

CHAPTER 8

THE BRIEF HISTORY OF BHARTANATYAM AND THE CREATION OF BHARATANATYAM MARGAM BY THE TANJORE QUARTET



By the 11th and 12th century the classical dance had evolved well and become quite popular in many regions of South India. The dance was encouraged with sustained patronage by the Chola and Pallava kings (4th to 12th century AD). There were talented dancers who at times were well-paid, recognised and respected. This keen understanding and appreciation of the classical dance tradition was continued by the Pandya, Nayaka and the Maratha rulers of South India till almost the end of the 19th century. The *nattuvanars* ensured that the dance traditions were preserved in as pure a form as possible. The students, Devadasis, were rigorously taught and art passed on from one generation to the next. As a result, the dance got a tremendous fillip and the accompanying musicians as well as teachers, the great *nattuvanars*, also prospered and could create challenging and innovative work.



Fig. 1: Brihadishwara Temple



Fig. 2: Kumbhakonam Temple

The region of the Pallavas of Kanchi is noted for the rise of temples and the patronage of Arts.¹ As far as dance is concerned, there is a remarkable string of continuity both in consumption and execution. Dance had to gradually bring itself into more and more concretised and condensed forms. There are many bass reliefs of Pallava period depicting musicians, instrumentalists and dancers. "In the Pallava time there were singers named Tirupadiyampaduvor, Adigalmar, Pidarars who sung for Devadasis. These evidences suggest that Tirupadiyam hymns were popular from the days of *Nandivarman Ii Pallavamalla*." ² Dancers were attached to the temples to perform music and dance recitals everyday after the daily pooja and during temple festivals. Dancers who performed in the temples on several occasions were known as *Mannikattar*, *Talicheripendugal* and *Devaradiyar*. The sphere of dance forms, quite a lot of which is spoken of during the Chola age has the beginning in the Pallava period. The presence of Devadasi-s and their close ties with the temple is important because this is a clear departure of the practice that started during the *Sangam* age. However, by the end of the Pallava reign the SOLO dance art had developed to an impressive extent. The art of dance and music developed vigorously with the patronage of Rajaraja I. Hence the history of dance of Cholas beginning from

Rajaraja I. "Appointment of singers, dancers and *nattuvanars* in the temple continued in Chola period. In Brihadeswara temple at Tanjore, Rajaraja I appointed forty eight *pidarars* to recite *tirupadigam*."³ *Udukkai* and *kottimattalam* were the accompaniments for these recitals.



Fig. 3: Tanjore Devadasi with Musicians

Among the many dancers attached to Brihadeswara temple there were six groups of *sakataikottigalr*."

⁴ The dancers were regulated by the orders of the king. There were dancers specialized in different aspects and forms of dances. All of them were allotted specific occasion to perform in the temple and court. The appointment of *nattuvanaris* another interesting factor in this context. The *nattuvanars* conducted dance recitals hereditarily. There were regular male dancers and *nattuvanars*, assigned to the Thiruvidadimarudur temple. The king appointed additional dancer who could perform *Abhinaya*, in the temple. There were few male dancers who can perform *Agamarga* dance in the temple. The remuneration fixed for the *Abhinaya* dancer was the same as that of the dancer of *Agamarga*. The *nattuvanars* were remunerated by a piece of land which came to be known as *nattuvakani*. "The Brihadeswara temple inscription speaks of assignment of shares in temple lands and income from lands transferred to artists like *devaradiyar*, *kottimattalam* players,

muttharaisanghu, moriviyam, padaviyam players etc. It is interesting to find that the maximum was paid to the first grade *ganapadi* (singer)."⁵

Available evidence suggests that there was a uniform wage structure for these musicians. There are innumerable varieties of solo and group dances performed during this period. The technique of performing these dances is not clear, only the names of the dance varieties are available. "The text *Panchamarabu* describes *agamargam* as a complete repertoire consisting of sixteen varieties of dance items. They are *adi, anu, prakasam, pitam, pushpanjali, puyangam, desi, desiyottu, nidi, nilal, vaippu, vaguppu, vakkyam, kautuvam, tunukku* and *dandapadam*. Some of these items have Sanskrit names like *pushpanjali, kautuvam, desi* and *dandapadam* which were continued in the dance repertoire of the later centuries." ⁶



Fig. 4: Brihadeshwara Devadasi-s

The Nayaka period was a time of movement, innovation and rapid cultural growth. "The courtesan in the Nayaka period has become a paragon of power, piety, magnanimity and faithfulness. Dancers were made use of and generously rewarded for procuring strategic information from the enemy camp. The fostering of artists shifts the gravity of patronage from the temple to the theatre."⁷ Vijayaraghava Nayak

was also a great patron of art. The musical and dramatic activities held daily under the supervision of this king is available in many of the works produced by the court poets and by the king himself. Vijayaraghava, like his father, was a poet, composer, and a distinguished scholar in *sahitya* and *sangita*. Specialization in different styles of dancing was the remarkable feature of this period.

William Hickey in his work '*The Tanjore Maratta Principality*' has some interesting observations to make, "Of the Maratha dynasty of Tanjore we have no authentic records. It lasted about six hundred and seventy six years.... The country they obtained through easy treachery, they had wealthy people to rule over, and a rich province to support them; and in the process of time they sank into listlessness and luxury"⁸

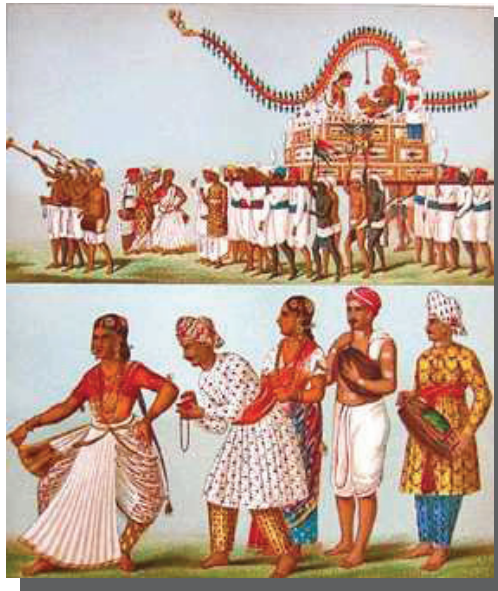
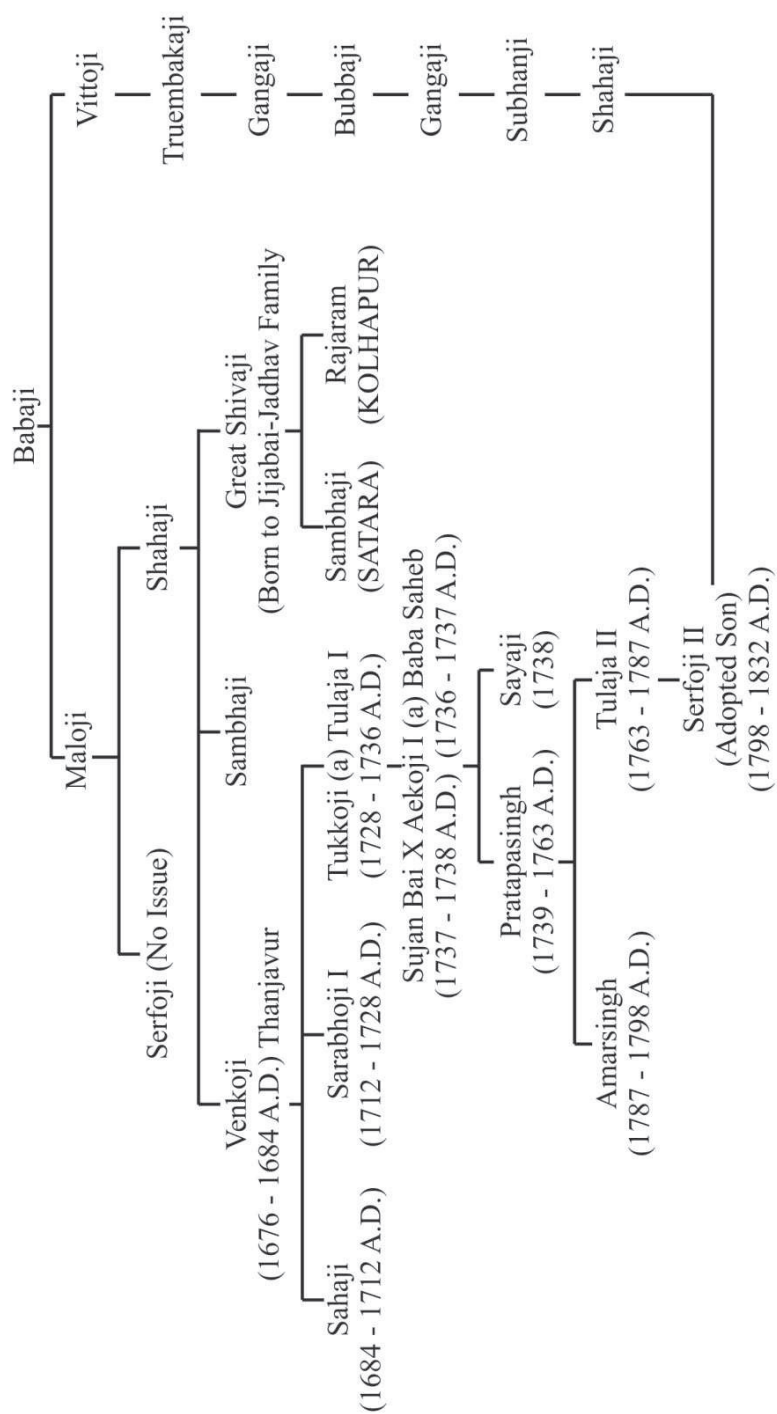


Fig.5: Tanjore king's royal wedding procession and dance performance during procession.

Ekaji established the Maratha empire in Tanjore in A. D. 1676-1684. He was a renowned Sanskrit and Telugu scholar. He wrote the *Dvipada Ramayana* in Telugu. He encouraged arts and culture just like the Nayakas. Shahaji II (A. D. 1684-1712) ascended the throne when he was very young. He was a scholar in *sangita* and *sahitya*. The very fact that hundreds of poems/*pada-s* were written in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada during this era is also proof of the fact that there was perhaps a demand for these verses to be danced to. In Tanjavur, King Shahaji (1684-1711) wrote

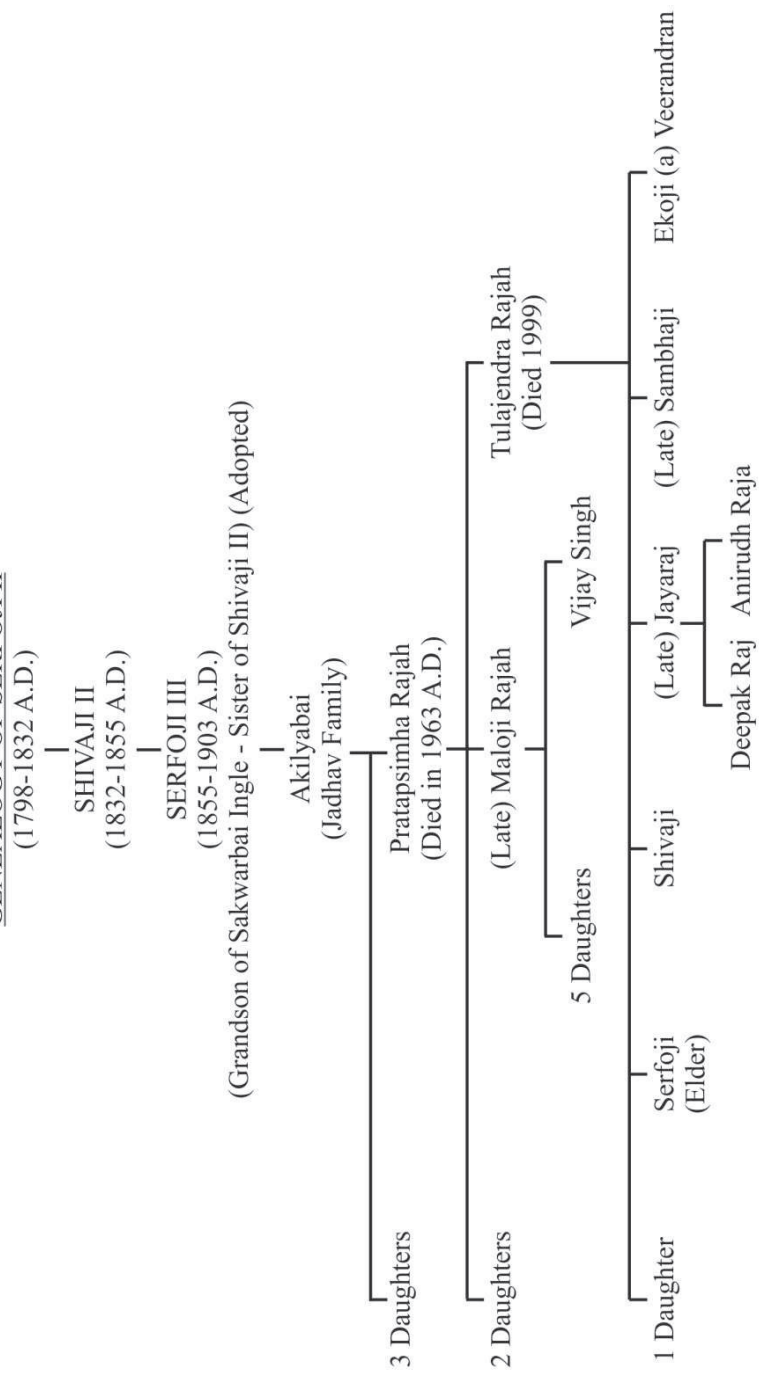
almost 500 Marathi *Padams* in the Telugu script and they are available as palm-leaf manuscripts preserved in the Saraswati Mahal Library Tanjavur. King Tulaja II (1763-87) wrote the *Sangitasaramrita*, the landmark technical treatise on *adavus*. This is also indicative of the fact that the dance form was developing so well that a need was felt to document its technicalities for students and teachers.

APPENDIX I
GENEALOGY OF THANJAVUR MARATHA ROYALS



APPENDIX II

GENEALOGY OF SERFOJI II



THE TEMPLE REPERTOIRE

The Devadasi dance performance presented in the temple or the royal court had a definitive structure as well. Just like the ritual performance of the dancer in the temple extolling the resident temple god, the music was required to create an atmosphere of devotion and auspicious ambience. This was known as *Mangala-isai* or *Mangala-vadyam*. Music is very important in temple rituals and the tradition of playing the *Nagasvaram* and *Tavil* continue to be vital components of temple culture in Tamil Nadu. "The music ensemble was called the *Periya melam* (the big one) and the dance ensemble called the *Chinna melam* (the small one). There was a deep social connect between the music artistes and the dance artistes (dancers, *nattuvanars*) and this was one of the reasons that a number of 18th and 19th century compositions have continued to survive in the oral tradition. A great example is the way some of the *Varnams* of Ramaswami Dikshitar (1735-1817) are available as tunes on the *Nagasvaram*, which otherwise would have been lost."⁹



Fig. 6: Devadasi Dance in the court

The Devadasis generally participated in the evening rituals in most temples (*sayarakshai-sevai*, *palliyarai-sevai*) on a daily basis. On the occasion of festivals and auspicious days when the idol would be taken out in a procession around the

temple, the devadasis would be required to perform as evening entertainment for the large number of devotees and worshippers who would be attending the festival. Especially during the important festivals, the devadasis would present “group” dances such as the *Kuravanji* 'fortune-teller' plays or narratives about the god of desire, Kama (known as *kamankuttu*), performed either on a makeshift stage in the temple complex or in the temple *mandapa*, if it is a really large temple. This would also be the occasion for the chief or senior-most devadasi to present a few solo items such as the *Varnam*.

On regular days, the devadasi dancers (also known as *mannikattar*, *talicheripendugal* and *devaradiyar*) participated in the evening temple rituals of singing and performing pada-s of praise and short dancing pieces on flower offerings (*Pushpanjali*) and food offerings (*balabhoga*). In some temples, the devadasi-s also regularly performed as propitiation of the minor deities of that temple, especially those who were protectors of the cardinal directions (*Baliharana* or *Navasandhi puja*). The *nattuvanar* was the teacher but also conducted the performance.



Fig. 7 : Group of Young Devadasi

"Almost all temples employing devadasis had a systematic daily programme for the work allocated to them, the temple rituals which required their presence. For

instance, at the Tiruchendur temple (Tirunelveli district), there was an established convention that identified the right dance items to be performed for the deity at the specific time."¹⁰

Time	Pan	Instrument	Dance
Morning	Gandaram	Sachaputa	Bhujangatrasitam
Noon	Sigamaram	Sachaputa,	Lalitam
Evening	Panchamam	KumbaSimhavad	Kamalavartitam
Midnight	Kausikam	yamPanchavady	Svastikam
Othertimes	Kausikam	amPanchavadya	Sandhyanrittam

Since many of the rulers during these periods were also very knowledgeable about dance and music, they exercised their liberty to appoint additional dancers who could perform *abhinaya* in the temple performances. Sometimes, there were male dancers as well to perform the *Agamarga* dance. Dance was termed as ‘*koothu*’ and there were different kinds of *koothu* practised – *tamilkoothu*, *aryakoothu*, *santikoothu*, etc. – that had individual patterns. For example, *Santikoothu* was performed as a solo as well as in a group. The descendants of Srikantakamba and his brothers, who were attached to Thirunallar temple, had the right to perform *koothus* during temple festivals.

"There are some textual references that describe the repertoire of the temple and court dancers over the 18th, 19th and even early 20th centuries. The first amongst these is the *Sangitasaramrita*, a text in Sanskrit believed to be written by King Tulaja I. There is a section dedicated to dance titled, *Nritta-prakaranand*, which describes the *adavu* movements, dance teaching methodology, and the actual practice of dance in those times. Though the text is in Sanskrit, there are Tamil and Telugu words to indicate basic steps and movements. This



indicates that the text was meant to be used extensively by those who may not be

fluent in Sanskrit."¹¹ (Fig. 8: Ancient wall painting of Maharaja Tulaja I)

The other text is *Kumarasambhava Nirupana*, attributed to Maharaja Serfoji II (1798-1832) which re-interprets the famous epic poem of the same name, by Kalidasa, through a series of songs that can be easily adapted to dance. Serfoji's court produced a cluster of *Nirupanas*— *Tarana*, *Tripata*, that could work very well with established ones such as *Varnam*, *Abhinayapada*, *Shabdham* consisted of three parts – *tattakara*, *alaru*, *aditya*. It is very close to the *Alarippu* of today's *Margam*. The dancer enters the stage in the first part, *tattakara*, with the recitation of a single line of *sollakuttu*, stamping her feet in rhythm. In the second part – *alaru*-- the configuration of syllables is exactly as in the second part of the *Alarippu*, ending with the sounds of 'digi, digi, digi'.

The Tanjore Quartets: Creating the Margam Format



Fig. 9: Tanjore Quartets with the Devadasi

There were a number of dance and music forms practiced in Tanjore, patronised by the Maratha kings. But with time new systems became the norm. The new forms flourished and the colonial rule forced out some old practices. One of the older forms that underwent change was Dasiattam. The Tanjore Quartet and some others revived

and restructured Dasiattam to become Sadir which eventually metamorphosed into what we know as today's Bharatanatyam.

The *Nattuvanar*, most usually male, was integral to a *dasi's* performance. He conducted the dance, knowing choreography and music very well as a senior teacher and also managed the group. His *nattuvangam* involved playing the cymbals, singing, controlling the *laya* of the dance. Different *Nattuvanars* and *Devadasis* had their own style which developed into *Banis*. One of the first *bani's* of Bharatanatyam was originated by the Tanjore quartet. They created a powerful and long line of dance teachers and masters. They never married into families with devadasis in their lineage. These four brothers were amply endowed with brilliance and genius. Mainly it is their compositions that set the trend and defined the *Margam* of Bharatanatyam performances. In Serfoji's court, in the early 19th century, the *Ekartha Prayoga* (single theme - different but interlinked combinations of *Nritta* and *Nritya*) style of Sadir was recomposed by the four brothers and some others such as Sabhapati, Gopala Narayana and Shivarاما Subbaya to form the unlinked *Pritagartha prayoga* structure or '*Margam*' as used today. (starting from *Alarippu* to *Tillana*), showing multiple themes.

The Tanjore Quartets comprised four brothers – Chinnaiya (c. 1802-1856), Ponnaiya (c.1804-1864), Vadivelu (c. 1810-1847) and Shivanandam (c. 1808-1868) – renowned exponents of music and dance. They were descendants from a family of *Nattuvanars* musicians who were patronised by the Nayaka and Maratha courts in 19th century of the princely state of Tanjore. Their earliest traceable ancestor is one Gopala Nattuvanar (b. 1638) who served in the Rajagopalasvami temple at Mannargudi, and was a chief musician at the court of King Vijayaraghava Nayaka in the 17th century. "At the decline of the Nayaka rule in Tanjore, this family moved to Madurai, and later to Tirunelveli. During the rule of King Tulaja II (r. 1763-87), three descendants of the family, the brothers Mahadevan (1734-91), Gangaimuthu (1737-98) and Ramalingam (dates unknown) were invited back to the Tanjore court. The present home of K.P. Kittappa Pillai on West Main Street in Tanjore was gifted to the family by Tulaja II. Gangaimuttu had two sons, Subbarayan (1758-1814) and Chidambaram (dates unknown). Subbarayan's sons were the Tanjore Quartet." ¹² Subbaraya Pillai, Gangaimuthu's son was in the durbar as a dance teacher. In those days Subbarayawas responsible for the female dancers performing in the royal

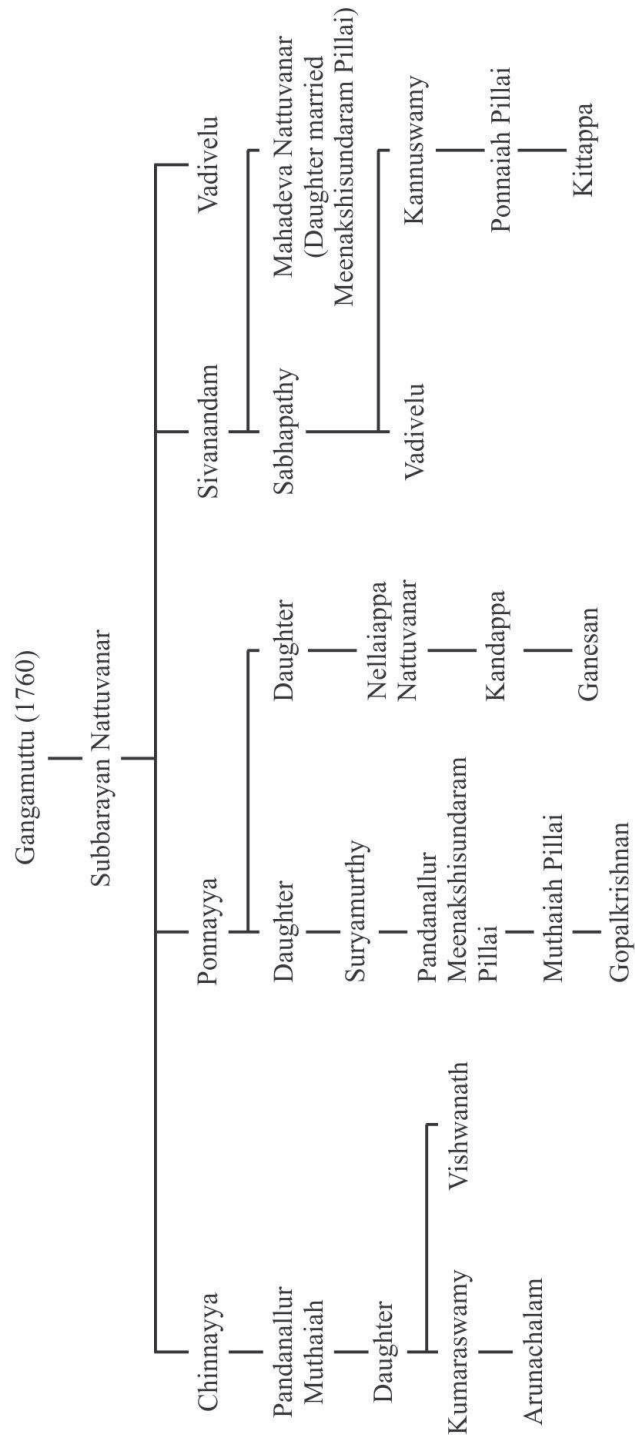
court. All four of them took the basic training from their father Subbaraya Pillai, and Muthuswāmi Dīkshitar (1776–1835) one of the members of the Trinity of Carnatic music. They were in the Tanjore durbar for some time. Gangaimuthu, was dancer and teacher. This Tamil family, *Oḍuvars* in origin, was brought from Tirunelveli to Tanjore to organize temple dances and recite *Tēvāram* (devotional) music.

The four brothers were formally trained in Carnatic music from Muttuswami Dikshitar for seven years and debuted in the royal court of Tanjore. They composed several *Tana Varnams*, and *Kirtanas* and many other *Kriti-s* with their signatures. After becoming well-versed in music, they got trained under their grandfather Gangaimuthu and father, Subbarayan in Bharatanatyam. They learnt the nuances of the theory and practice of the art, and thereafter formatted the performing pattern of the dance. After their debut, the brothers were praised and blessed by their guru, Muttuswami Dikshitar and were given the title of “*Bharata Shreshtar*”. The king appointed them as the musicians of the court and gave several gifts. The Quartet was employed as the Masters of the Highest order in the court of Raja Sarfoji II (A D 1798-1832) and here they became legendary as the Tanjore Quartet (TanjaiNalyar). They adorned the courts of various kings.



(Fig.10 : Shri Muttuswami Dikshitar)

GENEALOGY OF THANJAVUR MARATHAS



Of the four, Chinnaiah was a choreographer, Ponnaiah- a composer and vocalist, Vadivelu - a composer and violinist and Sivanandam excelled as a mridangist and *nattuvanar*. Originally these brothers recited the *Tevaram* and led dance performances at the Brihadiswara temple.

Chinnaiya (1802-56), was a great teacher of dance and the eldest of the four. He was one of the few males who danced dressed as a woman. He taught men to dance during the mattu pongal. He then moved to the Mysore court of Krishnaraja Udaiyar III (1811-68). A few of the Quartette compositions are dedicated to Krishnaraja Udaiyar III. Those are mostly the creations of Chinnaiya. He wrote a Telugu text called *Abhinaya Lakshanamu*, a reworked version of the Nandikeshvara's *Abhinaya darpana*, narrated to him by his father. Later Chinnayya was in the durbar of Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar (r. 1895–1940) in Mysore. He composed some *Kirtanams* and *Varṇams* in his patron's honour. It is believed that in the Durbar, he played a role in systematizing dance patterns. The exact period which Chinnaya spent in Mysore is not clear.

Among the brothers, Ponnaiya (1804-64) was prolific composer. Systematization of the Sadir Kacheri is credited to him. Most of the compositions by the brothers on Brihadishvara and several *Nritta* compositions (*Jatiswarams*, *Tillanas*) are credited to him.



The youngest Vadivelu was an accomplished vocalist, composer and violinist. He accompanied himself on the violin. His and his brothers' musical abilities were tested by three prominent female dancers: Sarasammal of Tanjore, Kamalamuttu of Tiruvarur, and Mannargudi Meenakshi, who performed

at Serfoji's court. As a disciple of Muthuswami Dikshitar, Vadivelu spent four years in Tanjore. He mastered the violin and became so proficient that even Thaygaraja would summon him to listen to the new instrument. Vadivelu then of 22 years, was appointed as Asthana vidvan of Travancore court for 8 years. His expertise as a

dance expert, as vocalist and violinist caught the fancy of Swathi Thirunal. **(Fig.11: Shri Swathi Thirunal)**

Vadivelu was also a Tamil and Telugu scholar. His mastery over violin seemed to be unmatched. Vadivelu was responsible, along with Swati Tirunal in transforming, codifying and popularization of Mohiniattam, providing opportunities to women dancers. Until then Kathakali, the male preserve, dominated the dance scene in Kerala. Vadivelu is known to have reviewed and critic Swathi's dance and music compositions. Together with the Tanjore sisters Sugandha Parvathi and Sundara Lakshmi, Kamakshi Ammal the singer, accompanied Vadivelu to Travancore court. Swati Tirunal and Vadivelu together created of many *Swarajathis*, *Varnams*, *Padas* and *Tillanas*. Vadivelu was excellent choreographer and proficient vocalist in his court. After leaving Tanjore, they reached the Travancore palace in Jan 1832. Their father Subbarayan and Chidambaram (uncle) went with them. Vadivelu died in 1846. The ivory violin gifted by Swathi Tirunal can be seen at the Quartet's ancestral home at 1818, West Main Street, behind Brihadeswara Temple, Tanjore even today. Though Vadivelu himself was never married, descendants of the other brothers carried on the work and trained many great dancers of Bharatanatyam.

During their stay in Tanjore, the Quartet structured the Sadir, perfected the use of the clarinet, the violin, trained many dancers and documented their efforts. The brothers composed a large number of varnams and kritis, including the Navaratnamalaa tribute to their guru. Dikshitar called Vadivelu an Ekasandhagrahi, one who had the ability to reproduce a song after hearing it only once. Sivanandam brought in the western Clarinet as an accompaniment for Carnatic music. Vadivelu contributed significantly to dance. Many famous *kritis* in praise of Brihadiswara were created by Ponnayya. The brothers propagated the Pandanallur Bani. A very traditional *kriti*, *Navasanthi Kauthuvam*, was pioneered by the quartet. All four were called '*Eka Chanda Grahi*,' for they had the ability to repeat what they heard just once. Due to some issues the foursome left the Tanjore court in 1830 and travelled to Travancore in Swati Tirunal's court. When Serfoji passed away in 1832, he was succeeded by Shivaji 2 and that was when Ponnaiya and Sivanadam returned to Tanjore upon the invitation of Shivaji II.

The greatest works of the Tanjore Quartet are the *Varnams*. They depict the ecstasy

and torment of romantic love, as well as depictions of states of spiritual rapture, interspersed throughout with *Nritta* sequences. The dance compositions of the Tanjore Quartet form the classical canon, or the supreme masterpieces, of Bharatanatyam."The Tanjore Brothers divided the repertoire of court dance into seven primary genres for the solo female court dancer: *Alarippu*, *Jatisvaram*, *Shabdham*, *Varnam*, *Padam*, *Javali*, and *Tillana*. These represented, in a well balanced manner, both the abstract dance technique (*nritta*) and textual interpretation (*abhinaya*). The aesthetic experiments of the brothers, Ponnaiya and Vadivelu in particular, were tested by three prominent female dancers of that time: Kamalamuttu of Tiruvarur, Sarasammal of Tanjore, and Minakshi of Mannargudi, who probably performed at the Maratha darbar. In 1834, the Quartets were banished from Tanjore because of a tryst with King Serfoji II, and moved temporarily to Travancore." ¹³

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE MARGAM: TANJORE QUARTET COMPOSITIONS

Bharatanatyam was formally codified into a structured performance repertoire by the Tanjore Quartet. The Tanjore Quartet infused the spirit of their devotional dance into the repertoire. Nevertheless, superb compositions like *Pancha Murthi Kavituams* and *Navasandhi Kavituams*, saturated with sanctity, fully radiate the splendour of the temple ritual. They were the first to formalise the *Margam* and codify the *adavus*. They planned and set the order of the different items of the repertoire in a performance structure. They composed several *kritis* of each category set to different ragas and talas mainly in Telugu, their mother tongue. They were addressed to the family deities, some other deities as well as to their patron kings. Performances of these items earned them fame and reputation. They were invited to spread the art by the royal patrons of Tiruvananthapuram and Mysore. And the kings also arranged performances in the temples.



Fig.12: Tanjore Brothers

Among the brothers, Ponniah composed several *Tanavarams*, *Kirtanams*, *Melaprapti*, *Alarippu*, *Jatiswaram*, *Shabdam*, *Swarajati*, *ChaukaVarnam*, *Ragamalika*, *Padams*, *Javali*, *Tillana*, *Dharu*, *Swarapadam*, etc. Some of these are dedicated to various deities and others dedicated to Maratha rulers of Tanjavur like Serfoji Raja II, Pratapasimha Bhonsle and Amarasimha Bhonsle. Sivanandam composed on Sivaji Raja and was well-known as a skilful teacher to many aspiring dancers. Chinniah composed several similar pieces in praise of his patron, Krishna Raja Wodeyar, the King of Mysore.

The four brothers were master-conductors (nattuvanar) and had a large student following. Celebrated *nattuvannars*, Pandanainallur Meenakshi sundaram Pillai and Chennai Nelliappa Nattuvanar were students as well as sons-in-law of Mahadeva Nattuvanar, son of Sivanandam. The Tanjore Quartet compositions form a large body

of work, many *Varnams*, *Javalis*, *Padams* are in general attributed to them, largely without individual distinction. Most of the *Shabdams* composed were in Kamboji, though now they are often rendered in Ragamalika. They have indeed composed many *Tana* and *PadaVarnams* as well as *Tillanas* which are famous and often danced. Their first *Mayamalavagoulai* composition is special because similar to their Guru Muthuswami Dikshathar, they also tuned it in *Mayamalavagoulai*. Also, many of their works are wrongly credited to Ponniah Pillai (1888-1945) and vice versa.

SOME OF THE COMPOSITIONS ATTRIBUTED TO THE TANJORE QUARTET

Shanmukhakauthuvam (Shanmukhapriya - Adi)

JatIswarem (Saveri - Rupaka)

Varnam: Sakhiyeindavelaiyil (Anandabhairavi - Adi)

Varnam: Sarasaninnu (Kapi)

Varnam: MannaviChekona (Shankarabharanam - Adi)

Chelinenethu – Paras

Satileni – Purvikalyani –

AmbaNeelambari – Neelambari

Muttavaddura – SaveriJavali

Bhakta palana – Keeravani –

Mayateetha – Mayamalavagowla

Gokulambadishabdam

Thillana – Mandari

COMPOSITIONS OF TANJORE PONNIAH:

AmbanIlambari (NIlambari - Adi)

Ranganatude (Saurashtram - Rupaka)

Varnam: Mohamana (Bhairavi - Rupaka)

Kali Kauthuvam (Gowlai - Rupaka)

Tillana (Shankarabharanam - Adi (tisragati))

COMPOSITIONS OF SIVANANDAM

Kappaduve (Anandabhairavi - Rupaka)

COMPOSITIONS OF CHINNIAH

Javali: Sakiprana (cenjurutti - Adi)

Javali: Celinenetlusaginthune (parasu - Adi)

Javali: Elarayene (bhairavi - Adi)

Tillana (Kapi - Adi)

COMPOSITIONS OF VADIVELU

Shabdam: SarasiJakshulu (Ragamalika - Mishra Chapu)

LIST OF KRITIS OF A MARGAM OF THE TANJORE QUARTET

1. *Thodayamangalam/Pushpanjali/Mallari/Kautuvam/Allaripu (in one of the 5 main Jatis)*
2. *Jatiswaram*
3. *Shabdam*
4. *Varnam/Swarajati*
5. *Padam/Javali*
6. *Astapadi*
7. *Kirtanam*
8. *Tillana*
9. *Shlokam, Mangalam*

The *Margam*, a structured 7-8 item based Bharatanatyam recital, was re-organised around 1930 with the regeneration of the dance form by its revivalists. This linear format of the traditional, secular recital, developed around the stem of *Pushpanjali/ mallari/ Todaymangalam, Alarippu, Jatiswaram, Shabdam, Varnam, Padam / Javali/ Kirtanam, Tillana* and *Sloka*, reflecting a marvellous scheme of aesthetic progression that paid adequate attention to physical endurance as well. This is described most succinctly by the late T. Balasaraswati, in a lecture she delivered at the Tamil Isai Sangam, Madras. It is obvious from an in-depth reading of the same that Balasaraswati truly believed that Bharatanatyam was grounded in *bhakti* and that "it is justified in being called a yoga because it is a spiritual discipline perfecting the

mind to thought-free serenity." This lecture, translated from Tamil by the late Shri S. Guhan, and reproduced in '*Bala on Bharatanatyam*', a monograph published by the Sruti Foundation, reads thus. "I believe that the traditional order of the Bharatanatyam recital... is the correct sequence in the practice of this art, for revealing the spiritual through the corporeal ... The greatness of this traditional recital-pattern will be apparent even from a purely aesthetic point of view. In the beginning, *Alarippu*, which is based on rhythm alone, brings out the special charm of pure dance. The movements of *Alarippu* relax the dancer's body and thereby her mind, loosen and coordinate her limbs, and prepare her for the rest of the dance. Rhythm has a rare capacity to concentrate. *Alarippu* is most valuable in freeing the dancer from distraction and making her single-minded. The joy of pure rhythm in *Alarippu* is followed by *Jatiswaram* where there is the added joy of melody. Melody, without word or syllable, has a special power to unite us with our being. In *Jatiswaram*, melody and movement come together. Then comes the *Shabdham*. It is here that compositions, with words and meanings, which enable the expression of the myriad moods of Bharatanatyam, are introduced. The Bharatanatyam recital is structured like a Great Temple: we enter through the *gopuram* (outer hall) of *Alarippu*, cross the *ardhamandapam* (half-way hall) of *Jatiswaram*, then the *mandapam* (great hall) of *Shabdham* and enter the holy precinct of the deity in the *Varnam*. This is the space which gives the dancer expansive scope to revel in the music, rhythm and moods of the dance. The *Varnam* is the continuum which gives ever expanding room to the dancer to delight in her self-fulfilment, by providing the fullest scope to her own creativity as well as to the tradition of the art. *Pada-s* now follow. In dancing to *pada-s*, one experiences the contentment, cool and quiet of entering the sanctum from its external precinct. The expanse and brilliance of the outer corridors disappear in the dark inner sanctum; and the rhythmic virtuositities of the *Varnam* yield to the soul-stirring music and *abhinaya* of the *Padam*. Dancing to the *Padam* is akin to the juncture when the cascading lights of worship are withdrawn and the drum beats die down to the simple and solemn chanting of sacred verses in the closeness of god. Then, the *Tillana* breaks into movement like the final burning of camphor accompanied by a measure of din and bustle. In conclusion, the devotee takes to his heart the god he has so far glorified outside; and the dancer completes the traditional order by dancing to a simple devotional verse. "



Fig. 13: Smt. T. Bala Saraswati

"Balasaraswati made the public Bharatanatyam conscious, not by conscious efforts as a torch-bearer or a reformer but by the beauty and eloquence of her dancing. It was left to others to fight prejudices and stupidity, do research, delve into the past. But Balasaraswati made us aware of the living miracle of Bharatanatyam to be seen and to be enraptured."¹⁴

This form of the *Margam* became extremely popular during the revival of classical Indian dance forms around the time of Indian Independence, and was sustained for almost 50 years after. Most solo dancers would perform the *Margam* lasting for almost three hours. However, these days, with less time available to the audience, dancers have begun to work around the *Margam* in various innovative ways. Therefore very few established dancers perform the full *Margam* now. But even today, the *Margam* continues to be the standard format for the *arangetram* recitals as it is structured in a way that allows for the young dancer to present his/her accomplishments in all aspects of the dance form to the audience.

Over the centuries several eminent artists contributed to the preservation and enrichment of the art. The Tanjore Quartet, brought artistic changes and innovations of matchless exquisiteness to the tradition. Their masterpieces of compositions are unparalleled and honoured in the world of classical music and dance. With their next eight generations, the tradition of this family expanded and inherited.

“The Margam evolved by the Quartet in a structured manner introducing nritha and nritya, including abhinaya, to make the transition from one to the other easy and smooth fashion for the artiste and the viewer alike, may seem to be dying with the introduction of Neo classical and many other modern infusions. But then again that is how it is. Dasiattam and Ekartha gave way to Bharatnatyam, now it is further changing again, and it is but natural, for man is never satisfied....”

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