

# *Historical Origin of Dance in India*

---

---

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF DANCE IN INDIA

This Chapter explains the historical origin of dance in India, from the ancient period to the modern period. It also describes Nataraja, Natyasastra, Devadasis, types of dance forms in India and classical, tribal and folk dances in India. Dance is an expression of an ancient civilisation to identify itself with God. All parts of life, including dance, are spiritual. Dance is universal and coeval with humanity as an expression of emotions. Dancing thus became invariably significant, inseparable part of a joyous and cultured social life of any community, that flourished during the ages.

India is one of the oldest civilisations in the world, with a kaleidoscopic type and wealthy cultural heritage.<sup>1</sup> Indian dance or the dance traditions are ancient and it only indicates that they carry within themselves certain elements of the historical past.<sup>2</sup> Indian dance too uses the proportions of the body, the measurement of the major and minor limbs in movement, to create the emotional states.<sup>3</sup> In India, dance is conditioned, penetrated and illuminated by a devotional culture. Indian dances are based on spiritualism. Indian dance is a means of salvation through the path of knowledge or 'Jnana' and then through the path of service or 'Karma' and lastly through the path of faith or 'Bhakti', which keeps alive Indian dancers and dances inspite of any adversity.<sup>4</sup>

#### Dance Forms in India

In India, dance has one of the largest repertoires in the world.<sup>5</sup> Dance in India has an entire tradition of over two thousand years.<sup>6</sup> Dancing in India has been both a way of

---

<sup>1</sup> *India 2008*, Research, Reference & Training Division, Publication Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting Govt. of India, New Delhi, 2008, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Mohan Khokar, *The Splendours of Indian Dance*, Himalayan Books, New Delhi, 1985, p.17.

<sup>3</sup> Krishna Sahai, *The Story of a Dance Bharata Natyam*, Indialog Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2003, p.26.

<sup>4</sup> Krishna Rao, U.S. and Chandrabhaga Devi, U.K., *A Panorama of Indian Dances*, Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi, 1993, p.13.

<sup>5</sup> George, T.J.S., *India 1000 to 2000*, Express Publications, Chennai, 1999, p.380.

<sup>6</sup> *India 2002*, Publication Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting Government of India, New Delhi, 2002, p.109.

life and a highly organised religious and cultural pursuit.<sup>7</sup> Indian dance is now an extensively recognised and respected art form throughout the world.<sup>8</sup>

Indian dance is separated into Nritta-the rhythmic elements, Nritya-the combination of rhythm with expression and Natya-the dramatic element. Nritya is generally expressed through the eyes, hands and facial movements. Nritya, combined with nritta, makes up the usual dance programmes. It comprises abhinaya, depicting rasa and bhava.<sup>9</sup> There are hundreds of dance forms prevailing in India, which are classified as Margi and Desi. The Margi is classical and Desi is folk in a larger sense. In both styles, there are Natya, Nritta, Nritya and dramas, which are generally included in the Natya style. There are many authentic works dealing with the techniques of the Margi style of classical dance and drama, from Bharata's Natyasastra upto Balaramabharatam.<sup>10</sup>

The Bharata Natyasastra gives a detailed narration of the movements and gestures of all the limbs of the body, including those of the hands and gestures, which are most expressive in style. The Sutras of Silalin and Krishasvin have been referred to as authority on the art of dance by Panini, the scholar. In course of time, Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Manipuri and Kathak developed in to four classical schools of dance developed under local and foreign technique. Bharatanatyam belonged to Kerala and both accepted Natyasastra as the authority. The former art was generally practiced by womenfolk and the latter by menfolk. Kathak came into existence as a mixture of Bharatanatyam and Kathakali, and the Manipuri dance reflected Rashlila of Radha and Krishna. In ancient society, dance was very popular and commanded a place of honour.<sup>11</sup>

Bharatanatyam is the successor of Kuravanchi and Kuchipudi evolved from Bhagavata Mela Natak and Yakshagana have got a folk milieu and it evolved from the

---

<sup>7</sup> Mohan Khokar, *Traditions of Indian Classical Dance*, published by Clarion Books, New Delhi, 1979, p.i.

<sup>8</sup> Sumana, R., *Dance as a Ritual in Folk Forms in India*, Bangalore University, 2012, p.9.

<sup>9</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Dances*, Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2007, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Dance and Music of South India*, International School of Dravidian Linguistics, Thiruvananthapuram, 2007, p.15.

<sup>11</sup> Raj Kumar Pruthi and Rameshwari Devi, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Society and Culture*, Vol. I, Mangal Deep Publications, Jaipur, 2002. p.41.

Nagamandala ritual of Karnataka villages. Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi dances satisfy the aesthetic urge of a Rasika, who expects technical perfection in the performance.<sup>12</sup> The more important publications, pertaining to dance, are Abhinaya Daspana by Nandikeswara, Dasampala by Dhananjeya, Sangeetha Ratnakara by Saranga Deva, Sangeetha Saramrita of Tulajaji and Balarama Bharata of Balarama Varma, Maharaja of Travancore and more recently Bharata Kalai, (Kotpadu) in Tamil, by Padma Subramaniam.

Indian folk and tribal dances are simple dances, and they are performed to express happiness.<sup>13</sup> The tempo varies over an astonishing range in these dances from the slow, languorous swinging of body in the dances of the tribal people of the Santhal area and also of the picturesque dwellers of the valleys of the Himalayas, to the boisterous jumps and leaps of the peasants of the Punjab and the wild, splendid whirls of the Rajasthan warrior, to the exciting rhythms of the great drums. In a very subtle way, these dances reflect their natural milieu as well. As the dancers from the mountains sway and bend, they suggest the vast undulating ranges of the Himalayas.<sup>14</sup>

## Nataraja



In India, dance is said to have originated in Lord Shiva. While Shiva danced the Thandava, Parvathi performed the Lasya. These are the male and female views of Indian dance. The thandava is vigorous, energetic and bold. The lasya is graceful, gentle and

---

<sup>12</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.32.

<sup>13</sup> Divyasena, S., *Essence & Essentials of Dance*, Divyanjali, Chennai, 2010, p.73.

<sup>14</sup> Krishna Chaitanya, *A Profile of Indian Culture*, Indian Book Company, New Delhi, 1975, pp.174-177.

feminine.<sup>15</sup> Shiva, worshipped even today, as the Lord of Dance, is credited with being the first teacher of the oldest system of dance and music, which would pre-date the Aryan Civilisation.<sup>16</sup> Siva's more popular names are Natesa or Nataraja, the king of dancers and actors.<sup>17</sup> The ancient tradition regards Lord Siva as the founder of the art of dance. His dance symbolised the rhythmic movement of the Universe.<sup>18</sup> It is believed that Lord Siva performed the first Tandava Dance at Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu.<sup>19</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy sees in the Nataraja "a synthesis of science, religion and art".<sup>20</sup>

The discoveries of the seals and inscriptions, found at Ur and sites in Mesopotamia, dating back to 2400-2000 B.C, reveal the primordial form of the image of God, Lord Nataraja, in bronze belonging to the Chola dynasty.<sup>21</sup> The Rajarajeshvara Temple at Tanjore is a gigantic masterpiece of South Indian Architecture, built to commemorate the victory of Rajaraja Chola I over the North and it was dedicated to Lord Siva. Following this were the Siva temple of Gangaikondacholapuram and the Nataraja Temple at Chidambaram. This Nataraja Temple at Chidambaram is, even to this day, well-regarded as the residence of dance. On the inside walls of one tower, dance poses have been sculptured, which are clearly the different Karanas as described in the Natya Sastra. The Nataraja Temple at Chidambaram displays the 108 Karanas, with the nomenclature of each of these, as described in the Natya Sastra. These have been sculptured, one above the other, to give the effect of pillars.

### **Natyasastra**

Bharatha wrote a long thesis on the art of dance, drama and music which is called the Natyasastra. Natyasastra is a 'Bible' of information for dancers, musicians and actors

---

<sup>15</sup> Leela Samson, *The Joy of Classical Dances of India*, National Book Trust India, New Delhi, 2002, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Krishna Sahai, *The Story of a Dance Bharata Natyam*, Indialog Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, Nov 2003, p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> Bharatha Iyer, K., *Dance Dramas of India and the East*, D.B Taraporevala Sons & Private. Ltd., Bombay, 1980, p.3.

<sup>18</sup> Raj Kumar Pruthi and Rameshwari Devi, *Op. cit.*, p.40.

<sup>19</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.9.

<sup>20</sup> Krishna Rao, U.S. and Chandrabhaga Devi, U.K., *A Panorama of Indian Dances*, Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi, 1993, p.14.

<sup>21</sup> Sumana, R., *Op. cit.*, p.7.

on the method of performance on stage.<sup>22</sup> Bharathamuni the great author of the monumental treatise on theatrical arts in Sanskrit the 'Natyasastra' designed the format of the art of Natya, as advised by Lord Brahma. The Natyasastra is an encyclopedic work comprising 36 chapters and 6000 verses transmitting all relevant informations about 'Natya'. It is said that Natya is the 5<sup>th</sup> Veda and it is the consolidated form of the four major aspects extracted from the four vedas, Paathya from Rig Veda, Abhinaya from Yajur Veda, Gita from Samaveda and Rasa from the Atharva Veda.<sup>23</sup>

Natyasastra is a significant text in the fine arts for many centuries influencing much of the terminology and structure of Indian classical dance and music. For about 2000 years the Natyasastra has inspired new texts and various regional traditions of theatre. The analysis of body forms and movements defined in Natyasastra also influenced Indian sculpture and the other visual arts in later centuries. 'Bharata' in the beginning meant a dancer-actor so that the heading could mean simply 'A Shastra on Drama for the Dancer-Actor'. Natyasastra has been variously dated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.<sup>24</sup>

### **Elements of Indian Dance**

Abhinaya: It covers all histrionic activity the physical, verbal, mental and decorative.<sup>25</sup> It is common to all classical Indian dances. Abhinaya is the expressional feature of dance or nritya.<sup>26</sup> Traditionally, classifies abhinaya as four types Angika, Vachika, Aharya and Satvika.<sup>27</sup>

Navarasas: Navarasas give all dances a completeness that allows the dancer and the rasikas to experience the full beauty and meaning of the lyrics and the movements

---

<sup>22</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, p.9.

<sup>23</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.9.

<sup>24</sup> Reginald Massey, *India's Dances*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p.31.

<sup>25</sup> Ananda Lal, *Theatres of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, p.161.

<sup>26</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.3.

<sup>27</sup> Ananda Lal, *Op. cit.*, p.161.

they are portrayed by.<sup>28</sup> Sringaram, Roudram, Veeram, Beebhatsa, Shantam, Hasya, Adbhuta, Bhaya and Karuna these are the main Navarasas.<sup>29</sup>

Mudras: Mudras are gestures of hands, which display the expression of thought and emotion. These mudras are prevalent from the time of the vedas and still used by the priests while chanting mantras.<sup>30</sup>

## Devadasis



Dance became the exclusive profession of women, dedicated to the temples, who were called Devaradiyars or Devadasis. They were not permitted to marry and performed at the temple.<sup>31</sup> Devadasis were devoted to the service of God. They performed during significant religious rites and during festivals and they were enduring fixtures of the temple, spending their lives within its four walls. Devadasis mean “Servants of God”. These women were brought up by the temple, never married and their life’s sole purpose was to dance in honour of the temple’s presiding deity. Sculptures of these elegant dancers, in their arabesque poses, can be seen chiselled in the ancient temple walls and gateways in the well-known temple complexes at Tanjore and Chidambaram.<sup>32</sup> Almost all main temples of India had troupes of dancers, who were trained as ‘Devadasis’.

---

<sup>28</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.3.

<sup>29</sup> Usha Mehta, *Dances of Hilly Regions*, Cyber Tech Publications, New Delhi, 2011, p.180.

<sup>30</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p. 49

<sup>31</sup> Prema Kasturi and Sundaram, G., *South India Heritage An Introduction*, II<sup>nd</sup> Edition, East West Books by Westland Limited., 2011, pp.453-454.

<sup>32</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, pp.16-17.

In later times, the Devadasi system became degenerated and the Devadasis got degraded in the society. But the Devadasi dance gave birth to a variety of dance forms in every state, according to the local situations. Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Odissi and many other major dance styles have their roots in the Devadasi dance of the region.

Devadasi applied to women, who danced in temples and sometimes also serving as courtesans.<sup>33</sup> The performance of dance as a holy offering is enjoined in the Agama Sastras of South India, which contain rules for making temple images and all that pertains to temple rites and festivals. This hieratic dance was rendered entirely by women called Devar-adiyal or Devadasis, votaries of God. The first dance performance of a Devadasi took place in the temple, in the presence of the king, who conferred the title of Talaikole on the skilled Devadasi.<sup>34</sup> Devadasis had their own customs and traditions of social and family life. They were given lands and emoluments by the king and had certain rights in to protection under the law.<sup>35</sup>

At first the Devadasis danced every morning and evening in the internal sanctum in front of the god, and their movements were largely back and forth, determined to some extent by the space available and the location of the idol.<sup>36</sup> In many cases, the highly trained Devadasis also were courtesans. This institution was denounced as “temple prostitution”, exploitative toward women and a cause of the dance’s degeneration into eroticism.<sup>37</sup>

Devadasis denote girls, dedicated to serve the god in a particular temple, by activities ranging from ‘housekeeping’ to ‘dancing’. Most recently, the term has been used to refer solely to those occupied with music and dancing. Devadasis’ work included performing early morning protective rituals, singing, and dancing before the image of the deity.

---

<sup>33</sup> Surjit Mansingh, *Historical Dictionary of India*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1998, p.xv.

<sup>34</sup> Ragini Devi, *Dance Dialects of India*, Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1972, p.45.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>36</sup> Ronken Lynton, H., *Born to Dance*, Orient Longman limited, Hyderabad, 1995, p.14.

<sup>37</sup> Chopra, P.N., Puri, B.N. and Das, M.N., *A Social, Cultural and Economic History of India*, Vol. II, Macmillian India Limited, Madras, 1974. pp. 162-165.



Devadasis also served the royal courts. They entertained at girls' puberty ceremonies and at wedding processions, where they symbolized good luck because as a deity's wives, they could never be widowed.

Their numbers and activities are included in the records of various southern dynasties, the earliest specific evidence, dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> Century. Temple carvings, done under the Pallavas who ruled Tamil Nadu in the 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Centuries, show dancers in formal poses. The temple rules in the Agamas indicate Devadasis from the 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. The Cholas ensured that temples were well staffed, which included dancing girls and musicians. Some temples had hundred of dancing girls. Devadasi or a temple dancer was originally an honourable profession.<sup>38</sup>

A Tanjore inscription, commissioned in 1004 A.D. by the Chola king, Rajaraja, refers to four hundred Devadasis who were attached to the Great Temple, received free living quarters on four neighbouring streets, and they were allowed tax-free land out of the temple endowment.<sup>39</sup> Many Chola inscriptions and Chola temples refer complimentarily to Devadasis and some are even mentioned by name which speaks of the high esteem in which they were regarded in that period. Chola king Rajaraja refers to 400 Devadasis, who were attached to the huge temple of Brihadeeswara Temple in Tanjore. They received free quarters in four streets close to the temple and they were permitted tax free land, out of the temple endowment.<sup>40</sup>

Under feudalism, Devadasi tradition got distorted and the term Devadasi came to be associated with royal courtesans, who appeared before kings, landed aristocracy and ministers of the royal courts and became a symbol of the evil effects of affluence.<sup>41</sup> While the temple and the court, the major pillars of art patronage were emasculated during the British rule, the Devadasi or temple dancer not only lost her support base but also earned social censure and the institution of the temple dancer was finally abolished

---

<sup>38</sup> Ronken Lynton, H., *Op. cit.*, p.13.

<sup>39</sup> Usha Mehta, *Op. cit.*, p.211.

<sup>40</sup> George, T.J.S., *India 1000 to 2000*, Express Publications (Madurai) Ltd., Chennai, 1999, p.385.

<sup>41</sup> Shobana Gupta, *Dances of India*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 2002, pp.6-8.

by law. The Devadasi in the south and the Tawaif in the north were categories of women, empowered as entertainers, living outside the conventional institution of marriage and domesticity.<sup>42</sup>

The seeds of today's performing arts scene sprouted in the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when music and dance became intertwined with issues of national identity. The collapse of Mughal patronage and delegitimation of Muslim courts after the 1857 Rebellion, marginalized some performance traditions, while stimulating others. The Mughal Emperor's court was disbanded and its performers were forced to leave. Lucknow's courtesan community, renowned for its song and dance arts, suffered property seizures by the victorious British after 1857. They faced pressure to close down. Some types of performances were banned. Artists performance styles became less associated with courts than with their teachers.<sup>43</sup>

The British ruling class, who did not understand the art of the Devadasis nor the customs and social environment of these talented dancers, began to condemn the dance and in public, criticized Devadasis as immoral. The traditional dance of the Devadasis found a secure place in the art life of Madras, under the new name of Bhartanatyam.<sup>44</sup> In 1947, the Devadasi Bill banned temple dancing in the then state of Madras. Certain types of courtesan performances were banned.<sup>45</sup> After independence, the Government tried to endow the classical dances with appropriate names. Sadir and Dasiyattam were replaced by literary terms like Aadal, Koothu, Chinna Melam and Bharatham.<sup>46</sup> T. Balasaraswati (1918-1984), the last well-known performer, descended from a Devadasis and saw many changes during her lifetime.

### **Classical Dances**

Classical dance, it is believed, was evolved by the creator Lord Brahma, as a pleasant pastime, which would be an all-embracing amusement, equally accessible to all

---

<sup>42</sup> Rupinder Khullar, *India Land of Celebration*, OM Books International, New Delhi, 2005. p.211.

<sup>43</sup> Chopra, P.N., Puri, B.N. and Das, M.N., *Op. cit.*, pp.162-165.

<sup>44</sup> Ragini Devi, *Op. cit.*, p.49.

<sup>45</sup> Chopra, P.N., Puri, B.N. and Das, M.N., *Op. cit.*, pp.162-165.

<sup>46</sup> George, T.J.S., *Op. cit.*, p.387.

castes and creeds. The Indian classical dances rest on five pillars, namely: music, intricate footwork, hand gestures, eloquent expressions and traditional costumes. The language of gestures and eyes plays an important role in the dance.

The classical dance has two main divisions. The first is Nritta, which is an intricate abstract dance, consisting of stylised movements and poses and work out of complex rhythms without narrative or representational content. The Nritya, on the other hand, is suggestive, expressive, interpretative dance, with every movement and gesture invested with meaning. This interpretative style uses all the expressive resources of the body-facial expressions, symbolic gestures by the hand and dramatic postures of the body.<sup>47</sup> In the Indian classical dance forms, the abstract or pure form is called 'Nritta'.<sup>48</sup> Nritta is pure dance. It is simply beautiful, graceful and energetic. Nritya on the other hand, is the art of storytelling through hastas or gestures, movements and facial expression.<sup>49</sup>

It was between the 1930 and 1960 that classical dances were revitalized and attained their present form and some even being rechristened like Bharathanatyam for the original Dasiyattam or Sadir. The classical dances of the present are really neoclassical and reinvented manifestations for the proscenium. Apart from the journey from temple to stage, a dance revolution began with classical dance, hitherto the prerogative of those born to the tradition, being thrown open to all persons.<sup>50</sup>

Classical dances are based fully or partly on the principles and techniques formed in the ancient Hindu scriptures and technical text on dance and allied arts. The earliest of these known scripts is Bharatha's Natya Sastra, believed to have been written around the Second Century B.C. Many existing systems of classical dancing, governed by elaborate techniques with a high degree of alteration, have had their origin in the dances of the common people.<sup>51</sup> Classical dance forms are based on ancient dance discipline and have rigid system of presentation.

---

<sup>47</sup> Krishna Chaitanya, *Op. cit.*, pp.174-177.

<sup>48</sup> Kapil Tiwari, *Pratyaya Dialogue on Tribal and Folk Culture*, Adivasi Lok- Kala Parishad, Bhopal, MP, India, 1993, p.66.

<sup>49</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, p.9.

<sup>50</sup> Rupinder Khullar, *Op. cit.*, p.211.

<sup>51</sup> *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.60.

In the first decades of the Twentieth Century, dancers began the concert by standing in place on a bare stage. Today's stage is often decorated with the icon of a deity. The dancer enters, and usually drops flowers and makes a graceful gesture of respect to the deity. Dance has recently been revived in temples with the institution of dance festivals at Khajuraho, Konarak, and Tamil Nadu's Chidambaram, dedicated to Shiva Nataraja.

Classical dances such as Bharatanatyam, closely related to the dance of Andhra Pradesh, eastern India's Odissi, Kathakali, Kathak, and Manipuri, achieved their contemporary form in the Twentieth Century. Very little is known about the historical development of nonclassical dance. Kathak, north India's classical form, highlights the rhythm and the tempo. During the performance, the dancer chants bol, the syllables that denote the beat. Precise footwork alternates with graceful, swift turns, gestures, and glances. Kathak dance is performed by both women and men soloists as well as by troupes, which perform dance-dramas. These include contemporary themes. The overall trend in the classical traditions, however, has been toward abstract or pure dance, which minimize mime and acting. Dancers work to establish flexibility and strength. One of the most intensive training regimes is associated with the male Kathakali dance of Kerala.<sup>52</sup>

The Sangeet Nataka Academi currently confers classical status on eight "dance" forms- Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Mohiniyattam, Odissi and Sattriya.<sup>53</sup>

### **Non Classical Dance**

Nonclassical forms often use a simple vocabulary of stylized movements. They are sustained by nonspecialists rather than professionals and they are learned in the neighborhood or family settings, rather than through lengthy professional training. In northern India, norms of upper to middle caste-based society, favor the separation of women and men dancers, who dance in separate groups or as separate halves of a circle. Female roles are played by male dancers. These conventions separate these groups from

---

<sup>52</sup> Carol E. Henderson, *Culture and Customs of Asia Culture and Customs of India*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 1954, p.171.

<sup>53</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.5.

the members of Scheduled Tribes and Castes (women and men may join hands in the dance) and also from elite classical dancers, whose ensemble performances now include male and female dancers. The mass media provide images of classical dancing. Classically trained dancers often help to organize or act as judges for competitions of local dances at festivals.<sup>54</sup>

### **Historical Origin of Dance in India**

History tells us that several centuries before the birth of Christ, India's art forms of dance, music and theatre were already highly developed.<sup>55</sup> The result of research into the history of primitive civilisations seems to prove that dancing is the first art as it is the first stimulus that takes an outward embodiment.<sup>56</sup> Primitive man had learnt to dance long before he had taken to singing or even speaking. This is why dance is called the mother of all art forms. Life ordains that man should dance because it is in its rhythm that life finds its various forms.<sup>57</sup> There is evidence of dance that dates back to the Paleolithic Age seen through rock paintings depicting dance. In many primitive societies-related rituals dances are performed at births, marriages and deaths. Possibly some of the most important rituals are those performed for fertility such as food and children.

Dances are one of the most exciting and appealing aspects of a country's culture. Dancing, in its nature or aesthetic forms, provides beauty and interest to visitors.<sup>58</sup> Bharata's pioneering work set the precedent for a steady flow of works on dance and drama, not only in its immediate aftermath but also through the centuries that followed, until the decline of dance in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, providing the dance in India with a history documented at every stage of its development. These records show that the historiography of dance evolved through three stages, each quite distinct in its character.

Its first stage is marked by the codification of dance by Bharata, who articulated the mythic origin and history of dance, laid down the philosophical and aesthetic ideas

---

<sup>54</sup> Chopra, P.N., Puri, B.N. and Das, M.N., *Op. cit.*, pp.173-176.

<sup>55</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, pp.3-4.

<sup>56</sup> Ethel L. Urlin, *Dancing Ancient and Modern*, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, 2002, p.xii.

<sup>57</sup> Kapil Tiwari, *Op. cit.*, p.67.

<sup>58</sup> Sarkar, A.K., *Indian Tourism Management, Motivation and Mobility*, Rajat Publications, New Delhi, p.154.

behind bodily motion and developed a stylised system of movements, thus creating an art-form that was recognised in the pan-Indian, Sanskritic tradition as the standard.<sup>59</sup> In the second stage of its development, from about the 10<sup>th</sup> or the 11<sup>th</sup> Century until about the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, dance history began to record regional variations, and many of the extant texts imported from regional sources, there are substantial additions to the style authorised by Bharata and his immediate followers. It was at this time that Sarnagadeva wrote his pathbreaking text on dance and music, in the treatise, called the Sangitaratnakara. The third stage in the development of classical dance styles was marked by yet another wave of new ideas, which came from cultures outside India, with the Mughul conquest of India. Persian and Mughul influences on Indian art opened new horizons in the cultural life of India.<sup>60</sup>

Any emotion in a dance is impersonal and, whatever emotions expressed, the result is an impersonal delight. In the Vedic age, mention is made of dancing.<sup>61</sup> Dance is also associated with the ritual, connected with death and this is borne out by a reading of the funeral hymn of the Rig Veda.<sup>62</sup> Dancing created a significant and inseparable part of the religious ceremonies and a variety of rites and rituals from times dating back to the Rig Vedic Period. In the Rig Veda itself, there are many occasions for collective music and dance. The two epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana, once again tell us a society where popular forms of music and dance co-existed with the professional, sophisticated forms. Dance was a prolific art during the period of the Mahabharatha. Dance has been such an engrossing art, as revealed to us from the fact that the gods themselves danced and their creations danced from time immemorial.

References to dancers exist in the earliest known text of the Aryans, the Rig Veda. An epithet of Indra, the greatest of all Aryan gods, is that he is the leader of dancers, the one who makes or causes others to dance. He himself is a dancer who has destroyed

---

<sup>59</sup> Mandakranta Bose, *Speaking of Dance the Indian Critique*, D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>61</sup> Thuljaram Rao, J., *Cultural Heritage of India*, Impress, Coimbatore, 2004, pp.178-179.

<sup>62</sup> Kapila Vatsyayan, *Traditions of Indian Folk Dance*, Indian Book Company, New Delhi, 1976, p.22.

cities. Other gods are also dancers and there are descriptions of their dance, though very sketchy. The apsaras were also closely identified with dance and music.<sup>63</sup>

By the time of the Sama Veda, a distinction between levels of performance must have already been recognized and the concepts of Margi (classical, belonging to the path) and Desi (regional, popular) could have evolved only after the arts had acquired a degree of sophistication. In the Yajur Veda, ritual begins to play a very important part. The propitiation of spirits was executed through dances of sacrifice. They are an integral part of all rites and rituals. The many forms of ritual, even magic and trance dances known to Asia and India, and today witnessed only in the context of tribal and folk dancing, can be traced back to the rites and rituals of the Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda.<sup>64</sup>

The earliest civilizations discovered in the Indian subcontinent are those of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa in the Indus Valley and they are dated to about 6000 A.C. It would appear that by that time, dance had achieved a considerable measure of discipline and it is likely but not certain that it was connected with religion. In any case, it must have played a part of some importance in society for one of the finds at Mohenjo Daro was a beautiful little statue of a dancing girl.

The excavations at Mohenjodaro and Harappa have yielded conclusive proofs of the existence of classical dance styles, practised over 5000 years ago.<sup>65</sup> Excavations of the archeological remains of the Harappan civilization, belonging to the later part of 2300 B.C. reveal a glorious past of the historical beginnings of our country, India. In the year 1922, a larger site was discovered known as Mohenjodaro.<sup>66</sup> The most impressive is the unique copper sculpture of a young maiden, a dancing girl from Mohenjodaro. It is perhaps the only human sculpture present, depicting the existence of a performing art form such as dance.<sup>67</sup> The male torso and the dancing female bronze, with one foot in the

---

<sup>63</sup> Krishna Sahai, *Op. cit.*, pp.32-33.

<sup>64</sup> Kapila Vatsyayan, *Op. cit.*, p.22.

<sup>65</sup> Indu Shekhar, *Sanskrit Drama its Origin and Decline*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, Pvt. Ltd., 1977, p.xiv.

<sup>66</sup> Sumana, R., *Op. cit.*, p.7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

air, from the Harappa and Mohenjodaro civilizations respectively, are suggestive of a dance pose.<sup>68</sup> The bronze nude figure of a dancing girl, found among the excavated remains of Mohenjodaro, is considered to be a wonderful piece of art, which points out the ancient origin of the art of dancing. The Indus Valley people had highly developed this art. The Jatakas also mention about dancing girls, lulling Kalabu to sleep, who took dancing as a professional art.<sup>69</sup>

The Jaina tradition is known for its contribution to the arts of India, although majority of most dance texts come from the Hindu tradition. Some Buddhist communities do admit dancing, as a part of worship, as we see in the religious practices of Tibetan Buddhism today.<sup>70</sup> One of the sculptures in the Buddhist monument, at Bharhut, mentions the names of dancers at the time of the adoration of the enlightenment of Siddhartha, with a turban. The dance traditions of Andhra are evident in the Buddhist temples of Nagarjunakonda, Amaravati, Ghantasala and the ruins of the temples of the Satavahana period. A variety of musical instruments and dance friezes can be seen on the walls of the Nagarjunakonda caves. The GaathaSapthashati, authored by Hala of the Satavahana period, refers to dancers and actors of this period.

The rule of the Eastern Chalukyas promoted all forms of dance, to propagate their religion. The Kakatiyas, who ruled from Warangal, were Shaivaites and hence the dancers danced the stories of Lord Siva profusely during this period. Veera Narasimha, the Third an illustrious leader of this dynasty, was a great lover of art and a patron of dance. The compositions of this period were based on the Radha Krishna theme. The works of Srinatha Mahakavi, in his Palanati Veera Charita, provides ample evidence about the patronage of the Reddy Kings to dance, which was more a court art and took new dimensions during his period. On the walls of Lankeshvara cave there is a particularly graceful image of dancing Siva, which stands testimony to the fact that dance was a very well known and prevalent activity during Chalukyan dynasty rule.

---

<sup>68</sup> Rupinder Khullar, *Op. cit.*, p.211.

<sup>69</sup> Raj Kumar Pruthi and Rameshwari Devi, *Op. cit.*, p.40.

<sup>70</sup> Mandakranta Bose, *Op. cit.*, p. 6.



The rule of the Chola dynasty in South India, has rightly been called the ‘Golden Age’, because all the arts flourished.<sup>71</sup> The Anti Nautch Movement, imposed by the British throughout the country, led to the downfall and deterioration of both the art of Indian dancing and the lives of the dancers themselves. The art of dance has also established itself in extensive representation in iconography, which has given us such celebrated pieces as the Nataraja bronze.

Rajaraja Chola maintained well trained and adept dancers in the temple, who were known as Devadasis, numbering four hundred, in order to perform the ritual dances. The great builder, Rajaraja Chola, the illustrious ruler of the Cholas, commissioned a detailed inscription on the walls of Tanjore Brihadishvara Temple. The inscription records dance and music which was performed all evening when the community came together for the worship of the deity amidst the chanting of hymns.

Ladkhan and Durga Temples showed an improvement in the sculptural decoration with the second and third phases at Mahakoota and Pattadakal and from the sculptural decorations, the history of dancing can be reconstructed. Rastrakutas who ruled from 700 A.D. to 1000 A.D contributed to the wonderful dance sculptures. Various successive south Indian dynasties, from the Pallavas and Cholas (6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries) to the Andhra kings of Andhra and Tamilnadu, and the Maratha rulers of Tanjore, contributed some measure of patronage to the classical dance art.<sup>72</sup>

The court document of 1505 A.D. mentions the practice of the Kuchipudi dance, by the migrating the artists from Siddhavatam to Vijayanagaram. Shri Krishna Deva Raya, an illustrious king of the Vijayanagara Empire, was a great patron of music and dance. It is interesting to note that dance was an integral part of the celebrations of a festival, by the whole community or the kingdom. Even to this day, there are sculpted friezes of panels of dancers in the folk style, identified in Kolkata today, on one of the biggest royal stone platforms of Mahanavami Dibba.

The highest caste, Brahmins, had begun to take up the art of dance in the south. Even after our independence, majority of the people in India were prejudiced against

---

<sup>71</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>72</sup> Usha Mehta, *Op. cit.*, p. 210.

dance.<sup>73</sup> In 302 B.C, Megasthenes came to India and noted that Indians were, of all people, great lovers of music and dance. They had practised dance from the days when “Bacchus and his companions led their bacchanalia in the land of India.”<sup>74</sup> Portuguese, French and British had revived the distinct dance forms and developed them into the sophisticated art forms, the way we see them today, thus existing as mere entertainment forms rather than ritualistic ones.

At the beginning of the British Era, the dances of India, like many other aspects of Indian culture such as art and architecture, were also in a state of decline. The dancers, who performed a religious duty in the temples and served an aesthetic purpose in society, came to be looked down upon as unwanted.<sup>75</sup> The British, who ruled us, were suspicious of our traditions and beliefs. They decided to ban all actions centred on the temple. By abolishing the Devadasi system, their position in the village society was also dissolved. In South India, the dancer moved from the temples to the homes of the rich land lords. Landowners and royalty were the only people who could afford to have the dancer come and perform for a marriage in the family or for the birth of the son.<sup>76</sup>

The post independence India witnessed many reforms by the pioneers of the regional dance forms and institutions like the Kalakshetra, Santhinikethan and the like. People from respectable middle-class families took to the art of dancing and contributed to its reputable place in society and its recovery in all its grandeur and magnificence. The Islamic culture had a serious influence on dance. Slowly the church gained influence and dance was quickly banned. Dance was seen as pagan activity. Sensuality was associated with dance and any form of worship, that approved dance, was opposed by the Christians of the medieval era.

The antiquity of dance in India could be substantiated by the innumerable sculptured figures, on early stupa or temple walls in Sanchi, Mathura, Amaravati and Nagarjunkonda. There was a shared dance tradition over the length and breadth of the

---

<sup>73</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, p.5.

<sup>74</sup> Krishna Sahai, *Op. cit.*, p.32.

<sup>75</sup> Chopra, P.N., Puri, B.N. and Das, M.N., *Op. cit.*, pp.368-369.

<sup>76</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, pp.3-4.

country till about the 8<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. It is from the 10<sup>th</sup> Century onwards that the Sanskrit culture was superimposed by strong regional cultures, with language playing a dominant role. This becomes evident when the dance figures sculpted in the Rajarani or Parasurameswara temples in Bhubaneswar, are compared with those in the Tanjavur Brihadeeswara temple or in the numerous temples at places like Kumbhakonam. The body technique is clearly different in Odissi and Bharatanatyam. From the 13<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, the dance manuals proliferated in all the regions and also the Bhakti Movement, spreading to all parts of the country, injected a strong Vaishnavite thematic element to the dances. Jayadeva's Gita Govindam, in particular, influenced almost all the dance form.<sup>77</sup>

In the first half of the Nineteenth Century, the dance practice was revitalised and refined by four gifted brothers- Chinniah, Sivanandam, Ponniah and Vadivelu. Indian dance too uses the proportions of the body, the measurement of the major and minor limbs in movement, to create the emotional states.<sup>78</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> Century middle-class developed a standard of morality which was highly puritanical and dancing was considered sensuous. The disappearance of the medieval devotion dealt a death blow to devotional dances as performed in the great centers of religion. There was no understanding of the spirit which the dances represented and no recognition of their artistic value.<sup>79</sup> Scholars have succeeded in tracing two lines of dance history in India. One of these begins in Kashmir, going down south to Malwa, Saurashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The other one starts from the successive South Indian royal dynasties like Pallavas and Cholas of the 6<sup>th</sup> Centuries, going up north to Andhra Pradesh, to be taken up by Maratha rulers well into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>80</sup>

The Twentieth Century dance was entertainment, performed by some of the greatest artists known to man. Today dance is as an important to us as ever, whether we are watching a spectacular performance in a theatre, celebrating special events in our

---

<sup>77</sup> Rupinder Khullar, *Op. cit.*, p.211.

<sup>78</sup> Krishna Sahai, *Op. cit.*, p.26.

<sup>79</sup> Chopra, P.N., Puri, B.N. and Das, M.N., *Op. cit.*, p.368-369.

<sup>80</sup> George, T.J.S., *Op. cit.*, p.384.

community or simply exercising at a dance class.<sup>81</sup> The pluralist aspect, reflected in the art forms, is rooted in the rituals of the indigenous people. Dance forms, accumulated from these ancient customs and traditions, were closely linked to the everyday life of the natives and the manner in which they lived off the land.<sup>82</sup>

## Indian Classical Dances

### Bharatanatyam



Bharathanatyam is a classical dance form of South India and it said to have originated in Tanjavur of Tamil Nadu. It was known as “Dasiyattam” since it was performed by Devadasis in temples of Tamil Nadu long ago.<sup>83</sup> Bharatanatyam is a fusion of the Sanskrit traditions and Tamil practices in Tamil Nadu.<sup>84</sup> Mudras, Abhinaya and Padams form the basis for the performance. Bharatanatyam is a sign of beauty and aesthetic perfection. Bharatanatyam requires whole dedication, vigorous practice and full concentration. It requires a mastery over the method of movements to achieve grace, balance, suppleness, physical endurance and a faultless sense of rhythm. The temple jewellery is used for the dance.<sup>85</sup>

Bharathanatyam literally is Bha+ Ra+ Ta+ Natyam, ie. Bhava+ Rasa+ Taal+ Natyam, meaning that it is a dance form combining Bhava, Nritta and Natya set to

---

<sup>81</sup> Andree Grau, *Dance*, Dorling Kindersley Book, Britain, 1998, p.i.

<sup>82</sup> Shanavas, P.N., *Kerala 2006*, Stark World Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2006, p.316.

<sup>83</sup> Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, *Introduction to Kerala Studies*, Vol. II, International Institute for Scientific and Academic Collaboration, New Jersey, USA, 2012, p.1304.

<sup>84</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.32.

<sup>85</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.20.

a Taal, to give rasa or Ananda. Its origins are traced to Lord Shiva's Nataraja form or posture, as is evident in the famous Chidambaram Temple. The key posture of this dance form is ayatam or aramandi or the half sitting position. The hand gestures and mudras, with intricate footwork, form an important part of the dance. This dance form is accompanied by the south Indian music known as the Carnatic music. Mridangam, Veena, Flute, Violin and Nattuvangam, ie. Cymbals provide musical support to the dancer's performance. The costume of a Bharathanatyam dancer is made of silk, and draped in such a way that it opens out into a fan, complementing the aramandi posture. The items of Bharathanatyam margam or repertoire consist of alaripu, jatiswaram, padam, tillana and javeli.<sup>86</sup> The performer wears a lot of ornaments of shining stones on neck, ears, hands and head, jasmine garland in the hair and anklets with small bells.<sup>87</sup>

Bharathanatyam closely follows the Natya Sastra. All the four elements of the classical dance, namely, angika, (gestures), vachika (words), sattvika (feeling) and ahanya (costumes) are effectively used in the dance. Bharatanatyam has been felt to be a dance of women only since Lasya is the main aspect of the dance. Dance first appeared in temples.<sup>88</sup> Nritta, Nritya and Natya are the three components of the Bharathanatyam.<sup>89</sup>

A lot of ancient sculptures in Hindu temples are based on Bharatanatyam dance postures. Bharatanatyam is a traditional dance form, known for its grace, purity, tenderness and sculptural poses. It continues to be a common and widely performed dance style at present times and it is practised by male and female performers all over India. Bharatanatyam is a combination of many various attributes, that complete the dance form.<sup>90</sup> The Bharatanatyam of South India is a more full-fledged form than both Manipuri and Kathak, because it combines both abstract and interpretative elements.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, pp.10-12.

<sup>87</sup> Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, *Op. cit.*, p.1304.

<sup>88</sup> Thuljaram Rao, J., *Op. cit.*, p.183.

<sup>89</sup> Binani, G.D. and Rama Rao T.V, *India at a Glance*, Orient Longmans Ltd., 1953, p.764.

<sup>90</sup> Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghavendra Reddy, V., *Encyclopedia of South India Kerala and Lakshadweep*, Vol. III, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2009, pp.249-250.

<sup>91</sup> Ashok Singh, *Cultural Tourism in India*, Raj Book Enterprises, Jaipur, 2002, pp.175-176.

Its history of Bharathanatyam has been written in the Natyasastra by the great sage, Bharata. It is a highly traditional and stylised dance form, which has been immortalised in successive generations by the great graceful dancers and by the renowned sculptors, who have demonstrated the perfection of Bharata's method on the exotic temples of Tamil Nadu. In ancient times, it was performed as Dasiyattam by the Devadasis of Hindu temple. It is also known as Sadir or Chinna Melam.<sup>92</sup> Bharatanatyam also had dance-drama traditions and these coexisted with the Devadasi solo tradition.<sup>93</sup> Lord Shiva was the main deity to whom the Devadasi dedicated herself. Lord Vishnu, Krishna and Karthikeya were the other deities for whom this dance was performed. Even today, Bharathanatyam items focus on tales connected with these deities.<sup>94</sup> This form of dance has been approved by 'Nattuvanars' and ritualistic dancers called Devadasis in the temples of south India.<sup>95</sup> The dance has been preserved through a rote tradition and it is taught by Nattuvanars or masters.<sup>96</sup>

The history of Bharathanatyam, considered from a broad angle, can be traced to the Vedic times or even earlier to the heydays of Dravidian culture, prior to the advent of the Aryans, as evidenced by the figurine of the dancing girl of Mohenjodaro. The Natya Shastra's Bharatha may be a happy blending of the Dravidian culture of Mohenjodaro of pre-Aryan period and the Aryan culture of the Vedic age. It is indeed a miracle that this dance form, admittedly the most subtle, graceful and sophisticated of all dance forms of the present day world, has survived almost intact in all its variegated splendour for 3000 years or more. It is the proudest possession of our cultural heritage and we owe it to ourselves to cherish, nurture and cultivate this unique old art form and ensure that it is understood and appreciated and comes in the possession of larger circles of people in the country and also all the world over.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghavendra Reddy, V/. *Op. cit.*, pp.249-250.

<sup>93</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, p.9.

<sup>94</sup> Shobana Gupta, *Op. cit.*, pp.10-12.

<sup>95</sup> Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghavendra Reddy, V., *Op. cit.*, pp.249-250.

<sup>96</sup> Thuljaram Rao, J., *Op. cit.*, p.183.

<sup>97</sup> Kanaka Sudhakar, *Indian Classical Dancing- The Therapeutic Advantages*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1994, p.4.

Historically, it had been the most common national and classical dance art of India, whose principles and technique had been systematized and codified about 1800 years ago in Bharata's Natyasastra and this ancient treatise has been followed by most writers in later centuries. Copious references to similar principles and technique are to be found in the great Tamil classic, Silappadikaram of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D also. The basic principles and technique of the art have remained the same to the present day. In short, it seems to be an art for eternity.<sup>98</sup> It is directly derived from the devotional dances performed in the temples of South India from the 10<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>99</sup>

The roots of Bharathanatyam are found in the ancient Tamil works like Silappathikaram and Manimekhalai of the Sangam Period (A D 100-1300). During the reign of Chola and Pallava kings, arts were encouraged. Rajaraja Chola maintained the dances in the temples and he was a connoisseur of dance and music. In the temples at Tanjore, Kumbhakonam, Chidambaram, Cholapuram, Madurai, Kanchipuram, Punamalai etc, there are ample evidences of the medieval dance culture. Poets and composers provided many devotional poems and songs, suited for the performance of dance. Dasis, attached to temples, were assigned the job of dancing in front of the deity or in the mandapam, specially made for such performances in the temple premises. Suchindram Temple was under the Travancore rulers till 1947 and the Regent ruler, Sethu Lakshmi Bai, stopped the dasi system in the year 1930, the corruption and decadence creeping into the social life at large.

The Maratha kings of Tanjore patronised to the existing Devadasi Nritta and named it 'Sadir'. Raja Sarfoji of Maratha was a great patron of fine arts. The famous Tanjore Quartette, Vadivelu, Chinnayya, Ponnayya and Sivanandam were members of the royal court. They were experts in dance and music. They gave great impetus to art and provided modifications, embellishments, systematization etc. to the repertoire of the dance style. Devadasis and their Dasiyattam, gave rise to the dance drama variety, called 'Kuravanji' and it also played a major role in the systematization of Bharathanatyam. The Kuravanchi tradition has a history of three hundred years. Raja Sarfoji II of Tanjore

---

<sup>98</sup> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, *The Dance in India*, Taraporevala's Tressure House of Books, Bombay, 1963, p.xi.

<sup>99</sup> Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghavendra Reddy, V., *Op. cit.*, pp.249-250.

himself composed a Marathi Kuravanchi play, entitled Devendra Kuravanchi. Dasiyattam gave rise to the Bharathanatyam. The late E. Krishna Iyer, Rugmini Devi Arundale and Veteran dancers of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Tamil Nadu gave much impetus to stabilise the format of Bharathanatyam.<sup>100</sup>

All the forms of dance, including the institution of Devadasis, continued to flourish in the south, as they remained outside the pale of Islam for a long time. It was only after the fall of the Vijayanagar Empire in the middle of the Sixteenth Century that the continuity of this tradition was disrupted as the Muslim rulers were not interested in the spiritual and devotional aspects of dance. However, a modified form of Bharata Natyam, which adopted some Islamic features such as ‘salamu’ and ‘tillana’, continued to exist in the courts of the Deccan Sultans. But, without its moorings and roots, it languished and almost died down with the conquest of the Deccan by the Mughals. However, some aspects of Bharata Natyam, such as the Kuchipudi dance-drama, dealing with life of Lord Krishna, were preserved in a few Brahmin families of Kuchipudi.<sup>101</sup>

The Devadasis dominated the Sadir. But with society losing its values, the dance form fell from its commendable position, during the period 1910-1930.<sup>102</sup> The period between 1910 to 1930 ushered in a dark period for this art, which was revived from 1926 onwards. The dance continued to be part of the Bhagavatha Mela, for numerous years that followed.<sup>103</sup> E. Krishna Iyer helped the dance and it came to be recognized as Bharatanatyam. It is a complete dance because all fundamentals of this art form are strictly followed as per the Natya Sastra from beginning to end. E. Krishna Iyer of Madras contributed to the development of Bharatanatyam. This was in the 1930’s. This is due to the developing nature of Indian dance.<sup>104</sup>

The modern form of Bharatanatyam evolved during the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. During the period of the Maratha ruler, Sarabhoji in Tanjore of the

---

<sup>100</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, pp.20-21.

<sup>101</sup> Chopra, P.N., Puri, B.N. and Das, M.N., *Op. cit.*, p.234.

<sup>102</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.16.

<sup>103</sup> Sumana, R., *Op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>104</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.15.



19<sup>th</sup> Century, four brothers codified the dance into a methodical system. They were known as the Tanjore Quartet and they were responsible for the format that modern day Bharatanatyam follows to this day.<sup>105</sup> Modern Bharatanatyam is not often practised as Natya Yoga, a sacred meditational tradition, except by a small number of orthodox schools. Bharatanatyam is the manifestation of the very old thought of the celebration of the eternal universe, through the celebration of the beauty of the material body.<sup>106</sup> The Bharatanatyam repertoire, as we know it today, was constructed by this talented Tanjore Quartet.<sup>107</sup> The Bharatanatyam repertoire grew through many decades and now it has its own typical style in all aspects though there are some sampradaya bhedas (schools), as Vazhavor style, Pandallur style, Kalakshethram style etc.

Today Bharathanatyam is not only pan-Indian but also reaches out to the burgeoning Indian Diaspora. It is well documented that this dance was born in temples as an offering to the gods, and over two Centuries, this dance style had evolved from a highly codified method to one affording maximum freedom to create innovative works. The earliest specific reference to the dance form is found in the literature of the Sangam Age. It is much more than a mere classical dance form. In style and substance, it reigns supreme for the precision and perfection of movements it extracts from the dancer's body, the hands, eyes, face, neck, torso, legs and feet. Its chiselled awareness of the human form allows Bharatanatyam to fully explore the body's immense power of expression. The dance enhances the emotive power of the literary compositions of saints and sages.<sup>108</sup>

Kapila Vatsyayan once remarked, "The process of constantly vitalizing the tradition by either reviving olden forms or by introducing new forms, has kept Bharatanatyam vital and healthy. Changes in repertoire are unavoidable and should be welcome". Bharathanatyam is the most popular dance form of Tamil Nadu and now it has widened the horizon not only beyond Tamil Nadu but even India".<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.16.

<sup>106</sup> Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghavendra Reddy, V., *Op. cit.*, p.253.

<sup>107</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, pp.5-6.

<sup>108</sup> Prema Kasturi and Sundaram, G., *Op. cit.*, pp.450-451.

<sup>109</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.24.

## Kathakali



Kathakali is one of the most magnificent and opulent classical dance forms, in the state of Kerala. It is the panoramic dance-drama of Kerala.<sup>110</sup> Kathakali is basically a dance drama, and the elements of natya take precedence over the nritta. This dance style is heroic, majestic and epic in character. Kathakali is performed in front of an audience only.<sup>111</sup> Kathakali literally means ‘story play’. It is believed to be around three hundred years old although its older forms such as Koodiyattam, Chakyar Koothu, and Nangiyar Koothu existed earlier. This dance form is based more on drama than on dance. This art form has evolved out of the martial art form of Kerala and hence it yet carries that tradition.<sup>112</sup>

Kathakali is a historic art. It is Dravidian in character and very vigorous and generally performed by males. It is a source of great entertainment to the village folk and lasts almost the whole night. It has a gestural language. It is a pantomime in which the actors do not speak or sing but interpret their ideas and emotions through a highly sensitive medium of appropriate gestures, picturesque hand poses and vivid facial expressions, perfectly intelligible even to the uninitiated.<sup>113</sup> Kathakali is the culmination of a process of evolution of various dramatic presentations of classical themes, through the media of dance and music. Kathakali is a beautiful combination of drama (Natya)

---

<sup>110</sup> Thuljaram Rao, J., *Op. cit.*, p.183.

<sup>111</sup> Shobana Gupta, *Op. cit.*, pp.21-23.

<sup>112</sup> Divyasena, S., *Op. cit.*, p.71.

<sup>113</sup> Binani, G.D. and Rama Rao, T.V., *Op. cit.*, p.764.

and Nritta.<sup>114</sup> Kathakali is considered to be a combination of five forms of fine arts: Literature, Music, Painting or makeup, Acting and Dance.<sup>115</sup> It is said that Kathakali music is of the Sopana style of singing the Gitagovinda of Jayadeva, in the temples of Kerala, during the morning rituals.<sup>116</sup>

Structurally, it is based on Natya Sastra with added embellishments derived from Hasthalakshana Deepika and Abhinaya Darpana. It presents in a unique manner, both the tandava and lasya style of dancing. Abhinaya may be said to be the backbone of Kathakali and its four varieties of Angikabhinaya, Vachikabhinaya, Aharyabhinaya and Satvikabhinaya are utilised in a remarkable manner, to bring out various emotions through the media of gesture or mudras. In fact, these mudras, from “the alphabets” so to speak of “the language of gestures”, are employed in a telling manner in Kathakali.<sup>117</sup> The characters in the dance are presented on the stage by dancers with intricately painted faces. The masks play a central role in the Kathakali performance.<sup>118</sup>

Kathakali is impressive in its costume and make-up. There are trained artists who focus on the art of make-up. Different characters of the play are painted, in different colours or styles, to represent the satwic, rajasic and tamasic roles. With make-up, the dancer-actors on the stage create an absolutely new atmosphere, different from the life on this earth, which the Kathakali intends to create for the better understanding of the subject matter of the themes. The gorgeous costumes like the uncommon make-up lend the performance dramatic value. The head-dress in Kathakali is again of a beautiful and creatively decorative style. Ornaments also are lavishly used.

The face make up alone is known to take about four hours to put on. The colours of the face, the eyes and the costumes are character specific. A regular spectator can easily identify the character based on the costume.<sup>119</sup> There are five main categories of characters, with well defined and precise modes of makeup and costumes. The Pacha or

---

<sup>114</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, pp.24-25.

<sup>115</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.43.

<sup>116</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.66.

<sup>117</sup> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p. xiii.

<sup>118</sup> Shobana Gupta, *Op. cit.*, pp.21-23.

<sup>119</sup> Divyasena, S., *Op. cit.*, p.71.

green signifies noble being, Kati or knife signifies demon, Kari or black signifies divinities, Minukku signifies female character and Thaadi or beard. The dancers have to don a thick costume, befitting their character. Kathakali performance opens with a thundering of drums inviting the audience. The dancer dances through the night creating the whole gamut of characters of gods, demons and animals. The themes are based on mythology and the epics of the Mahabharatha and the Ramayana. Basically, the dance is more theatrical in its stance than lyrical.<sup>120</sup> Kathakali makeup is a complicated process, lasting for three hours. It helps in giving a wonderful human look to the actors. The makeup is directly applied to the face and it does not obstruct the full expression of face and eyes.<sup>121</sup>

Hence normally women do not play a part in the dance, though nowadays female Kathakali dancers are known. Kathakali, like Bharatanatyam, follows the Natya Sastra. Here several characters appear at the same time. Thus Bharatanatyam may be said to be the Lasya dance while Kathakali is Tandava.<sup>122</sup> The Kathakali method of using the face expression is a pure marvel of accomplishment. Kathakali must be master of both tandava.<sup>123</sup> Kathakali uses two main drums- the Chenda and the Maddalam. The female character appears on stage when the larger and louder chenda is replaced by the smaller and sweeter edakka. A small curtain, called a therashila, is the only prop necessary in Kathakali. This curtain is used to bring a fresh character into the 'playing field'.

The origin of Kathakali is traced to the Vedic Age.<sup>124</sup> In ancient days, Kathakali performance mainly took place on temple premises or at the house of a local land lord.<sup>125</sup> Kathakali is rooted in remote antiquity and it has been developed through an admixture of Dravidian and Aryan dance concepts. The Nayars of Kerala, racially a mixture of Dravidian and Aryan, formed a warrior caste and from ancient times, practised martial dances in order to perpetuate in society the memory of their racial qualities. In course of

---

<sup>120</sup> Shobana Gupta, *Op. cit.*, pp.21-23.

<sup>121</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.47.

<sup>122</sup> Thuljaram Rao, J., *Op. cit.*, p.183.

<sup>123</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.6.

<sup>124</sup> Thuljaram Rao, J., *Op. cit.*, p.183.

<sup>125</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.44.

time, they merged their war dances with Kathakali and adopted the latter as their own. In the evolution of the Kathakali dance, the Nayars had a good deal to do. They developed its modes and techniques and made it a vigorous form of dance, at once masculine and skilful. The epics and the mythology supplied the themes for the dance in great abundance. Malayalam, with numerous Sanskrit words, became the language of the Kathakali songs.

When Manavadeva, propounder of Krishnanattam, refused to send his Krishnanattam troupe to the neighbouring kingdom ruled by Thampuran, the latter was enraged and he caused the staging of Ramanattam, a cycle of eight plays on the life of Rama. Unlike Krishnanattam that was performed to Sanskrit lyrics, Ramanattam was performed to Malayalam verses as well as to the accompaniment of great drumming on the Chenda, which till today is significant in a Kathakali performance. In course of time, the King of Kottayam a friend of Thampuran, wrote four story plays (Attakathas) for dance enactment, based on episodes from the Mahabharatha and Ramayana. It served to enlarge the boundaries of Ramanattam, which necessitated a change of name. The new name that came to stay was 'Kathakali'.

A similar movement in Calicut led to the preservation of a form of Kathakali in Kerala. The credit for this goes to the Zamorin of Calicut, who wrote Krishnapadi, a drama based on the life of Sri Krishna, who was said to have honoured the Zamorin by appearing before him. He commemorated the event by ordering the performance of his play, which lasted for eight nights. The fame of the Zamorin's Krishnanattam aroused the jealousy of the ruler of Kottarakkara, who wrote a play on Sri Rama and had it staged with the help of well-known actors. Thus the tradition of Kathakali continued throughout the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.<sup>126</sup>

Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Maharaja Karthika Tirunal of Travancore himself wrote a number of plays for Kathakali. Later on, another member of the same house, Maharaja Swathi Rama Varma, composed as many as seventy five padas for the Kathakali dance. Among others, poet Irayimman Thampi wrote a few plays for the dance and so did his daughter Thankachi also. In the heyday of the British influence in Kerala,

---

<sup>126</sup> Chopra, P.N., Puri, B.N. and Das, M.N., *Op. cit.*, p.234.

there was an attitude of apathy towards the classical forms of dance and music on the part of the Western educated intelligentsia. There was a time when Kathakali passed through a crisis, arising out of negligence, lack of patronage and general public indifference.

From the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, this decline was distinctly marked. When the decline was almost complete, it was the famous Malayalam poet, Vallathol Narayana Menon, who struggled on to revive the art at all costs. With much complexity, he procured money and in 1930, established an institute named Kerala Kala Mandalam. There he collected the experienced Gurus of the Kathakali art, who were living in adject negligence and oblivion, and gave them the opportunity to train up young disciples. Among the noteworthy gurus he got, there were famous exponents of the style such as Ravunni Menon, Kavalapara Narayana Menon and Kunju Kurup.

Kathakali owes its importance and revival to Mahakavi Vallathol, a renowned poet of Malabar (Kerala). The most well known Kathakali dancer is Gopinath.<sup>127</sup> The great poet Vallathol Narayana Menon re-discovered Kathakali, establishing the Kerala Kalamandalam in 1932, which lent a new dimension to the art form.<sup>128</sup> It came to receive wide recognition elsewhere in India and interested pupils, from many parts of the country, came to learn it at the institute with much interest. Ultimately, the Kerala Kala Mandalam was taken over by the Government in order to give attention to Kathakali. There are many notable dancers who have made Kathakali famous in recent times.

## **Kathak**



---

<sup>127</sup> Thuljaram Rao, J., *Op. cit.*, p.183.

<sup>128</sup> Divyasena, S., *Op. cit.*, p.71.

Kathak is a classical dance style, reinvented as a result of Mughal influence on Indian culture.<sup>129</sup> Kathak, for instance, became a very well-liked form of entertainment.<sup>130</sup> The word Kathak is derived from katha, a story.<sup>131</sup> It is a splendid blend of Hindu and Muslim culture. The costumes are very gorgeous and they were called Anrakha.<sup>132</sup> Kathak has a tinge of the sensual. It is the one Indian dance, which has entertainment as its only objective.<sup>133</sup> This dance form traces its origins to the wandering bards of former times in northern India, known as Kathaks or story tellers.<sup>134</sup>

A mixture of Tandava and Lasya characterises Kathak. Foot gymnastics is the main aspect of the dance, whose reverberations are produced to the jingling of bells in the anklets. Critics feel that there is absence of emotional expression in the dance, with over emphasis on the footwork.<sup>135</sup> It is a narrative dance form, characterised by fast footwork (Tatkar), spins (chakkar) and innovative use of bhav in abhinaya.<sup>136</sup>

Kathak dancing is performed by a dancer, who stands and moves about in the spirit of lasya. The dancer kneels or remains immobile the whole time, except for the (gat) a descriptive passage performed in a gentle rhythm and tells stories with his important powers, only with his face and hands. It is astonishing what charm such a dancer can weave.<sup>137</sup> This North Indian dance form, inextricably bound with classical Hindusthani music and the rhythmic nimbleness of the feet, is accompanied by the Tabla or pakhawaj. Traditionally, the stories were of Radha and Krishna in the Natwari style but the Mughal invasion of North India had a serious impact on the dance. This dance

---

<sup>129</sup> *India 2002*, Research, Reference & Training Division, Publication Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting Govt of India, New Delhi, 2002, p.109.

<sup>130</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, p.5.

<sup>131</sup> Divyasena, S., *Op. cit.*, p.72.

<sup>132</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.38.

<sup>133</sup> Binani, G.D. and Rama Rao, T.V., *Op. cit.*, p.764.

<sup>134</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.27.

<sup>135</sup> Thuljaram Rao, J., *Op. cit.*, p.183.

<sup>136</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.27.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

form was taken to Muslim courts and thus it became more entertaining and less religious in content. More stress was laid on Nritya, the pure dance aspect, and less on Abhinaya.<sup>138</sup>

Kathak was perhaps the only major classical dance, which received an impetus in medieval India. It was in fact a folk art, which was performed by Kathaks, a community of dancers and musicians, who wandered around the countryside, reciting episodes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, using music and dance.<sup>139</sup> Its roots are traced to the temples since stories had their sources in the epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, besides the Bhagavata Purana. Lord Krishna was the patron deity of narrators and the dance was initially named “Natawari nritya”, which later came to be identified as “Kathak”. Natwar was originally the art of the story-tellers and the story teller was referred to as a “Kathaka” or a “Katha Vachaka”.<sup>140</sup>

The classical dance in India is an art, that originated more than 2000 years ago and it has come down through the ages in various forms and styles. This ancient art, which fulfills all the rules of a codified technique, with a powerful dramatic content as detailed in the Sanskrit treatise, the Natya Sastra by Bharata Muni, has survived because of its enduring philosophic basis.<sup>141</sup> In its earlier stages, the dance was devoid of any technical or classical aspects and it was confined mostly to north India- Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh. However, the Vaishnava mystic revival transformed it into a major classical art, in conformity with the well established techniques propounded in the Natya Shastra.<sup>142</sup> Kathak passed down from guru to shishya and it has developed different styles, called gharana, during the pre-independence period. Lucknow gharana, Jaipur gharana and Banaras gharana are some well known Gharanas.<sup>143</sup>

The Kathak dance derives its name from the community of Kathaks, who were custodians of the art. This dance style was founded by the master, Maharaj Binda Din.<sup>144</sup> Great

---

<sup>138</sup> Divyasena, S., *Op. cit.*, p.72.

<sup>139</sup> Chopra, P.N., Puri, B.N. and Das, M.N., *Op. cit.*, pp.234-235.

<sup>140</sup> Sumana, R., *Op. cit.*, pp.53-54.

<sup>141</sup> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p.xii.

<sup>142</sup> Chopra, P.N., Puri, B.N. and Das, M.N., *Op. cit.*, pp.234-235.

<sup>143</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.33.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.



devotees of the art, deeply versed in the scriptures and inspired by the Bhakti cult of giving expression to their love of God through song and dance, like the great masters Bindadin Maharaj and his brother, Kalka Prasad Maharaj, were responsible for the preservation of this ancient art and for giving to it much of its lyrical character and brilliant technique.<sup>145</sup>

In the Mughal darbar, the dancer bows to the audience with a polite wave of the hands and starts the Kathak recital. The rhythmic vibrations of the flat foot, the pinpoint rotations, the scintillating bol and very graceful gestures, make Kathak one of the most difficult but enjoyable art forms of India. There is great scope in Kathak for subtle expressions. There are many Gharanas of this fine art and there is no dearth of Gurus who teach this. Birju Maharaj, the great exponent of the art form, Uma Sharma and others, have greatly developed this art.<sup>146</sup>

‘Katha kahey so Kathak kahaye’, which means that Kathak is what one tells a story in a dance form. Around the 16<sup>th</sup> Century AD, when the royal courts of the Hindu Maharajas and the Muslim Nawabs patronised the art, it acquired secular elements and sophistication, especially in the pure dance or nritta aspect. The dance form was enriched in the Mughal era by the subtlety of movement’s complicated rhythm and breathtaking pirouettes. It is only the classical dance form in India, which has a synthesis of Hindu Muslim cultures. Originally, from three North Indian Gharanas of Lucknow, Jaipur and Banaras, a uniform vision of Kathak had emerged. Kathak has managed to stay alive retaining its identity and character. The traditions of Kathak were hereditary and dances passed from generation to generation. By the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, an exact style had emerged and soon technical features like mnemonic syllables and bol developed. In the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Century, at the time the Bhakti Movement, Rasalilas had a tremendous influence on Kathak.<sup>147</sup>

The type of dance even influenced the Kathavachakas, who performed in temples. It was when the dance reached the Mughal Court after the 15<sup>th</sup> Century that Kathak began to obtain its distinctive shape and features. The environment of the North Indian Mughal courts caused a shift from a purely religious art form to entertainment. It remained a solo

---

<sup>145</sup> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p.xii.

<sup>146</sup> Kanaka Sudhakar, *Op. cit.*, p.121.

<sup>147</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.28.

art form, based on personal interpretations and emotional values. It was also during this period that the signature ‘chakars’ of Kathak were introduced, possibly influenced by the so-called whirling dervishes. During the Bhakti era, fervent worship of Radha-Krishna Kathak was used to narrate tales from the lives of these figures. After the Moghuls courts, Kathak evolved as a sophisticated art form, in the Jaipur gharana. The Banaras gharana was also formed at this time. With the arrival of British rule in India, Kathak went into sharp decline. The Victorian administrators publicly pronounced it as a base and unlovely form of entertainment, despite often confidentially enjoying the pleasures of the Tawaif.<sup>148</sup>

The Bhakti cult influenced this dance form. The themes even to this day are religious and the ritualistic feature of the dance is seen in the presentation of the Rangamanch, the gaths and the Vandana, which are the exclusive features of the dance form. The dance form is purely Vaishnavite in its rendering of themes and Ramacharitha Manasa, the Geetha Govinda and the Bhagavatha Purana provided constant inspiration to the presentation of the Ramalila and the Krishnalila respectively.<sup>149</sup> The multiplicity of movements, the sophisticated poses and the very intricate elaboration of rhythms, make the Kathak a dazzling art-form, with the accent perhaps more on a formal, intellectual delight. Later Kathak was influenced by the patronage of the very refined Muslim court of Oudh and Lucknow, resulting in the intellectualism being tempered by a delicate sensuousness.<sup>150</sup>

It has today a form, that has been influenced at various times in the past, by mythological narratives by Kathaks, temple dances, the Bhakti movement and Persian influence of the Mughal courts in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. With the advent of the Mughal culture, Kathak became a sophisticated chamber art. The method of Kathak is characterised by fast rhythmic footwork, set to complex time cycles.<sup>151</sup> Today Kathak has regained its fame, after a period of decline, during the rule of the British Empire. Currently, this classical dance is characterised by a combination of the temple and court forms, inclusive

---

<sup>148</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, pp.30- 31.

<sup>149</sup> Sumana, R., *Op. cit.*, pp.53-54.

<sup>150</sup> Krishna Chaitanya, *Op. cit.*, p.113.

<sup>151</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.27.

of both the devotion and romantic form, that has shaped it through the years. Expressive motion, rhythmic accuracy, graceful turning, poised stances, technical clarity, hand gestures and delicate look are significant components of contemporary Kathak<sup>152</sup>. Kalaka and Binda of Lucknow improved Kathak and their descendants Acchanan Maharaj and Shambu Maharaj are regarded as the greatest exponents of the art.

### **Kuchipudi**



Kuchipudi traditions were originally drama forms. The solo form was formed in the sixties, out of the original drama forms.<sup>153</sup> Kuchipudi is mainly a dance-drama but the Nritya and Nritya aspects of it have special characteristics and the Caturvidhabhinaya has a remarkable classical touch.<sup>154</sup> Its quick movements and rhythmic footwork, match the song, note for note. The special Kuchipudi beat, that so attracts the audience, has now grown to be one of the important classical dance forms. Though it is a very difficult art form to learn Kuchipudi is abundant in the Sringara rasa. Its extremely fast steps give the body a thorough workout and one can see sculptural poses in quick flashes, throughout the items. At the same time, very fluid graceful movements of the body and hands accompany the brisk foot work. In short it is grace, speed, agility and beauty all the way in Kuchipudi. Sri Vampatti Chinna Satyam, Sri Satyanarayana etc. have worked hard to give this art the classical form.<sup>155</sup>

---

<sup>152</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.31.

<sup>153</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, p.9.

<sup>154</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.32.

<sup>155</sup> Kanaka Sudhakar, *Op. cit.*, p.122.

Kuchipudi derives its name from the village of Kuchelapuram of Krishna District in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>156</sup> It was a Brahmin village. Kuchipudi dance drama was enacted there by the nephews of the great scholar poet devotee, Siddhendra Yogi, who was a Bhakta of the deity Ramalingeswar and who composed many dance dramas for Kuchipudi performances. He was the foremost disciple of Narayana Tirtha, who also had contributed much to the dance drama.<sup>157</sup>

The Kuchipudi dancing troupes are called Bhagavata Melas, as the theme of their performances was taken from the Maha Bhagavatam. Natya Sastra mentions the three types of dances- Nritta, Nritya and Natya and they are adopted in Kuchipudi dance drama. The Jatis represent the nritta portion, Sabdams represent the nritya while the conversational Daravus represent the Natya portion. Thus we feel that the Kuchipudi style is a fully fledged dance form. The richness of the style of music, sentimental display and sway over the audience are the special features of this dance style. Spurious styles are often propagated as Kuchipudi styles. This is a dangerous symptom just as all spurious foods are dangerous to the health of humanity. The soul should not be corrupted. At the same time, we owe our indebtedness to recent exponents of this art, who have created an audience for this rich tradition.<sup>158</sup>

Abdul Hasan, the Nawab of Golkonda, gave away the Kuchipudi village to the Brahmins, who presented the Kuchipudi dance drama as a gift around 1675. Siddhendra Yogi wrote poetical works like 'Parijata apaharanam', suitable for the Kuchipudi dance repertoire and it was later known as 'Bhama Kalapam'. Each character of Kuchipudi dance drama enters the stage with a Daru. There are 80 Darus out of which six are prominent ones and Patra Pravesa Daru is the most common. Generally, Kuchipudi dance was performed by men and not women in olden days. In recent times, women also perform female characters instead of men as in the past. The music used is mainly in Karnataka Raga-Tala styles. Sruti Vadya, Clarinet, Violin, Mridanga, Tala etc are used as

---

<sup>156</sup> Divyasena, S., *Op. cit.*, p.72.

<sup>157</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, pp.17-19.

<sup>158</sup> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p. xv.

accompanying instruments. Angika, Vachika, Aharya and Sattvika Abhinayas are important in this form. The male and female characters have definite aharya.<sup>159</sup>

The actors sing and dance and the style is a combine of folk and classical. Arguably, this is why this method has greater freedom and fluidity than other dance styles. Bhagavata Mela Natakam was always performed as an offering to the temples of Melattur, Soolamangalam, Oothukudu, Nallur or Thepperumanllur. There is great emphasis on Vachika Abhinaya. Sinddendra Yogi had written the first dance drama of Kuchipudi, namely, the Parijatapaharana. This was a predominately men's art form. The female roles were performed by men. The artistic height of performing a woman's role is seen in Bhamakalapam. Vedantam Sathyanarayana Sharma was an expert at this. With the work of gurus like Vempatti Chinna Sathyam, women have begun to take active participation in Kuchipudi.<sup>160</sup>

The background of the Kuchipudi dance in India is not something a historian can describe. For it is more than the history of man or of a nation. It is the essence both of eternity and time the spirit of man and woman. It is Purusha and Prakriti, a manifestation of the evolution of movement. It was also known as Kuchipudi Bhagavatam, Kuchipudi Yakshaganam and Kuchipudi Bharatham. Andhra's dance traditions are displayed in the ancient temples and Buddhist ruins, excavated at Nagarjunakonda, Amaravati, Ghantasala, Jaggayyapeta and Bhattiprole. Proof of this is also available in the frescos of Ajanta-Ellora, which were part of the kingdom of Satvahanas. Evidence is also available in the ancient Ramappa Temple, in Warangal, which were the capital city of Kakatiya rulers of Andhra Pradesh. Exquisite dance stances and musical instruments of the region are safely preserved in the sculptural remains, at Amaravati and Guntur.<sup>161</sup>

In the Nagarjunakonda carvings, a variety of musical instruments and dance stances are frozen in stone. The ancient text of Hala Satvahanas Gaatha Saptasati also refers to dancers and actors. The Jain rulers promoted all forms of dance, in order to propagate their religion. Veera Narasimha III the ruler of Kalinga Kingdom was a lover

---

<sup>159</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, pp.17-19.

<sup>160</sup> Divyasena, S., *Op. cit.*, p.72.

<sup>161</sup> Raja and Radha Reddy, *Dances of India Kuchipudi*, Wisdom Tree, New Delhi, 2004, p.12.

of art and patron of dance. Srinatha Mahakavi has written, in Palanati Veera Charitha, about the patronage of the Reddy kings to the dance performances in their courts. There is a mention of Kuchipudi dance in the Machupalli Kaifiyat, a court document of 1505 A.D.<sup>162</sup> The recent excavations, conducted by the Archaeological Department of Government of India in Andhra Pradesh, reveal rich traditions in the art of dance since the times of the Satavahana Emperors of the Second Century B.C. The sculptures reveal that there were two main schools of dance- Devadasi and Kelika, existing under the patronage of temples and rulers of the country. It is said that there were 300 families of Devadasi at Srikakulam, the original capital of the Satavahana Empire.<sup>163</sup>

At Ghantasala, before the onset of the influence of Buddhism, an exclusive street existed, consisting of the families of Devadasis and Kelikas. Influenced by the above traditions, Jayaprasenani, a commander of the Kakathiya Elephant forces, wrote a treatise on Desi and Margi traditions of dance styles in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. All the above places are situated within a radius of six miles from Kuchipudi, in the Krishna District. After the fall of the Kakathiya Empire, there was a dark period for this art in these parts. Later on, a great Vaishnava religious leader, Narahari Tirtha, came from the Kalinga Royal court to Srikakulam, as the regent of the minor prince and he was responsible for the propagation of the Bhagavata cult. Under this cult, Gita Govinda was sung and dances were set to the tunes by the Brahmin Gurus of Devadasi families. Thus the Krishna cult was responsible for the evolution of dance drama in Andhra during the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. Siddhendra Yogi was responsible for initiating the Brahmin families of Kuchipudi, in the dance drama of Bhagavata Melas. Sri Siddhendra Yogi laid the foundation of the village of Kuchipudi, which might have been originally called Kuseelavapuri, which means residence of travelling dancing parties.

Kuchipudi dance form attained excellence by the time of Golkonda king, Abdul Hassan Tanesha. Kuchipudi Brahmins are said to have received six hundred acres of land as a donation from Tanesha, for the important appearance before him. The rulers of Satavahana dynasty were great patrons of art. From the inscriptions found here, on the

---

<sup>162</sup> Raja and Radha Reddy, *Op. cit.*, pp.16-17.

<sup>163</sup> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p.xv.

temples of Andra Vishnu, which was the most sacred shrine of those days, it is evident that no fewer than three hundred Devadasis consecrated to the deity, received royal patronage. The sculptures, excavated in this area, have crystallised into stone the effulgent grace of those women whose dance was an act of worship. In later years, Buddhism flourished at Nagarjuna and Ghantasala. Ghantasala was a prosperous port, inviting traders from far away countries, till the Krishna River changed her course.<sup>164</sup>

## Manipuri



Manipur, the land of beauty since antiquity, has evolved a pattern of living in which it is almost impossible to distinguish art from life.<sup>165</sup> Manipuri dance is purely religious and its goal is a spiritual experience.<sup>166</sup> Manipur has won credit through the matchless grace of its dance technique called Manipuri dancing.<sup>167</sup> It is a ritualistic and recreational, religious and temporal. The traditional Manipuri style of dancing preeminently embodies delicate, lyrical and graceful movements, which enhance to the audience its beautiful and colourful costumes and presentation.<sup>168</sup> The Vaishnava belief brought along with it the origin of the Manipuri dance. The technique of Manipuri dancing is based on an interesting principle of contemporary movement, with the objective of achieving rounded movements and avoiding any jerks, sharp edges or straight lines.<sup>169</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.91.

<sup>165</sup> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p.xvi.

<sup>166</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.108.

<sup>167</sup> *Keli*, Nayana Jhaver, January, 1966, p.28.

<sup>168</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.110.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p.112.

Manipuri dancing is distinctly divided into two main types- Lasya and Tandava. Dancing in Manipur has been fulfilling its function to the fullest throughout the centuries in relation to both the individual and the society.<sup>170</sup> The most important musical instrument in Manipuri dance is Kartal or cymbal. The costumes in Manipuri dance are very colourful, attractive and very richly bedecked.<sup>171</sup> In Manipuri, is a natya or drama form. In Manipuri, the gestures are minimal.<sup>172</sup> The dance of Manipur remains poised at the transition between the abstract and interpretative styles and compared with the other classical dances of India, the technique is less rigid and less vigorous. The face also remains serenely immobile.<sup>173</sup> But the slow, graceful movements of the body and the sensuous flow of arms and limbs eloquently to convey a deep lyrical feeling.<sup>174</sup>

The dance is characterised exclusively by the Radha Krishna songs, popularised by Sri Chaitanya, the sect to which the Manipuris belong. The dance is in the form of a circle or semi- circle, in imitation of the famous Rasa Krida of Lord Krishna and it is known in Manipur as Rasa. Normally, the dance continues for hours, extending to even twelve hours, with songs from Jaidev's Gita Govinda or other Vaishnavite hymns. The four Javin sisters have dedicated their whole life to the propagation of Manipuri. The Rasa dances are lyrical, full of swaying movements, delicate footwork and creeper like movements. The dominant rasas are the Sringara, Karuna and Vatsalya. Deep devotion and yearning for union with the Divine, characterises the dance.<sup>175</sup>

With the classical heritages of music, "tala" and the "mudras", graceful, soft and delicate body movements form the core of Manipuri dancing. The costumes are also very picturesque. Dancing is considered sacred by these people and they firmly believe that the dance with "Karatali" (clapping) and "Mandira" (small size cymbals) condone the sins of years. According to their mythology, the people of Manipur associate dancing with the creation of the world. The dances of Manipur classical are things of disciplined

---

<sup>170</sup> *Keli*, Nayana Jhaver, January, 1966, pp.29-30.

<sup>171</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.114.

<sup>172</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, p.9.

<sup>173</sup> Krishna Chaitanya, *Op. cit.*, pp.113-114.

<sup>174</sup> Ashok Singh, *Op. cit.*, p.173.

<sup>175</sup> Thuljaram Rao, J., *Op. cit.*, p.184.



joy and power. They have rhythmical subtlety, slow suspense, speed, lyricism, drama.<sup>176</sup> From the religious point of view and from the artistic angle of image, we can claim that the Manipuri classical form of dance is one of the most chestiest, modest, softest and mildest but the most meaningful dances of the world. The most obliging view of Manipuri culture is that it has retained the very old ritual based dances and folk dances, along with the later developed classical Manipuri dance style.<sup>177</sup>

The most significant part of Manipuri repertoire is recognised by the generic term, Jagoi.<sup>178</sup> It means circular movement. In earliest texts, it has been compared to the movement of the planets around the sun. It is said that when Krishna, Radha and the Gopis danced the 'Rasleela', Shiva made sure that no one disturbed the beauty of the dancing. Parvathi, the consort of Lord Shiva, also wished to see this dance. So to please her, he chose the beautiful region of Manipur and reenacted the Rasleela. Hundreds of Centuries later, in the Eleventh Century, during the control of Raja Loyamba, prince Khamba of the Khomal Dynasty and princess Thaibi of the Mairang dynasty enacted the dance and it came to be known as Manipuri, the most ancient dance of Manipur.<sup>179</sup>

The Gopis call Krishna, the dancer, with their colourful costumes, consisting of wide open 'gagras' and beautiful head set and the drummers dancing and performing with their drums in various styles and combinations make this art. Manipur has earned for itself a name of its own in the classical dance field and their simple but attractive feet movements attract many students to learn this art form.<sup>180</sup>

It is stated that the indigenous people of the valley were the Gandharvas, mentioned in the Ramayana and Mahabharatha. Dancing, as a profession for a small number of people, is unknown to the simple people. Every Manipuri can dance without extra effort and after considerable time. The Manipuri dance and music of international repute centre around Krishna Bhakti and it is indeed a great contribution of the Gandharvas and the Vedic immigrants to Manipur, as revealed in the Ashoka's Pillar inscriptions.

---

<sup>176</sup> Binani, G.D. and Rama Rao, T.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.764-765.

<sup>177</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.110.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p.118.

<sup>179</sup> Divyasena, S., *Op. cit.*, p.71.

<sup>180</sup> Kanaka Sudhakar, *Op. cit.*, p.123.

Tagore was a great patron of the Manipuri dance and culture. He also deserves an honourable place as the “Pioneer of Manipuri dance and culture”. It was he who popularised the style among the people of the world. The world poet was fascinated by the lovely and delightful Manipuri Rasleela at Machhimpur, a Bishnupriya Manipuri area in the modern Sylhet District in Bangladesh in 1920. He immediately decided to open a new department of Manipuri dance in his Santhinikethan in Calcutta. He invited Guru Senarik Singha Rajkumar, Guru Nileshwar Mukharjee of Kamlganj Thana of undivided Sylhet district. Both the gurus belonged to the Bishnupriya Manipuri community and, they helped in the formation of a new department for Manipuri dance and within a decade, it crossed its region as well national fields and became a reputed international style. These dances whether folk, classical or modern, are devotional in nature.<sup>181</sup>

### **Mohiniyattam**



Mohiniyattam is a classical dance form from the State of Kerala. It is one of the later styles, based on the Bharathanatyam style.<sup>182</sup> Mohiniyattam is the dance of the woman in Kerala.<sup>183</sup> Mohiniyattam is based on the legend of Mohini, the temptress who tried to lure the Devas or the gods. Mohini was Lord Vishnu in disguise. Literally, Mohini means a maiden who exudes sensuous appeal and her dance of temptation is known as the Mohiniyattam. The theme or rasa is devotional in nature and the dominant Bhava is

---

<sup>181</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, pp.108-110.

<sup>182</sup> Shobana Gupta, *Op. cit.*, pp.24-25.

<sup>183</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, p.32.

sringar ie. love.<sup>184</sup> A Mohiniyattam performance is a balanced mix of pure dance and content. The content is based on mythology.<sup>185</sup>

The dance is essentially a solo performance by women. The movements are slow and graceful in lasya style. The music is accompanied by drums and violin. The hand gestures and expressions play a secondary role to the footwork and the movement of the body.<sup>186</sup> The themes of Mohiniyattam dance are love and devotion to god. Through slow and medium tempo, the dancer finds sufficient space for improvisations and suggestive Bhavas or emotions. The Mohiniyattam dancer maintains realistic make up and adorns a simple costume. The dancer is attired in a beautiful white, with gold border kasavu saree of Kerala, with the distinctive white jasmine flowers, around a French bun at the side of her head.<sup>187</sup>

Mohiniyattam means the dance of the enchantress.<sup>188</sup> The Mudras of Mohiniyattam are based on Hasthalakshana Deepika. Hence throughout the Mohiniyattam segment, the basic 24 gestures have been displayed in even flow, to serve two purposes: 1. to help the reader compare and contrast these with the Bharatanatyam chart and 2. to enhance the aesthetic appeal of this segment. A speciality of Mohiniyattam is the presence of the rhythmic instrument, Edakka, in the musical team.<sup>189</sup> Angika, Vachika, Aharya and Sattvika Abhinayas are beautifully blended in Mohiniyattam, besides, the Nritta, Nritya and Natya aspects. If Mohiniyattam is the successor of the Dasiyattam, which existed in the temples of Kerala, some fragments of knowledge regarding the Dasiyattam are pointed out by some knowledgeable old persons.<sup>190</sup>

The repertoire of Mohiniyattam, which had no temple connections or a Koothambalam history, has nevertheless a strong devotional element. Manipravala

---

<sup>184</sup> Shobana Gupta, *Op. cit.*, pp.24-25.

<sup>185</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.46.

<sup>186</sup> Shobana Gupta, *Op. cit.*, pp.24-25.

<sup>187</sup> Divyasena, S., *Op. cit.*, p.72.

<sup>188</sup> Vidya Bhavani Suresh, *Popular Classical Dances of India*, A Skanda Publication, Chennai, 2005, pp. 41-42.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.43-44.

<sup>190</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.28.

Kavyas are full of references to the female dancer called Unni, Unniyadi, Unnicheruthevi, Cherukara Kuttathi and Uniachi. Ganikas, attached to certain temples, were considered to be women of low repute. But women dancers, attached to Suchindram and Thripunithara temples, were dancing to Tamil lyrics and their dance identifiable as neither Mohiniyattam nor Bharatanatyam. Historical evidence proves the existence of Tali Nangyar doing solo dance. Nedumpura Tali inscriptions mention one Chittarayil Nangyar donating land to the temple and payments being made to Nangyar and Nattuvanar.<sup>191</sup>

The temple dance, Tevidichiyattam, began to lose popularity and decline steadily in the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century A. D. due to the moral degeneration of the Devadasis. In order to promote the dance and give it a new life, the name, Tevidichiyattam, might have been changed to Mohiniyattam, in order to save the art. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the Vaishnava Bhakti Movement had spread all over South India, including Kerala. That also must have been one reason for giving the name Mohiniyattam to Devadasi dance.<sup>192</sup>

Its history is not very certain. It was patronized about 150 years ago, by a prince of Travancore and became very popular. Its technique lies somewhere between Dasi Attam and the lasya aspect of Kathakali. Because of its inherent qualities, Mohiniyattam was eminently suitable for use by loose women, and it was frequently used by them to attract would be clients. This led to its unpopularity and eventual decline at the beginning of the last century.<sup>193</sup>

The first reference to Mohiniyattam is in the Vyavaharamala of Mazhamangalam Narayanan Nambuthiri, which was written in 1704 or so. In 18<sup>th</sup> Century, poet Kunchan Nambiar has referred to Mohiniyattam in his Thullal poems and Sri Karthika Tirunal Balarama Varma Maharaja of Travancore made reference to this art in his treatise on Natyasastra, 'Balaramabharatam', as 'Mohini Natanam'. It was Sri Swati Tirunal Rama

---

<sup>191</sup> Leela Venkataraman, Avinash Pasricha, *Indian Classical Dance Tradition in Transition*, Roli Books Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2014, p.98.

<sup>192</sup> Nirmala Paniker, *Nangiar Koothu, The Classical Dance-Theatre of the Nangiar-s*, Natana Kairali, Thrissur, Kerala, 1992, pp.14-15.

<sup>193</sup> Reginald Massey, *Op. cit.*, pp.131-132.

Varma Maharaja of Travancore, who redesigned the format and composed many beautiful songs, suitable for dancing in the Mohiniyattam style.<sup>194</sup>

Maharaja Swati Thirunal Varma devoted a lot of his time and energy to the promotion and enrichment of the promoting arts as the king of Travancore. He established the Mohiniyattam form. After his death, however, the dance developed “into eroticism to satisfy the epicurean life of some provincial satraps and landlords”. The guiding theme of Mohiniyattam is devotional love to Vishnu and Krishna in larger part. The steps are sensitive and circular and the expressions are subtle and placid.<sup>195</sup>

Another historical record proves that Sri Swati Thirunal’s Aunt Parvati Bai engaged one Ayyappa Panicker at Trivandrum, to teach girls the Mohiniyattam dance and that a few girls were selected to learn. Sri Swati Tirunal’s many compositions i.e. Padas, Varnas and rhythmical svarajatis were written not for singing alone but they are popularly accepted in the dance mode of Mohiniyattam. Mohiniyattam is a continuation of a Dasiyattam and there are influences of Kathakali also.<sup>196</sup>

The erstwhile reputed Mohiniyattam dancers followed certain order of presentation of Mohiniyattam. According to Kalamandalam Kalyanikutti Amma, the order of items is as follows: Cholkettu, Ganapathi Stuti, Jatiswaram, Saptam, Varnam, Slokam, Tillana, Ashtapadi, Padam, and Dasavataram. This system was popularised through her disciples and her work on Mohiniyattam, which provides all details about the form, content, historical evolutions, format and the adavus. It was Swati Thirunal Maharaja, who gave a definite shape to the repertoire of Mohiniyattam and wrote various types of compositions like Varnam, Padam, Kirtanam, Tillana, Jatiswaram etc. Later the Kerala Kalamandalam was founded (1930) by Vallathol Narayana Menon and the proficient teachers of the institution improved the repertoire for Mohiniyattam, which is the most popular in the contemporary times.<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>194</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.28.

<sup>195</sup> George, T.J.S., *Op. cit.*, p.389.

<sup>196</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.28.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

Nonetheless, when the Kerala Kalamandalam was founded, Vallathol managed to find Kalyani Amma a fine exponent of it, and engaged her on his staff. She began teaching it there, and then later at Tagore's Santhnikethan. The demand for Mohiniyattam grew, but the Malabarists had not forgotten its unholy associations. They finally managed to persuade the Maharaja of Cochin to ban it, and this ban was not finally lifted until 1950.

The grace of Mohiniyattam is appreciated by all. Kanak Rele, Bharathi Shivaji has contributed extensively to this dance form and any student of Mohiniyattam is gifted with beauty of form and grace.<sup>198</sup> Mohiniyattam is an Ekaharya (solo) dance form though in recent times it is presented by groups or by two or more artistes.<sup>199</sup>

### **Odissi**



Odissi, the dance style from Orissa, is particularly known for its lyrical grace, elaborate rhythmic variations and dramatic expression. It is easily identified by visual manifestations of the silver ornaments worn by the female dancers to adorn their body and pith-flowers, topped by a prominent tiara, made also of pith flowers and representing the spire of the temple also worn by these exponents to adorn their hair.<sup>200</sup>

Odissi is based on the common devotion to Lord Krishna and the verses of the Sanskrit play, 'Geeta Govindam', are used to depict the love and devotion to God. The Odissi dancers use their head, bust and torso in smooth flowing movements to express specific moods and emotions. The type is curvaceous, concentrating on the

---

<sup>198</sup> Kanaka Sudhakar, *Op. cit.*, p.122.

<sup>199</sup> Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.30.

<sup>200</sup> Sharon Lowen, *Dances of India Odissi*, Wisdom Tree, New Delhi, 2004, p.11.

tribhang or the divisions of the body into three parts-head, bust and torso. The mudras and the expressions are similar to those of Bharathanatyam. Odissi performances are based on with lores of the Eighth incarnation of Vishnu, Lord Krishna. It is a soft, lyrical classical dance, which depicts the ambience of Orissa and the philosophy of its popular deity, Lord Jagannath, whose temple is in Puri. On the walls Bhubaneswar, Puri and Konark, the dance sculptures of Oddissi are clearly visible.<sup>201</sup>

Odissi also had its origins in the Jatra parties, that travelled across Orissa. These Nataka groups performed with small boys dressed up as girls, who did Odissi like movements. Their movements were extra gymnastic and they were called gotipuas<sup>202</sup>. It is a smooth lyrical classical dance, which depicts the ambience of Orissa and the philosophy of its most popular deity Lord Jagannath whose temple is in Puri.<sup>203</sup> Oddissi is a very beautiful and graceful classical dance form, which portrays many sculpturesque poses in a very fluid and elegant manner. The high head set the graceful hip movements and hand movements make Odissi a pleasing dance art.<sup>204</sup> The pure and decorative dance items of Odissi, convey importance to the stance, the body line and the manner of performing. The movements are soft and lyrical. All these unite to build up the elaborate grace and charm, the fundamental characteristics of Odissi.

The technique of Odissi dance met all the four requirements of the classical dance. The abhinaya continued the satwik, angika, vachika and aharika aspects prescribed by Natya Sastra.<sup>205</sup> The Natyasastra speaks of the dance of Odhra Magadha, which included Kalinga and Odhra, excelling in dramatic expression.<sup>206</sup> Odissi, with a religious import and devotional intent, has a rich and varied repertory, covering both Nritta and Nritya. The theme is embedded in religion and the urge is as much spiritual as aesthetic. It is suffused with spirituality both in its dance pattern and music to which it is set.

---

<sup>201</sup> Divyasena, S., *Op. cit.*, p.73.

<sup>202</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, p.9.

<sup>203</sup> Nirupama Chaturvedi, *Op. cit.*, p.7.

<sup>204</sup> Kanaka Sudhakar, *Op. cit.*, p.120.

<sup>205</sup> Moosad, C.K., *Mohiniyattam A Classical Dance of Kerala*, Dept. of Public Relations Govt. of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1986.p.45.

<sup>206</sup> Sharon Lowen, *Op. cit.*, p.15.

A programme of Odissi opens with Mangalacharan, an invocatory piece of dance, followed by singing of a sloka in obeisance to Lord Ganesha or Jagannatha. 'Batu Nritya' is an item of pure dance, laying stress on sculpturesque poses. The history of Odissi dance is largely the history of the Devadasis attached to almost all the important shrines of Orissa.<sup>207</sup>

The earliest representation of this dance of Orissa is found on a 2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C. Inscription, from King Kharavela at the Hathi-Gumpha which states that dance was an entertainment he provided to his people. While this dance, seen on the stage today, may be far from the form seen by the king and his populace in 2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C., the roots of this performing art have their genesis from this time.<sup>208</sup> The Ninth Century onwards, there was the growing tradition of young women being dedicated to service in the temples, offering dance and song to the deity. Maharis dancers lived as servants of the deity. In 1435, the scholarly Kapilendra established the solar dynasty. He built the outer wall of the Jagannath temple and had inscriptions carved on the temple walls, which included an order for the performance of a dance offering in the natamandira, at the time of the bhog of Lord Jagannath and again in the evening as the god was ritually adorned for bedtime and which was called bada-sringara or barha-sringara.<sup>209</sup>

A substantial number of inscriptions give evidence of the dedication of dancing girls to the temples. The practice of dedicating dancing girls, in honour of gods, was at one time prevalent throughout India and it began in Orissa with the growth of Shiva temples at Bhubaneswar. It was ordained that the dancing girls were to dance and sing only from the Gita Govinda at the time of food offerings in the Jagannatha temple. The technical nature and well codified dance, that demanded long laborious training, began to wane. The voluptuous dances of the 'Gotipua' and 'Sakhipila' took its place, catering to the low taste of the general public.<sup>210</sup>

---

<sup>207</sup> Ashok Singh, *Op. cit.*, p.65.

<sup>208</sup> Sharon Lowen, *Op. cit.*, p.12.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.18-19.

<sup>210</sup> Ashok Singh, *Op. cit.*, p.65.



By the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Gotipua dance was apparently influenced by what was considered a more decadent dance. Sakhi Nach performed on Orissa's southern border. However the Oriya texts and the music and training of Gotipuas have provided a strong base for the revival of Odissi dance in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>211</sup> Odissi dance, which has become so popular in recent years in our country and abroad, marks the revival of an old and ancient system of dancing in India, which unfortunately could not attain its legitimate place in the field of arts under foreign rule as well as for lack of publicity.<sup>212</sup>

The ancient Mahari tradition, with its emphasis on dramatic expression, and the medieval Gotipua tradition of boy dancers performing outside the temple precincts, which emphasised the more physical and even acrobatic aspects of dance, constituted the foundation for development of classical Odissi, as we know it today.<sup>213</sup>

### Sattriya



Sattriya, yet an unidentified form of Indian classical dance, comes from the beautiful state of Assam, in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>214</sup> It is devotional in character and 'Bhakti Rasa' is predominant in this dance form.<sup>215</sup> Sattriya is a word derived from, Sattrra, which means monastery. With texts like Sri Hastamuktavali, which describe detailed use of hand gestures, the style has all the elements of Indian classical dance, including a margam of eight sequences, which encompasses the Tandava and Lasya elements.

---

<sup>211</sup> Sharon Lowen, *Op. cit.*, p.26.

<sup>212</sup> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, *Op. cit.*, p.xiv.

<sup>213</sup> Sharon Lowen, *Op. cit.*, p.30.

<sup>214</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, pp.33-34.

<sup>215</sup> Nirupama Devi, *Op. cit.*, p.145.

This eloquent ritual tradition has now been passed on to interested artistes, who are vigorously engaged in performing and popularising Sattriya dance in India and elsewhere in the world.<sup>216</sup>

‘Sattriya Nritta’ has been an integral part of Assamese culture for the past six hundred years. Male monks perform it even now in the ‘Sattras’ or Monasteries, though it is more of a ritual than a performing art. An exclusively male dance form, girls were forbidden to enter the ‘Sattras’ and the dancer enjoys a more interactive rapport with the audience who sat around the dancer. This dance consists of three distinct parts-Guru Vandana, Ramdani and Geet Abhinaya. The Sangeet Nataka Akademi recognised Sattriya as an Indian classical dance in 2002.

Its origin is attributed to Srimant Sankaradeva, the man who gave the Bhakti Movement to the Assamese. Now Sattriya seeks freedom from being performed single and the right to perform by men in groups.<sup>217</sup> The saint poet, Shankar Deva of the 15<sup>th</sup> century AD, wanted to bring harmony to the region of Assam, through religion and by creating forms of dance-dramas, music, painting and collective prayer. This ritual was later incorporated into the practices followed after the adoption of Vaishnavism in 16<sup>th</sup> Century AD. With the introduction of women artistes, this stylistic ritual dance has undergone a subtle change in the nature and treatment of movement. A traditional Sattriya was performed only by young pre-pubescent boys, who also danced in female roles. But today, with the entry of women dancers, a Sattriya classical dance evening follows a format of presentation, that is similar to other classical dance forms.<sup>218</sup>

## **Folk Dances and Tribal Dances in India**

### **Folk Dances**

The folk dances of India also accommodate spiritual and religious content, though the main force behind the folk dances of India is the celebratory mood.<sup>219</sup> A folk dance is,

---

<sup>216</sup> Nirupama Devi, *Op. cit.*, p.150.

<sup>217</sup> Leela Samson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 33-34

<sup>218</sup> Shovana Narayan, *Indian Theatre and Dance Traditions*, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 82-83.

<sup>219</sup> Valluru Prabhakaraiah, *Indian Heritage and Culture*, Neelkamal Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, Hyderabad, 2013, p.213.

by implication, a dance of the people, but the word, 'folk' as it is used in connection with dance, song, lore, custom etc, indicates characteristics that are distinctive from those associated with the word, popular. Folk dances fall into two main groups-ritual ceremonial dances and social dances.<sup>220</sup> Folk dances literally mean dances of the people. The celebration and joy on such occasions burst forth in the form of dance. Folk dances are basically regional. The costumes of the folk dancers are also a reflection of the tradition and culture of the province.

Folk dancers generally sing in their own regional language. Rhythm and movement, set to a time frame, is the other feature of folk dances.<sup>221</sup> Folk dances are thus basically a reflection of the life and regional ethos of the diverse milieu. Sometimes, folk dances are performed by men only, and sometimes by women only and other times, men and women dance together. One of the main characteristics of the folk dances, which set them apart from the classical dances, is the fact that the collective natural spirit on the people is the base of folk dances and not the technique, as in the classical dances. Folk dances are performed to celebrate the arrival of seasons, birth of a child, a wedding and other festivals. The dances are very simple, with minimum of steps or movements. Men and women perform a number of dances separately while in some performances, men and women dance together. On most occasions, the dancers sing by themselves, while being accompanied by artists on the instruments. Each form of dance has an exact costume.<sup>222</sup>

Folk dance is tinged with rich naturalness and originality.<sup>223</sup> The vast variety of folk dances of India may be grouped under three heads: 1. Community dances, held on major religious festivals and social occasions. 2. Tribal dances, rooted in indigenous cults and expressive of their magical philosophies of life. 3. Folk dances, conserved by hereditary professional families and troupes, who perform at birth, betrothal and marriage in the villages.<sup>224</sup> In India, without folk dances, the lives of villagers will be dull because

---

<sup>220</sup> *Folk India*, Vol. XI, Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 2004, pp.xxxvii- xxxviii.

<sup>221</sup> Shobana Gupta, *Op. cit.*, pp.28-29.

<sup>222</sup> Divyasena, S., *Op. cit.*, p.73.

<sup>223</sup> George, T.J.S., *Op. cit.*, p.380.

<sup>224</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, *The Dancing Foot*, Publications Division, Delhi, 1957, p.7.

they give them joy, inspiration and a sense of oneness. Folk dances can be divided into four varieties-Cultural or Semi-religious folk dances, Social folk dances, Warrior dances and Seasonal dances.<sup>225</sup>

### **Ritual dances**

A ritual dance has spiritual significance, where the purpose is to communicate with a greater power, to achieve bountiful harvest, fertility, recovery from injury or illness, or another desirable outcome. It gives people a way to deal with forces that seem beyond their comprehension and control and the participants are not necessarily concerned about aesthetics.<sup>226</sup> Derived from religious ceremonies, the ritual dances are associated almost invariably with local annual customs, which can be grouped under seasons like the harvest time etc. In the ritual dances, it is the characters which become subsidiary and the superstitions are projected as Guru whose dance magic is dispensed to the community. In these ancient plays, animal and plant fertility rites can be discerned. The dance drama represents a life and death conflict, often covering the complete cycle of human life.<sup>227</sup>

### **Tribal dances**

Tribal dances are usually danced as part of courting, at births, wedding, as exercises for protection and self defence, after a successful hunt, or even as death rituals in certain tribes. Tribal dances, like the folk dances of India, are full of the same spontaneous freedom and natural grace.<sup>228</sup> Tribal dances not only vary from one tribe to another but also fall into many different categories, such as weapon dances, fertility dances, sun and moon worshipping dances, initiation dances, war dances and hunting dances. Tribal dances are full of the same spontaneous freedom and natural grace.<sup>229</sup>

---

<sup>225</sup> Krishna Rao, U.S., Chandrabhaga Devi, U.K., *A Panorama of Indian Dances*, Sri Satguru Publications, New Delhi, 1993, p.286.

<sup>226</sup> Erica M. Nielsen, *Folk Dancing*, Greenwood, California, 2011, p.xviii.

<sup>227</sup> *Folk India*, Vol. XI, Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 2004, pp. xxxviii-xxxix.

<sup>228</sup> Shovana Narayan, *Folk Dances of India Unity in Diversity*, Shubhi Publications, Gurgaon, 2017, p. 17.

<sup>229</sup> Shovana Narayan, *Indian Theatre and Dance Traditions*, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, 2004, p. 97.

The tribal dances are the visible rhythmic expression of the joy and beliefs of the simple, unsophisticated people, known as Adivasi or original inhabitants, who lived in India before the Aryan influx. These tribes live mostly in scattered forest areas and dance is an integral part of their ritualistic life.<sup>230</sup>

This Chapter narrated the historical origin of dance in India, classical dance forms in India and folk and tribal dances of India. Dancing is one of the main ancient arts in Indian culture. The dance forms of India are also varied and different. There are many types of dance forms in India, from those which are deeply religious in content to those which are performed on social occasions. The next chapter is focused on the over view of dance forms in Kerala.

---

<sup>230</sup> The Handbook of India, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, New Delhi, 1978, p.6.