



## **CHAPTER 9**

### ***THE NRITTA KRITIS OF MARGAM***



As we saw in last chapter, once learning of Bharatanatyam and dancing became accepted, it became widespread. A modern interpretation of Bharatanatyam began to be widely taught to young girls, the dance gurus worked on the standardized *Margam* created by the Tanjore Quartet. As per the previous chapter, this *Margam* was a string of items designed to highlight all the skills related to *Nritta and Nritya* techniques. It involved control over rhythm, grace and speed in movements, awareness of one's physical stage presence, *abhinaya* skills, choreography; in short, everything that the dancer can present to an audience. The *Margam* developed not only as a dance training curriculum, but also accepted by many mainstream dancers presenting a solo performance of about 2 to 3 hours. One of its major exposition is the performance in the numerous *arangetram* presentations. The *Margam* consists of a series of dance items, some of which are of pure dance that is *nritta*, some only *nritya* or *abhinaya* and some are a mix of both pure and interpretative dance *nritta* and *nritya*. *Nritta* is called pure dance for it is non-narrative and abstract. It lays the foundation to perceive pure consciousness and therefore a Bharatanatyam dancer can get in touch with one's inner self or embodied being, like a yogi through his practice of meditation.

According to Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, "*Nritta* in classical dance is a coordinated unit of movement which is well structured with geometric precision and harmony. *Nritta* has evolved from the systematization of body movements which were perhaps the very initial way man used to express his joy and sorrow before he learnt to speak. In India, dance took two directions. One, it developed as a way of amusing oneself and others on occasions i.e., the desire of man to express his sense of fun through dancing. Another is, to use dance as ritualistic practices of our faith. Not only has man known that the mortal form can express joy and sorrow through movement, but he has also realized that this movement must have discrimination and selection and just as he must organize society to transcend the selfishness of the personal man on the horizontal plane, he must formalize movement to transcend himself along the vertical plane and devote himself to a being higher than himself, a power which he evokes and to whom he dedicates himself body and soul. This direction of growth is most important for our purpose as it is this instinct for sublimation, for transcendence, that gives true fibre and character to classical dance. That dancing was and is an essential feature of the Hindu temple is not a casual happening. It results directly from a

continuous process of thought and living: this ritualistic dancing, in both its religious and classical richness, ascends and descends - grows and declines, with the other sociological processes of history."<sup>1</sup>

The *Margam* begins and ends with *Nritta* item. All of them are described in this chapter with discussion on their evolution over the years and significance in the *Margam*. The opening *Nritta* item is mostly *Alaripu* but it can be any one or two from *Thodayamangalam*, *Mallari*, *Kauthvam*, *Pushpanjali* and *Allaripu* also, next that is the second is *Jatiswaram* and the last is *Tillana* followed by a small *shloka*.



**Fig.1 : Padmabhushan Smt.Alarmel Valli**

## **Thodayamangalam**

*Thodayam* in Tamil means invocatory, so *Thodayamangalam/Tolumangalam* is an invocation/prayer song sung at the opening of a dance-drama in praise of the deity around whose narrative the dance-drama is enacted. As a musical composition, *Thodayamangalam* is a set of songs, composed by saints like Sri Badhradri Ramadasa Swami, Sri Annamacharya, and Sri Vijayagopala Swamigal, sometimes strung together like a garland by Marudhanallur Sathguru Swamigal. *Thodayamangalam* songs are in praise of Lord Vishnu and his *avatars* -- Rama, Krishna, Srinivasa. They are composed in Sanskrit and Telugu in *gana ragas* like *Naatai*, *Aarabi*, *Madhyamaavathi*, *Saaveri*, and *Panthuvarali*. They were popularly sung as *Aahvana Keerthanam* (to welcome the Lord with *mangalam*), at the beginning of Sampradhaya Bhajans and so on.



**Fig. 2 : Dr. Yamini Krishnamurthy**



"The very popular examples of *thodayamangalams* in Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi performances (even solo ones) are the five *thodayamangalams* composed in praise of Lord Venkateswara by the Tallapakkam Brothers of Andhra Pradesh. Singing of this set of five *Thodayamangalam* songs prior to the start of a solo *Sadir* recital was still popular in the early decades of the last century."<sup>2</sup> Amongst contemporary dancers, Yamini Krishnamurthy was known to open her recitals with a fast-paced *Thodayamangalam* followed by the *Alarippu*. *Thodayamangalams* were introduced in the popular dance-dramas of the Nayaka period in south India. It was sung at the Dance *Kutcheri* too, primarily because it helps create an auspicious ambience, with a pure and devotional environment. It guarantees a successful performance!

In the Vazhuvur style presentation, *Thodayamangalam* was the first item in praise of Lord Gnyana Sabeshar of Vazhuvur. These dancers presented the *Thodayamangalam* of Tanjavur Swaminathan, the great 19th century *nattuvanar*, a native of Vazhuvur. It starts with the words "*Jaya su bhrapurivasa, jaya mahajnana sameta*", in *Nattai*. In its last line, it contains the *mudra* of the composer, Bhakta Swaminathan, the grandfather of Vazhuvur Ramiah Pillai. Well-known contemporary dancers such as Kamala, Padma Subrahmanyam, Chitra Visweswaran who studied with Ramiah Pillai usually start their recitals with this particular *Thodayamangalam*.

Chitra Visweswaran says, "I have seen the song inscribed on the walls of the Vazhuvur temple. The disciples of Swamimalai Rajarathnam and K.J. Sarasa, the gurus who were earlier associated with the Vazhuvur tradition, also do the same. Ramiah Pillai claims he has composed many *Melaprapti jatis*, but they are not in vogue now. Many dancers have replaced the erstwhile *Melaprapti* and *Thodayamangalam* with the rendering of invocatory verses or songs. Some sing '*Mahaganapatim*' in *Nattai* composed by Muthuswami Dikshitar or '*Vatapi Ganapatim*' in *Hamsadhvani* or '*Vinay aka ninu vina*' in *Hamsadhvani* composed by Kothavasal Venkatarama Iyer."<sup>3</sup>



**Fig.3 : Smt. Chitra Vishweswaran**



**Fig. 4: Guru Smt. K J Sarasa**

The *Thodayamangalam* is at times accompanied by *Melaprapti*, *nattuvanar*, the vocalist, and a complete instrumental orchestra that includes flute, *mridangam*, *kanjeera*, and *ghatam*. The *Thodayamangalam* was included in their dance curriculum and choreography by several well-known teachers including V. Ramaiya, Adyar Lakshman, and Durairaj Iyer. Nattuvanar Kalyan Sundaram's riveting choreography was one of the reasons for the popularity of the *Thodayamangalam* as the opening item in a solo recital. However, it is believed that the legendary T. Balasaraswati and her daughter, Lakshmi, never included it in their repertoire. Though T. Balasaraswati mentioned the practice of *Melaprapti*, including the singing of the *Thodayamangalam*, in an interview she gave to *Sruti* magazine (*Sruti* No. 3, February 1984), "in her presidential address at the Tamil Isai Conference in 1975, she had omitted reference to *Melaprapti* and *Thodayamangalam* probably because it was believed that the *Thodayamangalam* is a prelude to and not a part of the dance recital, and also because the practice of *Melaprapti* had been discontinued years earlier. The person who reportedly had taken the initiative to do so was her guru Kandappa (*Sruti* No.3, February 1984). However, dancers trained by the late M Durairaj Iyer and Adyar Lakshmana presented the *Thodayamangalam* as the first choreographed item of their recitals. However they often danced abridged versions

of the *Thodayamangalam*, because to dance to all the 70 lines of the original five songs, the most famous one being '*Jaya Janaki Ramana*', would take too much time.

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Fig.5: Smt. Bala Saraswati taught Her Daughter Laxmi Knight

### *Mallari*

*Mallari* is instrumental music played only on the *nagaswaram*. There is a set of *solkattus* set to particular patterns of *svaras*. This pattern is played on the instrument as a tune and on the *tavil* in the form of *jatis*. *Mallari* is usually played in *Gambira Nattai* as the *raga* stands for the *Veera rasa*. There are two major types of *mallari* - *chinna mallari* and *periya mallari*. While *chinna mallari* can be played on all days, *periya mallari* can be played only on specific days. Originally, *mallari* was played in all temples. Later on, it was divided into *Siva mallari* (played at the Nataraja temple in Chidambaram) and *Vishnu mallari* (played at the Tyagaraja temple in Tiruvarur). "It was Muthuswami Dikshitar's father, Ramaswami Dikshitar who formalised the *utsavarituals* in the Tiruvarur temple and specified the stages of *mallari* to be played during the daily *pooja* and annual festivals. This was a custom followed by all the *nagaswara vidwans* at the temple."<sup>5</sup>



**Fig. 6 : Smt. Priyadarshini Govind**

One significant mallari is *triputa tala mallari*, based on seven beats either as "*takita takadhimi*" (3 + 4) or "*takadhimi takita*" (4 + 3). *Taer mallari* which has 5 beats is the only mallari used during procession days. Except a few like *triputa mallari* and *taer mallari*, *taligai* and other mallaris do not have any specific *tala* structure (beats). Mallaris are usually set to four or eight *avartas* or *tala* cycles. *Solkattus* used in Mallari, are *Mridangam solkattus* (i.e. imitating sound of different strokes on the drum and facilitate precisionist.)

"According to the legend, during the Siva Tandava, Siva's anklet came off and fell on the ground producing basic drum sounds, "*Tha dhi Tom Nam*". This has formed the basis of *jatis* for several percussion instruments like the Mridangam. Using two hand strokes, the *sollukattus* like "*Dhim Dhim, Tham Tham*" could be derived. This forms the basis of the *mallari* presentation. The *mallari* is usually played in all three speeds: *vilamba*, *madhyama*, and *drudda*. This same *mallari* is then played in *tisra gati* followed by *kalpanaswara*." <sup>6</sup>



Some of the *mallaris* are:

- a. *Teertha Mallari*: Set to *Misra Chapu*, *Teertha Mallari* is played when water is fetched from the *yagansala* for the *Tirumanjanam* ritual (*abhishekam* of the deity). This *mallari* is also called *Tripura mallari*, as it is set to *Tripura tala*, of seven beats either as "*Takita takadhim*" (3 + 4) or "*Takadhim takita*" (4 + 3).
- b. *Ter Mallari*: This is played during the procession of the deity on the *Ter* (*the chariot*). *Ter mallari* is set to *Chatusra Tripura tala* with *Khanda gati*, a five-beat cycle. In the temple of Tiruvenkadu, the *Ter mallari* is played when the presiding deity Swetaranya sets out. It is played in the *raga Mohanam* (this is unique and special to this temple as all other *mallaris* are set to *Gambhira Nata raga*.) This *mallari* is followed by a *mallari* in *GambheeraNata* for the deity *Aghora Veerabhadraswami*.
- c. *Purapattu Mallari*: This *mallari* is a signal for the *Purapattu* or the Lord's procession to start. This is also called *Peria* (big) *mallari*, and is usually in *Adi tala*. The *Peria mallari* is played during the *Rishabha Vahana*, a very important event in Siva temples. All other *mallaris* that are played fall under the category of *Chinna* (small) *mallari*.
- d. *Taligai Mallari*: This *mallari* is played when *Naivedyam* is brought to offer to the Lord.
- e. *Kumbha Mallari*: This is performed while giving the *Poornakumbham*.
- f. *Palli Arai Mallari*: This is played in Vaishnava temples, when the deity enters the temple after the procession. Afterwards, the *lalioonjal* is played as the deity is put on the swing to sleep for the night. It is followed by the first part of the big *mallari*.

### **Pushpanjali**

When dance was performed in temples, as a ritual and a mark of respect, the dancer would begin the performance with a prayer and an offering of flowers – *Pushpanjali* -- to the image of the deity in the temple. Over a period of time, this short piece, developed into a slightly longer item, extending the obeisance to the Guru/teacher, the *ashtadikpalas* (guardians of the eight directions), and finally, the audience.

During the prosperous Chola rule in south India, *Pushpanjali* was also a popular item performed during the ritual of procession of the diety in temples to celebrate festivals. It would begin with the dancers facing the main diety in the temple, or they may even go around the temple in a *pradakshina*, carrying flowers in their hands. *Pushpanjali* is also mentioned in *Agamaragam* and in *Panchamarabu*. In *Agamaragam*, the offering of flowers was part of ritualistic worship. *Pushpanjali* was performed with or after the *Kumbha Harati* ceremony as preventive and propitiatory item as part of *Devadiyar* (*devadasi*) service at the temples. *Kumbha Harati* is very special ritual of removing black eye (*drishti*) performed only by *Devadiyarhal* (*devadasi*). They would wave a big lamp looking like a pot in front of the idol, the king or their patron. They were considered as auspicious women (*Nityasumangali*) as they were married to God and thus would never become widows. Guru S Sharada has noted that "*pushpanjali*, *kauthuvam* and *todayamangalam* originate from other Art forms and do not belong to the original Bharatanatyam repertoire. If these items are performed, they should be simple." <sup>7</sup>



**Fig. 7: Ms. Saranya CHandran**



**Fig. 8: Ms. Savitha Sastri**

As dance moved out of temples and into secular space, some of the ritual-based compositions bit the dust. Even the Tanjore Quartet did not include the *Pushpanjali* and *Kautukams* in their teachings and choreography and *Alarippu* became the opening item of choice. However, these items are being revived by contemporary dancers as they bring variety in the presentation, are indicative of the dancer's

research interests, and the very simple fact that fresh flowers are visually very attractive.

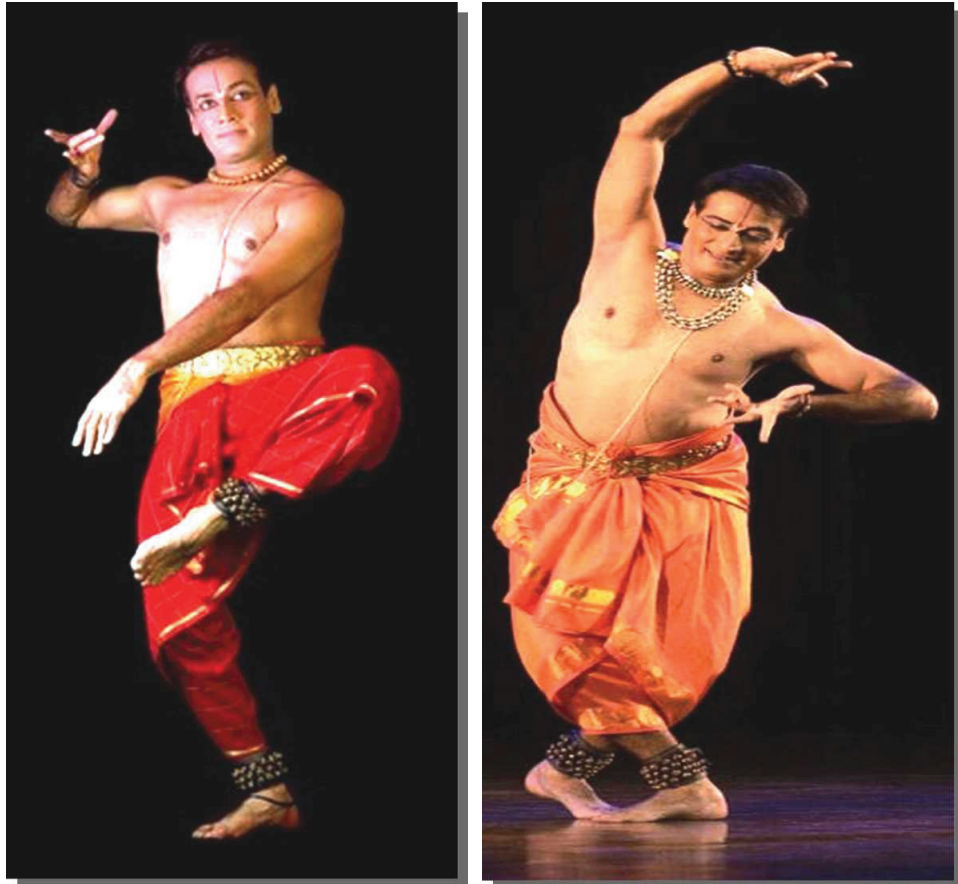
### **Kauthuvam**

Along with *Pushpanjali*, *Kauthuvams* is a dance item that belongs to the hoary temple traditions of south India, closely linking dance, ritual and common belief. There are several opinions in the dance fraternity on the origins of *Kauthuvam*. It is sometimes referred to as *Kavithvam* or *Kavithavum*, owing to its poetic quality. *Kautta*, *Kouta* or *Koutuvam* all seem to be the corrupt forms of the Sanskrit word *koutukam* which literally means words of praise. “*Koutukam*” is defined in Nandikesvara’s *Bharatarnava* as a dance composition set to rhythm, comprising drum syllables (para-s of *sollu-s*) intermixed with words in praise of a deity.”<sup>8</sup> (*Anubandh 1. Shloka 11-14*) In order times this dance form was witnessed only in temples. Traditional *koutukam-s* in Tamil are available even today. Serfoji has termed it as *Kauttam* in old Marathi language and for most of his *Kauttams* he has fixed the Raga in which the song is to be sung. The traditional *Koutukam-s* are not sung but only recited, set to a particular tala. It is an absorbing mode of prayer to god. In Serfoji’s chronology this item is performed last. In Modern usage it comes at the start.

In an article authored by dancer Chitra Visweswaran, with Sri. T.S. Parthasarathy’s support, the emergence of *Kauthuvams* is discussed thus. “Discussing the word *Kavuttuvam*, Prof. P. Sambamoorthy suggests the possibility of its being a distortion of *Kavithvam* (from *kavya*, which has much to do with poetry). But the *Kauthuvams* available to us are by no means great works of poetry. Nor can they be traced back ritualistically to *kavithva* and *kavya*.”<sup>9</sup>

Dr. V. Raghavan in his introduction to *Nritta Ratnavali* of Jaya Senapati has traced the present day *shabdham* to *Kavithvam*. His seems a more plausible explanation. According to him, the term *Kauthuvam* may be associated with temple rituals. *Moolavar* or *moola bimbam* is the name by which the main deity in any temple was called. *Kautuka bimbam*, *utsavar* or *utsava bimbam* is the deity taken out in temple procession. *Kauthuvams* were performed in the temple processions in front of the *Kautuka bimbam*, is known. Could the name of this dance piece be originated from this ritual? During the marriage, tying of the *kappu* around the wrists of the marrying couple was called *kautuka bandham*. In Telugu *Kautukamu* literally means the

celebration of tying the *kapu* or *kapu utsava*. So, it can be said that to ward off the evil, the *Kauthuvam* or *Kavutam* was performed in the presence of the deity, in the nature of tying a *kapu*. The close connection between *Kappu* and *Kavuttuvam* can be further studied from the *Bhairavakappu* in *Takkayaga Parani* of Ottakuttan, the famous 12<sup>th</sup> century Tamil poet.



**Fig. 9 & 9.1: Shri Satyanarayan Raju**

Though *Kauthuvams* were popular and regularly performed for many years in temples, they suffered a period of decline but they have been re-introduced in Bharatanatyam recitals in recent years. *Kauthuvam* became popular as a as an invocatory item in Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi recitals, as early as in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As such it a hymn, a song of devotion in praise of a deity, performed by *devadasis* as part of daily rituals, special occasions or during festivals. Most of the *Kauthuvams* are dedicated to a particular deity. e.g, the *Chidamabara Natesa Kauthuvam* by Gangai Muttu Nattuvanar is dedicated to the deity at the



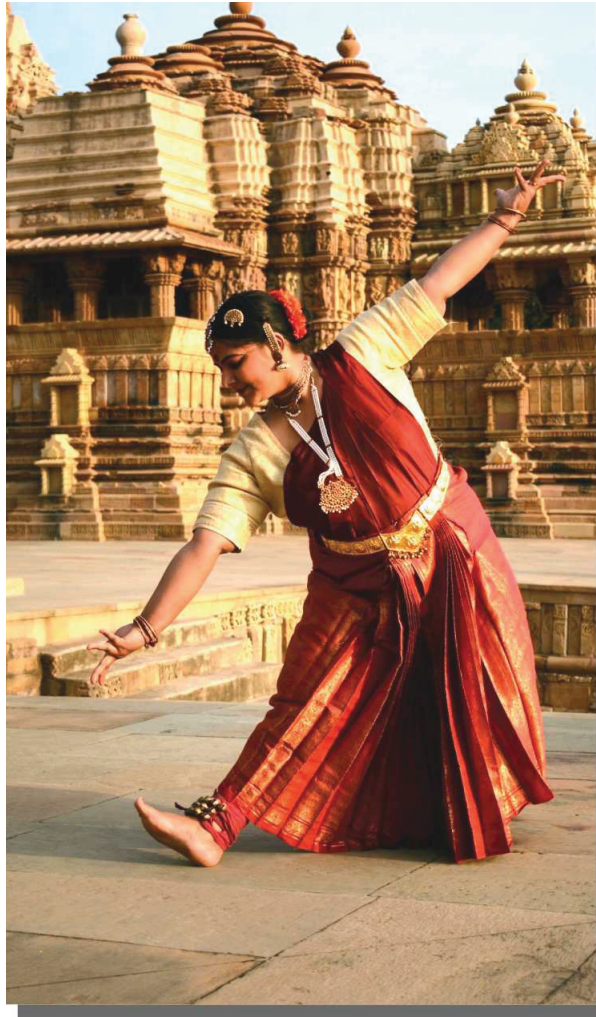
Chidamabaram Nataraja temple and similarly *Nachiar* or *Andal Kauthuvam* is dedicated to the shrine at Srivilliputhur. *Madurapuri Sokkar Kauthuvam* is dedicated to Madurai temple. *Kauthuvams* dedicated to deities like Vinayaka, Subramanya, etc, do not have mention of any particular temple but the *Panchamurthi Kauthuvams* are dedicated to Vinayaka, Muruga, Chandikeshwara, Sambanadar, Sandeswarar and Nataraj and this was performed on the Thiruvathirai day in the month of Margazhi, when the idol was taken out in procession. *Kauthuvams* on nature are known as *Vanampadi Kauthuvams*. *Kauthuvams* that mentioned *Nithya Sumangali* or the *Rudrakanika* are focussed on the devadasis<sup>4</sup>.

There are also *Kauthuvams* on Kings and noblemen. But these came into existence only after the Tanjore Quartet. The *Navasandhi Kauthuvam*, a very special item, propitiated the *ashtadikpalaks*, the guardian of the 8 directions with Brahma at the centre. They were performed in the different *sandhis* in the temple and performed to propitiate the deities of these different *sandhis*.

<b>Brahma (Center)</b>	<b>Left: chatura</b>	<b>Right: hamsasya</b>
<b>Indra (East)</b>	<b>tripataka both hands, crossed at wrists</b>	
<b>Agni (Southeast)</b>	<b>Left: langula / kangula</b>	<b>Right: tripataka</b>
<b>Yama (South)</b>	<b>Left: pasha (almost like tamrachuda hasta facing the ceiling)</b>	<b>Right: suchi</b>
<b>Nirruthi (Southwest)</b>	<b>Left: khatva</b>	<b>Right: shakata</b>
<b>Varuna (West)</b>	<b>Left: shikhara</b>	<b>Right: pataka</b>
<b>Vaayu (Northwest)</b>	<b>Left: ardhapataka</b>	<b>Right: arala</b>

<b>Kubera (North)</b>	<b>Left: alapadma</b>	<b>Right: mushti</b>
<b>Ehsaana (Northeast)</b>	<b>Left: Mushthi</b>	<b>Right: tripataka</b>

Hari Krishnan gives the following description of the *kauthuvam* (based on the text called *Natanadi Vadya Ranjanam*.) "In addition to courtly compositions such as the *shabdams*, the early part of the *Natanadi Vadya Ranjanam* also presents us with devadasi temple repertoire, in the form of ritual dances called *kavuttuvam*. The text contains the full cluster of the nine famous *navasandhi kavuttuvams*, and in addition, nine other *kavuttuvam* compositions. The *navasandhi kavuttuvams* are a set of nine compositions that invoke the deities of the eight cardinal directions (called *lokapalas* or *dikpalas*) plus the god Brahma in the centre (*brahmasthanam*) of the temple during a major festival (*mahotsava*). The ritual is accompanied by the worship of the structure called *balipitha* (seat of offering), and thus is thought of as part of a larger offering often called *balidana* or *baliharana*. Textual injunctions for the performance of such dances at the time of *balidana* is found in south Indian Sanskrit Agamas such as the *Kumara Tantra* and in the Shaiva commentator Sadyojatashivacharyas manual for priests called *Kriyakramadyotika*. In the form of the *kavuttuvams* that we find in the *Natanadi Vadya Ranjanam* however, these rituals were performed by devadasis at the Thanjavur Brihadishvara temple and the Madurai Minakshi temple until ca. 1946 in Thanjavur and 1955 in Madurai. The texts of the songs of the *navasandhi kavuttuvam* are descriptive in nature. They invoke both Sanskrit terms (such as the *krantaka karana* movement from the *Natyashastra*, and hand gestures *pataka* and *arala* mentioned as those used to depict Vayu in the *Abhinayadarpana*) and Tamil ones, (including the names of the basic modes [pans] of ancient Tamil music)." <sup>10</sup>



**Fig.10: Ms. Divya Patel (Researcher)**

The other *kavuttuvams* found in *Natanadi Vadya Ranjanam* are the following:

- *Ganapati kavuttuvam (on Ganesha)*
- *Subramaniyar kavuttuvam (on Murugan)*
- *Sirkali Campantar kavuttuvam (on the nayanar Tirujnanasambandar)*
- *Chidambara Natesar kavuttuvam (on Shiva-Nataraja)*
- *Tiruvallankadu Kali kavuttuvam (on Kali)*
- *Tiruchengodu Vishnu kavuttuvam (on Vishnu)*
- *Srivilliputtur Nachiyar kavuttuvam (on the alvar Andal)*
- *Madurapuri Chokkar kavuttuvam (on Shiva-Chokkanatha of Madurai)*
- *Darukavanam Mahalinga kavuttuvam (on Shiva-Mahalingasvami of Tiruvudaimarudur)*

According to noted scholar and critic, E. Krishna Iyer, *kauthuvams* popularity waned after devadasi tradition was banned in India in the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, the performance of such rituals ceased when dancing in the temples was banned. It is believed that in the second half of 20th century, *kauthuvams* were revived and cautiously restructured by Guru K. P. Kittappa Pillai, who played down the ritualistic elements as the dance began to be performed on the stage. Nowadays *kauthuvams* are defined as dance compositions in praise of a deity, in the form of an invocation performed at the commencement of a Bharatanatyam recital.

"Of these, four (those on Ganesha, Murugan, Nataraja, and Tirujnanasambandar) were among the five *panchamurti kavuttuvams* sung by the descendants of the Thanjavur Quartet every year during the festival of Tiruvadira (also known as Arudra Darshana) at the Brihadishvara temple. These four songs plus another *kavuttuvam* on the saint Chandikeshvara would be sung by the dance-master as they played the cymbals (*talam*) while the processional image of Shiva as Somaskanda would be taken around the temple grounds. Clearly then, the compositions in *Natanadi Vadya Ranjanam* were specifically compiled in textual form by observing and recording the living traditions of devadasi dance at a crucial point in history, and therefore its significance as an early 'documentation' of the south Indian dance repertoire cannot be understated." Prof. Sudharani Ragupathy in her VCD on *Navasandhi Kauthuvam* talks about *Kauthuvam* being performed before a *Shabdam*.



**Fig. 11: Prof. Sudharani Ragupathy**



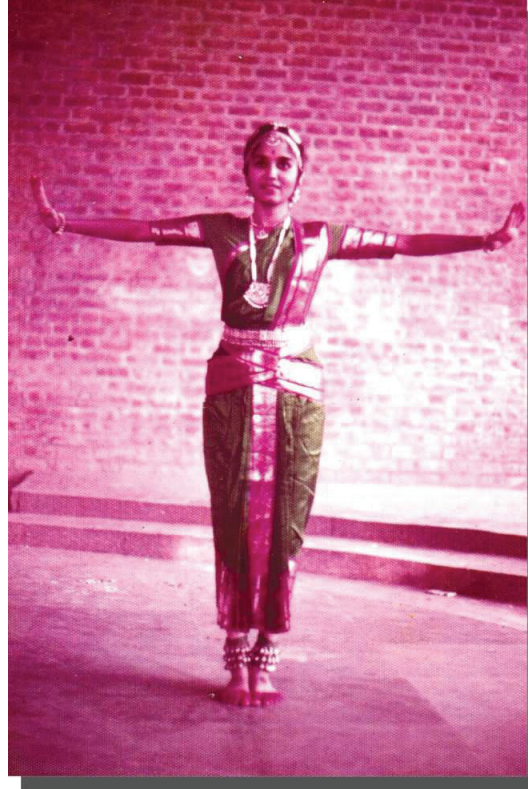
It is difficult to exactly construct how *Kauthuvams* may have been performed in their olden, popular days. But the structure of present day *Kauthuvam* is of the following pattern -- first the rhythmic syllables *orsollus* are recited and then sung. This is then interspersed with lyrical passages that are first recited and then sung. It ends with *sollus* or rhythmic syllables. The lyrical passages offer some scope to explore poses and movement variations while the *sollus* keep the pace and tone of both the dancer and the audience like in *Alarippu*, neither too long nor too short, ideal as an invocatory or opening piece. *Kauthuvams* are not bound by any *raga* restrictions, so the dancer is free to select to any *raga* of his/her choice and the focus is on complicated footwork and variations in the movements. There are no 'sanchaaris' in *Kauthuvams*. They are performed according to the meaning with 'thattimettu' and concluded with 'thattimettu.' As an ancient component of classical dance, there are as many *Kauthuvams* as there are temples and deities and many of these are listed in Gangamuthu Pillai's book.

The *Kauthuvams* popular with contemporary dancers include *Natesha Kauthuvam*, *Ganapathy Kauthuvam*, *Subramanhya Kauthuvam*, *Srivilliputtur Andal/nachiar Kauthuvam*, *Hari Narayana Kauthuvam*, and *Tiruvallankadu Kaali Kauthuvam*. Sometimes, but rarely, one also comes across other *Kauthuvams* such as *Tharugavana Mahalingar Kavutuvam*, *Seergazhi Ganasambandar Kauthuvam* and *Madurapuri chokkar Kauthuvam*.

### **Alarippu**

The *alarippu* is a pure dance (*nritta*) item. The first item of a modern Bharatanatyam Margam recital, the *alarippu* is short and simple, but significant as a ritual dance prelude to the performance. Its primary intention is to invoke the blessings of the divine and to offer homage to the audience. It sanctifies the body of the dancer and the performance space. *Alarippu* is traditionally taught as the first item, after learning of the *adavus*, to students of Bharatanatyam. The name itself suggests 'flowering', a subtle reference to the opening of the body and limbs in preparation for the more vigorous items in the rest of the performance. In scientific terms, it is extremely appropriate as a physical warm-up, as it features a progression of movements, beginning with simple ones of the eyes and head, then the shoulders and hands, then

the legs and the hips, and then slowly graduating to more complex body movements, and using more of the performance space.

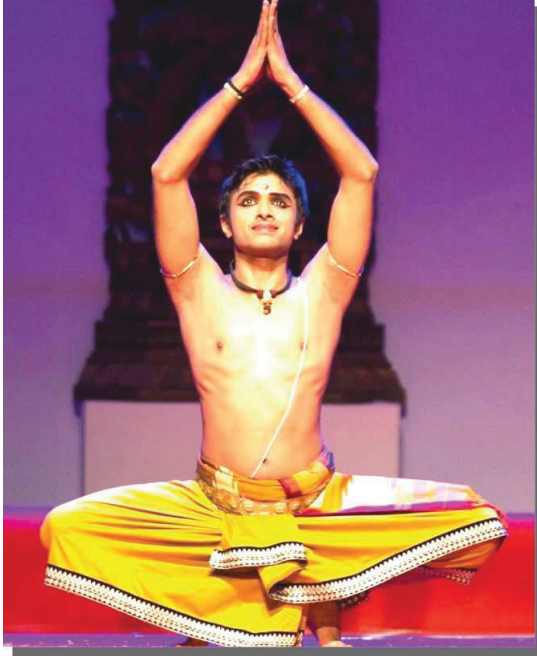


**Fig. 12: Prof. Dr. Parul Shah**

It begins with *Attamis* or neck movements followed by *Mandi advau* in the second half and later culminates with vibrant foot work and *teermanam adavu*. The *alarippu* is accompanied by the *sollukattus*, “tham-dhi-tam, tai-tat-thai”, and percussion in slow, medium, and fast tempos. The duration of the *alarippu* is about three to five minutes. In the *Bhakti Marga* tradition, *Alarippu* can be interpreted as a prayer to God where the dancer, as a devotee, uses elemental movements to awaken the different limbs of the body and in the culminating movements propitiates to God with the whole body. This awakening is said to be the blossoming of the body and is symbolically compared to the blooming of the lotus flower.

According to T. Balasaraswati, “*Alarippu*, which is based on rhythm alone, brings out the special charm of pure dance. The movements of *Alarippu* relax the dancer’s mind and thereby her mind, loosen and coordinate her limbs and prepare her for the

dance. Rhythm has a rare capacity to invoke concentration. *Alarippu* is most valuable in freeing the dancer from distraction and making her single-minded.”



Philosophically, *Alarippu* is considered an offering or prayer to *paramatman* (Godhead), who resides in all living beings as *jivatman* (self). This *atman* is born many times, till it achieves spiritual liberation which happens only when it cultivates detachment, acquires knowledge of the ultimate reality and transforms that knowledge into direct experience. In *alarippu*, this *amsa* (limited self) of God prays to the Ultimate Being (unlimited Self). The physical body is the vehicle of the

*atman* (inner self), helping one set out on the path of spiritual realization. **(Fig. 13 Shri Parshwanathan Upadhye)**

In linguistic terms, *Alarippu* is a verbal noun form derived from the word ‘*Alarinchu*’. In Tamil and other Dravidian languages K\_C\_T\_TH\_P after nasal become, G\_J\_D\_DH\_B and the Telugu ‘*Alarimpu*’ will usually be pronounced as ‘*Alarinbu*’. There is also an expanded term *alaralippu*, which is an exact Tamil rendering of the original Sanskrit term, *pushpanjali*. *Alar* in the sense of a flower occurs in the more famous appellation of Goddess Lakshmi (*Alarmelmangai*, lady on the flower).

Mythologically, it is believed that vis-à-vis the dancer’s body is divided into two parts --the male or Tandava on the right side, the female or Lasya on the left side. This is represented in the *Alarippu* when the dancer joins the palms over her head thus allowing spirit of god to enter the body to transform the dancer into a kind of *ardhanarishwararoopa* and can thus perform the *tandava /lasya abhinaya* and *nritta* in the best possible manner irrespective of the dancer’s natural gender.



**Fig. 14: Smt. Rama Vaidhyanathan**



Different *Natyacharyas* or dance teachers relate different origins for *Alarippu*. The treatises, *Shuddha Nandu Prakasha* and *Bharata Sangraha*, mention the word *Alaari* but do not describe the word in detail. Some scholars say that it suggests the opening of a dancer's soul like the blossoming of a flower or a tree. Others say that *Alarippu* is a prayer to the holy Trinity -- Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar. Whatever that may be, it is true without doubt that *Alarippu* captures the quintessence of Bharatanatyam technique with correct posture, movements of the eyes and neck, shoulder, bends, walks, fundamental foot work and a thorough knowledge of the three speeds of rhythm. There is a belief that if this dance is not performed at the beginning, a proper atmosphere for a Bharatanatyam recital is not created on the stage.

Allaripu is often performed in five Jati-s, combination of Jati-s, in different Gati-s like Tishra jati tishra gati or Chatushra Jati tishra gati and so on. The choreographers with strong control of tala easily play with such rhythmic cycles and make wonderful choreography of this simple invocatory piece!

### **Jatiswaram**

The second item in the traditional *Margam* format of Bharatanatyam is called *Jatiswaram*, probably introduced in the early days of Sadir. *Jatiswaram* is an *nritta* item, and precedes all *nriya* and *abhinaya* numbers in the *Margam*. In the book, *Sangeeta Muktaavali* written by Devendra probably around 1400 AD, there is mention of two items -- *Suddhayati-nritta* and *Regganga yati-nritter* after *Pushpanjali* and *Mukhachali*. These apparently correspond to what we know today as *Jatiswaram*. Some scholars however, think that the *melaprapti* form evolved from the *suddha yati-nritta*. Others are convinced that *regganga yati nritta* is the same as *Jatiswaram*.

When one examines the historical development of Dance in general all over the world, having rhythm as the sole requirement for dance was the first stage of the development, and including melody along with rhythm was the second stage. In that context, *jatiswaram* represents this development process in the best possible manner. In the traditional *Margam* repertoire, the *jatiswaram* follows the *alarippu*. The *jatiswaram* is set to *swara-s*, and the accent and prosody in each *jati* (*Adavu-s*) are set to parallel the *swaras*. The *jati* explores the rhythmic arrangements within the structural characteristics of the *tala* used. It consists of three or more segments, each

called a *charana*. The dancer performs the *adavus* set to each *jati* to the accompaniment of *swaras* sung.



**Fig. 15: Prof. Dr. Parul Shah**

called *Korvai*. The purpose of the *jatiswaram* is to create various beautiful forms, purely for artistic pleasure. No mood or sentiment is expressed. There are certain choreographic features that are typical of a *jatiswaram* – an elegant gait to each side of the stage, for example – that contribute to its unique quality.

"The *jatiswarams* he composed are still ranked as the favourite of several talented dancers as they are also distinctively composed and quite challenging as well. Some of the early *jatiswarams* (danced as early as in Sadir times) were in *Chakravakam*, *Kalyani*, *Todi*, *Sankarabharnam*, *Saveri* and *Varanta ragas*."<sup>11</sup>

*Jatiswaram* is a more elaborate form of *nrittathan alarippu* and is executed to the tune of the *swara* passages in a particular *raga* and *tala*. The dance combines rhythmic sequences of movements in groupings of *jatis*. It is performed to *swara* passages in a particular *raga* (melodic scale) and *tala*, accompanied by musical instruments. These two elements give the item its name, *jatiswaram*. At the beginning of the *jatiswaram*, there is a *teermanam* accompanied by *sollukattus*. The rest of the item is danced to *swaras* and they are

- |                                |                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Todi – Eka</i>           | 8. <i>Ragmalika – Chapu</i>      |
| 2. <i>Sankarabharnam – Eka</i> | 9. <i>Sankarabharnam – Chapu</i> |
| 3. <i>Athana – Eka</i>         | 10. <i>Saveri – Eka</i>          |
| 4. <i>Bhairavi – Eka</i>       | 11. <i>Chakravakam – Eka</i>     |
| 5. <i>Kalyani – Tripura</i>    | 12. <i>Varanta – Eka</i>         |
| 6. <i>Todi – Adi</i>           | 13. <i>Hemavati - Chopu</i>      |
| 7. <i>Khamas – Eka</i>         |                                  |

Besides these 13, there are two *jatiswarams* in Ponniah Mani Malai, Kalyani in Eka, and Poorvikalyani in Adi. These are attributed to Ponniah Pillai.

In Bharatanatyam recitals, the *Jatiswaram* opens with a *teermanam* in a fast pace, gently upping the tempo of the performance. The *pallavi* of *swaras* is then followed by sequences of about four *swara* passages, in the same *raga* and *tala*, each of which is danced and marked off by the repetition of a set dance finale. However, nowadays, *Jatiswaram-s* are composed in different *raga-s* and *tala-s* thus calling them *Ragamalika* and *Talamalika Jathiswaram*. The dance teacher composes about five ‘*Jati-s*’ which are a compelling combination of various *adavu-s* ending with different *Muktaya adavus*. Then three or four *swaras* are sung. Such a *jatiswaram* trains the dancer to get a firm grip on the rhythm, and during a performance, it gives her a good opportunity to exhibit her prowess in the *tala*, *laya* and *adavu* combination.

In the *jatiswaram*, the groupings of *jatis* are formed first and then the *swara* groupings are set accordingly. Since *nritya* does not include *rasa* and *bhava*, there is no *sahitya*, hence no lyrics for *abhinaya* in *jatiswaram*. However, some dancers and dance schools allow for a line of *sahitya* at the end of the item. In *jatiswaram*, music must take a visual form. That means, where music appears, the dancer must move, arms whirling, the torso bending or rising, the legs lifting, wheeling or stepping in time to the music and the beat, to the sways of the *raga* and its *swarageeti*. The counters of movements match the *swara* patterns.

The physical movements should be pleasing, forming patterns in the air in consonance with the *gamaka-s* of the *raga* as well as the *akshara-kala -s* of the *tala*. It is only then that this perfect harmony with the music invests the dance with a special charm that has to be conveyed to the audience as it is experienced by the

dancer. This is believed to be the correct effect of the *Jatiswaram*. The jatiswaram, as the Nritha item of about 8 to 10 minutes, demands correct dance technique, postures and stamina from the dancer to complete it with ease and refinement.



**Fig.16 : Ms. Dakshina Vaidhyathan**

### **Tillana**

*Tillana* is the final item in a traditional Bharatanatyam *Margam* recital. In Hindustani music, the composition *Tarana* is similar to the Carnatic *Thillani dhirana* or *Nadir Dhim*, *Udanadhim Dhitillana*, etc. In Carnatic music, *tillanas* are composed in different *ragas* and *talas*. It was introduced as a dance item in Bharatanatyam by Maharaja Swati Thirunal of Travancore, under whose patronage Vadiavelu (of the Tanjore Quartet) composed much of the Bharatanatyam repertoire. As essentially an *nritha* piece, the *tillana* ends on a very brief piece of *sahitya*, about two lines or a couplet at the most. The *tillana* is danced briskly, embellished with statuesque poses,



beautifully choreographed *brahmaris*, *utplavans* and *mandalas*. If there is one adjective that effectively describes the *tillana* performance, it is ‘scintillating’. After the long and challenging execution of the *varnam*, the dancer, relieved at the successful completion of most of the *Margam* performance, brings renewed energy and effervescence to her *tillana*, leaving the audience satiated and charmed at this brilliance.



**Fig.17: Savitha Sastri**



**Fig.18: Smt. Purva Dhanashri**

Gopala Naik from Tanjore court was captivated by the muslims and went to North India. This is a story. He popularised the South Indian musical traditions there. It is believed that he taught Karna Prabanda-s and playing of chitra veena to Amirkhusharu. These came to be known as *tarana* and later *tillana*. The earliest available *tillana*s composed by Veerabadrappa in *panturavali raga* and *aditala*. The *tillana* was included in a *sadir* performance during the reign of Pratapsimha and gained popularity during the period of Tulaja. In the *jakkini* variety the word *ellilam ellam le* is used frequently. Similarly, *dirtillana* is used profusely in *tillana*. Folk music uses the syllable *tillale*. *Tillana darus* are used in musical operas. Different varieties of *tillanas* are composed, choreographed and performed with *ragatalamalika*, *ragamalika* and in rare *talas* like *simhanandana*. The *sahitya* of *tillana* are composed in many languages. They are mostly in praise of a deity and sometimes on the royal patron. Tulaja and Raja Pratapasimha created the *tillana* an item in the *natya* performance. Melattur Veerabadrappa set it to carnatic music.

Many *tillanas* were composed on Lord Padmanabha by Maharaja Swathi Tirunal. His *tillana* in *dhanashri raga* is very popular in present day *Bharathanatyam* recitals as it has Hindi *sahitya*. *Tillana* is performed after the *padam* or as the final item in present day *Bharathanatyam* recitals. This is one of the most liked and applauded item. The beautiful *sollukatus* and *svaras* interwoven in rhythmic foot pattern create a colourful picture.

In her book, *Bharatanatyam- From Temple to Theatre*, Anne Marie Gaston writes, "Thillana is one of the presentation styles in Bharatanatyam, where a host of dancers perform together, exploring the extent of strong kinetics. This style requires exemplary skills in terms of rhythm, timing and synchronization in order to radiate the unique performance charm associated with it. It is usually the culminating piece of a Bharatanatyam performance. Graceful body movements and some elements of Abhinaya (acting) combine in Thillana."<sup>12</sup>

The dancer, by this time, that is at the end of the Margam, reaches a degree of plasticity and fluidity of movement that she attempts to reinforce all that she rendered in her recital in a purely abstract number. What she had introduced in the *alarippu*, she fully develops here. Beginning with movements of the eye, she shifts to the movements of the neck, and then proceeds to the movements of the shoulder, of the erect torso, of the outstretched arm positions and of the innumerable standing postures, the leg extensions, the pirouettes, and the *ardhamandali* positions. All the tempos are used and the dance cadences (*karvai-s*) are designs in space along straight lines, triangles, rectangles, and diagonals. In this number, even semi-circles are introduced in floor choreography. The characteristic finales of these cadences are the emphasized *araddi-s* [*arudi-s*]. Finally, at a fast tempo, the dancer ends [the number] either [with] a concluding *araddi* or by a quick exit.



**Fig. 19 Tillana in Group**

*Tillanas* are usually made up of three sections – *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and *charanam*. While *pallavi* and *anupallavi* consist of *jatis*( *adavu-s*), the *charanam* has *sahitya* for the first half and is concluded by *jati*. In most *tillana* compositions, the *pallavi* is in the first *kalam*. Dancer Veena Seshanna's *tillana* in *Bhairavi* and Pallavi Seshayyar's *tillana* in *Kanada*, are good examples of the same. It is rare to find *sollakuttus* in *madhyama kalam* in a *pallavi*. An example of a *tillana* with *sollakuttus* in *madhyama kalam* is Sivanandam's *tillana* in *Todi*. Usually phrases can be found in the first *kalam* in the *anupallavi*. Sometimes we also find *solkattu swarams* (*solkattu* and *swarams* both) in *madhyama kalam*. Examples of these are Ponniah's *tillana* composition in *Hamsadhwani* and Veena Seshanna's *tillana* in *Kapi*. Examples of *sollakuttus* in both the first and second *kalams* are found in the *tillana* in *Surutti* by Mysore Vasudevachar and in the one in *Dhanyasi* by Pallavi Seshaiyer. In the *charanam*, there is typically a line or two of *sahitya* in the beginning, which is followed either by *sollukattu* in *madhyama kalam*, *sollakuttu swaram* in *madhyama kalam*, or only *chittaswaram*. Mysore Vasudevachar has composed several *tillanas* in which the *anupallavi* is again sung after the *charanam* and then the *pallavi*. Many scholars believe that the popularity of the *tillana* is largely because the freedom it offers composers in being creative. The alternate occurrences of *jatis* in the first and

second *kalams* makes it a brisk composition thus appealing to a wide section of the audience.

Some of the well-known composers of *tillanas* include Melattur Veerabhadrayyah (1739-1763) who is known as the *Tillana Margadarshi* as he was one of the earliest composers. He was Ramaswami Dikshitar's guru. Though his first *tillana* is no longer available, a reference is found in Dr. Seeta's book, *Tanjore as a seat of Music*. Other *tillana* composers have been Swati Tirunal (1813-1846), the Tanjore Quartette (Ponniah -1801-1856, Chinnaiah, Sivanandam and Vadivelu), Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer (1844-1893), Oothukkadu Venkatasubbaier (1700-1765), Mysore Seshanna (1850-1926), Ammachatram Kannuswami Pillai, Patnam Subramanya Iyer (1845-1902), Pallavi Seshaiyer, Mysore Sadashiva Rao, Veena Seshanna, Ramanathapuram Srinivasa Iyengar (1867-1919), Muthiah Bhagavathar (1877-1945), Kunrakudikrishna Iyer, Papanasam Sivan, Mysore Vasudevachar, Lalgudi G. Jayaraman, T K Govinda Rao, Madurai Krishnan, Maharajapuram V. Santhanam, and M. Balamuralikrishna.

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