full-length performances at the Raja Rajeswari school, including:

1. Adi Sankara
2. Mahakavi Bharathi
3. Yagaraja
4. Purandaradasa
5. G N Balasubramanyam

²⁸⁴ tempo

²⁸⁵ Medium tempo

6. Papanasam Sivan

Additionally, they have performed dance plays such as:

Dance Drama Title	Based On / Theme
<i>Vasanthavalli – Tirukutrala Kuravanji</i>	Tamil literary tradition & folk narrative
<i>Śrī Āṇḍāl</i>	Devotional life of the saint-poetess
<i>Skanda Līlā</i>	Divine exploits of Lord Murugan
<i>Kṛṣṇa Līlā</i>	Childhood tales of Lord Krishna
<i>Cāraṇa Pādukā</i>	Devotion and symbolism of Rama's sandals
<i>Tyāgabrāhmaṇjali</i>	Tribute to Saint Tyāgarāja
<i>Nandana Caritram</i>	Story of child-saint Nandana

Their thematic presentations include:

Title	Central Theme
<i>Om Saravana Bhava</i>	Hymns and stories of Lord Murugan
<i>Jaya Jaya Śaṅkara</i>	Philosophical tribute to Ādi Śaṅkara
<i>Jaya Jaya Kṛṣṇa</i>	Praise and devotion to Lord Krishna
<i>Pancha Kanya</i>	Narratives of the five legendary women
<i>Śakti</i>	Exploration of the feminine divine power
<i>Bhakti Nṛtya</i>	Expressions of devotion through dance
<i>Mahātmanjali</i>	Homage to great souls and spiritual leaders

4.4 Pandanallur Bani

4.4.1. History

An apparently inconspicuous village in the Tiruvidaimarudur taluk of Tanjore district, Tamil Nadu, gained notoriety because of the outstanding contributions of the natyacharyas who came from it. One of these notable individuals was the unique Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai (1869–1954), a member of the Tanjore siblings' clan who lived in his ancestral hamlet for the majority of his life. His teaching shaped

the careers of numerous early luminaries, including Ramgopal²⁸⁶, Mrinalini Sarabhai²⁸⁷, and U. S. Krishna Rao²⁸⁸, marking his lasting impact on the world of classical dance.

Steeped in ancient beliefs, he was a traditionalist to the core. Yet, he displayed remarkable progress by teaching male students in a field once the domain of female dancers. The proximity of Tanjore and Pandanallur and the historical Tanjore tradition have led some scholars²⁸⁹ to argue that the Pandanallur Bani is a mere offshoot of the Tanjore Bani. However, Pandanallur has carved its own unique identity, a testament to the unparalleled brilliance of the nattuvanars from Pandanallur and the countless students they have guided.

4.4.2. Techniques of Pandanallur Bani

The Pandanallur Bani boasts a diverse and rich adavu lexicon, characterized by its chaste and orthodox nature. Adherence to paddhati (tradition) is evident in every nuanced movement of the dance. Linearity and lyricism, precision and poetry, symmetry and sinuosity seamlessly intertwine, creating a harmonious blend of form and expression. The intricacy and refinement of this renowned Bani are demonstrated by the variety of interpretations that may be expressed with small gestures, such as the flick of an eye or the turn of an arm.

One of the leading practitioners of this style, Alarmel Valli, characterizes the Margam as a well-balanced combination of cohesiveness, organic progression, and equilibrium. She claims that every performance component is painstakingly incorporated, resulting in a fluid flow that perfectly captures the spirit of this age-old custom.

This tradition has a steadfast dedication to anga shuddha (purity of body movement) and araimandi (half-sitting posture). The Pandanallur Vadyars²⁹⁰ have meticulously crafted elaborate laya (rhythmic) patterns that emphasize harmony, symmetry, profound musicianship, purity, and precision, all while rejecting extravagance and pretension. The emphasis on clean, precise lines is consistently

²⁸⁶ Ramgopal (1912-2003) was an Indian dancer and choreographer

²⁸⁷ Mrinalini Sarabhai (1918-2016) was a classical dancer and choreographer

²⁸⁸ U S Krishna Rao (1912-2005) was a renowned dancer, choreographer and teacher.

²⁸⁹ Including Kumbakonam A Gajendran

²⁹⁰ A term used as a synonym for the dance Gurus

upheld, with any form of gimmickry strictly avoided. This Bani is characterized by its powerful lyrics and a strong sense of melody, with movement and music flowing harmoniously together. This seamless integration truly embodies the phrase “*vaagarthaaviva samprktow- vaagartha prati patthaye*,”²⁹¹ reflecting the inseparable nature of the word and its meaning. In contrast to *lokadharmi*²⁹², the more informal manner, the focus is on *natyadharmi*²⁹³, the stylish and suggestive mode of interpretation, which evokes a metaphor and emotion. This *vazhi* is distinguished by its subtle grace, which avoids overt drama. The elegant gait, or *kulukkunadai*, is a fundamental component that serves as the framework for creating expressive sequences, or *abhinaya*. The principles of gradual progression guide this Bani, ensuring a seamless and refined flow. This exquisitely graceful style is intrinsically suited to both male and female dancers, enhancing their natural beauty and poise.

The distinguishing features of this Bani are the clear display of *hastas* and the broad, sweeping movements of the arms. In this style, unnecessary digressions under the guise of *sanchari bhava* are discouraged. The footwork is robust, with each step executed with precision and clarity. Even in the most serene and slow-paced movements, an underlying rhythm remains constant. The audience is made to feel peaceful and serene by the ease and grace with which the jumps (*utplavanas*), spins (*bhramaris*), and quick movements are executed.

The broad, sweeping arm motions, the *abhinaya* delivery’s delicate softness, and the precise and accurate *hastas* set the Pandanallur Bani apart. With each performance, the audience wants more because of the *abhinaya*’s subtle and concise manner. The focus is on grace and variety; thus, repetitive hand motions are uncommon. Since the *nattuvanars* of the Pandanallur lineage are well aware of the historical dishonour that previously dogged dancing, they forbid any kind of obscenity. They carelessly guarantee that each movement is performed with the highest elegance and sophistication. The interpretation of *javalis* and *padams* in this style is as subtle and nuanced as possible, reflecting a deep commitment to maintaining the dignity and sophistication of the art form.

²⁹¹ A line from Kalidasa’s poetry used to describe the oneness of Siva and Parvati

²⁹² In Sanskrit, *Lokadharmi* refers to a realistic or naturalistic mode of dramatic representation in traditional Indian theatre, particularly in Bharatanatyam and Yakshagana

²⁹³ *Natyadharmi*, in the context of Indian drama and dance, refers to a theatrical and stylized mode of performance

The emphasis in this Bani is firmly placed on content rather than superficial embellishments. Smt. Alarmel Valli often recalls how her guru would insist on the importance of *sarakku* (content) over *minukku* (embellishments). In this tradition, one seldom encounters unnecessarily prolonged poses or acrobatic steps. The practice of holding poses for extended periods to garner applause from the audience is strongly disapproved by the Pandanallur seniors. Instead, adavus that frequently utilize the natyarambham position are a hallmark of this Bani, underscoring the focus on substance and the integrity of the performance.

Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai (1869-1954), Chockalingam Pillai (1893-1968), also called Periya Vadyar, and Subbaraya Pillai, also called Chinna Vadyar, are among the notable individuals who have contributed to the development of the Pandanallur Bani. Having been trained by his cousin, Kumarasamy Nattuvanar, Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai became a key figure in this tradition. Their collective legacy has played a crucial role in defining the distinctive characteristics and high standards of the Pandanallur style, ensuring its enduring impact on the world of classical dance.



Plate - 4.4: Pandanallur Subbaraya Pillai²⁹⁴

²⁹⁴ <https://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/nartaka-festival-to-honour-pandanallur-subbaraya-pillai/article6527767.ece>

4.4.3. Pandanallur Subbaraya Pillai

The Pandanallur masters emphasised araimandi (half-sitting posture) and anga shuddha (purity of body movements). Even in his old years, Chokkalingam Pillai remained steadfast in his dedication to coaching his senior and junior students. He was known for his meticulous use of the thattukazhi (wooden block and stick) to keep time, instilling a precise and nuanced understanding of laya (rhythm) in his pupils. This rigorous approach ensured that the students developed a keen sense of timing and rhythm, which are essential components of the Pandanallur Bani's disciplined and refined aesthetic.

The Pandanallur Bani upholds the ideals of grace in azhuttam (force) and fluidity in movement, creating a harmonious blend of strength and elegance. Mastery of stage utilization is also critical, with dancers moving smoothly and congenially, avoiding jerky movements. Their footwork is marked by precision and gentleness, embodying the refined nature of this style. The arudhis²⁹⁵, though brief, are executed with such impact that they captivate the audience, keeping them on the edge of their seats.

Today, the legacy of the Pandanallur Bani is carried forward by illustrious dancers such as Pandanallur Jayalakshmi²⁹⁶, Pandanallur Pandian, Alarmel Valli, and Meenakshi Chittaranjan. Their dedication and artistry ensure that the Pandanallur tradition continues to thrive and inspire.

As seen in Alarmel Valli's perspective on the Pandanallur technique, "*The technique forms the essential foundation for any dancer. Without it, one cannot truly be a dancer. However, as I mentioned, it must be internalized. When this happens, one understands that dance transcends grammar and syntax. I can affirm that I was provided with robust foundational training and subsequently exposed to a vast array of experiences and knowledge.*"²⁹⁷

4.4.4. The Repertoire of the Pandanallur Bani

The Pandanallur gurus, as steadfast practitioners of the ancient and classical style of dancing, have always favored solo performances, a tradition that has stood the test of time. This enduring tradition is upheld today, with most prominent dancers of this Bani

²⁹⁵ Short rhythmic segments used to link the nrta and abhinaya sequences.

²⁹⁶ Pandanallur Jayalakshmi (1930-2017)

²⁹⁷ Sahapedia (2024). *Interview with Alarmel Valli*. <https://www.sahapedia.org/interview-alarmel-valli>

choosing to perform solo, thereby connecting the present with the rich history of Indian classical dance.

The Margam, a sequence of dance items, begins with the alarippu, a rhythmic piece that serves as an invocation to the gods and a warm-up for the dancer. The pushpanjali and todayamangalam, which are typically omitted, were not part of the original sequence established by the four brothers. Jatiswarams, which are pure dance sequences, are a crucial element of the repertoire. The portion following the varnam includes padams and javalis. Occasionally, compositions by Gopalakrishna Bharati and Mahakavi Bharati, such as “Dikku Teriyaadha Kaattil” and “Teeraadha Vilayaatu Pillai,” are performed, adding depth and variety to the recital.

In the raga Vachaspati, which was penned by Shri Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai and performed by his disciple Pandanallur Jayalakshmi, the pada varnam is a prominent element of the Pandanallur Bani. This magnificent composition was played in honour of Shri Shanmukha Rajeswara Sethupathi²⁹⁸, the Maharaja of Ramanathapuram. Because of how compelling the dance was, the Maharaja quickly decided to tie the knot with the dancer.

Though some analysts think Rukmini Devi Arundale invented this idea, this renowned Guru-sishya pair is also famous for bringing the orchestra to the stage. This presentational progression has improved the Pandanallur style’s creative and visual appeal, which has had a long-lasting effect on the performance dynamics.

Pandanallur Subbaraya Pillai²⁹⁹ found his most profound inspiration for creating dance from Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai. The old masters, including Meenakshisundaram Pillai, preferred not to use the term “choreography.” Instead, like many of his distinguished colleagues, he would compose the "hands" as he sang, creating a seamless blend of music and dance. In this approach, dance and music were one cohesive whole; dancing represented music for the eyes, and music was made visible via movement. Instead of only hearing music, it was thought that a dancer needed to absorb and feel it with her whole body.

Smt. Alarmel Valli echoed this philosophy in her Natya Kala Conference talk, emphasizing the profound musicality of the Pandanallur Bani. She illustrated this with

²⁹⁸ He was the head of the Zamindari of Ramnad.

²⁹⁹ Pandanallur Subbaraya Pillai (1914-2008)

two examples: “Adhiyokka Yugamu” for its special *lupus*, and “Payyada” in raga Nadanamakriya, where the despondence of the heroine is highlighted in the Jarvis and sang this of the songs, even without the dancer having to portray it explicitly. In this style, music is paramount, and the *adavus* (dance movements) are designed to complement and enhance the music.

In the Pandanallur Bani, fixing the dance sequence first and tailoring the music to fit is strictly forbidden. Instead, the music is given the space it deserves, and the dance movements are crafted to embellish and elevate the musical composition, ensuring a harmonious integration of both art forms.

The *jatis* in the Pandanallur style are characterized by intricate *sollukattus*, which are delivered in concise and compact sequences. These *jatis* are executed with simplicity and clarity, free from any unnecessary embellishments. However, significant emphasis is placed on *Vallinam-mellinam*³⁰⁰, the modulation between hard and soft sounds.

The *adavus* (dance movements) are meticulously synchronized with the *sollukattus*, ensuring precision and harmony. Additionally, the use of “*cross rhythm*”³⁰¹ is minimized, maintaining the performance’s traditional rhythmic structure and integrity. This approach highlights the technical finesse and disciplined artistry inherent in the Pandanallur Bani.

If a stanza or *charanam*’s *sahitya* (lyrics) contains offensive or lewd material, the entire *charanam* is removed from *abhinaya* compositions like *padams* and *javalis*. By doing this, the performance’s purity and grace are guaranteed. Because it rarely overlays intricate *korvais* over the *swara* segments, the Pandanallur Bani also offers the performer a comfortable environment while preserving the original arrangement of *swaras* in its most beautiful form as intended by the composer.

Several notable compositions performed in the Pandanallur style include those by the Tanjore Quartet and their descendants. Esteemed *pada varnams* in their repertoire include:

1. “Sakhiye Inda Jalam” in Shankarabharanam
2. “Mohamana” in Bhairavi

³⁰⁰ Rise and fall in intonation

³⁰¹ Where the matching between the footwork and the *jati* utterances are hard to discern

3. “Swamini Rammanave” in Khamas

Moreover, the Pandanallur style frequently features jatiswarams in ragas such as Vasanta, Saveri, Chakravakam, Kalyani, and Bhairavi. These performances highlight the extensive and varied musical heritage of the Pandanallur Bani. Each raga brings its unique mood and flavor, allowing dancers to explore various emotions and expressions. By incorporating these diverse ragas, the Pandanallur Bani not only preserves its rich tradition but also showcases the depth and versatility of its musical and choreographic repertoire.

4.5 Kaattumannarkoil Mutthukumaran Pillai’s Style

4.5.1. Background and Technique

Another eminent figure who established a unique and influential Bani (style) in the world of dance was Kattumannarkoil Mutthukumaran Pillai (1874-1960). He mentored numerous distinguished dancers who later became renowned nattuvanars themselves, such as KN Dandayudhapani Pillai, known for his profound mastery of laya intricacies and the introduction of lengthier jatis, and Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, whose Vazhuvoor Bani gained immense popularity.

Guru Mutthukumaran Pillai’s extensive teaching in various cities, including Chennai, Hyderabad, and Ahmedabad, significantly contributed to the widespread reach and adoption of his Bani. This geographical diversity allowed his style to flourish and cultivate a broad and diverse base of disciples, further solidifying his legacy in the dance community.

Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale recalled that her guru, Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai, could not stand and demonstrate all the postures due to his advanced age. As a result, she turned to Guru Kattumannarkoil Mutthukumaran Pillai, who was remarkably agile and fit despite being in his 70s. In her Sangeet Natak Akademi monograph from 1964, she noted that Guru Mutthukumaran Pillai’s adavu style differed somewhat from the Pandanallur Bani. His style featured more intricate footwork and fewer utplavanas (jumps).

An erect spine is more acceptable and appealing, according to Guru Mutthukumaran Pillai, who stressed its importance. His abhinaya, or expressive dance, was meticulous and closely followed the shastras (scriptures). Clean, precise arm movements and lines that were neither soft nor hard were hallmarks of his work. Its motions had a restrained beauty, were rounded but not sloppy, and were free of superfluous embellishments. He insisted that each movement should be smooth and seamless, with subtle transitions and not overtly noticeable.

His dance style mirrored his personality, always tranquil and composed, reflecting a deep sense of inner calm and discipline.

These insights were shared by Mohan Khokar³⁰², the esteemed art critic, in his 1964 Sangeet Natak Akademi monograph. Guru Kattumannarkoil Mutthukumaran Pillai trained several prominent dancers, including Ramgopal, Mrinalini Sarabhai, MK Selvamani, and MK Saroja³⁰³, and Rukmini Devi Arundale. Among his students was Kumari Kamala³⁰⁴, who, after studying under him, transitioned to learning from Shri Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai. Under their guidance, she emerged as one of the most celebrated exponents of the Vazhuvoor Bani, becoming a dancing star of her era.

4.5.2. History of Vazhuvoor Bani

The artists of Vazhuvoor are pleased to say that they have ancestry that dates back to Raja Raja Chozha's heyday. Their forebear was a renowned Nattuvanar, a master of dance and music, who had the privilege of teaching Princess Kundavai Piratti, the sister and eldest daughter of Raja Raja Chozha. More recently, the renowned Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai (1910-1979) elevated the Vazhuvoor Bani, a distinctive and highly regarded Bharatanatyam style, to prominence. Vazhuvoor is a small hamlet in the Kuttralam taluk of Nagapattinam district, Tamil Nadu. It is close to Mayiladuthurai, well-known for its many temples devoted to Lord Shiva. This relationship with the deity adds a profound spiritual depth to the Vazhuvoor Bani.

Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai, affectionately known as Vazhuvooraar, hailed from a respected Isai Vellalar family, a community traditionally associated with music and dance. His mother, Bhagyammal, had a brother named Manicka Nattuvanar, who

³⁰² Mohan Khokar was a scholar, historian, art critic and collector.

³⁰³ Madras Kadiravelu Saroja is a star disciple of Guru Mutthukumaran Pillai

³⁰⁴ Also known as Baby kamala, she was a dancing star and the most famous student of Ramaiah Pillai

played a crucial role in imparting the foundational knowledge of dance to the young Ramaiah. Both Manicka Nattuvanar and Bhagyammal were the children of the venerable Samu Nattuvanar, a master who had deeply studied the nuances of abhinaya under the guidance of the devadasi, Maduranthakam Jagadambal.

Though additional historical evidence is required to support this theory, it is generally accepted that these creative abilities precede the Tanjore Quartet. To seek chances in the emerging film industry, Ramaiah's instructor, Kattumannarkoil Mutthukumara Pillai, suggested that he relocate to Chennai, also known as "Patnam," in the 1940s. In addition to Mutthukumara Pillai, Ramaiah also studied under Guru Kaattumannarkoil Mutthukumaran Pillai. Each of these esteemed teachers had their own unique style, enabling the young Ramaiah to assimilate the finest aspects of both. Ramaiah Pillai's status as the successor to a rich and ancient legacy of dance and music was cemented by this twin impact. In his later years, he further contributed to the field by authoring a book titled *Deiveeka Aadal Kalai*, which delves into the art of Bharatanatyam.

Interestingly, despite Vazhuvooraar being hailed by the dance community as a master, genius, and trailblazer who permanently altered the Bharatanatyam scene, Ramaiah Pillai denied having produced anything novel. He felt that all he had done was restore some lost aspects and appealingly package the current style. He claimed in an interview that he had observed the 108 karanas that were once popular had fallen into disuse and that his mission had been to revive them. He taught his students the sculptures he had studied at the temples of Tanjore and Chidambaram by incorporating them into his choreography.

This highly feminine design prioritizes the Lasya aspect over the Tandava aspect. The Adavus are executed with seamless fluidity, devoid of any abrupt movements. This Bani skillfully incorporates static positions, adhering to the tala rhythm but occasionally surprising the audience, resulting in a captivating impact. An observer reportedly noted that the adavus of the Vazhuvoor Bani seemed to mirror the elegant undulations of the magnificent ocean. According to Leela Venkataraman, the Vazhuvoor dancers exuded elegance similar to that of ballerinas when they assumed a position. The dancer initiates the performance by making an entrance from the wings, in contrast to certain other Banis, where the dancer commences with a stance on stage.

The Vazhuvoor Bani effectively introduces a refreshing change to the repetitive and inflexible adavus parts by including delicate and nuanced facial gestures. While these facial gestures may not meet the traditional definition of “Abhinaya,” they contribute to and improve the dance. The movements exhibit a seamless flow, with infrequent sudden or unexpected changes.

The torso of the dancer is slightly bent forward from the waist up, and numerous jatis are dotted with leaps or utplavanas, which impart a vibrant and colorful appearance to the dance. When one leg is in a position of aramandi, and the other is in a position of front prekanam, the arms are extended downward till the fingers are in contact with the floor. According to an article in the 1988 issue of Sruti magazine, Kamala, the famous student of Vazhuvooraar, sang the opening words of Padams herself as she danced. In the lineage of Vazhuvooraar, it is not known whether this was a practice that was carried out by all of the dancers or whether Kamala was the only one who did it. There is a remarkable musical component to the Nrta, which contributes to its lively nature! Every one of the Vazhuvoor nattuvanars was an exceptionally talented vocalist. In addition, they made it a point to teach their disciples how to sing, giving their dancing a unique and captivating glow.

It is said that the Vazhuvoor Nattuvanars were exceptionally talented storytellers. By doing so, they made certain that the sancharis were brief but comprehensive. At no point did a “hand” appear again. Through each hand, they were able to interpret a single word in a variety of various ways during the past. Nothing is displayed boldly or outrageously in the Abhinaya, which is written in the natyadharmi style.

In comparison to being illustrative, they were more emotive. The majority of the Abhinaya is communicated through the hands and the gaze. In expressing emotions such as bhibhatsa, rowdra, bhayanaka, and others, care is required to ensure the face is not distorted. The abhinaya tends to follow the melody like a shadow that is very nearby.

Vazhuvooraar and his peers had a unique perspective on dance. It was believed that the purpose of dance was to showcase the finest aspects of our culture, such as arts, sculpture, folklore, legends, and mythology. This led them to select topics and songs that allowed them to highlight sancharis that would praise the gods, goddesses, and nayakas, depicting them in the most favorable manner. Avoidance of prosaic and literal

readings that were provocative. Even though some of the older compositions included occasional words or gestures that were somewhat crude, the Vazhuvoor Bani, with its meticulous approach, methodically removed them while preserving the other elements, akin to how a swan is said to separate milk from water. The drshti or parvai is maintained with gentle and delicate handling, ensuring that the eyes remain closed and the eyeballs do not protrude in an unattractive manner.

“Nalinam,” or grace, is the fundamental basis on which this Bani relies. The Vazhuvoor dancers, with every step they execute, exude grace and melody, a sight to behold. Shringara pieces are exclusively instructed to more mature students. Younger individuals are invited to showcase performances that are appropriate for their age. Therefore, the Abhinaya consistently exhibits an authentic and genuine quality devoid of artificiality. During the transitions between jatis or stanzas, the dancer assumes a stationary position instead of moving back while placing their hands on their waist. This enhances the aesthetic appeal of the dance. This tradition is primarily observed in the Thillanas.

Although Vazhuvooraar pioneered and popularized the concept of incorporating postures between dance moves, the poses themselves were employed with careful consideration. Acrobatic acts that required excessive leg raising or back bending were exempted. Only individuals who possessed grace and creative abilities were utilized. In addition, he held the belief that karanas should be taught systematically. By including line drawings in his teaching of Karanas, he also believed that excessive and unnecessary use of Karanas would result in the dance resembling a circus.

The Vazhuvoor dancers can keep the song’s melody, bhava, and laya intact while performing the karanas. When viewed in this light, the karana does not seem to be a “force fit.” It blends in well with the structure of the dance and shines like a theme that highlights the tapestry. There is a possibility that Vazhuvooraar’s time spent working as a choreographer in the film industry had an impact on his approach to work and his creative output. Dance numbers that were simultaneously lively, rapid, dazzling, and graceful were required for the films that were being produced during that era. One of his many talents was the ability to seamlessly combine all of these components and deliver hit after hit. As a result of the fact that many of his followers were actresses for whom he choreographed in cinema, his manner of composing movements for them

eventually made its way onto the stage as well. Because of this, his choreography became extremely popular, not only in the film but also in the proscenium. He could conceive of and imagine movements with the visual aesthetic in mind due to his work in the film industry.

As a result, he devised enormous and sweeping movements for extended views and movements that were lively but immobile for close-up shots. He also utilized this mixture on stage, which was magnificent and enchanted. He had perfected the talent of speaking without difficulty while working as a movie choreographer. It is possible that the art of subtlety was his most defining characteristic, and it was one that many of his students eventually absorbed throughout the course of their studies.

Throughout the years, the Vazhuvoor Bani has stood out brilliantly in its most exceptional manifestation, as demonstrated by the dance performances of Smt. Chitra Visweswaran. Her magnetism and unwavering commitment to her guru's teachings allowed her dance to communicate eloquently with her audience, displaying a mesmerizing elegance and effortlessness. During her later years, K.J Sarasa skillfully maintained the artistic style of her mentor, showcasing the elegance of ornamentation, statuesque stances, and captivating glances that are characteristic of the Vazhuvoor Bani. This was evident in the 50 or so group shows she made. Several works, such as Krishna Parijatam, Aditya Hrdayam, Silappadhikaram, Kundrakkudi Kuravanji, Desa Bhakti, and Kuttrala Kuravanji, achieved significant success.

The Vazhuvoor Bani (at least till Vazhuvooraar) adapts each thing to each student's potential and aptitude, in contrast to the Kalakshetra style, which uses a consistent approach to teach every student the same objects. Therefore, a student with a refined understanding of abhinaya would receive instruction in padams, javalis, and keertanams. At the same time, those who demonstrate a solid comprehension of laya would be taught complex jathis. Poses are constructed according to the dancer's physique. The Vazhuvoor Bani's popularity in the solo genre may be attributed to its flexible approach, which is one of its prominent causes. This method may not have been advantageous in group productions, but given that Vazhuvoorar primarily focused on producing renowned soloists, it had a captivating effect.

4.5.3. The Repertoire of Vazhuvoor Bani

The Vazhuvoor Nattuvanars, particularly Vazhuvooraar himself, possessed a remarkable sense of auditory beauty. The Vazhuvoor style became highly popular due to its combination of musical virtuosity. Ramaiah Pillai was highly sought after during his prime, with numerous individuals aspiring to become his disciples. EV Saroja, Hemamalini Arni, the Travancore Sisters (Lalitha, Padmini, and Ragini), Radha and Vasanthi (sisters), Kanaka Srinivasan, Chitra Visweswaran, L Vijayalakshmi, Padma Subrahmanyam, M Bhanumathi, Jayabharathi, Rajasulochana, Amala Shankar, and Prema Jagadeesan are just a few of the many female performers who were inspired by Vazhuvooraar's teachings and went on to achieve fame in the world of dance. When Vyjayanthimala was younger, he taught her, but she later followed Shri Tanjore KP Kitappa Pillai as her teacher.

The majority of the Vazhuvoor Bani's jatis were incredibly short. Despite their widespread presence, karvais enhance the aesthetic appeal of jatis. Vazhuvooraar improved the attractive qualities of the jati by skilfully using the karvais. He believed that using karvais to break up the sollus was preferable to repeating them one after the other. One of Swamimalai Rajaratnam Pillai's students, Swamimalai Suresh, displayed a traditional Vazhuvoor jati at the 2018 Natya Kala Conference, a pretty long paragraph that contains many instances of "kaarvais."

There was no fuss, and the trikalam was shown with ease. The sorkattus selection used is interesting and appropriate. They are crafted in a manner that renders the jati intricate and captivating while also pleasing to the auditory and visual senses. The concert begins with a Thodayamangalam, which praises Gnana Sabesa, the main deity of Vazhuvoor town, and another form of Lord Shiva.

Vazhuvooraar incorporated numerous innovative works into his repertoire of Bharatanatyam. Many individuals gained popularity due to their association with their star pupil, Kamala. She performed intricate dance movements to the classical compositions of Arunachala Kavi's Rama Natak keerthanais, Swati Tirunal Maharaja's songs, papanasam Sivan's varnams, Tyagaraja's krtis, Bharatiyar's songs, and Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi's compositions. He personally created numerous Shabdams, Keertanams, Padams, and Thillanas. His choreography of Bharathiyar songs brought originality to the art of dance and inspired a sense of patriotism during the freedom movement. In addition, he orchestrated and showcased the Kuttrala Kuravanji. Some

exquisite thevarams and Divya prandhams are also included in the repertoire of the Vazhuvoor Bani. The compositions written by Vazhuvooraar himself have also enhanced this Bani. These consist of a small number of Thillanas, Jatiswarams, and Tamizh Sabdams. The September 1988 edition of Sruti magazine provides an in-depth and comprehensive coverage of Kamala Lakshman's dance.

4.6 Mysore Bani

The Chalukyan sculptures of Badami, dating back to the 5th century, stand as a testament to the early knowledge of the Nāṭya Shāstra in Karnataka. These sculptures, which depict various dance postures and are found in ancient Kannada literature and temple inscriptions, clearly indicate the deep-rooted history of dance in the region. The Nāṭya Shāstra, a foundational text in Indian performing arts, provided a systematic framework for the practice of dance, music, and drama, and the Chalukyan sculptures are a tangible manifestation of this early understanding.

Dance, as a rigorous discipline, was formally taught at the universities of Talakadu from the 4th to the 13th centuries. The royalty of Mysore, particularly the Wodeyar monarchs, were not only patrons of art but also accomplished painters in their own right. Queen Shantala, for instance, was an exceptional dancer. Under the patronage of the Wodeyars, the diverse art styles not only flourished but also became more robust, a testament to their significant contribution to the cultural heritage of Karnataka.

While Chikkadeva Raja Wodeyar wrote two dance dramas, Geeta Gopala and Saptodpaadaki, Kantheeraya Wodeyar founded a Bharatanatyam school in Srirangapatna. Over time, a unique form of Bharata Natyam, known as the Mysore Bani, began to gain prominence. This evolution occurred gradually, reaching its peak during Krishnaraja Wodeyar's reign (1799–1868). Following Krishnaraja Wodeyar, Chamarajendra Wodeyar (1868-1901) extended an invitation to Chinnaya, a member of the renowned Tanjore quartet. Chinnaya's arrival marked the introduction of the Tanjore Bani to Mysore, enriching the local Bharatanatyam tradition.

The Tanjore brothers' Sadir Margam, which was incorporated into the pre-existing dance form in the Mysore royal courts, gave rise to a distinct dance style. In Mysore, the practice of "court dancing" or parlor dancing was more prevalent in the courts than in the temples. This was a significant component of the Mysore school, and

the royal court of Mysore was embellished with numerous rajadasis. This does not imply that the devadasi system was non-existent in Mysore. Several remarkable devadasis, including Jejamma and Rangamma, who exhibited exceptional virtuosity and technical expertise, thrived in the royal city of Mysore. The procedures employed in the Mysore Bani exhibit significant resemblance to those utilized in the Tanjore Bani. Regarding the abhinaya pieces, the Margam of the Mysore style incorporated the works of exceptional Kannada poets, therefore fortifying it with authenticity and a distinct local identity.

Excellent Abhinaya artist Jatti Thayamma was a Mysore-based artist known for her work. When she was only 15, she was allowed to perform as a court dancer. She was an expert in how to perform the poorva ranga vidhi. Her teacher, Venkatalakshma, was a prominent figure in the Mysore Bani despite her unconventional upbringing. She was hired as a court dancer at the age of 22, a position she held for over thirty years. C. Radhakrishna, Padmini Sridhar, Pulakeshi Kasturi, and Veena Sridhar are other supporters of the Mysore Bani. Each of these people greatly aided the spread of the Mysore Bani. However, it is the gurus of the Mysore Bani, including Keshavamurthy, Nagamani, Amrtappa, Dasappa, Bangalore Kittappa, Gundappa, Kolar Putappa, Amrithamma, Coimbatore Thayee, Bangalore Nagarathnamma, Radhakrishna, and others, who deserve our utmost respect for their significant contributions to its legacy.

4.6.1. Techniques of Mysore Bani

Abhinaya appears to be the primary subject of the Mysore Bani, rather than Nrta, at first appearance. Due to this, the Abhinaya is more complex and detailed than other forms of yoga. On the other hand, the adavus found in the Mysore Bani are also distinguished by their poetic refinement. One possible explanation for this is that the dance was primarily successful in royal courts before its introduction to the proscenium, where it was first performed.

The Mysore Bani is a dance form that exudes elegance, mainly through its intricate hand movements. The use of mudras such as alapadma and katakamukha, which are more complete and graceful, adds to the overall aesthetic of the dance. These mudras used more frequently than linear ones like pataka and tripataka, are carefully employed to enhance the buoyancy and vitality of the Jaaru adavus, adding a touch of sophistication to the dance.

The Abhinaya is performed while the participant is seated, a characteristic widespread in this dance curriculum. Because the Mysore dancers are very talented vocalists, it is likely that their performances of Abhinaya, in which they sat and sang at the same time, were a mesmerizing spectacle. The development of the sangathis was coordinated with the improvisation of the Abhinaya interpretation, which resulted in a highly polished performance. This was accomplished by having the dancer herself sing the song.

Songs based on Sri Krishna's legend receive much attention in the Mysore Bani. The story goes that this happened when a ruler from the Ganga dynasty in what is now Karnataka conquered some Orissan kingdoms. As a result of Jayadeva's patronage by Ganga king Lakshmanasena, the ashtapadis he composed for the Geeta govinda became an integral part of Mysorean culture and the repertoires of the rajadasis who performed in the royal courts of Mysore.

4.6.2. Repertoire of Mysore Bani

Mysore dancers, like their Odissi counterparts, are known to use the tribhangi extensively, which is one of the many parallels between the two styles of abhinaya. Their flexibility and willingness to try new things as dancers are inspiring. Wearing a ghunghat, or veil, in the tradition of North India, Jatti Thayamma performed abhinaya to thumris. By starting the recital only after honouring the Guru or Nattuvanar, the Rajadasis would show their devotion to their guru. This would hold true even if the royal palace was the venue for the play.

This style was extensively promoted by Chamarajendra Wodeyar, a renowned Rasika of Javalis. Jatti Thayamma and her institution popularized the practice of reciting several shlokas. In addition to performing numerous Kannada compositions, the musicians of this Bani also play lovely padams and ashtapadis, Neeti shataka, Amaru shataka, Mukunda mala, and many more. An extensive abhinaya repertory is a point of pride for the Jatti thayamma school.

Jatti Thayamma and her sishya paramparā execute poorva ranga vidhi in a way that is deeply respectful of the Natyasastra. Traditionally, choornikas would be performed in the raga Arabhi. In traditional performances, the dancer would sing this choornika while praising the rangaadhi devata, the god who rules over the stage. After that, a natya praarambha and Sabha Vandana shloka from Kalidasa's drama Malavika-

Agnimitra would be performed. To conclude this section, a Pushpanjali shloka would be used. Even thumris were given abhinaya by the doyenne on occasion. She performed this while accompanied by the tabla and sarangi.

The alarippu, a traditional opening piece in Indian classical dance, was replaced by a Ganapathy shabdam or any other shabdam. This change marked a significant shift in the Mysore repertoire, reflecting the evolving cultural influences and preferences of the time. Like most other Bani, the remaining pieces included jatiswaram, varnam, thillana, etc. As stated earlier, the Mysore repertory would not be the same without Jayadeva's ashtapadis. The Mysore rulers highly valued Sanskrit, and as the Ashtapadis provided enough opportunities for abhinaya, they blended in nicely with the Mysore Bani.

Additionally, this school performs the Neeti Shataka by Bharata Hari, the Krishna Karnaamrtam, and the Shlokas of Amara. This Bani is distinguished by poems by Dasara Koota composers and vachanas by composers like Raja Vilaasa. This Mysore Bani specializes in some exquisite Kannada javalis. These comprise the astounding Devarnamas and kritis of Mysore Vasudevacharya, Mysore Sadasiva Rao, and Mutthiah Bhagavathar, which is one more of this Bani's specialties.

Often, a padam is sung after a shloka. On rare occasions, a kandha padya may be conducted. These contribute to the atmosphere and environment of the ensuing composition.

4.7 Kalakshetra Bani

The Kalakshetra Bani, despite its relatively recent origin, has established itself as one of the most prominent and influential styles in contemporary dance today. The term 'Kalakshetra', originally referring to the institution founded by Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale has also come to represent the unique style, or Bani, practiced by her and her students. It remains uncertain whether Rukmini Devi deliberately intended to create a new Bani. However, her subtle modifications to her own dance techniques, made to better suit her personal needs, those of her students, and the expectations of her audiences, inadvertently laid the foundation for what is now recognized as the Kalakshetra Bani.

Despite its relatively recent origin, the Kalakshetra Bani is now one of the most revered and widely practiced styles in the world of classical dance. The extensive adoption of this practice can be ascribed to the substantial number of students who received training at Kalakshetra and their resolute self-control and rigorous commitment to the principles taught to them. As one of the pioneering institutions that formalized dance teaching, Kalakshetra has played a crucial role in preserving and propagating the Kalakshetra Bani. Its meticulous documentation of its pedagogy has ensured the continuity and standardisation of the Bani, resulting in an unbroken lineage of dancers who continue to influence and dominate the contemporary dance scene globally.

4.7.1. Techniques of Kalakshetra Bani

At its most fundamental level, the Kalakshetra Bani can be characterised as a fusion of the Pandanallur Bani, incorporating some Kathakali components into the composition. Several academics refuse to recognize the Kalakshetra Bani as a Bani. The current form of Kalakshetra can be attributed to the presence of several eminent lecturers who taught there and, therefore, contributed their own Banis to the institution.

Anna Pavlova, the renowned Russian ballerina, profoundly impacted Rukmini Devi, who was introduced to ballet during her early years. The recognition by Rukmini Devi that she had to adapt her interpretation of Bharatanatyam to suit the inclusion of the new cohort of male dancers in Kalakshetra may have influenced her subsequent decision to implement the described modifications. The expectation is that the araimandi will be maximally deep, while the Kalakshetra natyarambham will be vertically extended. All of the adavus are performed in the trikalam stance, and the feet are stamped vigorously and forcefully.

Rukmini Devi's dancing and teaching styles diverged from several aspects of the devadasi dance repertory, but she was inspired to learn Bharatanatyam after seeing the performances of two devadasi dancers, Pandanallur Jeevaratnam and Jayalakshmi. This garnered her both praise and criticism. The artist acquired knowledge from experienced practitioners of the traditional Pandanallur bani-Pandanallur Meenakshisundaram Pillai and Chockalingam Pillai. However, she introduced some innovative elements into her own dancing and choreography while abandoning many aspects of the traditional dance she had learned.

By endeavoring to cleanse the dance of what she perceived as unclean movements and language, she became the embodiment of this novel manifestation of Bharatanatyam. A large section of the new “market” that replaced the old bourgeois, aristocratic, and royal elite was made up of the educated middle class, who found resonance in this updated and modified approach. She eliminated from the dance any elements that she deemed vulgar or offensive. Specific gestures involving the mouth, neck, and hip were eliminated entirely from her dancing lexicon. The traditional dancers from the Isai Vellalar community, particularly T Balasaraswati, strongly protested against these modifications. She mentioned, *“The effort to purify Bharatanatyam through the introduction of novel ideas is like putting a gloss on burnished gold or painting the lotus.”*

Therefore, shortly after her emergence, Rukmini Devi’s character was compared to Balasaraswati, sparking a controversial comparison. They were perceived as competitors who occupied opposite extremes of the spectrum, with one symbolizing shringara and the other symbolizing bhakti. The Kalakshetra approach, while not completely eliminating the shringara component, presented a sterilized rendition of it. This alteration was deemed unappealing, stagnant, and lacking in vitality by many traditional practitioners. However, Rukmini Devi argued that to bestow dignity upon dance and enable the emerging educated middle class to appreciate and partake in it, it was necessary to eliminate its sensual and seductive aspects. As a result, even the shringara pieces that required the most incredible intensity were executed without coming across as sultry, further fueling the controversy.

An exemplary instance of this can be seen in a vintage video with Sri Balagopal, Smt Krishnaveni Lakshmanan, and Leela Samson delivering the Jayadeva Ashtapadi, Yaahi Madhava Yaahi Keshava composition. Shri Balagopal is a remorseful Krishna who has made a mistake, while Smt. Krishnaveni is a furious Radha who is angry at her beloved's reckless behavior. Leela Samson is a humble and compassionate Sakhi. Being a Kalakshetra veteran, Smt. Krishnaveni exhibits the anger and repulsion of Radha in the characteristic manner of a Kalakshetra - systematic, organized, and quantified. The eyebrows are drawn in the characteristic Kalakshetra style, slightly elevated, following the technique of Kathakali dancers.

Smt Krishnaveni expresses her displeasure in the abhinaya/lyric phase after performing a fast sollukattu with flawlessly choreographed adavus despite the piece being an abhinaya. The majority of Kalakshetra dancers possess flawless length and line. Years of intense training in just adavus are required for the Kalakshetra teaching methodology, which guarantees an exceptionally high degree of excellence in the performance of the adavus. However, the same cannot be valid for kids attending non-Kalakshetra-based schools run by Kalakshetra graduates.

The angika component is the main focus of Kalakshetra's teaching. Specific movements are amplified, and the linearity and geometry are more spacious. Crispness and precision in all motions, unique and exclusive positions for angas, upaangas, and pratyangas, intense training, and the nearly total removal of sensual and erotic components are its defining characteristics.

There is a strong emphasis on the bhakti component. The posture in this Bani is upright and free from any excessive body flexions. Straight shoulders are maintained without any elevation or sloping. Typically, the movements of the hands are harmonized with the shoulder level. The precision and discipline required in this dance form are evident in the balanced locations of the hands and feet, which are precisely balanced into a linear formation. Abnormal flexion of the elbows and wrists is rare. Rukmini Devi often substituted the ekapada sthanaka position with the Aindra mandala position. To illustrate this notion, consider the 8th naattadavu. Another modification implemented was the way the Tripitaka or alapadma hasta is presented when the arms are positioned in natyarambha.

Under the traditional sadirattam techniques, including those of Rukmini Devi's own gurus, the alapadma or tripataaka would face upwards as the arms were extended into a natyarambham. This was altered in the Kalakshetra Bani, where the mudra was rotated halfway, making it visible to the audience. This contrast between the traditional and modified techniques highlights the evolution and diversity of the art form. According to reports, Rukmini Devi had the belief that the purpose of the hastas was to be seen by the audience, and so, it was not thought desirable to tilt them upwards.

When it comes to the teaching and performance of adavus, the Kalakshetra Bani stands out with its meticulous and systematic approach. It employs various categories to classify adavus, such as tattadavu nattadavu the tha Thai thai tha, Kudittu mettadavu,

sarukkal adavu, and more, offering a clear and comprehensive structure for practitioners to understand and follow.

In the practice of adavus, the concept of thrikala plays a crucial role. This concept includes the vilamba (slow), Madhya (medium), and durita (fast), among other places, which are essential to maintaining the rhythm and timing in Kalakshetra dance.

It is believed that among the group of nrtta hastas, Rukmini Devi is credited with adding several unique hastas. For example, in the mei adavu of the Thillanas she did, she often used the Chandrakala hasta. Additionally, she performed the foot in the swastika pada position. The Kalakshetra Bani is known for a number of distinctive characteristics, each of which adds a layer of intrigue and curiosity to its practice. One of these is the altered version of adavus that was applied to the figures that were being portrayed, a feature prominently seen in the dance theater presentations of Kalakshetra, sparking interest and fascination among practitioners and enthusiasts.

The *Jatayu Moksham*, for instance, depicts Jatayu performing adavus while holding his arms in the dola position and bending his fingers into the garuda hasta position. Similarly, the adavus of the Krsihnamaari kuravanji undergoes a fascinating transformation, resembling the motions of a serpent. The dance of the apsaras, on the other hand, has been altered to give the impression that they are floating in space and not rooted in any particular location.

4.7.2. Movement pattern of Tattimettu and Teermanams:

The tattimettu is performed in a somewhat unconventional manner in the Kalakshetra style. During the tattimettus position, the legs remain centered in the aaleedha posture. Since the gurus of Rukmini Devi were Pandanallur Bani members and the Pandanallur Bani does not exhibit this pattern (of keeping the legs in aaleedha), this is an odd occurrence. When and why, Rukmini Devi brought this metamorphosis to her Bani is unclear whether this is the fact or not. For whatever reason, Kalakshetra dancers and the disciples they instructed have carried on this practice from one generation to the next.

Rukmini Devi's work was not only innovative but also deeply rooted in tradition. She became aware of the need for more jatis and teermanams as she expanded the Kalakshetra Bani's repertoire. She and her team crafted several exquisite jatis

tailored to these pieces. In the Kalakshetra Bani, jathis are known as teermanams. She adapted some of these teermanams to suit her dance works, even though they were influenced by the jatis or sorkattus found in traditional dasiattam.

4.7.3. Distinctive Elements of Nritya in the Kalakshetra Tradition:

In the realm of nritya, Rukmini Devi was responsible for several notable shifts.

- a. Her innovations, particularly the integration of Kathakali influences, were significant as they enriched the Bharatanatyam repertoire and expanded its expressive potential.
- b. The development of novel hand gestures
- c. Removal of the erotic

When Rukmini Devi started choreographing her dance dramas, she had to borrow certain elements that would help with the group work's presentation and be suitable for her male dancers' performances because Bharatanatyam was primarily a solo dance style meant to be performed by female artists.

Having taken this into account, she found inspiration in some elements of Kathakali. Although the Bharatanatyam lexicon provides great provision for the depiction of human and heavenly characters, there are a few components that find better expression through the hastas of Kathakali. These elements include the description of woods, lakes, bees, flowers, and other natural phenomena. This is how Rukmini Devi and her Kalakshetra Bani make sure that the elements taken from Kathakali are seamlessly incorporated into the Bharatanatyam grammar. A significant number of the components that make up the Kalakshetra Bani adhere to the natyadharmi style, a term that refers to the realistic or naturalistic style of presentation in Indian classical dance.

Rukmini Devi is said to have devised a few hand motions on her own, in addition to borrowing from Kathakali, according to many Kalakshetra elders. Her personal study of sculptures and scriptures may have been the source of inspiration for these projects. It has been observed that almost all of the dancing styles of Kalakshetra graduates are virtually identical. This is because the moves are standardized to such an extent. This particular style of Bharatanatyam is characterized by angular movements of the body that are controlled and stern. The characteristics that distinguish this Bani include

angular, straight, and ballet-like kinaesthetics. Attempts to perform rechakas should be avoided because they involve motions of the hip. The movements of every limb are precisely monitored and recorded. Kathakali, Bhagavata Mela, Kuchipudi, and Yakshagana³⁰⁵ were some of the influences Rukmini Devi considered when she was developing her Bani. The majority of her dance plays and her margam presentations are where these influences are most readily apparent.

4.7.4. “Theories and Practices in Pedagogy”

The Kalakshetra methodology, rooted in history, is based on the principle that the dancer should be provided with a solid foundation in both theoretical and practical areas of dance. As one of the earliest academies of dancing to operate on a full-time basis, it has a special place in dance education’s history.

It made sure that the instruction offered was thorough for those for whom dance was a way of life. Students’ curriculum covers mythology, history, dance, music, languages, and dance theory. Acquisition of shlokas from the Nāṭyaśāstra and Abhinaya Darpana is compulsory.

Rukmini Devi’s strong affinity for the Sanskrit language can be easily understood when we consider her Vedic and Sanskrit background. The teaching of shlokas related to the asamyuta hastas, samyuta hastas, greva bhedas, mandala bhedas, devata hastas, charis, and more at Kalakshetra is a clear example of this influence. This connection to her roots is a significant part of Rukmini Devi’s work and legacy.

One of the unique aspects of the Kalakshetra method of education is its commitment to continuity and uniformity. Since the time of Rukmini Devi, there has been a custom of chronicling and documenting the learning process, which includes making matchstick figurines. This commitment guarantees that the teaching strategies will not change over time, benefiting both present and future generations. Rukmini Devi did not desire to be perceived solely as a dancer. Like her husband, she aspired to enhance every facet of life she encountered. Rukmini Devi aimed at reintroducing Bharatanatyam to its esteemed status within the arts, although her primary focus was on revitalizing the spirit it represented.

³⁰⁵ As corroborated by Shri Baroda Chandrasekhar in 2021

She proclaimed, *“Reviving art forms is not just about bringing back a lifeless entity. By revitalizing the spirit, we not only restore the form but also become the origin of new artistic expressions that can rival the beauty of any created by humanity. This transformative power of art is evident in the establishment of novel creative mediums and the ongoing initiatives in every artistic domain in India. The artist’s prudent course of action is to refrain from imposing his personal interpretation of art and, instead, to allow the art to emanate through him. The advancement of art is not mere inventiveness; it is evolution. In states of freedom and vitality, we inherently exhibit creativity. This emphasis on freedom and vitality empowers us to explore our own creativity. If we can access the everlasting source within us, we are creative. We must differentiate between invention and imagination. Invention originates from the intellect; creation arises from both the intellect and the spirit. It is more universal. In the former, energy and power exist.*

To manifest beauty, we cultivate technique. It constitutes a discipline. It is a fascinating phenomenon to acquire mastery to attain freedom. We must exercise control to achieve a state of freedom. A river cannot flow without banks. Through control and discipline, we develop and transform into entities surpassing our acquired knowledge. We employ the technique to transcend the technique.

As an art form manifested through the body, dance embodies its peril and magnificence. The body must become so ethereal in the dance that observers forget its physicality. With the emergence of personality, degradation, and sensuality ensue. It is crucial to orient dancing towards a higher cause, a spiritual journey. It is an exquisite art, as it must convey the emotions of the head and heart while also expressing feelings through the physical body. This is why I refer to dance as the music of the body. It resides in the extremities of the dancer. It is, metaphorically, the ‘sukshma sharira’ of the intangible body of ‘tala,’ which represents the rhythm of sound in music.”³⁰⁶

Rukmini Devi’s objective was not to alter the foundation of the design. She was, in fact, amazed by its beauty. However, she was introduced to the physical technique of

³⁰⁶ Page 115, Rukmini Devi, A Life by Leela Samson

Western ballet and exhibited an innate response to moves that appeared constricted or confined. She comprehended the body's utilization and recognized the potential inside the established framework. She was also apprehensive regarding the music accompanying the dance, questioning its nature, whether it was explicitly composed for a specific audience or selected only for its artistic quality and excellence. She frequently discovered that the music was produced for particular occasions and the individuals for whom the girls were performing, which she found deeply displeasing and a hindrance to the art form's evolution.

Regarding Rukmini Devi's perspective on the Sahitya or literature of the padams and varnams, Shankar Menon explained,

Upon commencing her dance, Rukmini Devi began to contemplate composition. Until that time, the dance performance as a paddati, a customary framework, had been adhered to by dancers from the era of Sarabhoji Maharaja. The performances commenced with an alaripu, jatiswaram, shabdam, and varnam, succeeded by padams and similar compositions that were not laya-baddham, concluding with a Thillana. Kautuvams were exclusively performed at temples as an act of reverence. Upon Kalidasa Neelakanta Iyer's arrival at Kalakshetra, Rukmini Devi contemplated the introduction of new pieces for the dance. Neelakanta Iyer was a distinguished musician and an expert in pallavis. During that period in the music industry, only some individuals endeavored to perform pallavis within the complex tala patterns he executed. His scholarship was significant. Neelakanta Iyer assisted Rukmini Devi in rectifying the tala structure of some traditional compositions. The alaripu, jatiswaram, and shabdam remained unaltered as they had already been formalized. Nevertheless, she did not consistently appreciate the varnams because to their specific allusions to contemporary monarchs. Court poets were compelled to dedicate their works to the Maharaja instead of an ishta devata, as was the previous norm.

Additionally, the varnams were exquisitely composed. However, Rukmini Devi believed that this particular trait detracted from their beauty. It was possibly the inaugural instance in which anyone had examined a piece with such meticulousness and scrutiny. The dance instructors of that era were not universally informed about the literary and linguistic significance of the poetry. Rukmini Devi likely believed they

avored the subtly sycophantic allusions in the literature. One may comprehend this rationale upon considering the audiences for whom they performed.

As needed, exemplified in the Sankarabharanam Varnam, Rukmini Devi modified the Sahitya to exclude references to the Maharaja, substituting them with dedications to a god. She believed that the sringara bhava of the padams should stay refined and that the sahitya must be dignified. Except an allowable modification in this specific line of the sahitya, she preserved the customary varnams, although she adjusted the emphasis of the abhinaya when deemed necessary. Exemplary compositions such as Dikshitar's '*Roopamu joochi*' in Todi and Vadivelu's varnam in Yadukulakamboji, lauding Padmanabhaswami, serve as remarkable instances of 'chowka kala' varnams, characterized by their slow tempo, possessing profound musicality and literary substance. She executed these herself.³⁰⁷

Shankar Menon added that Rukmini Devi's modification of three of the four abhinayas, or dance expressions, was a meticulous process related to her viewpoint on the Sahitya, or literature of the padams and varnams. The four varieties are Angika abhinaya, Aharya abhinaya, Vachika abhinaya, and Satvika abhinaya. The four varieties are Angika abhinaya, Aharya abhinaya, Vachika abhinaya, and Satvika abhinaya. She started with Vachika, embracing the poetry, the sahitya, and the literary content. In her debut dance recital in December 1935, she chose her pieces, which were a departure from the usual repertoire, except for the Yadukulakamboji varnam, a piece she held dear. It was a magnificent varnam, the sahitya, the ragam, and the movements. It was meticulously crafted and served as a prized heirloom of the Pandanallur family, a fact they were rightly proud of. Vadivelu, the brother of Meenakshisundaram Pillai's grandfather, composed it, and it was exclusively taught to and performed by the most esteemed dancers of that institution. Rukmini Devi did not object to the padams of Kshetragana or the passages from Jayadeva's Gita-Govinda. However, she carefully selected the padams she would perform. She altered a significant portion of the vocal grammar while maintaining the grammar of movement. She revised the abhinaya segments and the bhavabhinaya, which includes the mudras and their designated application, as well as the prevalent facial expressions or mannerisms during that

³⁰⁷ Pg 117, Rukmini Devi, A Life by Leela Samson

period. She perceived that certain actions of the professional dancers were solely intended for the audience's observation or auditory experience.³⁰⁸

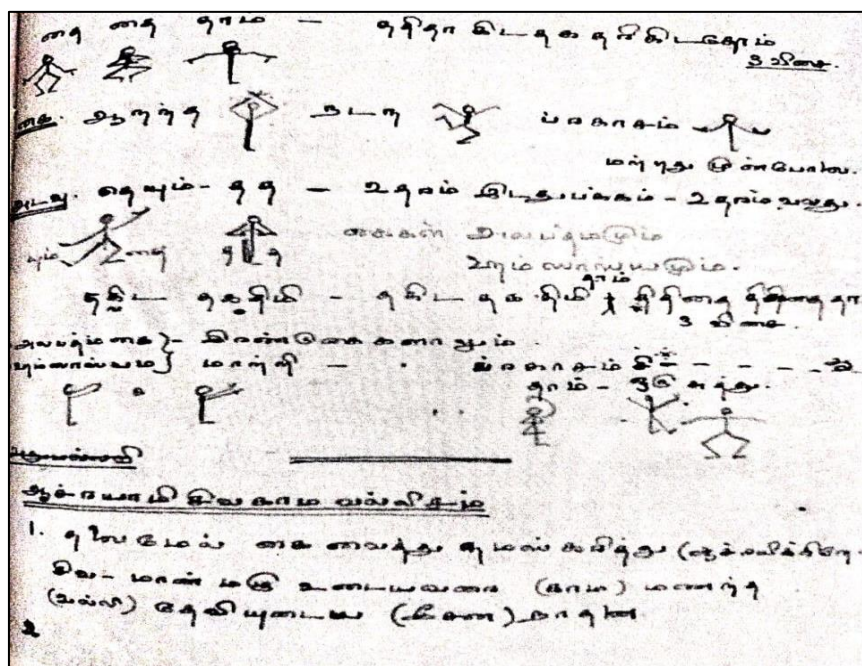


Plate - 4.5: A page from Rukmini Devi's copious notes for her dance choreographies³⁰⁹

She exhibited a notable sensitivity, as was customary for young girls to be instructed. She firmly believed that the fundamental style was exceptionally pure; the overall structure, movements, and dance architecture were immutable. Her unwavering dedication to this belief was truly inspiring. However, she thought that one could determine which words should be used or avoided and the gestures and facial expressions intended to be communicated to the audience. She maintained a strict vigil over all aspects, and whenever she perceived anything that lacked suitable refinement, whether for the young performers or the general audience, she did not hesitate to make alterations or remove it. She would not execute these pieces as they were intended... Several of these, which she found quite unappealing, were promptly removed and have not returned to the dance repertoires of our era. While other institutions maintained a semblance of these practices, Kalakshetra refused to permit anything of the sort.

³⁰⁸ Pg 118, Rukmini Devi, A Life by Leela Samson

³⁰⁹ Page 119, Rukmini Devi, A Life by Leela Samson

She considered the notion that technique was insignificant due to its lack of personal relevance to be a misguided perspective. Technique, she believed, enabled the execution of one's intentions. Costume, lighting, or choreography, while vital to a theatrical performance, cannot compensate for a lack of artistic knowledge. She reiterated this often. However, she emphasized that genuine art transcends mere technical mastery. In December 1939, during a seminar titled 'The Creative Spirit', she stated,

*"Acute intelligence, profound cognitive abilities, rapid perception and reflexes, and agility in comprehending and transforming ideas are essential for the artist as they convey emotion. To be a really creative artist, both heart and intellect are crucial. In contemporary society, intellect prevails, and artists often exhibit ingenuity. Some individuals achieve success, while others do not. Intelligence alone is insufficient. Intelligent art is exceedingly challenging and distressing to observe or hear, as it necessitates engaging one's intellect in the process. An aspect of art exists that evades human examination, transcending the analytical faculties of the mind."*³¹⁰

4.7.5. The Tapestry of Folk Dance and Music

Rukmini Devi's unwavering dedication to preserving and promoting the dance inherited from her gurus was a testament to her passion and commitment. Her profound affection for all aspects of Indian culture was evident in all facets of her life and profession. She introduced to Kalakshetra the diversity and vitality of folk dances throughout India, which were simultaneously vivid and alive, exuding the aroma of the land. As Kalakshetra expanded and drew students from throughout the nation and the world, its' variety programs flourished significantly. The Kalakshetra folk dances possess a remarkably stark aspect. Executed by ensembles of skilled male and female dancers backed by real ethnic music, these historical performances are a visual and auditory delight.

³¹⁰ Page 120, Rukmini Devi, A Life by Leela Samson

4.7.6. Transformations in Aaharya

Rukmini Devi drew inspiration for her Bharatanatyam costumes from the bas-reliefs and temple panels. The insights she garnered from this study, along with her personal aesthetics and experiences as a well-travelled theosophist, helped her to

Devise an elegant costume that numerous dancers continue to use and utilize to this day. She also eliminated the vibrant backdrops utilized for dance in favor of plain blue drapes. She relocated the musicians from the stage's rear to the dancer's right side. Her engagements with the Kathakali performers, which significantly influenced her makeup and clothing selections, are a fascinating example of cross-cultural exchange. The depiction of eyebrows in Kalakshetra is notably exaggerated. Similarly, Ravana's attire in Seeta Swayamvaram is unconventional for a Bharatanatyam performance

4.8 Melattur Bani:

4.8.1. History and Techniques

Shri Mangudi Dorairaja Iyer, the creator of the Melattur Bani of Bharatanatyam, was a man of many talents. Born in 1900 to Shri Mangudi Ramanathan Bhagavathar, he was not just an expert in mrdangam, but also a music scholar and a Sri Vidya follower. His teachers, Tanjavur Vaidhyanatha Iyer and Anganna Naickar, honed his skills in mridangam. He had the privilege of accompanying many renowned musicians. His versatility was further showcased when he directed the theatre production of his 1932 Tamil drama "Mithra Pasam". He studied Bharatham and Nattuvangam under the tutelage of Melattur Natesa Iyer, a prominent figure among the Bagavatha Mela instructors of Melattur. He also authored two books: 'Mrdangam Swabodhini,' co-written with PK Murthy (1939), and 'Swabodha Bharatha Navaneetham' (1957). He founded the "Chidanandha Natya Mandali," through which he trained a select group of students in his distinctive style.

Sri Dorairaja Iyer, driven by his spiritual perspective, sought to infuse an esoteric and heavenly essence into his dance instruction. This profound impact of his spiritual perspective is evident in his writings, where aspects of his Srividya Upasana are discernible. Shri Dorairaja Iyer detested Narastuti, since he considered it contrary to his principles as a devoted Srividya upasaka. Consequently, all his possessions were exclusively religious and did not exalt any human benefactor. He drew inspiration from

the old temples and their dances, crafting a repertoire that celebrated the deities and sages.

This does not imply that shingara was discarded. The dasi dance significantly inspired this Bani; consequently, shringara also played a vital position in the Melattur repertoire. Nonetheless, the shringara was nuanced and emblematic. Coarse and simplistic interpretations were meticulously avoided, and the shringara is evidently imbued with Bhakti. Consequently, the audience's minds were consistently anchored in the prevailing atmosphere of devotion and piety. The objective of the Melattur Bani is to render the footwork melodious and aesthetically beautiful.

The practice of indiscriminate foot stamping is discouraged. Instead, the dancer is encouraged to master the technique of employing the salangai bells artistically. This mastery will not only bring variation to the sounds created by these bells but also showcase the dancer's skill and competence. The dance pays particular attention to the usage of the salangai bells, and it's important for the sound of the kinkini bells to reflect the accents heard in the percussion instruments and the rhythm of the song.

The Melattur Bani is recognized for its precise execution of adavus, seamless variations, and diverse patterns in korvais. The face is conditioned for mobility; each movement is executed with exuberance and vitality. The impact of Bhagavatha mela is seen in the dramatization of abhinaya and the amplified ocular motions. However, the dignity and grace of Bharatanatyam remain uncompromised. Although the Abhinaya is exaggerated, it is neither theatrical nor melodramatic. There is considerable opportunity for personal improvisation.

This form is highly physically taxing due to the deep araimandi and the arched posture of the spine. The kala pramana transitions from Vilamba to athi duritha, thereby perpetually challenging the dancer. The artist must be capable of transitioning swiftly between the natyadharmi and lokadharmi modes. This necessitates considerable variety and flexibility, both cognitively and physically.

4.8.2. The Repertoire of Melattur Bani

Dr Rama Kausalya states:

“Actually, Melattur played a visionary role in the development of Bharatanatyam. The first alarippu, first Shabdam, first Thillana, and first

Swarajati were composed in Melattur” Shri Dorairaja Iyer resurrected the Suddha Nr̥ttam, Bhattasa Natyam and Perani Natyam. The Melattur style is said to be based on shri mangudi dorairaja iyer’s study of ancient and rare texts such as “Kohaliyam”, “Nagarjuneeyam”, “Bharatha Sastra Moolam”, “Abhinaya Darpanam”, and “Natanadhi Vadya Ranjanam” (R. Kausalya, 2017).

Sri Dorairaja Iyer, as a mridangam vidwan, left an indelible mark on the art form. He integrated elaborate panache, nada, and gait bheda patterns, and in numerous varnams, gati bheda is incorporated in each jati. The Melattur Bani is renowned for the unique element Shuddha Nr̥tta, a testament to his influence. After seeing a performance by a devadasi at the Cheyyur Sengalvarayar temple, a prominent cultural and religious hub for the art form, Shri Dorairaja Iyer became interested in Shuddha Nr̥ttam.

She executed it with at least seventy-one varieties of other things or musical styles, including Kavita, Nr̥tta, Vadya, and Sangeeta. The Melattur Bani, characterized by its impressively complex footwork and rhythmic foot tapping, examines diverse time signatures at varying tempos. It resembles a duet between the dancer and the mridangist, a testament to the dancer’s insight and resilience, representing the pinnacle of the Melattur Bani.

Other distinctive elements of the Melattur Bani are Bhattasa Natyam and Perani Natyam (a dance performed on a clay pot).

4.8.3. Aharya in Melattur Bani

Shri Mangudi Dorairaja Iyer’s tenure at Gemini Studio is reputed to have shaped his concepts of dance, particularly regarding the aharya dimension. He implemented the habit of securing a cotton belt around the waist to safeguard the dancer’s spine and promote an upright stance.

4.9 Baroda Bani

4.9.1. History and its Technique

In the year 1883, the wedding of Princess Lakshmibai of Tanjore to Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad marked the beginning of Baroda’s experimentation with Bharatanatyam. Her splendid trousseau included a team of dancers and singers, marking the introduction of

Bharatanatyam to the Baroda court. The Chinna melam ensemble, with its three dancers: Kamu, Gowri, and Sarada; their nattuvanars, Kannuswamy Nattuvanar and Kuppuswamy Nattuvanar; the mrdangists, Vadivelu, Subrahmanyam, and Sabapati; and the periya melam artists, Mutthukrishnan (nagaswaram), Karandai Ratnam Pillai (taval), and Ramaswamy (Otthu), were the living embodiment of this cultural exchange.

It is believed that the Maharaja of Baroda was a great lover of the arts and that he provided a comfortable living for the Tanjore dancers who performed in his court. Even though the ensemble expanded in size (by 1916, it consisted of 48 members), the Maharaja ensured that all of the musicians were well taken care of and could follow their craft without any difficulty. The Kalavanth Katha, also known as the artists department of the government, was responsible for managing the artists and ensuring that they received money consistently. As a result, the Baroda dancers not only received adequate training but also had the freedom and imagination to share their artistic talents, creating a vibrant and creative arts scene.

It is commonly noted that dasiattam dancers would modify their repertoire and style of dancing to align with the preferences of their patron kings and audiences. However, in the case of the Tanjore troupe in Baroda, they did not engage in such practices. The ensemble adhered to their original repertoire throughout the performance, delivering the same pieces consistently until the conclusion. They did not incorporate any Gujarati items into their repertoire or permit any local influences to infiltrate their dancing. The comfort provided by their royal employers, coupled with their own conviction and pride regarding their dancing, undoubtedly contributed to this outcome.

The attendance book from 2002 says:

“Unlike the mix and fix, match and latch (to other languages) that came to dilute the form, these dancers presented only traditional margam, no deviation... not even to please the kings. They never composed anything in Marathi or Gujarati to curry favour”.

4.9.2. Repertoire of Baroda Bani

The Baroda Bani closely resembles the Tanjore Bani, as the dancing girls from Tanjore adhered to their traditional repertory. The Baroda Bani traditionally includes

performances of Pushpanjali, Alarippu, Jatiswaram, Shabdham, Pada Varnam, and Thillana, among others.

4.10 The contemporary understanding of Bani

Traditionally, an exclusive guru-śiṣya relationship was used to uphold the Bani notion, which is currently the focus of serious controversy. A śiṣya's education was restricted to their guru in the days before social media and digital technology, protecting them from the influence of other Banis. This exclusivity ensured the purity and authenticity of the Bani's transmission from the guru to the śiṣya, making the guru the sole educational source for each disciple. Conferences, lecture demonstrations, seminars, and workshops occurred less frequently than they do presently.

Even when such occasions occurred, many gurus hesitated to allow their śiṣya's to participate. The contemporary dance realm is far more accessible and characterized by abundant information sharing. Numerous students get knowledge from various mentors, either concurrently or sequentially. A dancer's adaptability is evident as they acquire foundational skills from a guru, adhering to one Bani, before progressing to advanced training under a guru who follows a different Bani. Due to the significant role of muscle memory in dancing, it is nearly impossible for a dancer to forget the techniques acquired from a previous instructor when transitioning to a new one. This adaptability allows the dancer to execute a synthesis of the teachings acquired from all her instructors, demonstrating resilience and flexibility in their art.

There are numerous instances where a dancer, committed to a specific Bani, learns and performs one or two pieces choreographed by a guru or dancer from a different Bani. The question that arises is, when she performs, does she execute this piece in her own Bani or in that of the teacher/choreographer? This is a question that requires a more precise response. The dancer, whether consciously or unconsciously, often performs in a 'hybrid' style, incorporating elements from her established technique alongside those from the guru from whom she learned the piece, thereby highlighting the significant influence of the guru on the dancer's performance.

It is usual for a Bharatanatyam dance student to study one or more additional dance genres. Numerous Bharatanatyam dancers acquire proficiency in Kuchipudi, Kathak, and Odissi, among others. Although the ancient gurus disapproved of this method, it has gained acceptance in recent decades. Numerous contemporary

luminaries, including Smt. Alarmel Valli and Ms Malavika Sarukkai, have trained in Odissi.

Kalaripayattu and Kathakali are the primary training grounds for most Kalakshetra students. Even though these dancers might not perform all of these genres professionally, it's likely that their Bharatanatyam performances reflect the influence of these disciplines. Accordingly, many scholars maintain that it is wise to steer clear of a fundamentalist or puritanical interpretation of Bani and instead view the dance as a creative, beautiful, uplifting, energising, and enlightening experience. William Shakespeare said a rose with any other name would smell the same.

4.11 Conclusion

In addition to the above Banis, numerous other 'fringe' Banis have developed over time. However, their limited popularity is a concern, possibly due to a need for more practitioners. This scarcity underscores the need for further research and practice in these Banis, engaging the audience in the commitment to their development. No Bani is independent of the Bharatanatyam form itself, yet it imparts individuality and exclusivity to its presentation.

It is essential to recognize that artists should refrain from initiating new Banis irresponsibly or merely to achieve rapid popularity and immediate attention. The aforementioned Banis have developed over time and are the product of relentless endeavors by a wide array of esteemed gurus and exceptional performances. Consequently, one should act on time in the pursuit of comprehending or modifying any existing Banis or in the creation of a new one. Furthermore, slight variations in style do not warrant the designation of a distinct "Bani." These are merely stylistic distinctions and personal preferences.

In light of this, it is undoubtedly possible to assert that none of these excellent masters who crafted their own Banis intended to do so. They merely made the adjustments that they believed would appeal to the target audience. This allowed them to freely give and take from one another while they were doing it. The pioneers of the various Banis were highly respectful of each other, which resulted in an excellent synthesis and osmosis process.

The esteemed gurus and nattuvanars, deeply rooted in history, sought to establish personal domains. Their goal was to impart their craft and disseminate its renown. Enduring a time of profound darkness and uncertainty, these nattuvanars diligently endeavored to restore Bharatanatyam to its former splendor. Their commitment to terminology such as Bani or style was unwavering. They understood that the art transcended the individuals who practiced it; therefore, they pursued and refined it with devotion and enthusiasm. Over time, the transmission of these artistic characteristics from one generation to the next gradually solidified into a Bani or a vazhi.

A contrasting perspective, however somewhat cynical, posits that individual Banis only reflect the shortcomings of artists, which have been passed down via successive generations of their students and ultimately solidified into a Bani over time. Regardless of intention, the realm of Bharatanatyam has been enhanced by the diversity introduced by the numerous Banis that currently thrive in the discipline.

Each has unique advantages and disadvantages. These Banis share the same attitude and aesthetic, and all follow the same set of rules. The basic hastas, adavus, and principles of the Natyasastra, along with the age-old wisdom of our natyacharyas, combine to form several Banis with their magnificent repertoires, much like the vast Carnatic music repertoire is based on seven swaras. The various Banis follow their own paths but eventually unite and add to the richness of the enormous world known as Bharatanatyam, much like the several rivers that gracefully wind their way across the land before merging into the vast ocean.

CHAPTER- V

A Pedagogical Study of Bharatanatyam in Selected Universities in North India

5.1 Introduction

Changes in India's social and cultural landscape significantly influenced the evolution of Bharatanatyam pedagogy over the 20th century. Originally performed by Devadasis as a ritual offering in temples, the dance form underwent a transformation in the early 1900s. Rukmini Devi Arundale played a crucial role in this revival by presenting Bharatanatyam on proscenium stages and founding Kalakshetra in 1936, thereby elevating it as a classical and respectable art form (Khokar, 2017; Meduri, 1988; Britannica, n.d.). Although most initial revival happened in the south, particularly Tamil Nadu, spread to the north, starting with individuals, followed by cultural groups and institutions. The style has been modified to match the favourite dishes, languages and learning systems used around the world. In this segment, The Researcher asked how Bharatanatyam can be taught in different places such as government universities, state cultural academies, and private organizations for dance. Each school or teacher adds something specific to the way Bharatanatyam is taught. A few remain true to the dance style of Kalakshetra, but others add verses from regionally inspired poetry, work with different fields of art, and explore socially related ideas. Much like these, MS University from Vadodara focuses on Gujarati literature and explains important ideas related to the arts and Sanskrit dramas. Since Natya Vriksha and Darpana Academy use a liberal strategy, students can interpret Bharatanatyam in modern styles but should still focus on classical training. It describes the changes and similarities between the past and present that have formed the structure, culture, and style of this dance today.

5.2 Objective

Originating in the temples of Tamil Nadu, Bharatanatyam has evolved from a ritualistic practice into a widely performed classical art form. In the 20th century, this transition was marked by significant institutionalization, and today, Bharatanatyam continues to thrive and develop within academic and cultural circles across Northern India. Lately, Bharatanatyam has been taught differently in universities and private centres in North India. There is a study of the various educational systems present in Maharaja Sayajirao

University (MSU), Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (Khairagarh), Raja Mansingh Tomar University (Gwalior), Rabindra Bharati University (Kolkata), and Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya (Lucknow). It also studies how Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, Natya Vriksha, and Ganesa Natyalaya use new approaches and styles in education to promote and expand Bharatanatyam on a modern scene. It highlights the impact of language, books from different localities, political atmospheres, and current performance trends on style and the teaching system. A major focus is given to the Margam style, dancers' steps, hand gestures, physical discipline, and skills to communicate feelings. It also follows how systems of teaching are altered as they account for differences in language, traditions, and age between communities and groups. Overall, the chapter highlights that Bharatanatyam remains flexible and strong due to its approach to teaching, allowing it to be honoured and developed in the North. The following are the case studies on the selected Universities and Institutions.

5.3 Pedagogical Study of Selected Universities and Institutions

5.3.1 Maharaja Sayajirao University (MSU), Vadodara

Maharaja Sayajirao University has made performing arts a key part of its academic curriculum. In 1950, the Academic Centre set up the Faculty of Performing Arts, which includes a Department of Dance that offers Bharatanatyam at various educational degrees and levels. MSU's curriculum focuses on Kalakshetra traditions, making sure to improve both straight lines, posture, and accurate movements. Many programs are shaped by Tanjorekar Ji and Anjali Merh, early gurus trained by Rukmini Devi and others. Bharatanatyam has been successfully adapted for Gujarat by including its literature and local style in the dance's compositions. Moreover, in this setting, a theoretical background helps students relate to traditions and gives the teachers the chance to emphasize the viewpoints from various regions. Texts such as Nāṭyaśāstra³¹¹, Abhinaya Darpanam³¹², and others on the subject of aesthetics are studied by students. Comparative dance studies, the background of margams, and the usage of rasa and

³¹¹ The Nāṭya Shāstra is a Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts. The text is attributed to sage Bharata, and its first complete compilation is dated to between 200 BCE and 200 CE, but estimates vary between 500 BCE and 500 CE.

³¹² The Abhinaya Darpana, meaning "Mirror of Gesture," is a classic Sanskrit treatise on the art of Abhinaya, or expressive gestures, in Indian classical dance and theatre. It's a foundational text, particularly for Bharatanatyam, and is attributed to the sage Nandikeshvara. The text details hand gestures (hastas), facial expressions, and body movements used to convey emotions and tell stories.

bhāva are commonly explored in assignments and dissertations. During practical lessons, students focus on learning the entire margam. Teachers encourage students to analyze dance movements, understand spatial arrangements, and express emotions through the narrative embedded in the dance. The faculty emphasizes that Bharatanatyam is more than just performing on stage, it is a classical art form that requires both intellectual engagement and physical discipline. They are taught how to think through dance, communicate their thoughts in writing and create original works.

5.3.2 Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi

Bharatanatyam in North India has been significantly recognized as an academic field thanks to the Faculty of Performing Arts at Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Bharatanatyam in North India has been significantly recognized as an academic field thanks to the Faculty of Performing Arts at Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Influenced by the Theosophical Society and visiting artists, Bharatanatyam was introduced at BHU during the mid-20th century. This classical dance form gradually transformed from an enjoyable hobby into a serious academic discipline. The Faculty of Performing Arts was originally established in 1950 by Pandit Omkarnath Thakur and became a full-fledged faculty in 1966. The Department of Dance officially began in 1978, initially offering a three-year diploma in Bharatanatyam. Renowned Kalakshetra alumnus C.V. Chandrasekhar was among the first to teach Bharatanatyam at BHU, followed by Shri Premchand Hombal, who played a key role in developing the department. Over time, the institution expanded its offerings to include Bachelor of Performing Arts (B.P.A), Master of Performing Arts (M.P.A), and Ph.D. programs in Dance, covering both Bharatanatyam and Kathak.

Bharatanatyam changed from an enjoyable hobby to an area that offers dedicated courses and degrees.

BHU's curriculum involves both learning the Kalakshetra style through practical classes and learning the major aspects of music, Sanskrit, drama, and the history of dance through lectures. Excessive attention is focused on the writings of Bharata (Nāṭyaśāstra), Nandikeshwara (Abhinaya Darpanam) and similar traditional texts. Part of the degree programs includes classes on rhythm, composition and expression.

A characteristic of Bharatanatyam teaching at BHU is including North Indian religious and literary works into its dance plots. Instructors ask students to perform works written in Hindi, especially bhajans and poems by people such as Surdas³¹³, Kabir³¹⁴ and Tulsidas³¹⁵. The steps are created following the rules of Bharatanatyam, allowing both the southern dance style and northern music to harmonize. Changes to the lesson plan allow students to participate in and feel the emotion and language present in the play. Having some Hindustani classical music in those parts of the curriculum helps to integrate different regions.

Many campus events and workshops are organized which also include participation by the Sangeet Natak Akademi and other such local organizations. Both their true learning and performance experiences grow due to attending inter-university performances, involvement in outreach and lectures.

In addition, we have classes that allow students to look into the shared elements and differences between Bharatanatyam, Kathak and the folk dances from North India. It leads to learning different styles, continuing to follow historic Bharatanatyam techniques.

BHU instructors believe that their students should not only learn to dance well but also learn about the history and literary and artistic sides of Indian traditional dance.

5.3.3 Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (IKSV), Khairagarh

Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (IKSV), located in Khairagarh, Chhattisgarh, holds the distinction of being the university dedicated to music, dance, fine arts, and theatre, established in 1956. The university was founded through the royal patronage of Maharaja Birendra Bahadur Singh and Maharani Padmavati Devi of the princely state of Khairagarh, who donated their palace to create a center for artistic excellence. Over the decades, IKSV has emerged as a pivotal institution in formalizing classical dance education, particularly Bharatanatyam, in Central and Northern India Ahmed (2010).

³¹³ Surdas was a 16th-century blind Hindu devotional poet and singer, who was known for his works written in praise of Krishna. His compositions captured his devotion towards Krishna. Most of his poems were written in the Braj language, while some were also written in other dialects of medieval Hindi, like Awadhi.

³¹⁴ Kabir was a well-known Indian devotional mystic poet and saint. His writings influenced Hinduism's Bhakti movement, and his verses are found in Sikhism's scripture Guru Granth Sahib, the Satguru Granth Sahib of Saint Garib Das, and Kabir Sagar of Dharamdas.

³¹⁵ Rambola Dubey, popularly known as Goswami Tulsidas, was a Vaishnava Hindu saint, devotee and poet, renowned for his devotion to the deity Rama.

The Department of Dance at IKSVM offers a structured curriculum that includes Diploma, B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. programs in Bharatanatyam and Kathak. These academic pathways integrate rigorous practical training with theoretical coursework in Nāṭyaśāstra, dance history, choreography, and aesthetics. IKSVM has been instrumental in producing generations of classically trained Bharatanatyam performers and scholars who have contributed to both stage and academia. It also regularly organizes national seminars, workshops, and cultural festivals, providing a dynamic platform for exchange between artists, students, and scholars.

By bridging traditional Gurukula training with university pedagogy, IKSVM plays a critical role in the institutionalization and regional dissemination of Bharatanatyam beyond its Southern roots. It continues to influence the artistic landscape of North and Central India through its alumni, outreach programs, and collaborations with cultural organizations across the country.

5.3.4 Raja Mansingh Tomar University, Gwalior

Raja Mansingh Tomar Music & Arts University, located in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, was established in 2008 by the Government of Madhya Pradesh and is named after the legendary music patron Raja Man Singh Tomar. It is a public state university recognized by the UGC and serves as a central institution for fine arts education in the region, with over 150 affiliated colleges. The university offers undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs across five major faculties: Music, Dance, Fine Arts, Drama & Theatre, and Social Sciences. At the undergraduate level, it provides degrees like BA, BFA, BPA, BVA, and BDes in areas such as animation, fashion design, interior design, and performing arts. Postgraduate options include MA, MFA, MPA, and MVA, while doctoral candidates can pursue a PhD through entrance exams or via UGC NET/JRF qualification. The campus, located at Swarang Parisar in Gwalior, is well-equipped with academic, cultural, and residential facilities and houses a Dhrupad Kendra that supports classical Indian music training in the guru–shishya tradition. With its strong emphasis on arts, heritage, and cultural education, the university plays a vital role in nurturing creative talent in central India, Singh (2020).

5.3.5 Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata

Rabindra Bharati University (RBU), established on 8 May 1962, is a public research institution located at Jorasanko Thakur Bari in Kolkata, the Tagore ancestral home. It

was founded to commemorate the birth centenary of Rabindranath Tagore and today operates under the Rabindra Bharati Act. Rabindra Bharati University's Faculty of Fine Arts comprises dedicated departments for Dance, Drama, Instrumental Music, Vocal Music, Rabindra Sangeet, and Musicology, offering comprehensive academic programs ranging from undergraduate to PhD levels, structured according to both semester and Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS) formats.

Table 5.1: Levels and Programs Offered

S. No.	Levels	Programs Offered
1	Diploma	Performing Arts Therapy (PG & Advanced)
2	Undergraduate	B.A. (Hons.) in Dance, Drama, Vocal, Instrumental & Rabindra Sangeet; B.F.A. in Fine & Performing Arts disciplines
3	Postgraduate	M.A. in Dance, Drama, Vocal, Rabindra Sangeet; M.F.A. in Visual and Fine Arts
4	Research	M.Phil. & Ph.D. in Musicology, Abstract Arts, Dance Research

5.3.6 Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Lucknow

Founded in 1926 as the Marris College of Hindustani Music by the esteemed musicologist Pt. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Rai Umanath Bali, the institute has played a pivotal role in formalizing and spreading Hindustani classical music education. In 2000, it was granted deemed-university status, and in June 2022, it was upgraded to

a full-fledged state university under the Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya Act to encompass a broader cultural mandate. BSVV is dedicated to teaching and preserving Indian music, dance, allied arts, and cultural traditions. It emphasizes structured pedagogy, including raga theory, notation, musicology, and performance training across disciplines.

Departments & Artistic Programs

Bhatkhande Sanskrit Vishwavidyalaya (BSVV) comprises specialized academic departments dedicated to diverse artistic disciplines. The Vocal (Gayan) department covers Classical, Semi-Classical, and Light music forms. The Instrumental (Vadan) department offers training in Swaravadya instruments such as sitar, sarod, violin, flute, harmonium, as well as Talavadya percussion instruments, including tabla and pakhawaj. The Dance (Nritya) department emphasizes classical dance forms like Kathak, Bharatanatyam, and selected regional folk styles. Additionally, the university houses dedicated departments for Musicology & Research, providing rigorous scholarly engagement, and Applied Music, which includes advanced studies in musical composition, direction, and genres such as Thumri and Dhrupad-Dhamar.

5.3.7 Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, Ahmedabad

Mrinalini Sarabhai, a well-known dancer and activist, established the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts in Ahmedabad in 1949, and it has influenced many classical dancers ever since. Darpana has made sure to extend Bharatanatyam by blending age-old rules with current trends. Darpana's approach to teaching is different from many schools, as it is flexible and involves various fields and social needs. Besides being skilled in nr̥tta, abhinaya, rhythm, and music, students are meant to develop their theatre, voice, writing, and overall theme abilities. The training at Darpana approaches Bharatanatyam from the viewpoints of performance, communication, activism, and change. She began by believing that dance could be used to encourage changes in society. Even now, choreographers deal with themes such as the environment, having equal rights for all genders, addressing caste distinctions, and mental health. Strong classical technique gives room for innovation within limited traditional structures. Both group and individual training are part of dance classes, and often students take part in planning the dances from the beginning to their performance. Students gain even more from their experience through multimedia, creative new ways of staging, and

collaborations with artists from abroad. Learning languages is another part of the program; students work on Sanskrit, Tamil, Hindi, and Gujarati texts, helping them relate more to the material and better absorb it. At Darpana, faculty guide artists to improve their artistic skills and also help them develop strong emotions and feelings. Students at the institution can access rare recordings, manuscripts, and film footage from the archival department. Over the past few years, Darpana has been active in educating people in schools, slums, and rural communities through its workshops. Bharatanatyam, therefore, is now used for giving opportunities and learning to everyone.

5.3.8 Natya Vriksha, Delhi

Geeta Chandran's Natya Vriksha has earned a standing for being both challenging and modern when it comes to training in classical dance forms Prickett, (2007). Many students have received training in Bharatanatyam through this institution based in New Delhi which also emphasizes learning through discipline and critical thinking. At Natya Vriksha, training integrates the Tanjore style —emphasizing structural clarity, disciplined form, and restrained movement— anchored in the traditional Thanjavur Quartet repertoire. Students learn limber, linear adavus alongside expansive, devotional pieces like the Varnam patel et al. (2019). Through repetitive practice, they cultivate both technical precision and physical stamina, deepening their performance and interpretive skills. Even so, the curriculum includes more than just working out the body. It is stressed that the dancer uses reading, writing, interpretation and challenge as part of their cultural work. Students get acquainted with concepts such as aesthetics (rasa, bhava), iconography, mythology, and semiotics. They should become familiar with texts from both India and the West to develop various ways of interpreting. Taking part in discussions on dance history, gender studies, and politics builds critical thinking among students. Often, the Natya Vriksha dancers' express problems in society through their dance. Chandran explores themes such as environmentalism, gender and living in cities, using the expressions of Bharatanatyam, Narayanan (2025). Students participate in these shows and get a chance to adapt nr̥tta and abhinaya for new stories and scenes. Language diversity can contribute to the teaching process. Bharatanatyam pieces are originally taught using Sanskrit, Tamil, and Telugu; however, they are also adapted into Hindi and Urdu, so anyone interested can learn and practice them. You will hear ancient Carnatic melodies mixed with updated modern Indian classical pieces. At Natya

Vriksha, mentorship is created around each dancer. Teachers oversee the development of their students and guide them in working alone, in groups, presenting work, and taking part in festivals. In addition, Natya Vriksha cooperates with organizations like India Habitat Centre and Sangeet Natak Akademi to offer its students opportunities on the national stage. Because of the model used, Bharatanatyam evolves into an active and engaged art form where exchanging traditions is a constant part of the dancers' practice.

5.3.9 Ganesa Natyalaya, Delhi

Ganesa Natyalaya, created by Guru Saroja Vaidyanathan in 1972, has a strong reputation in Bharatanatyam in North India. They follow a semi-gurukula model, meaning that teachers still interact with students as in traditional times yet include new teaching styles. Its purpose is to strengthen dancers in the art of Bharatanatyam, their spirituality and performance abilities. Ganesa Natyalaya has many intense classes. Fundamentally, students focus on adavus, nattuvangam, and body workouts. The repertoire features the full margam, Varnams, Padams, Javalis and pieces based on specific themes, Iyengar (2025). What makes Natyalaya unique is that its training includes cultural education. They explore the legends, main stories and motifs in Indian art, in addition to their classes. Nāṭyaśāstra, Bhagavad Gita and Sanskrit poetics help guide a dance in a spiritual direction. The institution is very interested in performance. Many students take part in festivals in Delhi, Doordarshan television events, cooperative programs with schools and activities at American embassies. Students at Ganesa Natyalaya perform classical and innovative dances in their own annual festivals, Dere (2025). Ganesa Natyalaya's approach to teaching also involves: Participating in workshops to learn about Indian folk styles as well as other forms of classical music • Studying yoga and the skill of chanting in Sanskrit • Using apps for composing, listening and judging how one is playing the institution's fame, global partnerships and persistent interactions with students after graduating have played a key role in spreading Bharatanatyam across Delhi and North India (Bala Krishnan 2025).

The following table will give a clear picture of the special features and the courses related to Bharatanatyam encompassed in the said institutions.

Table 5.2: Institutional Development and Pedagogical Trends of Bharatanatyam in North India

Institution	Location	Year Bharatanat yam Introduced	Art Forms Taught	Courses Offered	Faculty & Special Features
Maharaja Sayajirao University (MSU)	Vadodara, Gujarat	1950	Bharatanatyam, Music, Drama	Diploma, BA, MA, Ph.D.	Kalakshetra style; regional adaptations
Banaras Hindu University (BHU)	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh	Post-1966	Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Music, Drama	Diploma, BA, MA, Ph.D.	Hindi bhakti themes; Kalakshetra style; Hindustani music fusion; inter-university outreach
Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (IKSV)	Khairagarh, Chhattisgarh	1956	Bharatanatyam, Music, Painting, Theatre	BA, MA, Ph.D., Diploma	Kalakshetra Style, Inclusive pedagogy; cross-disciplinary research;

					rural outreach
Raja Mansingh Tomar University	Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh	2008 (approx.)	Bharatanaty am, Kathak, Folk Dances	BA, MA, Diploma	Kalakshetra Style, Emphasis on regional literature; seminar culture
Rabindra Bharati University (RBU)	Kolkata, West Bengal	1962	Bharatanaty am, Rabindra Nritya, Odissi, Kathakali	BA, MA, Ph.D	Kalakshetra Style, Tagorean values; interdiscipli nary collaboratio ns
Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyal aya	Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh	Late 20th century	Bharatanaty am, Kathak, Hindustani Music	Certificat e, Diploma, BA, MA, Ph.D	Kalakshetra Style, Comparative Kathak– Bharatanaty am studies; Carnatic- Hindustani synthesis
Darpana Academy of Performing Arts	Ahmedab ad, Gujarat	1949	Bharatanaty am, Theatre, Music	Diploma, Worksho ps, Custom Programs	Founded by Mrinalini Sarabhai; activist dance; multimedia

					and language integration
Natya Vriksha	Delhi	Early 2000s (approx.)	Bharatanatyam	Intensive Classes, Mentorship	Founded by Geeta Chandran; sociopolitical themes; textual and aesthetic study
Ganesa Natyalaya	Delhi	1972	Bharatanatyam	Certificate, Diploma, BA, MA	Founded by Saroja Vaidyanathan; semi-gurukula model; global links and classical depth

An introduction and progression of Bharatanatyam in the key academic and institutional centres of North India are presented in Table 5.2. The form originated in Tamil Nadu; however, its integration into the curricula of Northern Indian institutions is illustrative of a noteworthy pedagogical Bharatanatyam expansion. BHU and MSU are among the early adopters of Bharatanatyam, situating it within formal education frameworks alongside its integration into Kalakshetra and regional literary considerations. IKS in Khairagarh is distinctive within its interdisciplinary and holistic public tribal and rural student-centric inclusiveness. Darpana and Ganesa Natyalaya focus on social and spiritual issues, respectively. More recently, Raja Mansingh Tomar and Natya Vriksha have embarked on the creation of a new and innovative integrated framework. Rabindra Bharati University is distinctive for its

integration of Tagorean values. All these institutions highlight the academic credibility and flexible adaptability of Bharatanatyam in Northern India.

5.4 Expansion in North Indian Universities

Over the past few decades, Bharatanatyam has flourished in universities across North India, including institutions such as Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Rabindra Bharati University (RBU), Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (IKSVV), Raja Mansingh Tomar University, and MS University Baroda. These institutions have contributed significantly to reshaping the pedagogical contours of abhinaya.

For instance, Rabindra Bharati University, emphasizing literary and emotive traditions, has enriched abhinaya pedagogy by focusing on poetic interpretation and contextual usage of mudras, transforming gesture into poetic communication (Meduri, 2005). This approach creates technically sound performers and intellectually engaged students who understand abhinaya's symbolic and literary resonance.

At Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Bharatanatyam training integrates research, choreography, and performative analysis, encouraging students to explore the expressive vocabulary of abhinaya through academic frameworks and creative compositions (Pattabhi, 2010).

Similarly, institutions like Natya Vriksha and faculty at BHU and MSU Baroda are fostering abhinaya-based innovations. Students are now being encouraged to reinterpret classical abhinaya for contemporary themes such as environmental consciousness, gender identity, and mental health, without compromising on aesthetic integrity and classical structure. This freedom to innovate inspires students and contributes to the evolution of abhinaya.

5.4.1. Curriculum and Creative Expansion

Many of these universities have integrated abhinaya training into their coursework, practical labs, lecture-demonstrations, and research theses. Students analyze compositions, choreograph narrative sequences, and participate in performances that explore traditional repertoires (padams, varnams, javalis) and experimental choreographies using modern texts and themes (Zarrilli, 2000).

Faculty members often adopt interdisciplinary approaches, combining linguistic, psychological, and dramaturgical perspectives in teaching abhinaya. This

enables students to move beyond mechanical replication and embrace nuanced, emotionally resonant performance practices.

5.4.2. Language, Literature, and Cultural Literacy in Teaching

Part of Bharatanatyam teaching is exploring the literature that serves as inspiration for the performance. The majority of classical music pieces are written in Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit and Kannada, so students are commonly taught the main lessons in these languages or offered translations of the words. However, in the education system in North India, many schools and colleges add Hindi, Bengali and Gujarati literature into their Bharatanatyam teaching programs. As a result, it is easier to understand and it helps build stronger feelings and support for other cultures. During this course, Gujarati *nasas* or *chandras* of Narsi Mehta are frequently expressed and incorporated into the syllabus using *padams* or *shabdams*. At BHU, both Tulsidas and Surdas *bhajans* take place in the *margam*, helping students express themselves in Tulsidas' and Surdas' writings. This brings some important educational benefits to students: • It helps create connections within a culture • Motivates exploring traditions from various geographical places • Connects the technical aspects of dance with the personal feelings of the performer. They are also instructed in how to use meter, rhyme and imagery when they write poems. As a result, they learn how to perform, make choreography and interpret dance through research. Certain schools give assignments to students requiring the writing of new works for Bharatanatyam dancing, helping them improve their creative and literary abilities.

By looking at the above categories, one can analytically see the pedagogical practices invoked in the Northern Universities with regard to Bharatanatyam. The following is an attempt at the same.

5.5 PEDAGOGICAL CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES IN BHARATANATYAM AS PRACTISED IN NORTHERN INDIA

The pedagogical system in Bharatanatyam is one of the most highly structured and philosophically rich among Indian classical dance forms. Rooted in ancient dramaturgical treatises like Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* and Nandikeshwara's *Abhinaya Darpanam*, the practice of teaching Bharatanatyam is both a physical discipline and a philosophical undertaking. Across the diverse institutional environments in North India,

ranging from formal university structures to private academies and gurukulas, the teaching methods remain connected by certain core principles while also adapting to local contexts, artistic priorities, and student needs.

5.5.1. Adavus and the Foundation of Movement

At the heart of Bharatanatyam pedagogy lies the teaching of *adavus*³¹⁶, the foundational units of movement that develop posture, rhythm, alignment, and spatial awareness. Each *adavus* consists of coordinated leg movements, hand gestures (*hasta*), and rhythmic syllables (*solkattu*)³¹⁷. These are classified into several groups such as *tatta adavu*, *natta adavu*, *visharu adavu*, *thirmana adavu*, and others, each with a distinct rhythmic and spatial structure.

Training in *adavus* typically begins at a very early stage in a dancer's education. They serve not just as warm-ups or technical exercises, but as the building blocks of all future choreography. Pedagogically, the *adavus* help establish:

- Muscular memory and stamina
- Core-limb coordination
- Understanding of rhythmic meter (*tala*)
- Aesthetic symmetry and balance

At institution like Ganesa Natyalaya, students undergo rigorous daily practice of *adavus* for several years before progressing to more complex repertoire. In academic settings such as The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (MS University), foundational training is equally emphasized to ensure technical proficiency prior to advanced choreographic exploration daily for several years before students are allowed to move into complex repertoire. The importance of perfection in *adavus* is emphasized repeatedly by teachers. These repetitive movements not only improve technique but also instill discipline and mindfulness in the student. Each *adavus* is taught in various speeds, *vilambit* (slow), *madhyam* (medium), and *drutam* (fast)—helping dancers develop control and rhythmic understanding.

³¹⁶ Adavus in Bharatanatyam are the basic building blocks of the dance form, essentially the “alphabet” of pure dance (*nritta*). They are combinations of footwork, hand gestures, and body postures, all executed in sync with the rhythm (*tala*)

³¹⁷ In Bharatanatyam, *Solkattu* refers to the rhythmic syllables or spoken phrases that accompany and guide the dance movements. These syllables, often called “bols,” are derived from Carnatic music and are used to vocalize the rhythmic structure of the dance, acting as a verbal description of the steps and beats.

Kalakshetra-style training, dominant across most Northern institutions, particularly emphasizes clean linear movements, straight torso alignment, and geometric clarity in each adavus. Simultaneously, teachers at progressive institutions like Natya Vriksha and Darpana Academy encourage students to critically engage with traditional adavus, adapting them to suit thematic narratives and explore spatial dynamics. This pedagogical approach fosters a constructive dialogue between classical structures and contemporary innovation, enriching the creative process while maintaining a rooted connection to tradition.

5.5.2. Mudras and Gesture Vocabulary

The mudras or hastas constitute a vital component of Bharatanatyam pedagogy, functioning as an expressive gestural language used for storytelling, emotional expression, and symbolic representation. These hand gestures are codified in two primary classical treatises: the *Nāṭyaśāstra* by Bharata (circa 200 BCE–200 CE), which outlines the foundational principles of Indian classical performance, and the *Abhinaya Darpanam* by Nandikeshwara (circa 10th-13th century), which provides detailed classifications and usage. *The hastas are broadly divided into asamyuta hastas (single-hand gestures) and samyuta hastas (double-hand gestures), and are central to the abhinaya or expressive aspect of Bharatanatyam.*

In pedagogical practice, *mudras* are first taught in isolation, students learn the shape, the Sanskrit name, and its various meanings. For example, the pataka hasta can denote a flag, the sky, or refusal, depending on context. Once the basic forms are memorized, students are taught to integrate them into phrases of movement and *abhinaya* sequences.

5.5.3. Body Mechanics and Posture Training

Bharatanatyam is known for its bold and sophisticated movements. For this reason, pedagogical systems focus much on training the body and becoming aware of its structure. Students are always taught to have good posture, adjust their weight and straighten their spines. Here are a few of the main postures used are: • Araimandi: This is the foundation of Bharatanatyam, as it is the way the dancer seats themselves halfway. It makes the movements more stable and well-rooted. • Murumandi: In Bharatanatyam, Murumandi (also spelled Muzhumandi or Murumandi) is a deep squat position, often described as the “full sitting position,” which builds strength and enhances the dancer’s

posture. • Natyarambham: Showing oneself ready for dance with arms out and legs in Araimandi. It takes a long time for dancers to hold positions to improve their power and stamina. They describe body movements as being like those you see in sculptures or shapes, encouraging students to picture and feel the alignment. During alignment drills, the guru uses a mirror, draws lines on the floor or physically guides students into the right position. Rabindra Bharati University incorporates yoga, body exercises and breath control in their dance program. It means that a dancer sees their body as more than an instrument; they use it to discover something within themselves. Beyond that, examining how movement shifts from one posture to the next is considered an advanced teaching goal. Students are taught by teachers to maintain a smooth transition from one pose to another. Well-done transitions are beautiful to watch and also help to prevent injuries.

5.5.4. Margam Structure and Repertoire Building

The margam is the traditional sequence of Bharatanatyam items, designed to reflect the spiritual journey of the performer and audience. It begins with Alarippu (invocation), in an expanded version of Margam, the performance starts with Pushpanjali, proceeds through Jathiswaram (pure dance), Shabdham (narrative introduction), Varnam (central piece blending nr̥tta and abhinaya), Padams and Javalis (expressive compositions), and ends with Thillana (rhythmic conclusion) and Mangalam (closing benediction).

Pedagogically, the margam offers a complete artistic framework. Students are taught each item sequentially, often over several years. Each composition teaches specific skills:

- **Pushpanjali**³¹⁸: Invocatory piece seeking divine blessings
- **Alarippu**³¹⁹: Coordination and rhythm
- **Jathiswaram**³²⁰: Movement patterns and musicality

³¹⁸ In Bharatanatyam, Pushpanjali is an invocatory piece and a traditional salutation performed at the beginning of a dance recital

³¹⁹ Alarippu is the first item in a Bharatanatyam recital, serving as an invocation and warm-up for the dancer. It's a pure nr̥tta (pure dance) piece, focusing on rhythmic movements and coordinated limb and body actions. Alarippu symbolizes the blossoming of the dancer and is performed to offer respect to the deities, guru, and audience

³²⁰ In Bharatanatyam, a Jathiswaram is a pure dance (nr̥tta) piece focused on intricate footwork, rhythmic patterns, and geometric movements, all set to a combination of melodic notes (swara) within a specific raga (melody) and tala (rhythm). It's a technical choreography that emphasizes the unity of music, rhythm, and movement.

- **Shabdam**³²¹: Introduction to abhinaya and narrative expression
- **Varnam**³²²: Stamina, emotional range, and rhythmic complexity
- **Padams**³²³: Nuanced abhinaya and poetic interpretation
- **Keerthanam/Kriti**³²⁴: Devotional expression through expressive storytelling
- **Javali**³²⁵: Light-hearted, romantic or playful abhinaya
- **Ashtapadi**³²⁶: Expressive portrayal of divine love, often from the Gita Govinda
- **Thillana**³²⁷: High-energy conclusion requiring technical brilliance
- **Mangalam**³²⁸: Closing benediction to express gratitude and seek blessings

In most Northern institutions, the teaching of margam is complemented with regional adaptations. For instance, at BHU and MSU, *Padams* in Hindi or Gujarati are introduced to connect with the local cultural ethos. At Natya Vriksha, the traditional

³²¹ In Bharatanatyam, a Shabdam (also spelled Sabdam or Yashogati) is a dance item that introduces the element of expression (abhinaya) for the first time in a dancer's repertoire

³²² In Bharatanatyam, a varnam is a central and elaborate dance piece that showcases the dancer's skill in both pure dance (nritta) and expressive dance (nritya). It is a demanding composition that tests the dancer's stamina, technique, and ability to improvise and alternate between these two aspects. A varnam typically includes both musical and lyrical elements, incorporating intricate footwork, hand gestures, and facial expressions to convey the emotions and narrative of the piece.

³²³ Padams in Bharatanatyam are expressive dance pieces that focus on conveying emotions, particularly love, devotion, and longing, through graceful movements, facial expressions, and hand gestures. They are slower-paced than other Bharatanatyam compositions and emphasize abhinaya (expressional dance). The lyrics of a padam are often poetic and draw from South Indian languages like Tamil and Telugu, exploring narratives from Hindu mythology

³²⁴ In Bharatanatyam, Keerthanams and Kritis are dance items primarily focused on expressing devotion through elaborate abhinaya (expression) and rhythmic movements. They are compositions praising deities, often incorporating pallavi, anupallavi, and charanam sections, set to light ragas and medium tempos. While both are devotional, Kritis are generally more musically complex than Keerthanams.

³²⁵ In Bharatanatyam, a javali is a type of song and dance composition characterized by its lively pace, colloquial language, and focus on worldly love and sensuality, often contrasting with the more devotional or spiritual themes of another Bharatanatyam repertoire.

³²⁶ In Bharatanatyam, Ashtapadi refers to a specific type of expressive dance item based on the Sanskrit verses of Jayadeva's Gita Govinda, particularly the "eight-stepped" hymns. These hymns, which depict the love between Radha and Krishna, are a popular choice for dancers across various Indian classical styles

³²⁷ In Bharatanatyam, a Tillana is a fast-paced, rhythmic piece, typically performed at the end of a recital to showcase the dancer's skill and energy. It's a celebration of rhythm and movement, featuring intricate footwork, elegant postures, and expressive hand gestures

³²⁸ In Bharatanatyam, Mangalam is a concluding prayer piece performed at the end of a dance recital, seeking blessings and auspiciousness for all beings and the universe. It's a ritualistic part of the performance, often invoking deities like Rama and expressing well-wishes for the audience and performers.

margam may be interspersed with thematic pieces that reflect contemporary issues, while still maintaining the arc of progression from invocation to benediction.

Repertoire training is thus both a preservation of tradition and a pedagogical strategy for individual expression. Students often perform complete margams in exams and festivals, developing their stamina, memory, and stage presence.

5.5.5. Rhythmic and Musical Training

Bharatanatyam being intrinsically tied to rhythm and music, rhythmic literacy forms an essential part of its pedagogy. Students are trained in:

- **Tala systems** (especially Adi Tala, Rupaka Tala, Misra Chapu, etc.)
- **Nattuvangam** (cymbal playing and vocal recitation of *jathis*)
- **Counting cycles and composing *korvais*** (rhythmic patterns)

Rhythmic training enhances not just the dancer's timing, but their ability to improvise and respond to live music. Students also study Carnatic music theory, learning to identify *ragas*, tempo, and mood so they can align their *abhinaya* accordingly.

Advanced training in Bharatanatyam involves close collaboration with musicians. At Universities like Banaras Hindu University and Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (Khairagarh), dancers are encouraged to attend music classes and participate in vocal ensembles to develop a refined sensitivity to melodic phrasing and rhythm. This interdisciplinary approach is also adopted at major academic institutions such as The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (MSU) and Khairagarh University, where formal curricula in dance include mandatory training in Vocal or Instrumental Music, fostering a holistic understanding of Laya (rhythm) and Raga (melody) essential to classical performance

5.5.6. The Role of Abhinaya in Bharatanatyam Pedagogy and Its Flourishment in North Indian Universities

Abhinaya, the art of expression, is a foundational pillar in the pedagogy of Bharatanatyam, encompassing not only facial expressions and gestures but the embodiment of *bhava* (emotion), *rasa* (aesthetic experience), and narrative interpretation. Traditionally rooted in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, abhinaya integrates linguistic, emotional, and spiritual dimensions into dance training. Its pedagogical relevance has gained renewed attention in contemporary contexts, particularly within North Indian

universities, where Bharatanatyam is taught in traditional and innovative frameworks (Vatsyayan, 1996).

5.5.7. Abhinaya as a Pedagogical Core

In Bharatanatyam pedagogy, abhinaya is more than a stylistic device, it is a method of embodied learning that deepens students' engagement with cultural narratives, poetry, mythology, and human emotion. Internalizing a character, understanding poetic subtext, and expressing rasa cultivates aesthetic sensitivity and empathetic imagination in students (Kersenboom, 1987). Training in mukhabhinaya (facial expression), angika (body language), vachika (spoken word/music), and sattvika (inner emotion) is systematically imparted to enhance interpretative depth.

Apart from the above, as and when the technology changes, the universities have adapted the cutting-edge technological devices for upgrading the pedagogy and curriculum. This is been evident from the infiltration of visual aids into today's teaching of Bharatanatyam

5.5.8. Use of Visual and Performing Arts Integration

As a narrative-driven art form rooted in the Nāṭyaśāstra, Bharatanatyam has always relied on a synergy between movement, gesture (mudras), facial expression (abhinaya), and storytelling. Contemporary pedagogy in institutions such as MS University Baroda, Rabindra Bharati University, and Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya incorporates visual art elements, costume design, stagecraft, lighting, and scenography to complement and amplify narrative expression (Kersenboom, 1987; Leavy, 2015). By engaging with visual elements, students enhance their performance aesthetics and develop a deeper understanding of Bharatanatyam's symbolic and semiotic dimensions. A Bharatanatyam student sometimes learns storytelling with a puppeteer or explores different colors and moods with a painter. Collaborating with professors boosts students' art skills and prepares them for different careers in art-related fields.

5.5.9. Evaluation and Assessment in Bharatanatyam Training

Many Universities and institutions have their own systems for assessing Bharatanatyam students. In universities, it is generally established in the following way: • Having exams in actual situations, Viva voce is the practice of using oral exams. • Research

papers about different theories • Works that are based on scientific research or evidence. Students can be assessed by: Performing the requirements of the margam items. Ability to relate and perform different rhythms at the same time. The ability to show or perform dance moves, providing a clear understanding of various concepts. Today, some educational organizations allow students to prepare portfolios that include videos, lists of their work, essays, and accounts of their performances. It fits in with modern education practices and acknowledges that every dancer learns differently.

5.5.10. Challenges in Pedagogical Practice

While Bharatanatyam pedagogy remains deeply rooted in its classical traditions, contemporary academic frameworks, particularly in university settings, pose a set of evolving challenges that impact both teaching and learning.

- **Limited Mentorship in Semester-Based Systems:** The structure of semester-based university education often restricts the time available for immersive learning with a dedicated guru or coach. The degree of mentorship and student engagement may fluctuate depending on whether the course is discipline-specific or offered as an elective across programs.
- **Theoretical Emphasis Over Practical Immersion:** In many institutions, especially in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, there is a disproportionate focus on theoretical instruction, sometimes at the cost of rigorous practical training. This imbalance is further exacerbated by a shortage of qualified faculty with specialized training in Bharatanatyam.
- **Tension Between Tradition and Professional Pressures:** A growing number of students feel compelled to compromise on cultural depth or personal artistic identity in order to meet institutional or career expectations. Senior educators often express concern that institutionalization has shifted student priorities from experiential learning to credential acquisition.

In response to these challenges, several institutions are adopting innovative pedagogical strategies, such as increasing practical hours, extending rehearsal periods, and promoting critical engagement with repertoire and performance histories. Significantly, these constraints have also led to constructive developments: educators across North India are now collaborating more actively through knowledge exchange,

joint publications, and teacher-training initiatives. These collective efforts aim to ensure that the pedagogical journey of Bharatanatyam remains relevant, inclusive, and intellectually vibrant in a rapidly transforming academic landscape.

5.5.11. Gender and Accessibility in Bharatanatyam Training

Initially, only women (devadasis) practiced Bharatanatyam at temples, but today, people of any gender can participate, especially in North India. Even so, every person's educational experience is not the same, depending on their gender, social class or place of living. In recent years, Bharatanatyam programs at universities such as Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (Khairagarh), Raja Mansingh Tomar Music & Arts University (Gwalior), and The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (MSU) have witnessed a steady rise in male student enrollment. This shift reflects a broader institutional commitment to gender inclusivity within classical dance education. At BHU, for example, male participation has been supported since the 1970s, with faculty members trained in Kalakshetra and other classical lineages actively mentoring male dancers and adapting teaching methods to accommodate gendered expression within the form. Khairagarh University has produced several notable male dancers in both Bharatanatyam and Kathak, reflecting its longstanding inclusive approach. Similarly, Raja Mansingh Tomar University encourages male participation through its culturally embedded curriculum and regional outreach programs. University-organized festivals, such as Purushaakaram, which specifically highlight male classical performers, further validate and celebrate their presence on stage. As scholars and practitioners like Puru Dadheech and Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar have shown through their teaching and performance work, male engagement with Bharatanatyam is not only historically rooted but essential to its contemporary evolution. These institutional efforts challenge prevailing stereotypes, affirm male agency in classical performance, and signal a more balanced and inclusive future for Bharatanatyam pedagogy.

Even so, people's views on gender are not always accurate. • Sometimes, it is expected that male dancers show less shringara and not perform padams. It is possible for women in dance to encounter criticism for their excessive passion in places where academic study takes place. Non-binary and queer performers may have a hard time discovering people who are comfortable with who they are. Therefore, groups like Natya Vriksha have taken charge by including gender issues in their projects with

Bharatanatyam dancing. Workshops on how feminism affects reading ancient works, women stepping into male roles in theater and queering myths are also examples. Even without gender restrictions, not all people can easily get into the arts. Access to Bharatanatyam training remains limited for many students from rural or marginalized communities due to financial constraints such as tuition fees, the cost of costumes, and travel expenses. Institutions like The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (MSU) and Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (Khairagarh) have taken meaningful steps to address these barriers by offering scholarships, hostel facilities, and affordable learning resources. However, classical dance in India is still often perceived as being confined to elite circles unless systemic efforts are made to critically engage with the legacies of colonialism and caste privilege. As scholars such as Priya Srinivasan (2012) and Avanthi Meduri (2005) have noted, rethinking dance pedagogy through a decolonial and inclusive lens is essential for democratizing access. Educators today must intentionally create spaces that welcome learners from diverse socio-economic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. In doing so, Bharatanatyam not only sheds ingrained biases but also renews its transformative potential as a truly pluralistic and dynamic art form.

5.5.12. Traditional Gurukula vs. Academic University Models

A major theme in Bharatanatyam pedagogy today is the tension and interplay between traditional gurukula models and modern university systems. Each offers unique strengths and faces particular limitations.

Table 5.3: Traditional and Modern System Analysis

Gurukula Model	Academic Model
Emphasis on life-long mentorship	Fixed duration, curriculum-driven
No formal exams, based on readiness	Assessment through grades, credits
Deep immersion and personalized learning	Exposure to interdisciplinary studies
Focus on spiritual and performative growth	Emphasis on documentation, research

In the gurukula system, learning is holistic, students may assist the guru in daily activities, observe rehearsals, attend performances, and learn by example. This leads to deep internalization. However, opportunities for formal recognition, scholarships, and institutional mobility may be limited.

University systems, by contrast, provide infrastructure, visibility, and career pathways. But they are also constrained by semester systems, large class sizes, and administrative formalities that sometimes dilute the depth of artistic experience.

Today, many institutions aim to blend these models. At Ganesa Natyalaya, students attend daily classes but also write theory papers and conduct practical research. At Khairagarh and BHU, visiting gurus are invited to conduct short-term intensives, bringing the *guru-śiṣya* essence into the classroom.

This hybrid model seems to offer the most promising future, where the sanctity of traditional transmission coexists with the rigour and recognition of academic education.

5.5.13. Dance Notation, Documentation, and Archives

Another often overlooked but academically crucial aspect of Bharatanatyam pedagogy is the use of dance notation and archiving as a teaching tool. Traditional Indian dance does not rely on a single standardized notation system like Western ballet, but several systems have been developed:

- Karanas and Hastas diagrams based on temple sculptures
- Written solkattu and jathi patterns for rhythm
- Notation systems developed by scholars like Padma Subrahmanyam or Rukmini Devi
- Labanotation and Benesh Movement Notation (less common in Indian settings but increasingly explored)

All the Universities and institutions are required to maintain dance journals, recording choreographies, drawing movement patterns, and annotating music cues. This habit encourages:

- Analytical thinking
- Long-term memory retention
- Pedagogical independence (useful for future teachers)

Dance archiving is also emphasized in institutions, where students contribute to digital repositories, write analytical essays on recordings, and even document oral histories of their gurus.

The pedagogical value of this archival work lies in:

- Preserving rare compositions
- Offering material for research-based choreography
- Creating an institutional memory that future generations can build upon

By integrating notation and documentation, teachers empower students to become custodians and innovators of their art form.

5.6 CONTEMPORARY INNOVATIONS AND EXPERIMENTS

North Indian instructors in Bharatanatyam are paying attention to the tradition of the art form and responding to the changing demands of learners and audiences in the present day. For the last three decades, many teachers have been experimenting with different teaching methods to experiment with the pedagogy of the traditional margam system. Here, the main focus is on how introducing new ways of teaching has been essential for the continued vigor of Bharatanatyam.

Pedagogues today often include choreography not based on the classical margam in their curriculum. Traditionally, students were required to follow margam training, but now, many universities consider margam songs simply a base for studying other types of music. Because of this, singers can focus on modern-day issues in their music. The faculties at Natya Vriksha and Darpana Academy have made great efforts to promote this new approach. They learn how to design new theatrical structures using poetry that represents their own worries, personal politics and experiences. With this approach, classical dance looks at gender identity, damages to the environment, mental health, feeling isolated in cities and human rights. In Bharatanatyam, the deep emotions and ideas encourage young dancers to express their ideas, learn from solitude and unite with others, using their bodies as a form of resistance.

In addition, there is now greater motivation for everyone to join forces on topics that involve several fields. Pedagogy of Bharatanatyam in the north of India includes areas such as visual art, drama, and literature. The curriculum at universities encourages

different departments and various arts to collaborate. Participants are motivated to explore theatre skills to boost their acting and storytelling abilities and to use visual arts to improve their sense of composition, lines and symmetry in their gestures. Certain arts groups offer classes in photography, film and sound design for dancers which allows them to consider themselves in roles that range beyond merely dancing. Also, this new approach for education matches the complete ideals of Indian classical art, where dance, music and drama were meant to support each other. Bharatanatyam educators promote diversity in their students' skills by encouraging them to choreograph, perform, think creatively and reflect.

Developments in language and regional understanding have turned out to be essential in teaching. Since many North Indian students find it difficult to relate to Tamil or Telugu works, teachers have started using local languages in their lessons. Frequently, faculty at Maharaja Sayajirao University develop Bharatanatyam performances set to Gujarati devotional songs. In Banaras Hindu University, professors base their work on Hindi compositions, commonly finding verses written by Kabir, Meera or Tulsidas. Rabindra Bharati University includes Bengali poetry, especially by Tagore, within its Bharatanatyam classes. When the details of a dance are taught locally but follow the original form, students relate more to their classes and their emotions are involved. It also illustrates that Bharatanatyam is accessible to all Indians and is understood by people across the world.

Contemporary teaching approaches in Bharatanatyam increasingly incorporate modern themes alongside traditional mythological narratives, reflecting an evolving pedagogy that seeks to make the art form relevant to the present-day social and cultural context. In Bharatanatyam, the elaborate myths are useful for abhinaya; still, many educators want students to consider topics based on their lives, history and social issues. Integrating technology into teaching has made a noticeable difference in the way we teach. More and more institutions in India are using digital tools to assist with classroom learning. Thanks to the impact of COVID-19, more individuals moved to cities and the movement gained momentum. Now, teachers use videos to check their performance, share their routines and collect records. While Zoom and Google Meet help with lessons and critique, YouTube contains a lot of classic recordings and demonstrations. Creating a dance video, a presentation for a project or an online portfolio are examples of digital work students are given by educators. Students enrolled in Darpana and MS University vocational courses must keep a digital journal with rehearsal videos, their own ideas

and thoughts and advice from teachers. They allow more students to learn about dance and also train them to become tech-savvy artists nowadays. Nevertheless, the use of technology has made teachers reconsider the role of in-person presence, relationships with pupils and the need for physical guidance and corrections in their practise, a problem they keep encountering.

Many educators are now focusing their inventive pedagogical efforts on group choreography. In the past, Bharatanatyam was usually taught so that each dancer focused on giving a solo debut performance and pursuing a career as a solo artist. Yet, in the university and public academies, teaching groups make more sense, require greater collaboration and cost less. Modern teachers focus on teaching students not just about rhythm and geometrical alignment; they also help students understand how to project the same feeling within the group as a whole. Dancers are then able to treat subjects that require several dancers or actions on stage such as how groups share or get through hard times, how communities build strength or how groups or individuals fight for what they believe in.

Because of globalisation and migrant movements, there have been more changes in teaching styles. Today, Bharatanatyam is popular worldwide and institutions in North America, the UK, Australia and Southeast Asia are practicing it using both centuries-old and brand-new approaches. Northern India is using online residencies; international workshops and projects designed with the assistance of diaspora teachers. Students are able to see how Bharatanatyam evolves based on the languages and cultures of different communities. It leads students and teachers in India to question what it means when something is 'authentic'. How can tradition transform when it is brought into a new language? This means that learning Bharatanatyam involves much more than rote learning.

In the current era, learners in the classroom find ways to resist and experiment with the rules set by institutions. Teaching plans, marking criteria, schedules and funding shortage usually prevent students from attaining full mastery of the arts. As a result, many teachers now organize peer learning sessions, display their work individually, organize student-run festivals and operate shared scientific labs. They allow learners to practice innovatively, not worrying much about mistakes and keep trying until their work improves. Through insurgent pedagogy, Bharatanatyam is able to keep its prominent characteristics such as freedom, growth and transformation.

It is clear that Bharatanatyam is changing because its teaching is also evolving. Once students gain a better understanding of themselves, they seek greater challenges in their dance instructors. In return, teachers are meeting this demand with flexibility rather than strictness. The changes here are important, as they introduce new insights for Bharatanatyam, stretch its audience and help it speak to people today.

5.6.1 Interdisciplinary Collaborations and Hybrid Forms

North Indian universities increasingly encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between Bharatanatyam practitioners and visual arts, media studies, and theatre departments. For instance, at Rabindra Bharati University, Bharatanatyam students collaborate with musicology, stage design, and film studies scholars, creating multimedia works that integrate projection mapping, digital animation, and narrative layering (Leavy, 2015). This trend reflects a broader global shift where traditional dance practices intersect with contemporary art forms, enabling new modes of storytelling and audience engagement.

5.6.2 Pedagogical Innovation and Research-Based Practice

Contemporary innovations in Bharatanatyam are not limited to performance; they extend into curriculum design and pedagogical strategies. Institutions such as Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (IKSVV) and Raja Mansingh Tomar University have introduced modules on choreographic methodology, dance criticism, and arts-based research, encouraging students to document, analyze, and interpret their creative processes academically (Bresler, 2006). This aligns with a global recognition of dance as a form of practice-based research, where the body is a medium of expression and a tool for inquiry (Leavy, 2015).

As seen in the above sections, one can understand the changes and growth in the Bharatanatyam pedagogy. Adopted and updated by the North Indian Universities, with regard to Bharatanatyam teaching-learning processes. In a way, Bharatanatyam played a major role in reshaping the cultural expression in North India. The discussion below centres around the role and function of the Bharatanatyam

5.7 BHARATANATYAM'S ROLE IN NORTHERN DANCE AND PERFORMANCE CULTURE

5.7.1 Historical Entry and Cultural Assimilation of Bharatanatyam in North India

The introduction of Bharatanatyam to the dance scene in North India significantly shaped the future of Indian performing arts. Originally rooted in the devadasi tradition and temple rituals of Tamil Nadu, Bharatanatyam was historically confined to the southern region of India (Meduri, 2005; Kersenboom, 1987). The early 20th-century revival movement, led by cultural reformers, dancers, and nationalists, catalyzed its transformation from a temple ritual to a respected stage art form. This movement, gaining momentum in the 1920s and 1930s, enabled Bharatanatyam to travel beyond its regional boundaries (Soneji, 2012).

Initially preserved and taught at institutions like Kalakshetra in Chennai, Bharatanatyam began to spread to North India through the efforts of cultural ambassadors, artists, and Theosophical Society members such as Rukmini Devi Arundale, who restructured the form for proscenium performances (Meduri, 2005). In Delhi, Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra and later the Sangeet Natak Akademi played instrumental roles in legitimizing and institutionalizing Bharatanatyam for urban northern audiences, thereby gaining acceptance among the educated elite and contributing to its nationalization (Kothari, 2001; Chakravorty, 2008).

Bharatanatyam soon became an integral part of the curriculum in emerging performing arts departments across North Indian universities, thereby institutionalizing its presence beyond the southern cultural sphere.

This cultural assimilation was not merely geographical but also ideological. In Northern India, Bharatanatyam was adapted to resonate with local aesthetics, socio-political movements, and educational frameworks. Themes drawn from Hindi poetry, devotional traditions of North Indian saints, and contemporary social issues began to appear in choreographies. At the same time, the language of abhinaya expanded to accommodate new literary and cultural expressions (Chakravorty, 2008). As a result, Bharatanatyam became a pan-Indian art form, recognized for its classical roots and ability to engage with regional diversity and evolving cultural discourses.

5.7.2. Coexistence with Local Dance Forms and Styles

One remarkable aspect is that Bharatanatyam has grown in the North without erasing or taking away from the popularity of Kathak. Among its reasons for being a major center, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi are noted for their long association with Kathak, the support of Mughal courts, Nawabi support groups and Hindustani music traditions. Some people were concerned when Bharatanatyam was performed in this space, but over time, it has been shown that the two forms indeed support each

other and complement the overall art scene. At universities such as Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya (Lucknow), Raja Mansingh Tomar Music & Arts University (Gwalior), Banaras Hindu University (Varanasi), The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (Vadodara), and Rabindra Bharati University (Kolkata), classical dance education is embedded within a broader framework of performing arts scholarship. These institutions not only provide rigorous practical training in Bharatanatyam but also emphasize theoretical studies, cultural history, musicology, and aesthetics, thereby equipping students with a comprehensive understanding of the art form in both practice and context. They have seen that the grounded structure of Bharatanatyam and its geometry can be compared with the flowing Kathak dance and its turns, as well as the various rhythms used in Carnatic and Hindustani music. Through interaction with peers, mentors, and diverse performance contexts, these dancers gain a deeper appreciation of India's rich and varied cultural heritage, extending their learning beyond technical mastery to include intercultural awareness and artistic sensitivity. Including Bharatanatyam courses in these schools brings diversity and attracts a wide variety of students.

5.7.3. Urban Bharatanatyam: The Role of Metros in Shaping Dance Culture

Major metropolitan cities like Delhi, Kolkata, and Ahmedabad have played an instrumental role in shaping the Bharatanatyam scene in North India. Delhi, in particular, has emerged as a vibrant hub of Bharatanatyam pedagogy and performance, housing prestigious institutions such as Ganesa Natyalaya and Natya Vriksha. These institutions have nurtured generations of dancers, many of whom now teach or perform nationally and internationally. The presence of organizations like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), India International Centre, and Sangeet Natak Akademi has provided a fertile platform for Bharatanatyam performances and scholarships. Urban audiences, more exposed to intercultural exchange and experimental art, have been receptive to Bharatanatyam's diverse narrative possibilities, from the classical margam to thematic contemporary productions. Urban Bharatanatyam has also responded to metropolitan concerns, migration, identity, and climate change- thereby strengthening the dance form's relevance to modern life. Performances in these cities often incorporate digital scenography, multilingual texts, and cross-disciplinary collaborations, reflecting a pedagogy that is as much about responsiveness as it is about heritage.

5.7.4. Bharatanatyam in Small Towns and Tier-II Institutions

Beyond the metros, Bharatanatyam has slowly but steadily spread into the smaller towns and tier-II cities of North India. Places like Gwalior, Khairagarh, and Varanasi, though rooted in their own classical and folk traditions, have embraced Bharatanatyam in both formal and informal settings. Government-funded cultural bodies, NGOs, and school programs have supported its outreach. In these locations, Bharatanatyam often intersects with folk performance traditions, producing hybrid choreographic languages. Teachers report that students from small towns bring unique sensibilities to Bharatanatyam, greater spontaneity in expression, familiarity with storytelling traditions, and sensitivity to collective performance. While infrastructure and institutional support may be limited, the passion and dedication of teachers and students compensate for the lack of material resources. In such contexts, Bharatanatyam becomes a tool of cultural empowerment, offering students a path to self-expression, identity formation, and professional visibility in a rapidly changing society.

5.7.5. Interactions with Folk Traditions and Performance Practices

North India often connects the classical style with the folk style. Bharatanatyam training in this region now draws more influences from local folk traditions, which are either taught or learned in other ways. In many cases, teachers use elements such as storytelling, gestures, and traditional rhythms in both group exercises and special dance routines. If a piece is focused on Krishna in Bharatanatyam, it might include Braj bhasha folk songs, and if the topic is rain, the background music could take rhythm inspiration from Punjabi or Bhojpuri folk dance. They are advised to note and record the unique traditions of local dance, which helps them see Bharatanatyam within the context of other performers and styles. Participating in such dance forms is said to build intercultural competence.

5.7.6. Bharatanatyam and Religious Plurality in the Northern Context

Bharatanatyam's religious and philosophical framework is traditionally entrenched in Hindu devotional aesthetics. However, its spread into the pluralistic cultural settings of North India, where Hinduism coexists with Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism, has led educators and choreographers to rethink how spiritual content is conveyed (Zubko, 2014). This evolution is a testament to Bharatanatyam's adaptability, as contemporary choreographies now occasionally incorporate Sufi poetry or Christian

devotional themes, and in rare cases, even Buddhist philosophical concepts. This interfaith pedagogical approach does not dilute Bharatanatyam's classical core but reinforces its inclusive resonance in pluralistic contexts (Zubko, 2014).

In regions marked by religious diversity and historical communal tensions, such pluralistic spiritual engagement through dance can serve as a cultural bridge rather than a boundary. The increasing enrollment by students from non-Hindu backgrounds suggests a growing appreciation for Bharatanatyam's expressive and philosophical richness. Institutions play a crucial role in this, responding by interpreting mythological narratives symbolically, offering context, and fostering respectful dialogue. Their work is instrumental in positioning Bharatanatyam as a space for interfaith engagement and aesthetic pluralism (Zubko, 2014; "Ganga–Jamuni Tehzeeb," 2025).

5.7.7. Bharatanatyam as Cultural Capital and Professional Identity

In the contemporary framework of North India, participation in Bharatanatyam is increasingly regarded not merely as a classical art form or recreational activity, but as a valuable cultural and intellectual asset. It contributes to an individual's artistic identity, enhances cultural literacy, and is often seen as a marker of refined aesthetic sensibility within academic, social, and institutional contexts (Gupta, 2022). Students who study Bharatanatyam are able to apply for scholarships, teaching roles, fellowships, and international performances. It is becoming fashionable among middle-class parents to send their children for classical dance training, as this demonstrates their good manners, discipline, and intelligence. Because Bharatanatyam is becoming increasingly used in education, it has implications for teachers. Teachers are expected to accomplish tests, certifications, and strong performances. Although surface-level learning may occasionally occur, such challenges often serve as catalysts for educators to design structured curricula, implement transparent and equitable assessment practices, and cultivate mentorship-driven learning models that promote deeper pedagogical engagement. Notably, there is a growing recognition, particularly in northern regions of India, that careers in Bharatanatyam are both viable and fulfilling. Increasingly, students envision themselves not only as performers, but also as teachers, choreographers, researchers, and arts managers. Their aspirations are deeply rooted in the practice of Bharatanatyam, through which they aim to engage in meaningful cultural transmission, support artistic communities, and represent India on national and international platforms.

5.7.8. Globalization, Cosmopolitan Aesthetics, and Bharatanatyam in the Northern Metros

Bharatanatyam in North India is now perceived, taught, and performed much differently thanks to the globalization of Indian classical arts. Delhi and Kolkata are known for engaging in international culture by letting in guest artists from the diaspora, arranging conferences, and giving stages to performers for fusions of Bharatanatyam, ballet, contemporary dance, theatre, and world music. Nowadays, Bharatanatyam appears as a global statement rather than an Indian specific tradition. International performers and scholars are often invited by Natya Vriksha and Darpana Academy for workshops, classes, and events. Kang (2020) Students come across several cultural ideas that allow them to consider Bharatanatyam in relation to the world's theories on body, individuality, and politics. Cosmopolitan elements often change the way performances are viewed. Nowadays, audiences in cities across North India are comfortable with minimal house decorations, new styles of dancing and abstract art forms. Because of this, dancers learn to handle the classic techniques in new forms of staging. As such, there is no need to turn away from tradition; it means using Bharatanatyam as a channel to address several issues, including environmental problems, gender challenges or living in a digital world. For this reason, dancers must be well-versed in cultural heritage and ready to improvise with recent, international trends (Kedar, 2020).

5.7.9. Media, Digital Platforms, and the Changing Nature of Bharatanatyam Performance

It is just as common today for Bharatanatyam performances in North India to be viewed on screens as on a regular stage. Nowadays, performing artists can easily share, document, and make their shows available to eager viewers via social platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. With the assistance of technology, dancers share rehearsals, solo pieces and songs that convey their understanding of different themes. Because of this change, artists from small communities or hardly-known places are able to make a name for themselves and expand their networks. At the same time, this has created a common form and feel, making editors focus on quick, noticeable video episodes instead of calm and meditative ones. Digital media serves as a learning tool as well as a learning platform. Teachers use video recordings to teach students how to dance and highlight the differences between various types of dances. Today, anyone

learning by themselves has chances to get critiqued and receive feedback from others. Even MS University and Rabindra Bharati are now teaching digital performance and media studies through their courses. They are expected to carry out their performances as well as practice editing, curating, and promoting their own music. This new way of learning prepares dancers for how dance is being presented today in the digital world.

5.7.10. Politics of Representation and Cultural Identity

The rise of Bharatanatyam in North India has also raised important questions about cultural ownership, identity, and representation. As a form historically associated with Tamil and Telugu communities, Bharatanatyam's relocation into the northern cultural matrix necessitates negotiation between regional identity and national belonging. For some, Bharatanatyam's southern origins must be preserved through strict adherence to language, music, and movement. For others, the form's national popularity justifies localized interpretations that incorporate regional languages, themes, and aesthetics.

These debates reflect deeper political undercurrents concerning caste, gender, and cultural hegemony. Who gets to teach Bharatanatyam in North India? Who decides what is authentic? Can a dancer from Gwalior or Lucknow claim the same cultural legitimacy as one from Chennai or Madurai? Educators and scholars increasingly emphasize that cultural authenticity should not be policed by geography or lineage but understood as a fluid and dynamic process rooted in ethical engagement, rigour, and respect. The pedagogical focus has shifted from gatekeeping to inclusion—ensuring that Bharatanatyam's power as a classical form is not wielded to marginalize but to empower. Institutions are therefore re-examining syllabi, diversifying reading materials, and promoting conversations on cultural pluralism and critical historiography.

5.7.11. Future Directions: Bharatanatyam as a Catalyst for Cultural Dialogue in the North

Looking forward, Bharatanatyam is poised to play an increasingly important role in shaping North India's cultural landscape. Its presence in universities, festivals, and digital platforms gives it unparalleled outreach and influence. More than just a performance tradition, Bharatanatyam is emerging as a catalyst for cultural dialogue—inviting reflection on heritage, identity, and social justice. Institutions are now training students not only in technique but in critical thinking, arts administration, and cultural

diplomacy. Bharatanatyam graduates in North India are working as researchers, policy advisors, curators, and educators, expanding the form's relevance beyond the stage.

The future will likely see more cross-institutional collaborations, interdisciplinary research, and international partnerships. There is also a growing movement to decolonize classical arts education, re-centring indigenous epistemologies while remaining open to global engagement. As Bharatanatyam continues to evolve in North India, it holds the potential to become a model of how classical arts can remain rooted yet responsive, sacred yet inclusive, disciplined yet creative.

In this vision of the future, Bharatanatyam is not simply a classical dance form taught within the walls of institutions; it is a vibrant and vital presence in public life. It moves through auditoriums, schools, online platforms, protest sites, and healing spaces. It speaks to tradition, but also to trauma, transformation, and transcendence. For North India, this is not merely the adoption of a southern form; it is the co-creation of a shared cultural legacy, written in rhythm, gesture, and breath.

5.8 CHANGING TERRAIN AND TRANSFORMING METHODOLOGIES OF STUDYING TEACHING PRACTICES.

The study of Bharatanatyam pedagogy within North Indian universities and institutions necessitates a research approach that respects the dance form's embodied knowledge systems, cultural contexts, and institutional variations. This research adopted a qualitative, interpretive methodology guided by ethnographic principles, rooted in case-study design, and enriched through multiple methods of data collection, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, archival review, and survey-based fieldwork. Recognising that Bharatanatyam is transmitted not only through curriculum and lecture but also through gesture, atmosphere, repetition, and spiritual practice, the methodology was built around the principle of immersion, entering into the worlds of the teachers, students, and institutions that carry this classical form forward.

5.8.1. Framing the Inquiry: From Embodied Art to Institutional Context

The research began with the fundamental premise that Bharatanatyam pedagogy is both deeply codified and highly adaptive. Its transmission involves historical structures like the guru-śiṣya paramparā and modern frameworks such as syllabi, semester-based assessments, and research-driven innovation. This dual structure, traditional and institutional, requires a methodology capable of tracing both experiential and systemic

knowledge. As Vatsyayan (1982) asserts, classical Indian dance is not just performance but pedagogy, philosophy, and spiritual engagement encoded in movement. Therefore, the study's central question, how Bharatanatyam is taught, experienced, and transformed in North India's universities, had to be examined through a holistic lens. The methodological process was informed by feminist cultural theory, performance studies, and arts-based research paradigms. The approach aligned closely with Avanthi Meduri's model of "insider-ethnography" (Meduri, 2008), wherein the researcher participates within the field not as a distant observer but as an embodied, critically engaged interlocutor. This approach was particularly suited to Bharatanatyam, where knowledge is inscribed in the body, enacted in rehearsal spaces, and transmitted orally through subtle correction and improvisation.

5.8.2. Selection of Institutions: Scope and Sampling

Nine institutions were selected to provide a cross-section of geographical, pedagogical, and administrative diversity: Maharaja Sayajirao University (Vadodara), Banaras Hindu University (Varanasi), Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (Khairagarh), Raja Mansingh Tomar University (Gwalior), Rabindra Bharati University (Kolkata), Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya (Lucknow), and three premier private institutions, Darpana Academy of Performing Arts (Ahmedabad), Natya Vriksha (Delhi), and Ganesa Natyalaya (Delhi). These were chosen through purposive sampling based on criteria such as: historical importance in classical dance education, institutional support for Bharatanatyam, curriculum diversity, access to faculty and students, and regional cultural engagement.

The institutions collectively span the governmental, autonomous, and private spectrum. For instance, Banaras Hindu University and MSU represent old, highly reputed public universities, while Ganesa Natyalaya and Natya Vriksha operate as non-university academies with significant cultural clout. The selection allowed the researcher to examine not only differences in structure and curriculum but also how pedagogy is shaped by institutional philosophy, resources, and public visibility.

5.8.3. Participant Profile: Teachers, Gurus, and Students

The study was grounded in qualitative inquiry and engaged with 12 primary interview participants, comprising senior faculty members from six leading universities, renowned gurus from three key Bharatanatyam institutions, and experienced students

across these platforms. This diverse cohort enabled a comprehensive understanding of pedagogical practices and generational shifts in Bharatanatyam education in North India. Prominent contributors included Shri Premchand Hombal, whose oral testimony offered valuable insight into the evolution of Bharatanatyam in Banaras; Dr. Gowripriya Somnath and Shri Himanshu Dwivedi of Gwalior, known for bridging classical dance with theatrical interpretation; and Dr. Parul Shah, Dr. Ami Pandyal, and Smt. Aruna Raman's decades-long teaching at The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda has deeply anchored Bharatanatyam pedagogy in traditional and scholarly frameworks.

Additionally, Dr. P. Medini Hombal of Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya contributed historical perspectives on performance culture and pedagogical transitions over the decades. Dr. Gyanendra Bajpai of Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Lucknow, and Shri Rahul Mondal of Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, provided institutional reflections grounded in contemporary academic environments. The study also benefited from insights from eminent practitioners Geeta Chandran, Guru Saroja Vaidyanathan, and Mallika Sarabhai, whose reflections were particularly valuable in contextualizing Bharatanatyam's evolution in the northern region.

In addition to senior voices, the study incorporated interviews with younger faculty members and postgraduate students from institutions such as BHU, MS University, Indra Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Rabindra Bharati, Raja Mansingh Tomar University, and Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya. Their perspectives illuminated how Bharatanatyam pedagogy is being received, challenged, and reinterpreted by the next generation of dancers and scholars.

To complement the interviews, questionnaires were distributed to 36 respondents, primarily current students and recent graduates. The data collected included detailed field narratives, training experiences, comparative views on academic versus private dance education, and personal reflections on learning Bharatanatyam in North India. All responses were systematically coded and analyzed, enabling triangulation of perspectives and grounding the research in a nuanced blend of legacy, continuity, and emerging pedagogical thought.

5.8.4. Field Engagement and Duration of Data Collection

The data collection process was carried out over a period of several months through multiple field visits, virtual interviews, institutional correspondence, and review of

archival documentation. This immersive timeframe was critical to engage with the pedagogical environments in depth and to build trust with both faculty and students. It allowed the researcher to return to key informants for clarification, revisit rehearsal spaces at different stages of preparation, and observe how seasonal events, such as semester exams, festivals, or workshops, impacted training rhythms. Each phase of data collection was informed by the principle of slow, sustained observation, recognising that classical dance pedagogy unfolds over time rather than in isolated episodes.

5.8.5. Semi-Structured Interviews: Design, Execution, and Thematic Anchors

The primary tool used was the semi-structured interview, which allowed flexibility and responsiveness while maintaining a set of thematic anchors for comparison. Interviews were conducted in Hindi, English, or a combination of both, depending on the comfort of the participant. In cases where physical access was not possible, digital interviews were scheduled through platforms like Zoom and Google Meet. This proved particularly effective for reaching senior participants who were no longer affiliated with full-time institutional teaching but remained valuable repositories of pedagogical memory.

The structure of the interviews was designed to follow four key thematic areas: first, curriculum and institutional structure; second, practical methodology and daily training routines; third, student-teacher dynamics and performative evolution; and finally, cultural and regional adaptation of Bharatanatyam in the North Indian context. Within these broader categories, questions remained open-ended, allowing for elaboration, anecdotal recall, and philosophical reflection. For instance, Guruji's recollections often moved from direct curricular content into detailed narratives of past students, aesthetical ideology, and even the journey of Bharatanatyam in BHU's performing arts department during the 1970s and 80s. In contrast, Dr. Gowripriya Somnath and Dr. Himanshu Dwivedi placed greater emphasis on the interface between dance, theatre, and rural community aesthetics, describing how Bharatanatyam in Gwalior incorporated theatrical structures from local traditions to remain relevant to regional audiences.

5.8.6. Classroom Observation and Rehearsal Immersion

One of the most valuable sources of pedagogical insight came through direct participant observation. Over several weeks, the researcher observed training sessions, workshops,

and rehearsals at a range of institutions, including Natya Vriksha (New Delhi), Ganesa Natyalaya (New Delhi), Rabindra Bharati University (Kolkata), Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya (Lucknow), The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (Vadodara), Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya (Khairagarh), and Banaras Hindu University (Varanasi). These observations were essential not only for understanding technical sequences such as *adavus*, *jathis*, and *abhinaya* drills, but also for identifying broader pedagogical atmospheres. Elements such as discipline, hierarchy, spatial use, peer interaction, and body language provided rich data that could not have been accessed through interview alone.

Detailed field notes were maintained after each observation session, capturing everything from verbal corrections and the sequencing of exercises, to ritual observances like floor salutations, the manner in which students entered and exited the room, and the exact moment a teacher chose to demonstrate instead of explain. Through this ethnographic gaze, the classroom itself became a living text, revealing the values, anxieties, and habits that shape the transmission of Bharatanatyam.

5.8.7. Archival Documents and Historical Continuity

Equally significant was the institutional archival material accessed during site visits. These included academic syllabi from the universities, audio-visual recordings from Sangeet Natak Akademi, internal memos and newsletters from MSU, and student project reports that documented performance history and pedagogical lineage. Reviewing this material helped the researcher trace the evolution of Bharatanatyam's status within formal education systems. For instance, a syllabus from 1989 at Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya listed Bharatanatyam under a "miscellaneous" category in the dance department, suggesting marginalisation at the time. By contrast, the current curriculum recognises it as a core discipline, with dedicated faculty and exam protocols. This shift, corroborated by alumni interviews, marked an important indicator of institutional maturity and legitimacy. Vatsyayana (2001).

These documents also provided invaluable data for cross-referencing interview claims with formal records. For example, Hombal Ji's recollection of BHU's changing Bharatanatyam policy could be confirmed by archived university circulars and departmental minutes. Such triangulation of oral and documentary data ensured scholarly rigour and prevented the over-reliance on memory as a sole source of truth.

5.8.8. Survey Distribution and Thematic Structuring

In addition to interviews and observations, questionnaire-based surveys were designed and distributed to broaden the data pool. These surveys, collected via hard copy and digital forms, were structured to gather comparative data on student experience, training challenges, access to resources, and individual perspectives on the balance between tradition and modernity. The questions were open-ended but organized around five thematic axes: first, engagement with daily practice and performance; second, understanding and application of theory; third, exposure to interdisciplinary and experimental work; fourth, access to institutional support such as music, costumes, and performance opportunities; and fifth, career aspirations within or beyond the Bharatanatyam field.

Thematic analysis of the surveys revealed a pattern of shared concerns and hopes across respondents from different institutions. Many expressed a desire for deeper engagement with music training, better access to high-quality costumes and performance spaces, and more mentorship for career planning. Importantly, the open-ended nature of the questions allowed respondents to frame their own priorities, sometimes introducing topics the research had not anticipated, such as body image, mental health under performance pressure, and the desire for cross-cultural collaborations.

5.8.9. Student Profile Diversity and Learning Trajectories

The survey data also provided valuable insight into the diverse positionalities of students enrolled in Bharatanatyam programs. Respondents included both full-time and part-time learners, spanning age groups from undergraduate students to mid-career professionals pursuing diplomas. While some participants had a prior background in Bharatanatyam, many had entered the field from other disciplines such as literature, music, sociology, or theatre. Some identified as aspiring performers; others saw dance as a cultural inheritance or a meditative practice.

This diversity of intention and identity revealed how Bharatanatyam functions differently within different learner ecologies. While private institutions like Ganesa Natyalaya trained students with professional performance in mind, public universities like Rabindra Bharati and Raja Mansingh Tomar catered to broader educational goals, Devan (2021). In the latter, Bharatanatyam was often one subject among many, leading to a more integrated but less intensive form of training. This

contrast helped illustrate how pedagogy is not only about what is taught, but why, to whom, and under what conditions.

5.8.10. Analytical Framework: Thematic and Phenomenological Methods

The analytical framework for this research was based on thematic analysis and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify, code, and categorise patterns emerging from interviews, observations, and survey responses. Major themes included curriculum evolution, teacher authority, student agency, regional adaptation, and institutional tensions. This method allowed for both horizontal and vertical analysis, comparing across institutions and drilling deep into specific phenomena.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis, meanwhile, allowed the study to retain the richness of individual experience. It was particularly effective when analysing narratives that dealt with internal transformation, emotional learning, and aesthetic breakthrough. For instance, when a student described finally “feeling” a padam after years of mechanical repetition, that moment was not treated as incidental but as an epistemological event, one that revealed how embodied knowledge unfolds in nonlinear ways.

5.8.11. Ethical Considerations and Research Sensitivity

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the research process. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, its use in academic writing, and their right to anonymity. Consent was obtained through written or verbal agreements, depending on the context. Interviews were recorded only with explicit permission, and participants had the right to review transcripts before inclusion. In cases where responses touched on sensitive topics, such as institutional politics, criticism of pedagogy, or personal struggles, those sections were anonymised and contextualised with care.

Moreover, the researcher took special precautions during classroom observations, maintaining a non-intrusive presence and refraining from photographing or filming unless explicitly invited. The aim was not to extract data but to witness it with respect and interpret it with humility. Given the emotional and spiritual dimensions of classical dance, the researcher was attentive to unspoken cues, silences, hesitations, shifts in tone, that often conveyed as much meaning as verbal articulation.

5.8.12. Reflexivity and the Researcher's Embodied Presence

Access to organizations, time scarcity and hesitancy among participants made this study a challenge, just like other qualitative research studies. There were organizations willing to provide full access to their data; however, others remained vigilant and used red tape to manage access. At times, the schedule changed because a senior teacher was traveling, unwell or retired, so students would present alternate versions they had learned. In certain cases, I had to change the way I asked questions during the event and some interviews were held in open areas. To address these problems, the researcher used courtesy, put themselves in the locals' shoes and adjusted their approach. Introductions usually happened when people had leaders or colleagues who they both knew. Even informal talks were given the same importance as interviews that were typed onto paper. Whenever I could not find the needed data directly, I turned to syllabi, public talks or interviews for information.

5.8.13. Challenges in the Field and Adaptive Strategies

Like any qualitative research, this study faced practical challenges, especially around institutional access, time constraints, and participant hesitancy. Some institutions were generous with permissions and data sharing; others were protective, invoking bureaucratic procedures that delayed or limited interaction. While senior teachers' limited availability occasionally posed logistical challenges, these situations opened alternative avenues for inquiry, such as drawing on the perspectives of their long-term students or observing informal interactions during rehearsals and performances. These spontaneous, context-rich moments often revealed nuances that formal interviews might have overlooked

The researcher addressed these challenges through respectful persistence, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability. Introductions were often facilitated through mutual acquaintances or professional networks. Informal conversations were treated with as much seriousness as formal interviews. When direct data was unavailable, parallel material such as syllabi, public lectures, or published interviews was consulted to fill gaps.

5.8.14. Justification for Qualitative Methodology in Bharatanatyam Pedagogy

The nature of the research topic necessitated a qualitative methodological approach, as it enabled an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences, pedagogical strategies, and

interpretive frameworks embedded within Bharatanatyam education. This approach prioritized subjectivity, meaning-making, and context, allowing the researcher to attend to the nuances of embodied knowledge transmission, student–guru dynamics, and the evolving aesthetic and socio-cultural dimensions of classical dance training. Through tools such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and performance analysis, the methodology captured the complexity of how Bharatanatyam is not only taught but also internalized, interpreted, and reimagined across different institutional and individual settings.

When it comes to classical dance, Bharatanatyam teaching is not only about completing set routines. It is the result of bodily movements, learning from others' experiences, faith, emotional lessons and ideas promoted in the environment. Most of these dimensions relate closely to a person, vary from one situation to another and are hard to measure simply by counts or questionnaires. Because qualitative methods, especially ethnography and interpretive phenomenology, pay close attention to such things as nuance, contradiction, ambiguity and transformation, the researcher is able to consider them all when studying dancers and teachers. This type of research involves conversation and listening to what people have to say, instead of lifting them into general ideas or concepts. The researchers allowed participants to play a role in the study by engaging in interviews and observing them for a long period, allowing them to highlight their own troubles and join in forming the narrative. As a result, the approach matched the main concepts of Bharatanatyam teaching which are conversations, spontaneous creativity and how to present on stage. It valued the brain in the body, in the classroom and in the silent cooperation that gave classical training its quality.

5.8.15. Integration of Practice-Based Research in Dance Studies

Unique to this methodology is its approach of regarding PBR or practice-based research as a valid form of inquiry in art. According to Robin Nelson and Susan Melrose in performance studies, PBR means that a framework for knowledge develops when artists engage in creating art (Wookey, 2020). Therefore, in Bharatanatyam exercises, different steps, creative movements, lesson plans and moments of trial and error were included as data. They contributed more than details to theory; they influenced thinking on their own merit. Using these two practices went hand-in-hand for classroom observations. In this study, performance was considered a place for knowledge, where the movements,

memory and sense of rhythm were examined. One could see how various teachers split a thillana into separate steps and worked on a padam emotionally by explaining its meaning and altering the musical accompaniment. Breathing techniques and remaining motionless were important for a few gurus, while emotional liveliness and lively music were the main focus for others. These ways of teaching could be seen only by being there and observing in the classroom; they couldn't be defined just by reading material.

5.8.16. Role of Local Languages and Translation in Fieldwork

In North India, when Bharatanatyam moves, its teaching includes many languages, rather than Sanskrit and Tamil shlokas only. The Researcher conducted interviews and classes using Hindi, English, Gujarati, Bengali and on some occasions, a combination of all three. Since languages were so well integrated, the researchers needed to pay close attention to translating concepts and ways of thinking, as well as metaphors and cultural aspects. Many of the participants, mainly Hombal Ji, Rahul Mondal and Aruna Raman ma'am, chose to talk about their lives in Hindi or regional languages. Idiomatic expressions, cultural references and analogies from that time were very linked to the lives of those people. The Researcher had to be careful when translating the interviews so that the tone, mood and suggestive ideas were preserved. In order to keep the original rhythm, the researcher translated the speech contextually instead of word-for-word. Not only was it a practical issue, but it also influenced the way I went about my work. It became clear that the teaching method includes the idea that Bharatanatyam should connect with people's way of speaking and expressing themselves using various languages. If a teacher sang a Hindi bhajan as a substitute for a Telugu varnam or taught poetry movements based on North Indian traditions, it was education combined with politics. It understood language as playing an important role in affecting the way students think, feel and express themselves during learning.

5.8.17. Interdisciplinary Influences on Data Collection

The research methodology benefited from a consciously interdisciplinary perspective. While grounded in dance studies and cultural performance theory, the study incorporated frameworks and techniques from anthropology, feminist ethnography, musicology, and education theory. This interdisciplinary lens enabled layered modes of data collection, where an interview could simultaneously function as a biographical narrative, a critique of institutional politics, and an aesthetic reflection. For instance,

during in-depth conversations with Guru Leela Samson, an eminent Bharatanatyam artist known for her minimalist aesthetic and introspective choreographies, discussions naturally shifted between concepts of abhinaya, spatial dramaturgy, and sound-text relationships. Her pedagogical emphasis on cultivating ‘cultural literacy’, a learner’s ability to interpret and embody performance traditions with contextual sensitivity, demanded an engagement with theatre semiotics, Carnatic musicality, and Nāṭyaśāstra-based philosophy. This integrative approach advanced not only technical precision but also fostered a layered understanding of character, emotion, and cultural subtext.

Similarly, fieldwork at Kalakshetra Foundation required familiarity with not just adavu structures but also scenographic composition, costume symbolism, and sound design intricacies. The inclusion of tools such as movement notation, spatial mapping, and rhythm sketches further supported the interdisciplinary framework. These tools captured embodied and non-verbal data, such as talam variations, gesture clusters, or lighting cues, that might otherwise be occluded in conventional interview transcripts. By embracing such multiplicity, the methodology remained faithful to the hybrid ontology of Bharatanatyam as both text and texture, codified tradition and creative improvisation.

5.8.18. Temporality and Rhythm of Classical Arts Fieldwork

Another vital aspect of the methodology was recognising the unique temporality of classical arts training. Unlike semester-bound academic courses, Bharatanatyam training unfolds across years, sometimes decades. Knowledge does not always arrive in chronological order but in loops, layers, and spirals. A student may revisit the same adavus for years, or understand a varnam’s emotional depth only after repeated performance. Pedagogical milestones, like the arangetram, a dancer’s debut solo, are less about curriculum completion and more about internal readiness, spiritual maturity, and the guru’s approval.

Conducting fieldwork within this temporal frame meant slowing down the researcher’s expectations. Not every question had an immediate answer. Some observations yielded insight only in retrospect. Field notes became recursive, with earlier entries gaining new significance after later events. This slowness was not a hindrance but a methodological virtue. It allowed for deep listening, long-term trust-building, and the emergence of layered meaning.

Furthermore, rhythm, both literal and metaphorical, became a guiding principle. Rhythmic cycles shaped not only class structure but interview timing, conversation flow, and analytical structure. The researcher noted how often teachers used musical metaphors to explain life, how movement breaks were mirrored in verbal pauses, and how repetition generated understanding. The study thus evolved a methodology attuned not just to content but to cadence, to the pulse of dance as a way of knowing, remembering, and relating.

5.9 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF INTERVIEWS AND SURVEY RESPONSES

This section offers a multi-dimensional analysis based on extensive field data and narrative-rich responses gathered from diverse stakeholders, students, alumni, and teachers, across institutions in North India. This empirical layer not only deepens the qualitative depth of the study but also contributes statistically to a grounded understanding of contemporary Bharatanatyam pedagogy.

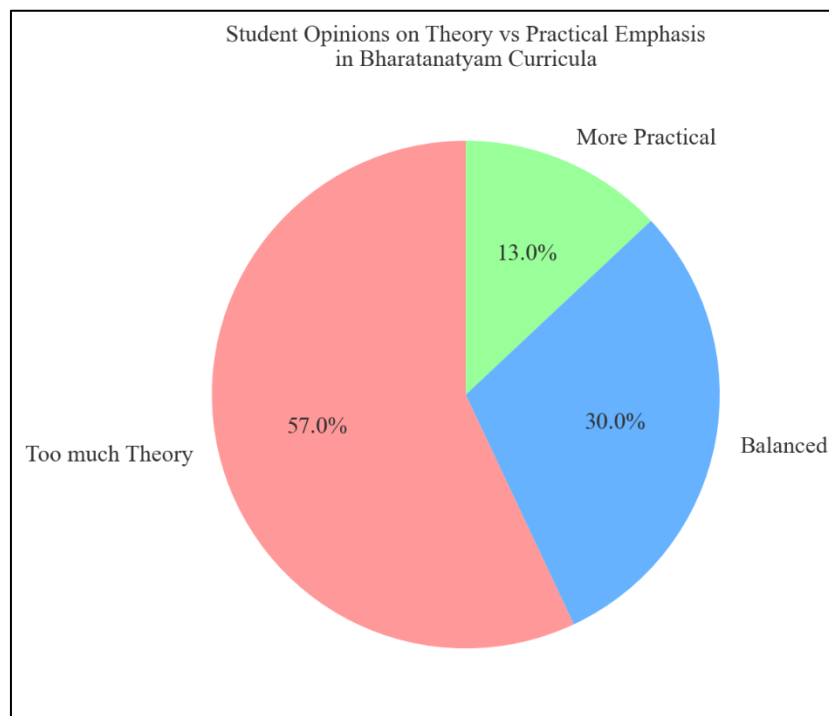


Figure 5.1: How Students Feel About the Division of Theory and Practice in Bharatanatyam Courses

Many students at the eight surveilled institutions share that they think the gap between learning theory and learning through practice in Bharatanatyam is significant. 57% of those who completed the survey stated that the curriculum is overloaded with theory, so little time is spent on movements and learning by doing. Thirteen percent of those surveyed felt that hands-on work overshadowed other tasks, and 30% agreed that there was a fair mixture. It demonstrates that learners generally feel that the program focuses more on studying information orally or in written form, when it could be more active, requiring physical action.

The strong desire for greater practice reveals how Bharatanatyam is a form of dance meant for performance. Many students wished they could work more on abhinaya, nṛtta, and dance performance since these practices were either given less attention or needed to be rushed due to various schedules and requirements at their college. It demonstrates that, due to this gap, dancers' instruction may benefit from new curriculum approaches.

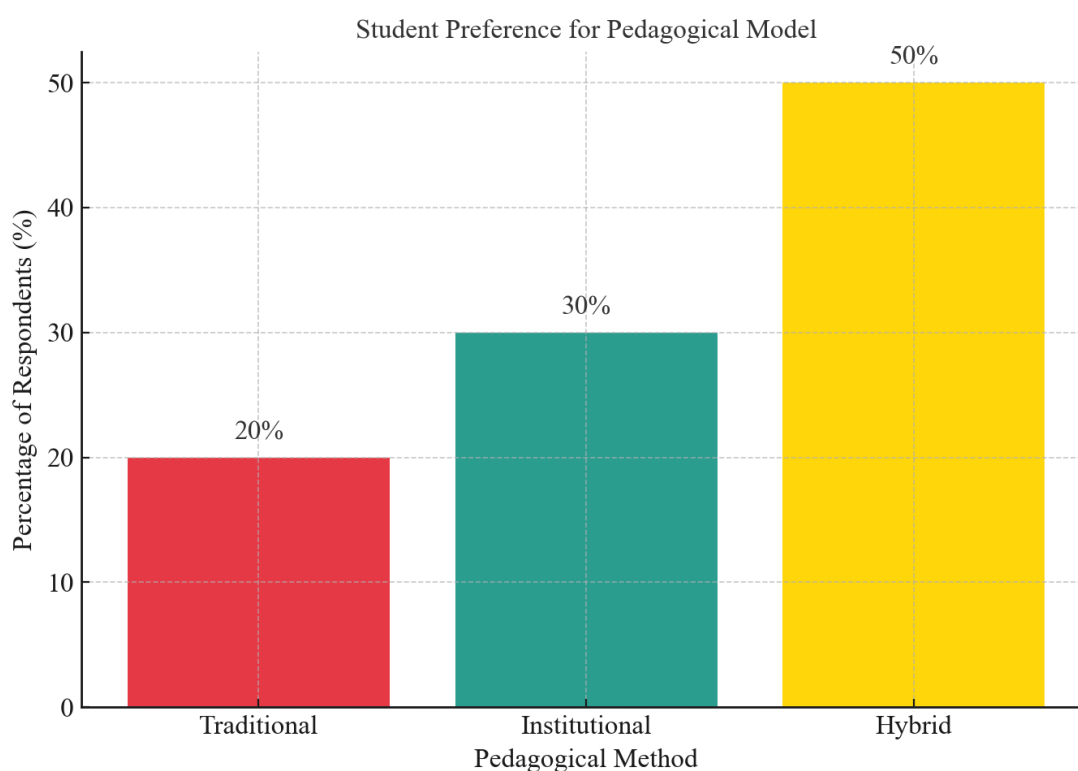


Figure 5.2: The Types of Pedagogical Models that Students Prefer

Figure 5.2 highlights the preferences students have toward the major teaching methods used in Bharatanatyam classes. Around 50% of people voted in favour of learning under a master-disciple system as well as attending university classes. However, 30% of respondents chose the institutional model, and only 20% picked the traditional way completely.

It appears that students like the personal direction, heartfelt approach and involvement in traditional education, as well as the tools, socialization and recognition found in schools. There were several praises for hybrid learning due to its flexibility and ability to maintain a serious approach. It demonstrates that a new generation of students want to learn about their cultural past and today's world.

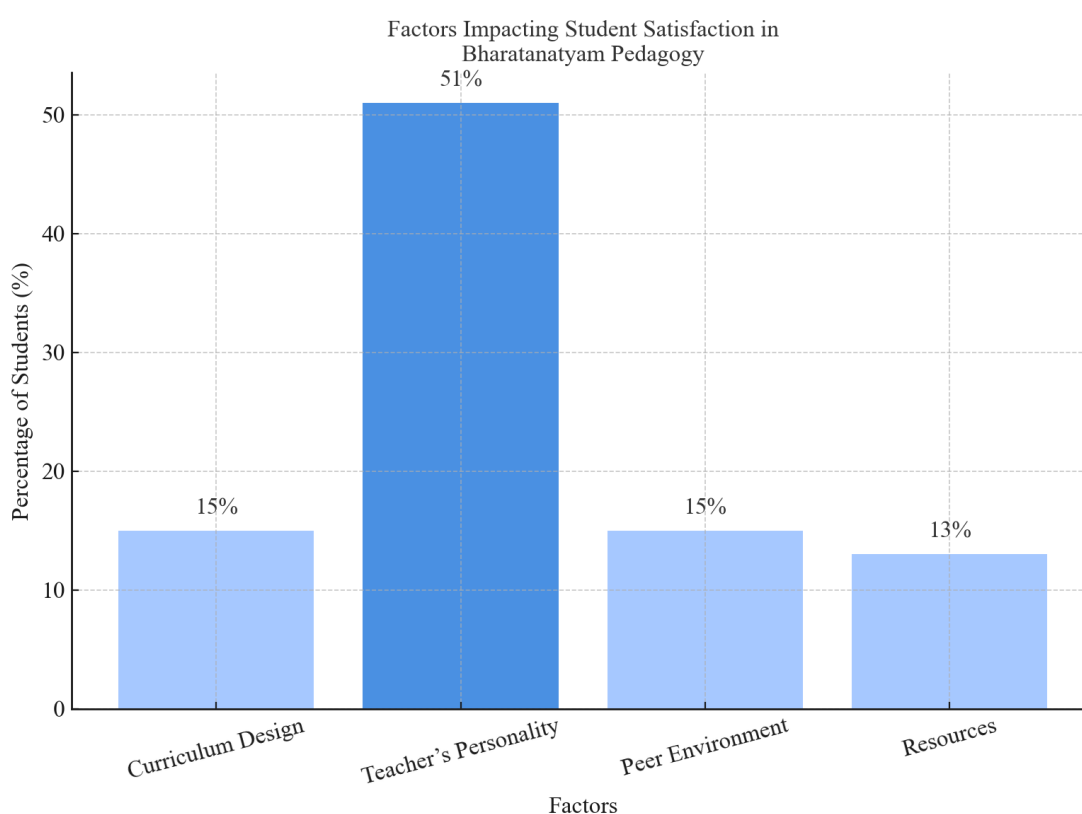


Figure 5.3: What Influences Bharatanatyam Students' Satisfaction

What matters most to students when learning Bharatanatyam seems to be the student-instructor relationship, rather than the materials taught. Almost sixty-five percent of students (from Figure 3) selected the teacher's personality as most important,

while curriculum, students' feedback and school resources were chosen by only a small percentage.

The insight points out that, even in school, a strong connection between the teacher and student plays a key role. Charisma, understanding others and the physical way teachers taught were often seen as reasons students became more active, self-assured and determined. According to the data, learning and teaching Bharatanatyam depends on a bond and show of interest between the student and teacher and not only on learning the full syllabus.

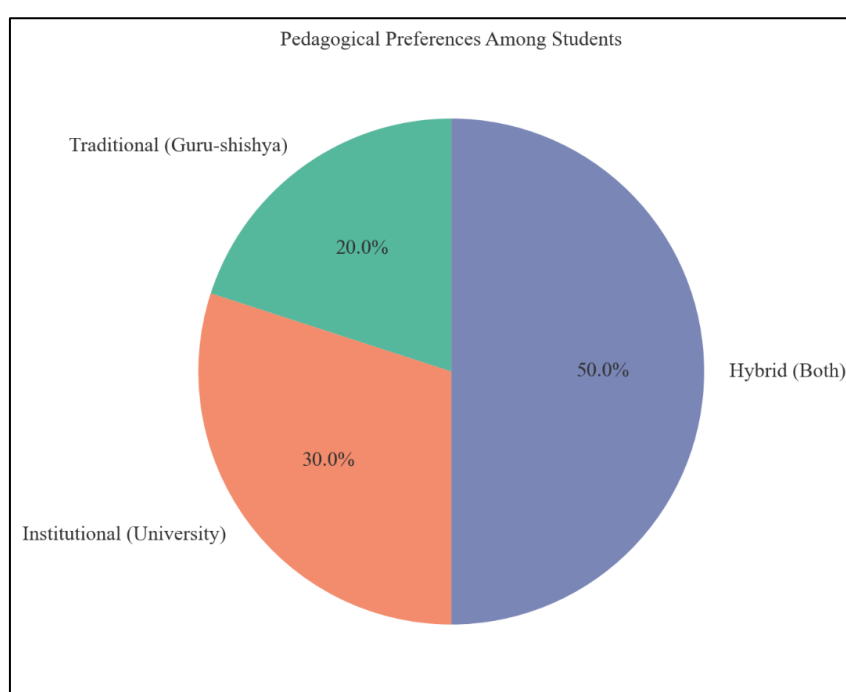


Figure 5.4: Indicates the preferences students have for different types of teaching

As we saw before, Figure 5.4 again indicates that students see the hybrid mentoring method as the most suitable (50%). Thirty percent of the questions asked about institutional strategies and 20% about purely traditional ways. The presence of this trend in several reports argues for introducing blended learning methods in classical dance education.

They described it as ideal, where learning technique, music of the world and music theory are all equally important. This means that today's learners are not against traditional pedagogy, but prefer using it as a core part of education programs that support moving ahead professionally and obtaining qualifications.

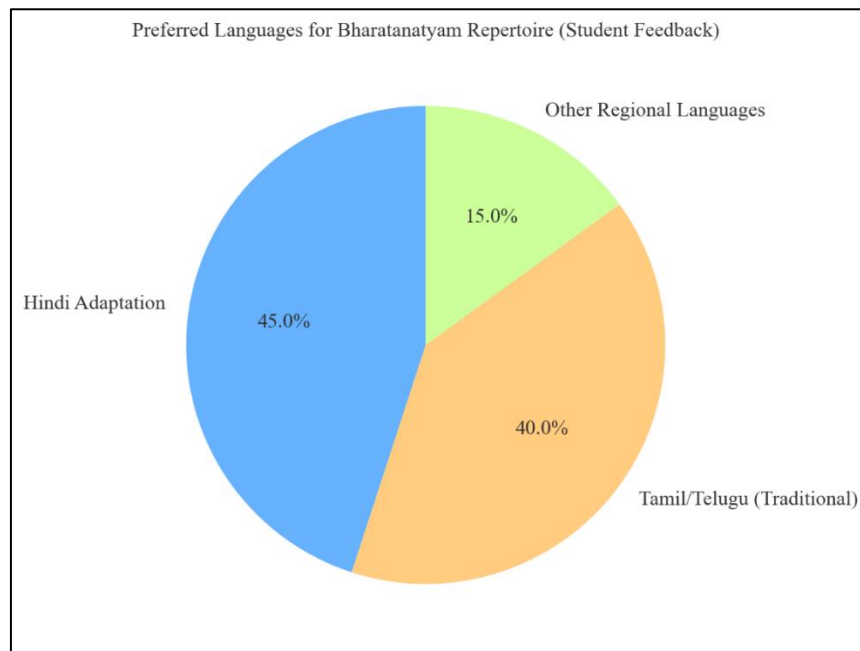


Figure 5.5: Shows the Favourite Dances in Bharatanatyam, as Suggested by Students

Being able to communicate in the right language is very important for anyone learning Bharatanatyam. It is clear from the diagram that 45% of students chose Hindi, compared to 40% for Tamil/Telugu and another 15% for regional languages. Such a distribution indicates that including many languages should become a priority in Bharatanatyam teaching and the selection of dance routines.

While Tamil and Telugu are still the main languages taught, some students found it difficult to grasp the true meaning of these songs and verses. The rise in interest in Hindi is due in part to its wider use in India and also to the idea that it helps students access the course material more easily. Besides, there is an interest in adapting works using regional languages, allowing Bharatanatyam to showcase new expressions and keep its regional influences.

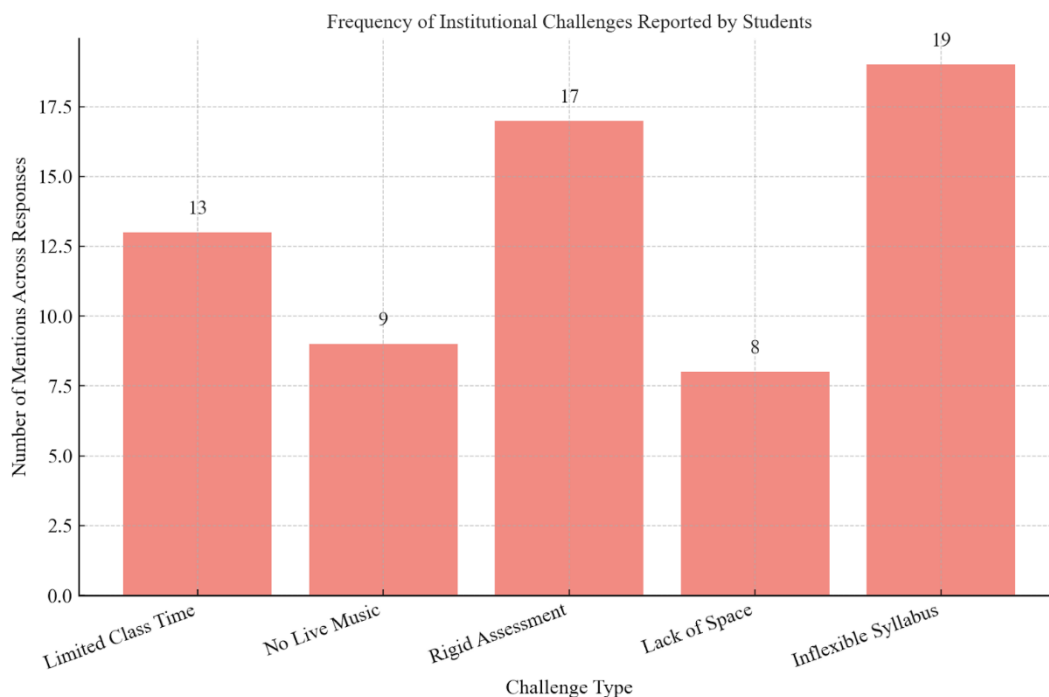


Figure 5.6: Number of Institutional Matters Identified as Challenges to Students

They mentioned several issues with the system that make effective learning hard in universities. According to Figure 5.6, inflexible syllabi, rigid assessments, lack of free time, no live music and opportunity are the most mentioned issues in the reviews.

Overall, these issues explain the teaching constraints presented by both infrastructure and curriculum for Bharatanatyam. Students mentioned that the rigid syllabus was no longer relevant to the new developments in both theater and dance. People believe that having no live music detracts from Bharatanatyam, since it is normally very interactive. Since flexibility in subject content, testing approaches and studio resources is essential, this chart shows that institutional delivery processes should be improved.

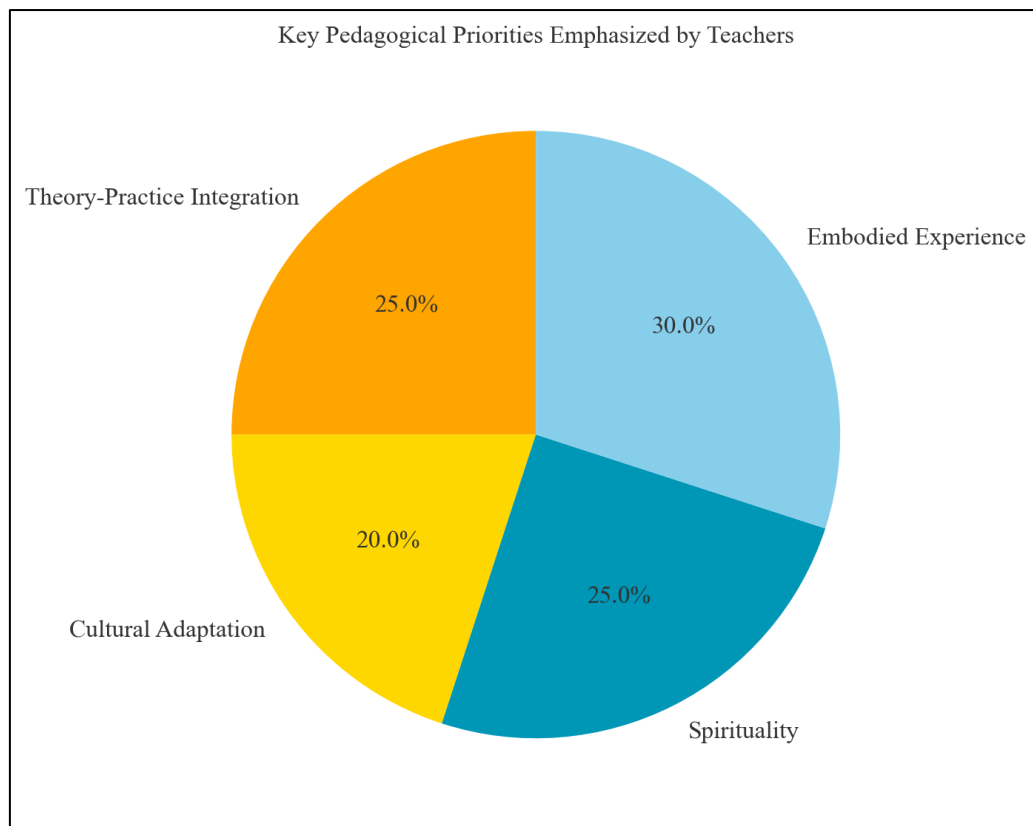


Figure 5.7: Important Areas Emphasized in Teaching by Teachers

The interviews with faculty led us to a view that was distinct but could be paired with the findings of the survey. As the chart above (Figure 5.7) illustrates, many teachers most often talked about using their own experiences (30%), spiritual themes (25%), linking theory and practice (25%) and adjusting to different cultural contexts (20%) as main components of their teaching philosophy.

This means that although students put more attention on how Bharatanatyam is taught and which languages are used, teachers consider the mood, full scope and cultural side of the training more vital. Many teachers discussed how to keep the spiritual side of art as they make it suitable for today's classrooms. Bringing together theory and realistic teaching is a common approach that unites the education methodology.

5.10 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the ways Bharatanatyam is taught in universities and independent institutions in North India. After completing a rich set of interviews, direct observations, and a detailed study of student responses, this research

found that classical dance education in India is not the same for everyone. While Bharatanatyam was formed following strong traditions in South India, introducing it northward into universities and personal institutions has prompted people to adapt, talk and refresh it.

The study identified that there is a major conflict between traditional and institutional ways of teaching. Even today, many followers and teachers regard the tradition of studying under a guru as the best method for practising yoga. Even so, modern institutions use standardized lessons, evaluate frequently and group students into larger groups, so this calls for a new strategy. Students revealed that they do appreciate having a paper to show for their studies, yet many were not satisfied with the topics and ways they were taught. Meanwhile, musicians educated in schools described the missing personal, religious and stage comfort in such environments.

As a result, learning in such countries involves a mix of traditional and digital teaching methods. More than half of the student respondents supported an approach where students practice real-world skills while also focusing on studies. For instance, Natya Vriksha and MSU combine instruction on theatre performance with the study of texts, innovative storytelling and thoughtful reflection. It does justice to Bharatanatyam's true dance grammar as well as supports the evolving world view of future generations Iyer (2022).

It also became clear from the data that the way a teacher and student relate can have a strong impact on teaching and learning. In both schools and private lessons, students highlighted that the most meaningful lessons came from teachers who were passionate, reliable and acted with humility. What people remembered about Guruji and Aruna Raman Ma'am was the way they taught, guided others and inspired transformation in values and taste. It means that in teaching the performing arts, a teacher must act as an active example of the values, attitude and creativity required by the art.

In addition, the chapter explored the role of students in making decisions and thinking critically based on replies to various surveys. Students now participate in the traditions. They interrogate, reform and in some cases challenge the common methods of teaching found in their professional and personal lives. They pointed out that they wanted to be on stage more often, get more feedback, see other languages included and

learn interdisciplinary courses. The new voice heard in learning suggests that education towards art should grow to become a multiparty discussion that values history and welcomes fresh, new ideas.

Additionally, how language and place of origin influenced the region became very noticeable. While Bharatanatyam started with roots in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, people in North India often introduce elements of Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali and local poetry to it. Most students thought this kind of flexibility was positive, since they found that people in the audience paid more attention to their music and could better relate to its message when it was sung in their native languages. Yet, the new focus also asked how far Bharatanatyam can re-imagine its themes or linguistics before it could lose its characteristic structure? According to the research, it is not enough to approach these questions dogmatically, as classical forms continue to live by engaging audiences everywhere and every time.

Students often highlighted the barriers to their work caused by few rehearsals, strict exam times, not having live musicians, and a lack of support for their performances. The difficulties caused by such things shaped both their experience of learning art and their confidence in performing it. Evidence reveals that for Bharatanatyam education to improve, universities must update their administration, invest in needed infrastructure and modify their curriculum in several departments.

Finally, the insights of scholars such as Dr. Himanshu Dwivedi have contributed a valuable philosophical dimension to this study. His emphasis on integrating each lesson with theory, performance, and ethics highlights the need for a holistic approach in dance education. Faculty members like Dr. Urmimala Sarkar (Jawaharlal Nehru University), known for her work on dance ethnography and pedagogy, and Dr. Anita Ratnam, who bridges classical rigor with contemporary expression, have similarly advocated for reflective and inclusive teaching methods. Scholars such as Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam, whose research on Karanas and Nāṭyaśāstra has redefined the academic foundations of Bharatanatyam, and Prof. C.V. Chandrasekhar, who emphasizes analytical thinking in movement and music, further reinforce the need for interdisciplinary learning. Additionally, educators like Dr. Ananya Chatterjea (University of Minnesota), who works at the intersection of dance, social justice, and feminist theory, and Dr. Sunil Kothari (noted dance historian and critic), have stressed

the importance of contextual awareness in performance education. These perspectives collectively reinforce the view, echoed by pioneers like Maya Rao and Onto- that pedagogy must cultivate critical empathy, cultural literacy, and clarity of expression to foster transformative learning experiences.

In the context of North India, however, one persistent challenge remains: language. Since Bharatanatyam repertoire is primarily rooted in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit, North Indian students often face difficulties in fully understanding the emotional and narrative nuances of compositions. This highlights the need for pedagogical strategies that incorporate translation, contextual explanation, and cultural bridging, ensuring that linguistic unfamiliarity does not become a barrier to expressive depth or artistic authenticity.

In essence, this chapter illustrates that the teaching practices of Bharatanatyam in North India are varied, influenced by their past, by local factors, by professional aims and by what learners want. Even though there are several issues such as inflexible lessons and performance rules, the field can still change for the better. If an institution works on hybrid approaches, helps teachers improve, updates school buildings, and focuses on students, it can build unique, strong, and contemporary learning methods based on tradition.

The findings suggest that Bharatanatyam embraces a living heritage, spiritual significance, appreciation for culture, and an aesthetic pursuit.

CHAPTER- VI

Conclusion

The present study set out to investigate the evolving pedagogical landscape of Bharatanatyam in North India, paying close attention to the complex processes through which the dance form has transitioned from its original socio-cultural and geographical milieu in South India, primarily Tamil Nadu, to the academic and institutional structures of the North, particularly in universities and performing arts institutions.

Historically, Bharatanatyam evolved from the ritual *Sadir* performed by *devadasis* in temple complexes, particularly in Tamil Nadu, into a modern stage art and later an institutionalized pedagogical form. This transformation was catalyzed in the early 20th century by cultural revivalists such as Rukmini Devi Arundale, E. Krishna Iyer, and Balasaraswati. Their instrumental role in reconstructing and re-legitimizing Bharatanatyam for performance and educational purposes, removing it from its earlier stigmatized associations, cannot be overstated. Through the Kalakshetra Foundation, Rukmini Devi formalized Bharatanatyam pedagogy with a strong emphasis on aesthetics, discipline, and moral purity, significantly influencing how the dance form was transmitted and taught.

As Bharatanatyam became a “national art form,” its pedagogical models migrated beyond Tamil Nadu. The cultural policies of independent India, particularly under the Nehruvian state, supported this dissemination by establishing institutions such as Sangeet Natak Akademi and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and integrating classical arts into educational institutions.⁴ This was further enabled by the rise of *Guru-Shishya-trained* practitioners who relocated to the North and founded institutions or joined university departments. Notable among these were Guru Saroja Vaidyanathan, who established Ganesa Natyalaya in Delhi, and Guru Kalyanasundaram, who contributed significantly to the institutionalization of Bharatanatyam in academic settings.

The North Indian academic framework introduced a significant shift in the pedagogical format of Bharatanatyam. Unlike the traditional *gurukul* system or private studio training, Bharatanatyam in universities became subject to curricular structure,

credit-based evaluations, research requirements, and theoretical instruction. This shift not only broadened access and enhanced the academic legitimacy of dance but also brought about certain divergences from the South Indian transmission models, particularly in the relationship between performance, theory, and embodied learning.

Through case-based investigations of selected universities such as the University of Delhi, Banaras Hindu University, and Jawaharlal Nehru University, this study highlighted the varied ways in which Bharatanatyam has been adopted, adapted, and even indigenized in the North. These institutions function as cultural laboratories where old forms and pedagogies are re-examined in the context of modern concerns, postcolonial discourses, and interdisciplinary collaborations, highlighting the adaptability of the dance form and enhancing our appreciation of its resilience.

Significantly, the research brought to light both continuities, in the retention of adavu-based training, adherence to Nāṭyaśāstra-derived structures, and the reverence for guru Paramparā, as well as divergences, such as the integration of contemporary movement vocabularies, the adaptation of Bharatanatyam for thematic, issue-based choreography, and the re-contextualization of the dance in multilingual, urban academic environments.

In doing so, this study does not merely document the northward movement of Bharatanatyam but critically engages with how pedagogy becomes a site of cultural transformation, adaptation, and resistance. As Bharatanatyam explores the complex dimensions of identity, modernity, and institutionalization, with its educational procedures in North India demonstrating the dance form's persistence, adaptability, and the continually evolving artistic dynamics that captivate our interest in its vibrant essence.

Summary and Thematic Elaboration

Chapter 1: Scope, Significance, and Methodology

The first chapter laid the comprehensive foundation for this research by articulating the rationale and objectives of the study. It emphasized the need to explore Bharatanatyam not only as a performative tradition but also as a knowledge system shaped by pedagogy, geography, and institutional frameworks. This chapter posited that examining the pedagogical models in North India offers a unique lens through which

to understand how Bharatanatyam is reconstructed, adapted, and sustained outside its original cultural context. The research adopted a qualitative case study methodology, combining historical inquiry, ethnographic observation, and pedagogical analysis. It aimed to bridge the gap between performance studies and dance education by situating Bharatanatyam within the broader discourses of cultural migration, identity politics, and curricular innovation in Indian higher education, making the audience feel informed and knowledgeable about the subject.

Chapter 2: Historical Evolution of Bharatanatyam

Chapter 2 undertook a historical excavation of Bharatanatyam's origins and transformation. It traced the form's sacred beginnings in temple rituals, particularly through the Sadir performances of devadasis in Tamil Nadu, where dance functioned as a ritual offering to the deity. This traditional embodiment of Bhakti was gradually marginalized during colonial rule when orientalist discourses and Victorian morality cast temple dance as morally suspect.⁶ However, the early 20th century witnessed a cultural resurgence spurred by nationalistic revivalists such as E. Krishna Iyer, who reclaimed Sadir as a classical art form worthy of preservation, and Rukmini Devi Arundale, who institutionalized it as Bharatanatyam at Kalakshetra, thereby transforming the socio-political legitimacy of the art.⁷ These revivalist efforts were not merely aesthetic; they were deeply pedagogical, recasting Bharatanatyam through curricular structures, codified techniques, and aesthetic ideologies grounded in Brahmanical and Theosophical values.

Chapter 3: Migration and Establishment in North India

The third chapter addressed Bharatanatyam's geographical and cultural migration to North India. While South India remained the stronghold of the dance's traditional pedagogical systems, the post-independence era saw a concerted effort by artists and educators to bring Bharatanatyam to urban centers in the North. Pioneering figures such as Guru Saroja Vaidyanathan (Ganesa Natyalaya, Delhi) and Guru Kalyanasundaram were instrumental in establishing institutional hubs for Bharatanatyam training in the North, thus sowing the seeds for future academic adoption.⁸ This chapter also examined the role of state cultural policies, such as those articulated through the Sangeet Natak Akademi and university departments of performing arts, in promoting classical dance as a marker of India's civilizational legacy and national identity.⁹ The inclusion of

Bharatanatyam in university curricula, especially at Delhi University, JNU, and BHU, was shown to be both a product and a catalyst of this cultural-nationalist agenda.

Chapter 4: Pedagogical Study of Bharatanatyam Banis

Chapter 4 undertook a comparative pedagogical analysis of the major Banis or lineages within Bharatanatyam: Thanjavur, Pandanallur, Vazhuvoor, Kalakshetra, Melattur, and Mysore. Each Bani, while anchored in the standard grammar of *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Abhinaya Darpana*, espouses unique stylistic features, movement vocabularies, and pedagogical emphases. For instance, the Kalakshetra Bani, shaped by Rukmini Devi, is characterized by linear geometry, minimalism, and a visual-theosophical ethic. At the same time, the Vazhuvoor Bani is celebrated for its ornate expressiveness and lasya-oriented approach. This chapter revealed how these Banis function as stylistic identities and as frameworks of embodied pedagogy, each informing the sequencing of adavus, narrative construction, and aesthetic training. Significantly, the chapter examined how these Banis have been selectively adopted and sometimes hybridized in the North Indian context, shaped by institutional constraints and cosmopolitan student bodies.

Chapter 5: Contemporary Pedagogical Practices in North Indian Universities

Chapter 5 provided an ethnographic and institutional insight into contemporary Bharatanatyam pedagogy in select North Indian universities and affiliated institutions. It highlighted the curricular structures, studio practices, and performance cultures in institutions such as the Banaras Hindu University, M.S. University, Indra Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Rabindra Bharati University, Bhatkhande University, Raja Maan Singh Tomar University, Ganesha Natyalaya, and Natya Vriksha. The sub-section on pedagogical practices revealed how these institutions integrate traditional Bharatanatyam training with contemporary pedagogical strategies, including critical theory, body studies, gender discourses, and interdisciplinary choreographic exploration. These universities are not merely sites of replication but of innovation, where Bharatanatyam is reimagined through multilingual performances, collaborative research, and digitally mediated instruction.

The chapter argued that Bharatanatyam pedagogy in these northern academic contexts is evolving into a hybridized educational model. This model combines the rigor of classical training with the criticality of liberal arts education, broadening Bharatanatyam education's scope. This shift reflects the contemporary dancer-scholar's

dual identity as performer and thinker, highlighting how institutional frameworks can serve as crucibles of cultural transformation. Including dance history, aesthetics, and performance analysis modules has expanded the epistemic scope of Bharatanatyam education, moving it beyond rote learning toward reflexive, research-based practice.

Key Contributions of the Present Study

1- Re-contextualization of Bharatanatyam in North India

One of the central contributions of this study lies in its exploration of the re-contextualization of Bharatanatyam as it migrates from its southern geographical and cultural matrix to the northern regions of India. This shift should not be seen simply as a geographic relocation, but as a transformative engagement in which the dance form not only preserves its core essence but also adapts in relation to the socio-cultural, educational, and political contexts of North India. Bharatanatyam, historically rooted in sacred temple traditions and courtly performance in Tamil Nadu, carries within it a dense grammar shaped by the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the *Abhinaya Darpana*, and the embodied legacy of devadasis and nattuvanars. In its northern journey, the form continues to draw upon this classical reservoir, maintaining core elements such as *adavus* (movement units), *abhinaya* (expression), *tala* (rhythm), and *rāga* (melodic framework), while simultaneously adapting to new pedagogical systems, urban sensibilities, and performative contexts. This study identifies a double movement: on the one hand, a preservation of tradition through fidelity to southern *Bani*s and *guru paramparā* systems; on the other, a strategic adaptation to the cultural climates of North India, where audience expectations, linguistic diversity, and institutional models differ significantly from those in the South.

For instance, Bharatanatyam performances in Delhi or Varanasi often negotiate with multilingual spectatorship, secular thematic content, and non-temple venues. The dance form thus begins to articulate new modes of meaning-making, drawing from pan-Indian mythologies, socio-political narratives, and contemporary issues, without losing its classical structure. This is a form of contextual translation rather than distortion, demonstrating what scholar Avanthi Meduri calls the “suturing of tradition and modernity.” Moreover, North India offers Bharatanatyam a pedagogical reconfiguration. University departments and academies reframe the dance from a lived art to a theoretical, examinable, and research-based discipline. This institutional

reframing demands that Bharatanatyam articulate its value through aesthetics and textual, historical, and critical literacies, thus producing dancer-scholars rather than only performers. In this process, the dance practice acquires a dual ontology: both a physical discipline and an intellectual pursuit. This re-contextualization also troubles the oft-invoked binary between “authentic/traditional” and “hybrid/modern.” Instead, the study reveals that Bharatanatyam’s geographical displacement acts as a productive force, enabling new intersections with feminism, interculturalism, and critical pedagogy. For instance, various practitioners from the North create choreography inspired by Sufi poetry, Buddhist philosophy, Dalit stories, and modern feminist literature, all while using the Bharatanatyam dance format. These artistic innovations are not deviations but rather advancements within the tradition, highlighting the form’s flexibility and liveliness.

In postcolonial cultural studies, this finding affirms the idea that classical forms do not remain static in the face of cultural migration. Instead, they become dynamic interfaces, spaces where tradition is not lost but re-imagined. The relocation of Bharatanatyam into North India is thus not an act of dilution but one of cultural negotiation and artistic evolution, where legacy and location co-author a new pedagogical and performative future.

2- Pedagogical Plurality and Epistemic Shifts

A central contribution of this research lies in its nuanced examination of the pedagogical plurality that characterizes Bharatanatyam training in North India. The study reveals how multiple pedagogical frameworks, from traditional guru-śiṣya Paramparā to university-based academic models, coexist, intersect, and sometimes contend, bringing distinct epistemological paradigms and bodily disciplining systems to the fore.

I- Embodied Transmission in the Guru-śiṣya Paramparā

In several urban and semi-urban contexts of North India, the guru-śiṣya paramparā continues to flourish, especially within private institutions and individual gurukulas. This model is grounded in experiential and embodied modes of knowledge transfer, where learning occurs through proximity, observation, imitation, correction, and repetition. The pedagogy emphasizes:

- Lineage-specific stylizations, where the aesthetic nuances of particular Banis are retained with fidelity.
- A holistic transmission of both technique and values, philosophies, and metaphysical underpinnings of Bharatanatyam.
- A deeply personalized and spiritual mentorship, where the guru is a teacher and a custodian of cultural legacy and moral grounding.

This form of training is less oriented toward documentation or theorization and more toward embodied memory, intuition, and experiential depth, aligning closely with orality-based epistemologies as described by performance theorists like Richard Schechner and Ananya Chatterjee.

II- Institutional Pedagogy in University Contexts

Conversely, Bharatanatyam education within university structures, as seen in institutions like the M.S. University, Rabindra Bharati, Banaras Hindu University, Raja Maan Singh Tomar University, Indra Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, and Bhatkhande University, adopts a systematized curriculum that frames the dance form within academic rigor, theoretical inquiry, and evaluative metrics. This model typically includes:

- Semester-based coursework, written examinations, and internal assessments.
- Exposure to critical theory, performance studies, dance history, and aesthetics.
- Choreographic laboratories and interdisciplinary collaborations encourage experimentation within classical frameworks.
- Integrating research methodologies enables students to engage with Bharatanatyam as a scholarly inquiry and artistic practice subject.

While standardizing learning outcomes, such institutions also promote critical reflexivity and artistic authorship, allowing dancers to articulate their practice through intellectual vocabularies and thematic consciousness.

III- Tensions and Synergies: Between Orality and Textuality

This study underscores these two pedagogical modalities' productive tensions and potential synergies. While the guru-śiṣya model privileges embodied continuity, the academic system fosters epistemic expansion and democratization of access. This

duality illuminates broader epistemological shifts within classical dance transmission in contemporary India, where embodied, oral, and performative knowledge is increasingly being reinterpreted through textuality, critical pedagogy, and institutional validation.

These pedagogical frameworks are not simply parallel but intersecting ecosystems, with many students navigating both models simultaneously. This hybrid training produces technically proficient dancers who are intellectually engaged, creatively confident, and capable of negotiating multiple roles: performer, researcher, choreographer, educator, and cultural interlocutor.

IV- Impact on Dancer Subjectivity and Expressive Agency

The study argues that the nature of one's training system significantly influences a dancer's expressive agency, ideological orientation, and creative disposition. While guru-led pedagogies may produce dancers with deep aesthetic internalization and stylistic integrity, academic institutions may enable dancers to critique, reframe, and reconstruct their practice in light of contemporary socio-political discourses.

Thus, pedagogical plurality in North India is not merely a structural phenomenon but a site of cultural negotiation, shaping Bharatanatyam's epistemic identities and futures.

3- Contemporary Innovations within Classical Frames

This study unveils a significant and ongoing evolution in how Bharatanatyam is taught, practiced, and conceptualized in North India. From its roots as a static or rigid classical tradition, Bharatanatyam in the northern pedagogical context is blossoming into a dynamic, critically engaged, and socially responsive art form. The study demonstrates that contemporary innovations are not a rebellion against classical form. However, a powerful renaissance from within its foundational structures empowers practitioners and redefines the boundaries of tradition.

I- Expanding the Thematic Repertoire: From Myth to Modernity

Historically, Bharatanatyam has revolved around devotional and mythological themes drawn from Hindu epics and temple traditions, particularly through the lens of *Bhakti* and *Shringara rasa*. However, this research documents a marked shift in thematic

concerns, especially in North Indian academic and semi-professional dance spaces. Social, political, and ecological themes are being introduced as part of choreographic work, inviting all to be part of this inclusive evolution. These include:

- Feminist interpretations of mythological characters, such as Sita or Andal, interrogate patriarchy through *abhinaya* and dramaturgy (Srinivasan, 2012).
- Dalit narratives and anti-caste critiques challenge Brahmanical dominance within classical art spaces (Meduri, 2004).
- Queer identities and non-binary embodiments are explored through gender-fluid performance and reinterpretation of traditional roles (Chatterjea, 2004).
- Environmental themes, rivers, forests, and ecological decay, woven into performance structures, using *adavus* and rhythm cycles to evoke environmental storytelling.

These themes are not added superficially; practitioners are developing aesthetic strategies to articulate them within Bharatanatyam's codified grammar. For instance, *abhinaya* depicts psychological complexity, while *adavus* and *mudras* are reconfigured to convey unfamiliar imagery, such as industrial pollution or protest movements.

II- Pedagogical Innovations: Reflexive Learning and Critical Practice

The development of transformational educational methods, especially in North Indian universities and independent training facilities, is another important conclusion of this study. In order to promote a hybrid approach that prioritizes both technical rigor and intellectual depth, educators are integrating critical theory, dramaturgy, and movement analysis into conventional training regimens. This transformative approach is about learning and engaging with the art form in a new light.

- Student choreographies are increasingly project-based, involving independent research, collaborative direction, and thematic self-expression.
- Workshops and festivals often feature interdisciplinary formats, inviting practitioners of theatre, martial arts, and multimedia to collaborate with Bharatanatyam dancers, promoting cross-pollination of artistic vocabularies.

This approach transforms the pedagogical space from a rote learning and replication site into one of dialogic experimentation and critical engagement, aligning with postmodern redefinitions of classical art as process-oriented rather than product-oriented (Chatterjea, 2004).

III- Choreographic Hybridity: New Body Languages and Performance Strategies

Additionally, the study notes a trend toward unique, hybrid choreography rather than classical repertoire, especially among up-and-coming North Indian practitioners. These developments go beyond the theme substance to include musical compositions, spatial arrangements, movement vocabularies, and dramaturgical systems.

- Some artists incorporate non-Carnatic soundscapes, spoken word poetry, or silence as integral components of the performance score.
- Others are drawing upon contemporary dance, yoga, and martial movement systems, resulting in new kinetic signatures that challenge the fixity of traditional Bharatanatyam karanas or adavus.
- The shift toward site-specific, immersive, and digital performances is also noted, especially in post-pandemic settings, where performance has migrated to virtual platforms and alternate spaces without losing its classical grounding.

This blurring of boundaries reflects a larger epistemological shift from tradition as preservation to tradition as negotiation, a space where inherited grammars are continually re-signified about the present moment.

IV- Decolonizing the Classical: Bharatanatyam as Critical Praxis

Contemporary innovations in Bharatanatyam pedagogy and practice in the North also resonate with ongoing scholarly discourses around the decolonization of classical Indian dance. As noted by scholars like Ananya Chatterjee, Priya Srinivasan, and Avanthi Meduri, Bharatanatyam's revival during the early 20th century was deeply entwined with elite, nationalist, and caste-based projects that excluded many identities and knowledge from the classical canon.

This study aligns with such critiques by highlighting how North Indian pedagogical spaces are becoming sites of critical reflection, where:

- The exclusivist narratives of “purity” and “authenticity” are being challenged.
- Intersectional identities, based on gender, caste, sexuality, and region, are being centered rather than marginalized.
- Pedagogues are foregrounding self-reflexivity, historical accountability, and inclusivity, encouraging students to reimagine what it means to “inherit” a tradition.

These processes point to a broader transformation of Bharatanatyam from a symbol of nationalist cultural pride to a performative tool for socio-political inquiry.

4- North Indian Institutions as Cultural Mediators

The present study underscores the transformative role of North Indian institutions as pivotal mediators in the translocation and evolution of Bharatanatyam beyond its traditional southern geographies. These institutions, far from being mere conduits of a Southern legacy, function as dynamic cultural laboratories where inherited tradition is reinterpreted through the prisms of pedagogy, performance, identity, and innovation, thereby shaping the future of this art form.

I- Bridging Regional Traditions: Transmission through Translation

As Bharatanatyam moved northward during the mid-20th century, it underwent a significant process of regional adaptation. Institutions such as the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts, Ganesa Natyalaya, and Natya Vriksha, as well as academic departments at Banaras Hindu University (BHU), MS University, Rabindra Bharati University, Indra Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Bhatkhande University, and Raja Mansingh Tomar University, emerged as nodes of cultural translation. These institutions introduced Bharatanatyam to predominantly non-Tamil, Hindi-speaking audiences and student bodies, requiring:

- Linguistic reinterpretation of Sahitya and Abhinaya, often adapting Tamil compositions into Hindi or Sanskrit explanations.
- Use of north Indian musical idioms or integration with Hindustani classical elements in accompaniment, particularly in interdisciplinary programs.

- Curricular adjustments to meet UGC guidelines and academic credit systems while preserving the rigorous training norms associated with the form.

Such bridging efforts reflect what Avanthi Meduri calls “translated modernities,” where classical forms are negotiated across regions and registers, producing hybrid pedagogical ecologies that are both rooted and adaptive.

II- **Negotiating Cultural Identities: Inclusion and Re-articulation**

Institutions in North India do not simply transfer Bharatanatyam knowledge; they actively negotiate and foster a diverse cultural landscape. Within the pluralistic and sometimes contested cultural topographies of North India, Bharatanatyam training in these spaces is a testament to the inclusive nature of these institutions:

Students from non-South Indian backgrounds, including Punjabi, Bengali, and Kashmiri heritage, are increasingly accessing Bharatanatyam, challenging the notion of being region-locked or caste-bound.

Teachers and choreographers consciously de-center linguistic, caste, and religious hegemonies, opening Bharatanatyam to Dalit, Muslim, and tribal voices, thereby making classical dance more accessible and inclusive.

Gender identities are also re-imagined; male, non-binary, and queer dancers find more space in urban North Indian institutions than in some conventional southern sabhas, partly due to progressive academic discourses embedded in university culture. This cultural rearticulation resonates with postcolonial performance theories that view classical arts not as “pure” traditions but as sites of identity negotiation and resistance (Srinivasan, 2012).

III- **Shaping New Generations: Performers, Thinkers, and Hyphenated Practitioners**

Perhaps most significantly, North Indian institutions have contributed to the emergence of a new generation of Bharatanatyam practitioners who operate at the intersection of performance and intellectual inquiry. These institutions foster hyphenated identities, dancer-researchers, performer-activists, and choreographer-educators, who are skilled in technique and critically engaged thinkers.

Academic institutions like Banaras Hindu University (BHU), MS University, Rabindra Bharati University, Indra Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Bhatkhande University, and Raja Mansingh Tomar University offer interdisciplinary frameworks where dance is situated alongside gender studies, cultural theory, and performance studies. In these frameworks, students not only learn the technical aspects of Bharatanatyam but also explore its cultural, social, and political implications, enriching their artistic vocabulary. Bharatanatyam students from these institutions often produce original choreographic work on themes like climate change, gender violence, and urban alienation. For instance, they might create a dance piece that symbolizes the impact of climate change on traditional farming practices or a performance that raises awareness about gender-based violence in urban areas. This transformation turns classical dance into a public scholarship and civic engagement platform. Annual festivals and lecture-demonstration series serve as cultural forums where tradition meets experimentation and performance meets discourse.

As a result, these establishments serve as cultural incubators, cultivating diverse and politically conscious Bharatanatyam styles that capture the essence of the traditional art form while also reflecting 21st-century reality.

Challenges and Reflections

Unquestionably, the institutionalization of Bharatanatyam in North India has increased the form's visibility, accessibility, and scholarly validity. Still, it also brings with it several pedagogical, cultural, and epistemological difficulties. Despite their significance, these challenges also encourage critical thinking and innovation in teaching classical dance.

1. Faculty and Infrastructure Limitations

One of the foremost limitations is the scarcity of adequately trained faculty who possess a balance of rigorous practical training and academic scholarship. Many North Indian universities and colleges offering Bharatanatyam struggle to staff departments with educators who are equally adept in performance, choreography, theoretical frameworks, historical contextualization, and interdisciplinary teaching.

- Pedagogical fragmentation frequently results from this lack of integrated competence, giving students either theoretical teaching disconnected from practical embodiment or a solely performative training devoid of critical discourse.
- As O'Shea (2007) notes, the success of Bharatanatyam pedagogy relies heavily on the teacher's ability to synthesize lineage-based knowledge with contemporary frameworks. In the absence of such faculty, curricula tend to fall back on outdated, rote-based models of instruction.

2. Linguistic and Cultural Distance from Source Texts

Another significant challenge in North India is the linguistic and cultural dissonance between students and the original textual materials of Bharatanatyam. Much of Bharatanatyam's repertoire, including compositions in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit, draws from devotional, literary, and mythological traditions that are often alien to North Indian students both linguistically and ritually.

- This distance impedes students' ability to understand and internalize the emotional and spiritual subtext of compositions like varnams, padams, and javalis, which require contextual familiarity for nuanced performance.
- As Meduri (2004) argues, cultural translation is essential but must be undertaken with sensitivity and intellectual rigor to avoid reductive interpretations.
- Especially in compositions that are driven by abhinaya, the lack of literary analysis, comparative frameworks, and appropriate translation frequently results in a superficial enactment of content.

3. Disconnect Between Theory and Embodiment

In several university setups, Bharatanatyam is compartmentalized into theoretical and practical modules, leading to a conceptual disjunction in how students approach the form. Dance is often reduced to a skill or credit-bearing subject rather than treated as a holistic cultural practice encompassing philosophy (*Nāṭyaśāstra*), aesthetics (*Rasa theory*), dramaturgy (*Bhava-Abhinaya*), and community ritual.

- This split undermines the integrative spirit of Bharatanatyam, which traditionally fuses body, intellect, and spirit in a seamless pedagogy.
- Students often find it challenging to apply critical theory to their own practice or to read movement as an epistemic act, which diminishes the reflective depth of their training.

Shresthova (2011) and Chatterjea (2004) both argue that classical dance education must reimagine embodiment not just as technical execution but as a political, spiritual, and intellectual act.

4. Catalysts for Reform and Innovation

However, in a number of universities in North India, these same challenges have sparked creative teaching methods. Teachers and choreographers are developing novel strategies and contextual reinterpretations to address these gaps:

More complex interpretations of works are made possible by partnerships between classical dancers and academics in the fields of anthropology, linguistics, and literature.

- To assist in closing linguistic gaps, digital platforms are being used to make multilingual commentary, annotated texts, and archive recordings accessible.
- Some institutions are experimenting with blended learning, integrating studio training with reflective writing, peer feedback, and public presentations.
- Others are de-centring mythological narratives, favouring socially relevant themes, using Bharatanatyam as a critical inquiry and civic dialogue platform.

These responses indicate that Bharatanatyam pedagogy in the North is undergoing a slow but meaningful transformation towards inclusivity, interdisciplinarity, and critical engagement rather than stagnating under structural pressures.

Scope for Future Research

While providing a thorough grasp of the pedagogical migration and modification of Bharatanatyam within academic institutions in North India, the current study also identifies several intriguing and little-studied avenues for further research. These new directions encourage deeper engagement with Bharatanatyam's changing

epistemologies, institutional cultures, and embodied practices, which span the historical, social, and performative domains. Future studies in these fields may greatly influence how Bharatanatyam pedagogy develops in the future.

1. Longitudinal Studies of Generational Pedagogical Shifts

One significant direction for future research lies in the longitudinal, intergenerational analysis of Bharatanatyam pedagogy across multiple geographical contexts, South India, North India, and diasporic communities. Such research can examine how shifts in socio-political climate, technological access, and changing notions of tradition and modernity influence teaching styles, repertoire selection, and performance aesthetics over time.

- From the focus on devotional alignment in previous generations to the emergence of identity-conscious and socially active dance in the present, this method can shed light on the development of educational principles.
- It can also chart how dancers' perceptions of authority, authenticity, and innovation transform as they navigate between lineage-based traditions and institutional frameworks.

Although researchers like Shankar (2016) and Zubaan (2021) have started mapping these generational tensions, there is still a lack of comparative, regionally diverse data.

2. Intersectional Analyzes: Caste, Class, and Gender in Bharatanatyam Pedagogy

Bharatanatyam's historical entanglement with questions of caste, gender, and class presents another fertile area for critical inquiry. Despite the form's reinvention as a pan-Indian classical idiom, its aesthetic codes, institutional gatekeeping, and access pathways continue to reflect underlying power hierarchies.

- Future research could apply intersectional feminist and Dalit epistemologies to explore how pedagogical narratives and curriculum design either reproduce or resist hegemonic structures.
- Questions to be explored may include: Who gets to teach and choreograph Bharatanatyam in universities? What narratives are legitimized or silenced? How do students from marginalized communities experience Bharatanatyam training within elite institutional spaces?

Such research would contribute to the decolonization and democratization of classical dance education, building on works like Meduri (2008), Chatterjee (2004), and Taneja (2018).

3. Practice-Based and Choreographic Research Models

Practice-as-research (PaR) is increasingly recognized as a legitimate and rigorous mode of inquiry within performance studies. Future research could explore choreographic experimentation as a method of theorizing, particularly in contexts where Bharatanatyam intersects with contemporary politics, digital media, and interdisciplinary performance.

- For instance, what happens when Bharatanatyam abhinaya is used to embody climate grief, feminist resistance, or queer desire? How do these choreographies reconfigure the pedagogical grammar of the form?
- Integrating such choreographic research with critical pedagogy frameworks (Freire, hooks, Boal) could reimagine the dance classroom as a space of inquiry, dialogue, and transformation rather than mere replication.

Recent performances and research by artists like Ananya Chatterjea, Maya Krishna Rao, and Preethi Athreya provide compelling case studies for such future research paradigms.

4. Global and Transcultural Comparative Studies

Given the transnational mobility of Bharatanatyam and its growing presence in global academia, future studies could examine comparative pedagogical models between North India and international contexts such as the US, UK, Canada, or Singapore. Such studies may highlight how diasporic politics, racial identity, and institutional frameworks shape the learning and performing of Bharatanatyam differently than in India.

- These inquiries could also investigate how digital learning environments, remote teaching, and cultural diplomacy initiatives are reshaping the transference of embodied knowledge across borders.

Concluding Remarks

North Indian Bharatanatyam is a complex, ever-evolving cultural phenomenon that goes beyond the easy divisions of tradition versus modernity and creativity versus preservation. We were reassured of the form's adaptability and longevity by this balance between tradition and modernity. Rather than existing as a static transplant of a Southern classical idiom, the form has become a dynamic site of negotiation, adaptation, and cultural production. This study has shown how the pedagogical development of Bharatanatyam in northern India is a complex interaction between individual artistic agency, institutional frameworks, socio-political discourses, and regional sensibilities.

Particularly within the university ecosystem, Bharatanatyam pedagogy is situated at a critical juncture, where it must balance the rigor of lineage-based technique with the analytical tools of contemporary academia. The classroom becomes not merely a space of skill transmission but a site for the re-interpretation of canonical texts, the interrogation of inherited aesthetics, and the generation of new expressive vocabularies. In this sense, pedagogy emerges as an act of cultural mediation, one that holds the potential to redefine the contours of Bharatanatyam for emerging generations of practitioners and scholars.

Moreover, as cultural contexts shift, shaped by changing identities, digital technologies, global networks, and calls for epistemic decolonization, the meaning of Bharatanatyam will continue to evolve. The form's ability to speak to the present without sacrificing its philosophical and aesthetic integrity is what will determine its future relevance in North India, not devotion to a single, essentialized past. Bharatanatyam has evolved further as a result of the impact of digital technology and international networks, in particular, which have created new channels for its interpretation and dissemination.

This study affirms that teaching is not only a procedural act of instruction, but it is a highly lived, relational, and transforming practice. Pedagogy is a tool for preserving a tradition and rethinking its future through the dissemination of method, values, history, and vision. A key component of this process is the 'guru-śiṣya paramparā,' a traditional teaching approach in which the instructor and student have a strong, intimate relationship. Whether transmitted through the 'guru-śiṣya paramparā' or formalized within university corridors, the teaching of Bharatanatyam in North India represents a living archive, a laboratory of cultural continuity, and a catalyst for creative change.

In acknowledging the plurality and fluidity of this evolving pedagogical landscape, this research invites continued scholarly engagement with Bharatanatyam as both a classical tradition and a contemporary practice, continually shaped by the dancers, teachers, institutions, and cultural currents that carry it forward.

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Multidisciplinary Education in the Field of Bharatanatyam

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Abstract

Since the inception of the Classical period, Bharatnatyam has been the soul of bygone-era art forms. Right from the evolution of Devadasi Parampara, Bharatnatyam has taken its foot in Indian territory and given birth to millions of its forms and formers! From there to today, it has succeeded in creating 'multidisciplinary education in the realm of its field. It, at the first level, nourishes the dancer's learning with feet and feathers (hand). Next, it teaches the connectivity between the head & heart. Slowly and steadily, it shapes a novice into a veteran jelling up its body with semiotics & rhythmic beats. Bharatnatyam's multidisciplinary approach has also truncated the stigma of gender bias by bringing both men and women on stage. The philosophies and Storytelling are what make Bharatnatyam - an art of olden-golden days. The spiritual connection in the aura of this art connects internal beings to the aesthetical surrounding. Finally, the divinity attached to Bharatnatyam has made it the dance of Gods.

Keywords : Bharatanatyam, Multidisciplinary, Devadasi Parampara, Classical period.

Introduction

Building on the tradition of the devadasis¹, Bharatanatyam² training methods, audiences, performance settings, gender norms, and dancer positions are resituated in light of shifting historical conditions from colonialism to the post-colonial era. Bharatanatyam may present a constrained picture of Hinduism that is associated with inflated ideals of Indian nationalism because of its intimate ties to Hindu devotionals. Modern content that takes into account current challenges and realities complements the strong sense of origin and tradition found in Bharatanatyam. The form's structure encourages artistic flexibility that has helped it grow into a craft that is always evolving while still allowing for inventiveness that adheres to conventional rules. The trajectory of Bharatanatyam's unending evolution draws from its rich past while contemporary artists adapt the genre to ensure relevance and advancement. It acts as a window into the future of limitless opportunity as well as a mirror to traditions.

There is a corporation perception amongst a few practitioners of dance in India that a complete and holistic technique to look at the dance is likewise a multidisciplinary one. The International Bureau of Education defines a 'multidisciplinary technique' as one that "focuses typically on special disciplines and the various views they create to demonstrate a subject matter, topic or issue." A multidisciplinary curriculum is one "in which the equal subject matter is studied from the point of view of multiple disciplines." Such a technique to bounce, therefore, might encompass views from multiple motion art. Dance, as is nicely known, has dimensions, one physical and the opposite mental. So, the multidisciplinary technique to bounce is likewise excellent and considered a -pronged one.

¹ **Devadasi**, (Sanskrit: "female servant of a god") member of a community of women who dedicate themselves to the service of the patron god of the great temples in eastern and Southern India.

² Bharatanatyam is a major form of Indian classical dance that originated in Tamil Nadu.

An exceptional blend of **Bhavam, Ragam, and Talam** - Bharatanatyam, a Tamil Nādu's evolved classical dance, is a two-pronged-one classical art form. Its roots unfold from the tradition: temple solo dancers. This dance form is now mushrooming due to its changing and ever-growing patterns which are being accepted and adopted in corners of the country and abroad. The multidisciplinary education that Bharatanatyam bestows its followers are- Physical fitness and psychological peace. In addition to that, it can be narrowed down to the different structural techniques and methods of teaching, enhancing the vocabulary, and giving a different insight to understand the approach of multiple disciplines in Bharatanatyam.

Traditional and Modern approach learnings: -

Guru Shishya Parampara

Guru (The Teacher); **Shishya** (Student of a guru);

Parampara (An uninterrupted succession).

Darkness is represented by "Gu," while light is represented by "Ru." Thus, an approximate translation of "Guru" would be "one who leads from darkness to light" or "one who guides from darkness to light." The Guru is a spiritual mentor who leads the student from ignorance or blindness to bliss, knowledge, and enlightenment, or he or she may be described as a teacher who controls the pupil's life. Without any lures for fame or riches, the Guru guides his disciples toward the ultimate objective. He leads his disciple down the path of God while also keeping an eye on his development. He exudes self-assurance, commitment, self-control, profound insight, and illumination by love. The shishya should value humility, moderation, and love above everything else. Even though the new millennium has begun, our culture has not been forgotten.

Indian classical dancers often follow the tradition of Guru Shishya, who compares teachers to God. The guru is the one who guides the disciples to self-development and helps them discover their mission in life. The wisdom-giving mentor is known as the Guru. The only way Shishya can learn wisdom and find purpose in life is through the presence of the guru and by sticking to it. This tradition is based on the simple idea that the Guru's words are the words of wisdom.

This custom dates back to roughly 500 BCE, and despite the passage of time, it continues to be just as significant today as it was then. Given the long history of this tradition, there have also been some outstanding guru-shishya couples in classical dance who have demonstrated to the world the benefits of success that result from adhering to and believing in this practice.

The guru was seen as a venerated figure who resembled a parent until the middle of the 20th century. The guru would treat his or her followers as though they were their children. The guru would prepare and serve them meals, organize costumes, and take care of logistics while teaching his students the discipline necessary for studying the dance style. Over time, a parental connection formed, which nourished the developing artists' physical, emotional, and psychological foundations. There was also a strong focus on self-improvement. The act of learning, assimilating, and producing has always been a component of structured dance traditions, according to Dasgupta, a trained Odissi artist.

The perfect coexistence of art and architecture, tradition, and technology best describes Bharatanatyam's relevance in today's world. In the 21st century, Guru-Shishya Parampara has moved from individualized teaching to institutionalization, where classes have been introduced, and to some extent, dance has become the norm. The traditional techniques ingrained in the Bharatanatyam art forms are being encouraged by contemporary artists. In order to portray gender as a shifting cultural construct, some modern practitioners use abhinaya to alter how transgender, lesbian, and bisexual dancers interact with Bharatanatyam. A cultured body may

always be redescribed, and the act of “quacking Bharatanatyam has the potential to become a means to "overthrow the strict rigidity that distinguishes this dancing technique.”

Body Vocabulary

“Yato hasta stato drishti”- “Where the hand gestures are, the eyes follow”

“Yato drishti stato manaha”- “Where the eyes go, the mind follows”

“Yato manaha stato bhava”- “Where the mind is, there is the feeling evolves”

“Yato bhava stato rasa”- “Where the feeling evolves, the Rasa flows”

With the help of facial expressions and other body motions, the complicated Mudra³ used in Bharatanatyam enables performers to portray a wide range of emotions and essential topics. The fact that Bharatanatyam allows for unrestricted expression and offers countless creative potential stems in large part from these factors.

Bharatanatyam expertly integrates hand and eye motion, allowing dancers to simultaneously express their Bhava and Kriya. These essential movements not only enhance the beauty of art, but also allow the body to regain its balance, instinct, and flexibility. The virality factor is thus activated by this adaptable classical method, luring more and more lovers to this tradition-based art. Bharatanatyam is a very advantageous form of classical art that provides the benefits of exercise as well. Starting with the upper part, it tones arms, slims the abdomen, elasticized the thighs, eases the knees, and strengthens the feet in addition to maintaining eye muscles through regular eye movement. As a result, it enhances the body's respiratory and circulatory systems as well.

- **Realm of Philosophy :** Nritya, Nritta, and Natya are the three components that unlock the secrets of Bharatanatyam. While Nritya frames its background by illustrating the bhava that underlies the action, Nritta gesticulates acts with bodily movements and postures. It represents how dance evolves into pure beauty. Natya, once more, refers to the leg gestures and finger motions that stand in for philosophical notions or narratives. Bharatanatyam's philosophies have always been depicted in a variety of ways. The imaginative landscapes decorated with creative expressions recreate traditional values and native civilizations. The literary component of philosophy personifies the stories and their elaboration, in contrast to the semiotics-based images that catch the eyes in the traps of mesmerism. These literary works satisfy the human yearning for spirituality and introduce young people to the rich heritage of the indigenous culture in which they were raised. These heartfelt ideologies go to great lengths to unite the supreme soul with almighty power. The oral stories with musical undertones enhance heaven!
- **Mental Approach :** Bharatanatyam provides long-term advantages for the mind as well as short-term ones, such as rapid learning and improved memory. Dancers benefit from learning and practicing the steps methodically since it helps them in all facets of life, both inside and outside the studio. Due to their planned approach to their aim and practice, dancers develop self-discipline and self-motivation in addition to improved learning and memory skills. Due to this, dancing cultivates a very disciplinary nature, which dancers frequently extend to other facets of their lives.

It also teaches dancers' intellect by enhancing their cognitive and behavioural abilities and tying their physical and mental selves together. This movement discipline also promotes mental clarity, serenity, rhythmic aura, and a comforting course through life! As all body parts must work together simultaneously with focus and concentration, it requires extreme technical competence. The body works well in tandem thanks to this mind-to-heart link.

³ In Indian dance, every hand gesture has a symbolic value and a precise meaning. These gestures are called 'mudra', Sanskrit word (language of the old Hindu texts) meaning “sign” or “seal”.

Gendered Role of Dance Forms

The Bharatanatyam dance, a traditional form of Indian dance, heavily incorporates gender dynamics. Dancers are required to play both male and female characters in the narrative portion of this choral form, the Abhinaya, employing a set of predetermined bodily attitudes and gestures. Given its history with the anti-devadasi movement⁴ that was played out at a high pitch in south India in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Bharatanatyam, a later name for what was formerly known as “Dasi Attam”, was always a tradition associated with female dancers in both its temple and court performance spaces. The perception of gender bias results from conditioned minds because of historical and cultural factors. The ability of the male body to adapt to the “Arai mandi” (demi plie)⁵, the primary stylistic concern of Bharatanatyam, and how strong hand and leg stretches bring out the crisp geometry of lines in this form were discovered after seeing many male dancers.

It can be argued that the history of the dance is etched all over the body of the devadasi, a historical professional female dancer. The nattuvanars⁶ who oversaw and guided the performances were teachers, not dancers, despite historical reports that some, like the renowned Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, were brilliant non-performing dancers. A dance routine was performed by the late Muttukumar Pillai, who temporarily worked as a teacher in Kalakshetra, alongside his sister Kannamba and the well-known Tiruvarur Gyanam. In order to prepare for their respective theatre roles as Ratnangi in the drama Sarangadhara and later as Malavika in Malavikagnimitra, both the well-known E. Krishna Iyer and female dancer Kuppiyah Pillai trained Bharatanatyam.

Bharatanatyam & Mathematics Integration

Every artwork has standard measurement analysis which makes its form streamlined and perfect in presentation. In Bharatanatyam, mathematical tools play the pillar role in defining rhythms, calculating beats, synchronizing patterns, and creating shapes. The essence of geometry is visible in parallel and equally distant spaces provided in group formation. Angular structure of thighs, half circles of repertoire, line formation of groups, and all other calculative snaps are the depiction of mathematics in this classical art form.

Bharatanatyam is heavily codified and schematized to accommodate all types of learners. Body motions in Bharatanatyam are choreographed and timed to Carnatic music. Contrary to other western dance forms, Bharatanatyam dances are presented to illustrate songs that are sung to vocal and instrumental music. There is more to Bharatanatyam than precisely timed, artistic motions. It is a semiotic media that uses music, paralinguistic elements, and schematized body movement to narrate stories from the Hindu epics. Bharatanatyam movements exhibit visual, spatial, and aesthetic qualities. Benefits of dance and math include the adavus⁷ dancing motions, cultural relevance, the incorporation of dance and geometry parts,

⁴ In the 1890s, Indian “reformers” began a social purity movement that dislodged the devadasi from her social space, and re-configured her as a morally inferior, diseased, fallen woman. The movement against devadasi practices was known as the anti-nautch movement.

⁵ The ardhmandali (or araimandi) is the fundamental dance position used in Bharatanatyam. Almost all Bharatanatyam movements categorized as nritta are performed in the araimandi position.

⁶ The term nattuvanar connotes a man who accompanied the devadasi dance in the capacity of a dance-master, music conductor, and vocal percussionist. In pre-modern South India, particularly among the Tamil-speaking devadasi communities, the nattuvanar would train the dancer and would also join her during the performance by reciting vocalized rhythms (sollukattu).

⁷ The word Adavu comes from the Tamil root adu, meaning to dance. Adavus forms the ABCs of pure dancing (Nritta) in Bharatanatyam. Just like a combination of alphabets give words and thereafter sentences, adavus are combined to form a dance sequence in Bharatanatyam.

and the use of alternative teaching methods like dance training to teach and master simple geometric shapes.

Story and Storytelling

Bharatanatyam is a stylized art form that uses the head, eyes, limbs, hand gestures, and diverse movements to convey stories or express many things, whether they are natural phenomena, animal behaviour, human emotions, or inanimate objects. This traditional technique brings to life tales from Indian folklore, mythology, folk tales, and epics with a rich vocabulary of lovely hand gestures, facial emotions, and sophisticated graceful dance moves. It provides spiritual enlightenment to the devotees as it epitomizes the spreading epics.

Bharatanatyam dance is a complement to storytelling as it delivers the bhava when words are incompetent! The system of single or double-handed gestures known as mudras, each of which has a myriad of meanings ranging from objects (such as animals) to verbs, is one essential component of its storytelling, in addition to footwork and facial expressions. This system enables any story to be told. Although their meanings may vary depending on the type of classical dance, they serve as the alphabet of Indian dance.

Chain of Semiotics

Balasaraswati Ji quoted, "Bharatanatyam in its highest form, is the embodiment of music in a visual form."

A Bharatanatyam Dancer traps your concentration with the language it symbolizes by hand gestures, leg movement, waist motions, and fingers articulation. The pattern of semiotics in Bharatanatyam transforms within a period and the expression-coated face refines the complete art. The creamish finishing in semiotics is done by the woven patterns of music. Again, the rhythmic scenes are an add-on to this beauty. All of this is carved by the thematic content which is an accompaniment of musical conjunction. Of Course, the core of all these parameters is mathematical precision which the dancer keeps a texture of, behind the mind! This effortless flexibility simply adorns the art and makes it pearl and pure.

Confluence of Music & Dance

The charismatic concoction of classical dance with Carnatic music has enriched the intensity of Bharatanatyam. Music endows employment of different scales, utilizing harmony, progressive chord and rhythmic beats which signals the dancer to motion his body in different semiotics and directions. This is further beautified by the array of mudras and beats of the ankle belt that recreates the resonance of this magnificent art in the air.

Veena, Flute and Mridangam are the main musical instruments participating in music and dance fusion. Veena overwhelms the texture of movements; flute embellishes the melody driven moves and Mridangam conveys rhythmic foot movements. Thus, a musician is subtly able to communicate with the dancer by virtue of his artistic approach and let him channelise his moves according to the beat of his tips!

Conclusion

Bharatanatyam is the most beautiful art form which is practiced all over the world and adopts the most comprehensive method possible, a multidisciplinary one. Many dancers have used this method to improve their vocabularies, strengthen and condition their bodies for dance, and to better comprehend their bodies. Bharatanatyam is a fully multidisciplinary art form that combines dance, music, storytelling, philosophy, mathematics, and a variety of other traditional and cultural aesthetics. It catches the beauty of nature, connects it to tradition, and displays it to the country, reviving ancient national values!

Due to its nature, there has been a lot more addition towards learning and projecting this art form in a more gracious and subtle manner. With the traditional roots a lot more socio, political, and contemporary subjects are a part of this art form. The framework of pedagogy has

given a different uplift which has made the universities and institutions contemplate various kinds of subjects with the students. Thus, Bharatanatyam, oneself is developing different vocabularies and spreading the values through multidisciplinary values.

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Importance of Yoga and Dance Kinesthetics in Bharatanatyam

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Abstract

The practice of an art is considered a form of yoga in Indian philosophy. When an artist creates a painting, music, or dance, the thought process and meditation that goes into it are both important. Creating the final tangible result is analogous to practising yoga posture, as well as transcendence from the mundane world. As a result, Indian art had reached a pinnacle of perfection, as had Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddhism, monks, and saints saw artistic creativity as a part and parcel of the religion part of their path to salvation. Where yoga elevates the mind, body and soul, the kinesthetics movements helps to outrage the movements within the mind and body of an artist. The twin folds combine and compliments in conditioning the dancer's body. Bharatanatyam, as an art form, necessitates a conscious understanding of the body, mind, and emotions. In what follows, we traverse and evaluate three general practises to the existence and significance of yoga and dance kinesthetics in Bharatanatyam, which provides a deep understanding of the relevance and importance of yoga and dance kinesthetics on the artists.

Keywords: Yoga, Bharatanatyam, Kinesthetics movements, Indian Classical Dance, Dancers.

Introduction

Bharatanatyam is one of the most prominent Indian classical dance forms of India, which is known as the oldest classical dance heritage. It began in Tamil Nadu's Hindu temples and eventually spread to South India. The Bharatanatyam dance is considered to be Ekaharya, where a dancer performs many roles in a single performance. In the threshold era of 19th century was marked by the famous Tanjore Quartet for the repertoire of the Bharatanatyam dance as we see it today was said to have been

under the patronage of Raja Serfoji. This art form was persistent by devadasis, who were girls "endowed" with their parents' temples and was married to the gods. Devadasis were used to perform music and dance that was considered as an offering to the deities in the courtyards of the temple. A significant defining moment in the advancement of Bharatanatyam was the improvement of the contemporary plan of the Bharatanatyam presentation, by four siblings from Thanjavur in the post eighteenth century. Chinnayya, Ponnayya, Sivanandam and Vadivelu, they were known to be the four children of Nattuvanaar Subbarayan. Bharatanatyam's singing is additionally sensitive, energized by his melodic coach, the incredible arranger Muthuswamy Dikshitar. These patterns framed Sadir into the forerunner of what we call Bharatanatyam today. The theoretical establishment of this style can be followed back to 'Natya Shastra,' an old Sanskrit Hindu text on the performing expressions. A sort of tale on Hindu strict points and profound thoughts, roused by an artist with amazing footwork and great signals, nritya, nritya and natya are important for an exhibition collection. "As per Hindu mythology, the name of the dance structure was inferred by joining two words, 'Bharata' and 'Natyam', 'Bharata' is a memory aide comprising of 'bha', 'ra', and 'ta', "which individually signifies 'bhava' that is feeling and sentiments; 'raga' that is tune; and 'tala' that is musicality, where 'Natyam' in Sanskrit implies dance". The theoretical foundations of this art form, also called Sadir, can be drawn back to the ancient Sanskrit-Hindu text of the Indian theater scholar and musicologist Bharata Muni about the performing arts, "Natya Shastra". Bharatanatyam is classically clear in its technique and approaches in its pure form. The feet run in confounded counter-rhythms; The legs are twisted in a trademark low squat; Arms, neck and shoulders are important for the development, in the emulate the hands recount the story with ordinary motions, while the face communicates the temperament, in unadulterated dance the hands are restricted to 11 mudras (representative hand signals).

Role of Yoga in Bharatanatyam

In India the dance is called Natya Yoga in light of the fact that while moving the artist can guide every last bit of her proactive tasks to her psychological state, which is given by the

figure, for example in the event that the artist stays in the sthaya bhava of the person, the artist turns into a person and they become indivisible. Similarly, as a yogi encounters physical and otherworldly retribution to adjust on the hub of greatness, an artist adjusts his body, psyche and soul with the pivot through training and during the dance to accomplish amazing quality on their excursion and cause them to understand that dance is a type of yoga.

If we examine any Indian classical dance, we observe that the dancers use diverse elements in their frame to create the artwork at the stage, like an artist makes use of his brush and colorations to color a canvas. Until unless, the artist has a great brushes and sharp colorations, any portray he conceives does now no longer attain excessive quality. Likewise, the body must be in good shape (not in relation to the figure so that it will carry out dance and invoke diverse rasas. Natyashastra's Bharata knew that the body must be properly conditioned in order to achieve the goals. Thus, via the diverse actions defined and codified in Natyashastra, one ought to obtain the most conditioning of the body.

The current Indian dance experts go through a warm-up training each day before starting the classes. Heating up the body is similarly just about as significant as cooling down after the class. In Bharatanatyam, slow stretches of the thigh, lower leg and biceps muscles are proceeded as warm-up works out. Additionally, Bharatanatyam artists use bicep conditioning to keep up with the natyarambham position or posture toward the start of the dance. Many dancers involve jumps and leaps inspired by other forms like kalaripayattu, chhau, etc. This mix of movements helps tighten and strengthen breath control in dancers. The Indian classical dance represents a complex approach to the physical and mental well-being of a dancer. First, the dance is physical and exerts a physical tension, similar to exhaling alone when jogging or exercising, not through the mouth but through the nose. Thus, breathing becomes easy for a long period of time even when performing a complex rhythmic pattern, which leads to the dancer developing breath control. Such control of breathing builds endurance and perseverance. Like great development, Indian dance fortifies the heart, further

develops blood dissemination, expands lung limit and uses all muscles in the body.

Role of Kinesthetics movements in Bharatanatyam

Kinesthetics is the study of body motion, and of the perception (both conscious and unconscious) of one's own body motions.^[1] It has traditionally been defined as a coherent sense as opposed to a projective sense. It is a process by which we perceive our own postures and movements: it provides direct or immediate information about the current state of the body as opposed to information about the state of the mind objects and events in the immediate vicinity. Pure movements can occur in the sagittal plane around a lateral axis. The resulting movements are the forward bend (except for the knees, which only bend in one direction); Extension a return of flexion; and hyperextension, a rearward extension beyond the normal anatomical standing position.

The second category of movements includes those that occur in the lateral plane and in the sagittal axis. These are sideways movements. Away from the midline of the body they are called abduction, and toward the midline or return of the abduction is called adduction. The third plane in which the body or a body part is supposed to move is horizontally around a vertical axis. For example, when the leg is rotated outwards, away from the center line of the body, it is rotated laterally in a horizontal plane with axis at the hip joint. The rotation to the normal position is called the medial rotation. The quantity of potential developments in each joint relies upon the construction of the joint. In the case of joints that allow movement in two or more planes, it is possible to combine movements. During the analysis it is necessary to know such possible combinations and to carefully check them. It is crucial for dancers to recognize their body, anatomy, and the bodily extremes that they could push themselves. Since the body is the instrument where an artist performs with, understanding his/her body type recognizes what kinds of warm-up practices are ideal.

In Bharatanatyam there is an implicit element of instruction that the dancer creates with meticulous geometric movements that correspond to shapes such as squares, triangles, lines, diagonals, etc. the permutations and combinations of kinesthetics movements allow the dancers to delve with these

shapes in all the possible manners. Whether its leaning, bending, moving forward/backward, jumping, whirling etc, the awareness of kinesthetics movements helps the dancers to understand their body and helps in conditioning the movements.

In Bharatanatyam dance, the kinesthetic sense and the ability to react and flexibility are important components of motor performance, as different movement figures have been created with the appropriate music and rhythm, so the kinesthetic sense and responsiveness and flexibility are essential elements, almost necessary for any kind of Dancer. the sense that helps us understand weight, body position, or the relationship between movements in parts of our body such as joints, muscles, and tendons. In short, it's the muscle sense. "Dance, though it's a visual component, is essentially a kinaesthetic art whose basic cognitive process is grounded not simply in the eye however within the entire body".

Benefits of Yoga and Kinesthetics movements for dancers

"According to Nandikeshwara's Abhinaya Darpana, the major inner qualities of dancers (Antah Prana) are as follows":

**"JAVAHA STHIRATVAM REKHA
BRAHMARI DRISHTI AASHRAMAHA
MEDHA SHRADDHA VACHO GEETAM"**^[2]

Swiftness or speed; steadiness; Line and Symmetry; Versatility in circular movements; Glances of the eyes; Ease and tirelessness; intelligence; Confidence and interest; Clarity in speech; Capacity of song.

All these inherent attributes can be evolved and maintained through practising yoga in addition with kinesthetics movements. It is predominant that the dancer has numerous physical and mental skills that can be acquired in addition to the personality aspects as mentioned above. Some other benefits that a dancer can acquire through practising yoga and with dance kinesthetics are:

- **Strength and Balance:** - These physical qualities are indispensable for the dancer in all stages of his/her artistic career. Standing postures like Trikonasana, Pudahastasana, Natarojasana, Virasana, Padangushtasana and their variations are particularly helpful for developing strength in the legs and thighs. Like Natarajansana, Ekapadasana and Ardha Chandrasana help to develop an excellent sense of

balance and better focused concentration. Balancing hand postures such as Hamsasana, Mayurasana, Matsasana and Veishikasana, help develop the strength in shoulders, arms, and wrists that is essential for holding the arms and upward in numerous nritta sequences such as Alarippu, Varnam, and Tillana.

- **Concentration:** - During focused breathing, stretches and yoga poses help rejuvenate and oxygenate the blood and promote nutrients through pranayama into the vessels and capillaries, increasing alertness, awareness, and memory which gives a good result in the concentration of mind and body with respect to movements.
- **Centre and Carriage:** - Various back bend poses such as Chakrasana, Ushtrasana and Bhujangasana help in avoiding the hunchbacks. Repeatedly practicing balancing postures between right and left and sideways, as well as from different positions lying on your back. In the prostrate position and in the smashed and curvilinear stances, the focal point of gravity is improved and this prompts an ideal situating of the running body for the different components.
- **Resilience:** - One of the major physical qualities a dancer needs is flexibility and the other one is resilience. Jathis and other adavus practices require spinal twists like Ardha Matsyandrasana and Vakrasana. The body can then be a flexible, well-tuned instrument that allows us to effortlessly and gracefully perform any movement like bhramari, utplavan, chaari etc. we want while dancing.
- **Co-ordination and collaboration:** - Practising of breathing Pranayamas, Surya Namaskara, as well as collaboration of various jathis and adavus help in developing co-ordination, and balance in the dancer.
- **Physiological role:** - Yoga helps in fostering all frameworks of the human body, for example, (cardiovascular, respiratory, stomach related, excretory, endocrine, anxious and outer muscle frameworks), to fortify, filter and decontaminate the human body with the goal that it is under our own's cognizant will, which is extremely pivotal for artists.
- **Vitality:** - In the science of Yoga, body movement and breath should be synchronous. The body is upraised on the

incoming breath and lowered on the outgoing breath, Bhastrika of the “bellows breath” activate the coeliac plexus, that is associate energy reservoir, additionally as strengthens the diaphragm therefore manufacturing strength, vitality and endurance. Pranyamas like “Mukha Bhastrika” stimulate the inner cleansing of poisons. Breath is directly associated with energy levels, vitality, life span, and quality of emotions, state of mind and therefore the clarity and subtlety of thoughts. This use of breath power with the body movements brings regarding revolutionary effects on the performance of the dancer.

- Anxiety and Tranquility: - Yoga has a ton to bring to the table as far as pressure alleviation. Artists face extraordinary pressure and exclusive requirements from instructors, companions, family, and general society as they get ready for their exhibitions. Different creators likewise will in general press yoga asanas, pranayamas and jnana yoga kriyas, where they work on the different koshas of our body and clear up every single inner mind "quirk" in our cerebrums from billions of long periods of advancement from creature state to people. Eccentricities assists us with understanding our response to various circumstances and to forestall our pressure response to it. The "stress relievers" in Hatha Yoga and Jnana Yoga are of massive use in alleviating smothered feelings and in directing our responses to distressing circumstances.

Conclusion

Using the vocabularies of yoga and kinesthetics is a paradigm for the dancers to be self-oriented for self-cultivation, self-enjoyment and self-enrichment. This not only helps in the dancing but grooms the overall personality of a dancer. Indian classical dance consists of all yoga postures. Because of its quick movements, Bharatanatyam offers strength and flexibility. In addition, movements controlled by rhythm and tala make the reflexes strong. Although Bharatanatyam was not intended to be a system of practice. However, it fulfils all the requirements for an ideal exercise. Bharatanatyam or all of India's classical dances provide a healthy exercise that involves the respiratory system-control of the breath while performing; the digestive system-stretched stomach and tight waistbands to tone the muscles;

circulatory system- The alternation of fast and slow movements influences the heart rate; the muscles, the effect of acupressure (different foot positions) etc. and so on. Kinesthetics movements helps in rehabilitating individuals using body awareness, symmetry and shape of the body. Whether it's adavus, jathis or bhedas in Bharatanatyam, the blend with the kinesthetic movements give a definite structure and space to a dancer. Dancers need to be aware of how the body's metabolism affects their performance and adjust their diet, accordingly, plan their hydration, etc. Dance has scientifically proven benefits for the body and mudras help keeping the body in shape. The balance between body and mind helps the dancer maintain good mental health.

Footnotes:

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