

Chapter - 3
Literature as Dance
Documentation

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As with the visual arts, references to dance in literature can also be seen at several levels of documentation. But unlike in the visual arts where dance is featured in an 'unconscious' manner most of the time, written texts are the authentic documentary evidences describing the dance techniques. At times they also describe dance activities in society and prevalent dance practices. Sometimes this literature comes to us as technical texts or instruction manuals detailing different aspects of techniques and presentation. Also there are interesting stories about dancers and their lives. There is a vast literature in the form of poems and songs that have been used by dancers and choreographers for artistic activity. The accounts of travelers visiting different parts of India and their descriptions of performances they have seen as well as the inscriptions on the walls, pillars and stone-slabs, provide insights into the contemporary dance scene.

On the examination of these literatures, general as well as specific to the performing arts that were written over the centuries, one finds numerous references to all aspects of dance and related activities. The *Natyashastra* of Bharata Muni, the most comprehensive of texts on the performing arts of India, dates back to the early Christian era, we have references of Panini's *Nattasutra* and *Astadhyayi* traced back to even before that, though they are no longer available. Some inscriptions dating back to 1st century BC support the antiquity of dance and music practices in India. For example, the

Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela, king of Orissa, dated end of 1st century BC refers to him as proficient in *Gandharvaveda*. *Samudragupta's* famous victory inscription at Allahabad (about 330-375 AD) describes him as surpassing Narada and Tumburu in *gandharva* and *lalita*.

Looking at the history and development of art and culture in India, one is able to identify two distinct periods. One is from the beginning of the Christian era till the end of about 10th century AD, predominated by *Sanskrit* literature and the arts influenced by the same. The second begins after the 10th century with the coming of *Prakrit* and later, *Apabhramsha* languages which encompassed regional specialties and varieties within the mainstream activities. In the first period, *Sanskrit* exercised a firm hold on the intellectual life of the people. Its rich literature endowed the development of all arts in the country with unity and continuity. The first period also seems to have upheld the *Natyashastra's* tenets of dance, music and dramatics as being integral to each other where the poet and the dramatist were equally well versed in the technical intricacies of Performance. The second period saw a marked development of regional styles stemming from the main trunk. Though based on the *Natyashastra* these allowed individual developments of special groups of people and geographic areas as per their own cultural needs. The *Sangita Ratnakara*, following the *Natyashastra*, added the *desi* in all areas of dance and dance-related activities.

Technical Texts on Dance

The performing arts have been an integral and important part of Indian life from the earliest times. It is given the status of the *Fifth Veda* in the *Natyashastra* of

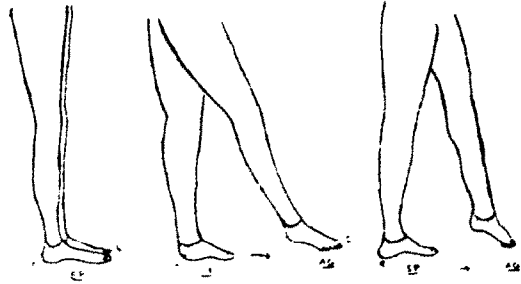
Bharatamuni, an extant text on dramaturgy. Here “*Natya*” comprises music, dance and drama. The four-fold area of communication, *abhinaya* (*angika*, *vachika*, *aharya*, *satvika*), for any dramatic presentation, is given in amazing detail. The descriptions of body movements in the context of movement of each part of the body and the possible variations therein are described with a great clarity. This forms the basis of later developments in dance and for detailed documentation. Following the dictums of the *Natyashastra* from the 2nd century AD till now are a number of technical texts of dance in Sanskrit and a few in regional languages. Though they follow the *Natyashastra*, the prevalent performing practices are cohesively accommodated and taken into account from time to time. From all areas of India and during all periods of time one finds such texts written by experts. The *Abhinav Bharati* (10th century AD) of Abhinavagupta, commentary on *Natyashastra*, makes the concepts of the *Natyashastra* even clearer. Sharangadeva’s *Sangita Ratnakara* (13th century) highlights the extension of the *Natyashastra* tradition while describing the *desi* variations. Nandikeshvara’s *Abhinaya Darparam* is a comprehensive text that is followed by most contemporary dancers and dance gurus.

By the 13th century, dance had its own existence and was no longer an ancillary to drama as was the case during the *Natyashastra* time. The concept of *nritya* already existed and *nritya* was established, each with their own individual identity. This is reflected in the appearance of numerous works on the art of dance and music from all four corners of India. *Visnudharmotara Purana* (5th century), *Manasollasa* (12th century) of Someshvaradeva, *Sangitasamayasa*

(12-13th century) of Parshvadeva, *Nrttaratnavali* (13th century) of Jayasenapati, *Sangitamakaranda* (13-14th century) of Narada, *Sangitopanishatsaroddhara* (14th century) of Sudhakalasa, *Sangitadamodara* (15th century) and *Hastamuktavali* of Subhankara. *Nrtyaratnakosa* (15th century) of Maharana Kumbha, *Nrtyadhyaya* (14th century) of Asokamalla, *Eharatarnava* of Nandikeshwara, *Rasakaumudi* of Srikantha, *Nartananirnaya* (late 16th century) of Pundarika Vitthala, *Sangitadarpana* (17th century) of Damodara, *Sangitanarayana* of Purusottama Misra, *Sivatattvaratnakara* of Basavaraja, *Natyasastrasamgraha* of Govindacarya and *Sangitasarasamgraha* of Ghanashyamda - all these deal with dance in detail. In some of the other texts the treatment as given in the *Natyashastra* as Dance being ancillary to drama in the context of *natya*, is continued such as in *Dasarupaka* of Dhananjaya which elaborates the ten different kinds of plays, *Srngaraprakasa* of Bhoja, *Natakakalasa* and *Nartanakosa* of Sagarandini, *Natyadarpana* of Ramachandra and Gunachandra, *Bhavaprakasa* of Sharadatanaya which explains histrionics, *Sahityadarpana* of Vishvanatha Kaviraja, etc. In the *Natyashastra*, Bharata Muni has taken into account only the *Margi* style. If the regional varieties existed they were not incorporated in the *Natyashastra*. Later writers like Dandin, Bhoja, Saradatanaya, Sagarandini and several others have referred to regional dances.

The techniques of dance that is body movements, postures etc. described in these texts, co-relate to the contemporary performing practices of dance, which are part of the oral tradition. As life changes from one breath to the next, so does the oral knowledge, allowing the maximum creative freedom to an artist.

Similarly the text also allowed ample freedom to the practitioners. Take for example, the *Janita Chari*. As per NS (sh. no. 24 chap 11.) it is described as



“*Musthi* hand held on the breast and another hand moved round. The feet to be *Talasanchara*”. As per SR (sh. no. 938,) it is described as “One hand is kept on chest with *musthi* and the other moves in a beautiful way. One foot is in *agratalasanchara*”. Both these describe the *Chari* with the same name. NS says *Talasanchara*, which would mean moving or sliding of the whole *tala* (back of foot). This is normally interpreted as, that with one leg stationary and without any weight shift, one can move the other leg practically by about a foot. As per SR it is *agratala* that is the ball of the foot and offers a little more movement. In both these cases there is no indication of direction, where the leg neither extends nor is any concrete information on the movement and placements of the hand. Each artist, guru, teacher, choreographer of any style and any gharana is free to use it in the way that pleases and does justice to their need.

Stories narrating Dance, Dancers, Themes etc.

From the earliest times till now, dance has continued to be an integral part of Indian life. Dance is performed on all special occasions of life like childbirth,

weddings, coronation of a king and even death. The social and professional dance and dancers go parallel at times and meet on the crossroads. Kings and temples patronized the talented dancers. Amrapali, Vaishakhi, Vasantsena, Madhavi, and such others were the pride and prized possessions of their kingdoms. Stories about their lives, their dance, its technique, its teaching, its social relevance all are vividly described by no less poets than Ilango, Kalidasa, Bhasa, Bana, Vararuci, Bhavabhuti, Harsa, Rajasekhara, Damodaragupta, Jayantabhatta and in contemporary times, K M Munshi and many others, in Sanskrit as well as in the regional languages. These fictional stories could have been a part of poetic imagination but they were supported and reflective of the existing cultural situations. The royal and state patronage exists even today within the democratic Indian society, only changing the titles. They also cover those literary texts that are probably fictional stories where either the main female character is a dancer or where the story features sequences where dancers or a dance performance forms a pivotal part of the story. In addition there are the already existing innumerable legends and stories in the Epics and Puranas that form the backbone of the *sahitya* and themes used in dance and dance-drama performances. Here are a few examples from our vast literature providing important links to dance and its development through the centuries.

King Harshavardhana of Kanauj, a student of dancing and patron of dramatics and dance (early 7th century) wrote a play, *Patnavali Natika*, where there is an actual performance of a dance, which appears to be a folk-dance,

performed on Holi. Madhavi's *Arangetram* in *Silappadikaram* (Ilango, 2nd century AD), Malvika's *Sabha Nrutya* in *Malvikagnimītra* (Kalidasa.), Arjuna's dance (in disguise as Bruhanalla) in King Virata's palace in the *Mahabharata* are outstanding examples of detailed descriptions of dance training, performances and relationship of the teacher and the taught.

King Harsha of Kashmir's (11th century) interest in dance and music is referred to in *Rajatarangini*. This text has numerous references to dancers, dance teachers, dance legends and the relationship between dance and temples. There are specific mentions of the names of the dancers attached to temples such as Kamala of Paundravardhan in the temple of Kartikeya, Sahaja and Kayya attached to another temple. Ksemendra's *Brhatkathamajari* provides many examples of dancing girls and stories related to them. The *Harsacharita* of Bana, talks about five types of *Goshthis* - *kavyagoshthi*, *galpagoshthi*, *gitagoshthi*, *nrityagoshthi*, and *vadyagoshthi*. It also elaborates the different kinds of dances, who danced them and what were their characteristics. There is detailed information about musical instruments and the importance of *tala*. The anklets of the dancers played a significant role in keeping the beat.

In the famous Tamil text of 2nd-3rd century, *Silappadikaram* by Ilango, Madhavi is said to be in the line of descent of Urvashi and is called Vanavamakal (divine woman). Madhavi's *arangetram* takes place before the king. Later Madhavi also performs in the Indra Festival. This text has extensive references to technical terms connected to dance and performing

arts like *natya*, *ranga*, *pindi*, *varam*, *karakam*, *mandala* as well as Tamil technical dance terms such as *elir kai*, *tolir kai*, *arangu*, *izhippu* and many more suggests the prevalence of and familiarity with the classical dance art. They seem to be well integrated in regional practices of dance of that time. This text also has references to other classes of dancing women (other than devadasis) - *kaval ganika* (women guards), *kalattiladum kutt* (dancers in the military camp), *adal kuttis* (dancers who performed *ahakkuttu* or *srngara* dances like *padams*), and so on. "It appears that by the time of the *Silappadikaram* the three-fold classification of dancing girls as *ganikas*, *kuttis* and *adal siladi* - corresponding to the later classification *tahiyilar*, *patiyilar* and *devaradiyal* - had come into vogue"¹.

Most importantly, *Silappadikaram* contains extensive chapters on dance (*Arangetru Kadai*), music and musical instruments (*Kadaladu Kadai*, *Konalvari*, *Venir Kadai*), and folk dances (*Archiyar Kurava*). The text also includes a mention of an authoritative text or dance called '*Jayantam*' which laid down the prescribed rules for the dance. Dance was known as *Aadal*, but more popularly as *Kuttu*. Madhavi's *arangetram* is described minutely. The chapter on dance elucidates in great detail, the proficiency of the dance teacher and his skill as a choreographer and musician, and the principles of stage management. The text also explains the classification of two distinct dance types, prevalent in that era, the *Aham* (*Ahakuttu*) and *Puram* (*Purakuttu*). Under *Ahakuttu*, twin concepts are explained such as *Aryam* and *Tamil*, and *Iyalpu* and *Desi*. Further *Santi Kuttu* was divided into *Chokkam* or

Suddha Nr̥ttam (pure dance, later *nr̥tta*) and incorporated the 108 *karanas*. The other was *Mei Kuttu* that incorporated *Desi*, *Vadugu* and *Singalam*. It had three divisions - *Sama Kuttu*, *Vanmai Kuttu* (*tandava*) and *Menmai Kuttu* (*lasya*). Under *Purakuttu*, come three mõces - *Perunatai*, *Charyay*, and *Bhramari*. *Silappadikaram* as a story incorporated both existing streams of dance, classical and folk.

References to dance and dancing abound in Sanskrit literary texts. The Sanskrit *kavya* literature and *natya* literature often has elaborate descriptions of dance performances in highly technical terms. Both *kavya* and *natya* literature often consist of dramatic verse which adapts itself easily to dance interpretations. These poet-dramatists appear to be extremely well versed in the principles of dance as codified in the *Natyashastra*. In *Malavikāgnimitra*, the well-known *natya* of Kalidasa, Malvika is a princess who is a trained dancer and her performance is the high point of this work. Malavika's actual performance is the focus of this literary work and as such there are innumerable descriptions of her repertoire, the accompanists, her performance itself and of the dancer's own technical prowess. Ganadasa, the dance-master describes Malavika to be very quick of understanding and dexterous in practice of expressive movement ('*bhavikam*'). Detailed technical references to dance are also found in *Malvikāgnimitra*. At the court of Pushyamitra (circa 150 BC) there is a '*preksagrha*' (theatre) and a separate hall for practice of music and dance. There are two royal dance masters; Haradatta is under the patronage of the king and Ganadasa under that of the queen. They are called '*natyacharya*', '*abhinayacharya*' and '*nartayita*'. They were not only gurus but

also performers. Ganadasa ascribes the two-fold dance (*tandava* and *lasya*) to the Ardhanariswara form of Shiva. The work of the dance masters was called 'natya', 'abhinayavidya', 'shilpa' which meant art or craft at that time. The performer was called 'patra'. Both dance masters differentiate between 'sasthra' (theory) and 'prayoga' (performance). The well-known art historian Anand Coomarswami suggests that dance was not only patronized but also even learnt and practiced by the royal and noble ladies of the court.

In *Abhijnana Shakuntal*, Kalidasa has given exact stage directions which are illustrative of the care that the poet-dramatist took to make sure that the play was performed correctly. What is however most interesting is his creative adaptation of dance *hastas* and movements to express what is physically not possible to show on stage. In *Vikramorvasiya*, another work by Kalidasa, dance and especially music is discussed in more technical detail. In this work, Urvashi, the accomplished dancer, dances all the eight *rasas* with great virtuosity. In fact Kalidasa's entire body of literary work is highly embellished by extensive references and descriptions of music and dance. His similes in *Meghdutam* and *Rutu Samhara* invariably use images of dance. In *Meghdutam*, there are descriptions of the dances by the women of Ujjain, the sound of thunder invite the peacocks to dance, and of the gracefulness of women dancing in Alkapuri which are explained with dance terminology. In his *Raghuvamsa*, a description of creepers compares them to the hands of a dancer forever moving in gesture and where the hum of the bees offers the music. In a truly extraordinary simile, the movements of branches of a young

mango tree are compared to that of a young dancer just starting to learn *abhinaya*! In the famous *Mrcchakatika*, the courtesan-heroine, Vasantsena is an expert in dance and her movements are often described in terms of dance. From the 11th century, there are writers like Somadeva (Kashmir) who wrote *Kathasaritasagara* and Jinavallabh of Rajasthan author of *Sanghapattaka*, have referred to dancers performing in temples in their works. While *Kathasaritasagara* actually features two *devadasis* called Sundari of Kanchanpura and Rupanika of Mathura, the Jain Jinavallabha describes dancing girls distracting monks in the *derasars* of Rajasthan.

Literature used in Dance/ Dance Sahitya

For *nritya* and *abhinaya* items and dance dramas, the narrative is danced. The dancers and *gurus* have usually taken recourse to the extraordinary wealth of the existing Indian Epics, Puranas and legends from which to create and choreograph an item. The direct narratives and their interpretations have remained the eternal sources. For example, the Draupadi Vasta Harana or the Sita Swayamvara are danced and choreographed by almost all. They are so much part of our life that they become the direct links of communication in all styles of performing genre. Famous poet-composers have written and composed items suitable for dance performances. Each dance style can boast of special compositions, which are immortal.

Devotional Hymns composed by *Saivite Nayanmars* and *Varshnavite Alvars* (7th century) have often been used by dancers. The *Tevaram* hymns of Sambandar and Appar refer to the daily *nityapujas* by the Brahmins where they

recited the *Vedas* and the girls danced. In fact a number of *Tevaram* hymns are full of the *srngara* tradition. The contribution of the musical stalwarts like Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar, Shyamashastri, Purandaradasa, Kshetrageya in South India and Surdas, Tukaram, Jayadeva, Mirabai, Shankardeva in north India have enriched the repertoire of Indian Dance.

Bharatanatyam repertoire is rich and offers a lot of selection, with varied emotions and themes due to the rich compositions of the Musical Trinity and others. Muthuswami Dikshitar (1775-1835), composed and wrote the famous *varnam*, “Roopamujuchi...” (Ragam *todi*, *talam adi*), which is a must for all dancers, if not for performance, definitely for training. Vadivelu (of the Tanjore Quartet) was a disciple of Muthuswami Dikshitar and used many of the Dikshitar compositions in his dance choreography. He shifted from Tanjavur (after the death of Maharaja Sarfoji in 1832) to Travancore, taking with him his compositions, choreography and dancers. He gave Maharaja Swati Tirunal of Travancore an incentive to compose the forms of dance music like *Varnams*, *Padam*, *Swarjattis* and *Tillanas*. Swati Tirunal composed more than 30 *varnams* among which, “Sumasayaka” in Kapi presents innovations like *sangat* or progressive variations in the *pallavi* and the form of a *ragamala* in the last *charana*. These *varnams* are popular in Bharatanatyam too. His *jatiswaram*, *Pancharagaswrajati*, beginning Sa Ni Sa Re Sa in Kalyani *raga* is still popular. Apart from Tamil and Telugu, he wrote also in Hindi, Marathi and Sanskrit.

The Dance Compositions of the Tanjore Quartet, edited by Bharatha Sangeetha Vidwan, Natya Kalanidhi Tanjore K P Kittappa and Veenai Vithakar, Tamil Nadu State Vidwan Kalaimamani, Tanjore K P Sivanandam, and originally published in 1961, brought to light many unknown compositions of the Quartet including Jathiswarams, Varnams.

Thyagaraja (1767-1847) the great composer-lyricist was a devotee of Lord Rama. He composed mainly in Telugu - kritis, namavallis, kirtanas, geyanatakas, etc. - sometimes in Sanskrit. Compositions of Thyagaraja, especially his *Nauka-charitra* with 21 songs in 13 ragas, lend itself beautifully to an effective production as a dance-drama. He also composed in popular and rare ragas.

Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* of 12th cen. AD is not only a rich source for the miniature painters, but also equally perhaps more, important source of poetic subtlety for the dancers. The Stringer Rasa, both sensual and sensuous, depicted through the love of Radha and Krishna, are like eternal fountains, springing forth, with new colors in dance. *Bhajans* of medieval Bhakti poets like Mirabai, Surdas, compositions of Tulsidas, Kabir and others form a staple part of most classical dance recitals today. Though profound in philosophy, they are full of simple life observations, more dramatic in content, and with visual imageries, giving ample emotional scope to the masters and reaching directly to the hearts of the spectators.

Up to the early 20th century, the songs to which dances were composed were exclusively those rich in sringara bhava - some in honor of kings and nobles,

patrons of both the arts and artists. While many of these were beautiful songs, the *devadasis* often interpreted them in a very earthly way. Coming to the concert stage, the flavor of compositions is more lyrical, sensual, and subtle in all areas as well as strong in expressing ideas which generate at times strong emotions. A lot of post-independence Indian poetry, describing the relevant issues like concern for Ecological balance, women's issues, political concerns as well as musical forms, yet not danced in the traditional Margam, such as Gazals, non-metered poetry are used for an added advantage.

Dance References from Travelogues / Govt. Reports / Temple Records / Inscriptions And 20th century Dance Literature

Scholars and explorers who traveled to ancient India and even as recent as the 19th century have left behind their travelogues that describe the dancers and the dances that they have seen, the occasions on which dances have been performed, the social customs associated with dance activity, the difference in professional and folk dances, and sometimes, the economic and political necessity for Courts to support dancers. Since dancing was chiefly associated with temples, texts or manuals describing temple rituals offer important information on why and when dance was performed in the temples, its significance as a part of the temple ritual, how temples supported dancers and so on. Government reports and gazettes are also important documentary evidences of the legal status of the dancers and the regulations that applied to them.

In 867 AD an Arab traveler, Abu Zeid Al Hasan mentioned dancing girls attached to temples. Another traveler, Al-Beruni also probably from an Arab country has referred to dancers performing in temples in his works. His interpretation of dancers in temples in north India, where he toured, is that “they were revenue-earners for the kings as they were a major attraction in the cities”². A number of European travelers visited India from the 17th century onwards, writing travelogues describing what they saw and experienced. Amongst the first ones was Tavernier, who extensively toured south India, especially the Deccan region. He interpreted dancing girls as an indirect source of revenue for the rulers. Liquor was taxed in these kingdoms and dancing girls ‘promoted’ heavy consumption. He also observed that “there were 20,000 dancers in this region but he describes them as courtesans with no connection to temples”³.

Fray Sebastien Manrique also came here in this century and has recorded a Durga procession led by a vast troupe of dancing girls in his book, *Travels of Fray S. Manrique*. Abbe Jean Antoine DuBois, a French missionary who traveled and worked in India from 1792-1823, has written about the singing and dancing in temples at fixed times and how every important temple had at least 10-12 *devadasis* attached to it, in his travel book, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*. He has written about a festival at Tirupati with a procession of Lord *Venkatesvara* where the temple priests selected the most beautiful women from amongst those who had come to watch, to serve as new dancing girls in the temple. He has also described dancing at the *Pongal*

festival of Tamil Nadu. Three hundred years earlier, Marco Polo recorded during a visit to Malabar that the dances of the *devadasis* were believed to encourage sexual union between gods and goddesses, thus ensuring prosperity and good harvests. Another travel-writer, Lt. Francis Hamilton-Buchanan who wrote *Journey from Madras through Mysore, Kanara and Malabar*, in 3 volumes in 1807, has observed therein that the two important temples at Kanchipuram has about a hundred dancing girls attached to them. A missionary, Amy Wilson-Carmichael describes in her book, *Things As They Are*, (1904) how devadasis were carefully selected and how attractiveness was a prized characteristic. References to dance are found in James Todd's *Annals & Antiquities of Rajasthan* where he explores the tradition of extensive Krishna-worship in the state and the association of dance with this worship, the 'mystic dance' the Rasmandel and comparing it to the Pyhic dance, or the fire dance of the Egyptians.

Robert Sewell in his book, *A Forgotten Empire (Vijaynagar)* published in 1900 describes a city and a pagoda style temple therein with an image of Ganesha. He recounts how women dance before the image and that the daughters of these women belong to the temple. He describes the expensive lifestyle of these women. However, most importantly, he describes what appears to be a Dancing School in the king's palace "There is a hall where the king sends his women to be taught to dance. There are images seated on the elephant, as well as those on the panels, are all dancing women having little drums...The designs of these panels show the positions at the end of

dances in such a way that on each panel there is a dancer in the proper position at the end of the dance; this is to teach the women so that if they forget the position in which they have to remain when the dance is done, they may look at one of the panels where is the end of that dance. By that they keep in mind what they have to do. At the end of this house on the left hand is a painted recess where the women cling on with their hands in order better to stretch and loosen their bodies and legs; there they teach them to make the whole body supple, in order to make their dancing more graceful...in the middle of the wall is a golden image of a woman...with arms in the position which she occupies in the end of the dance"⁴. The author further describes what was perhaps popularly believed. It seemed that probably the whole of the *Natyashastra* was illustrated in sculpture and imagery, and it is such a misfortune that this wonderful structure has not survived. However in the Kalyana Mandapa of the famous Vitthalaswami temple at Hampi, there is a throne platform profusely decorated with a rich frieze at its base representing various types of musicians, dancers and drummers performing before an appreciative king, probably Krishna Deva Raya. This was perhaps the throne where the king witnessed performances which must have reached high standards of perfection in the kingdom of Vijayanagara.

In addition to the reports by travelers from foreign lands, there are numerous Government Reports and Gazettes that authentically note the happenings in various parts of the country. As recently as in early 1900s, there are local government reports that state that there were temple dancers in Assam,

Madras and the Jagannath temple in Orissa. But not in Bengal, Sind, United Provinces or Gujarat (*Legislative Debates*, 1922). By 1932, when it was becoming quite clear that dancing in temples would no longer be legally allowed, the *Journal of the Madras Music Academy*, 1932, states, “We all know that today, even in Pandaripur, daily worship is being done in the temple accompanied by *natyam* (dance) similarly in Srirangam., during the ten days preceding the *Mukkotai Ekadasi* day, worship is generally accompanied by *natyam*”⁵. The reality of the dancer-in-the-temple continued in actual fact over many centuries almost all over India until it was banned by an act of law in the mid-20th century. Dancing in temples, and temple precincts has reappeared in recent years when professional classical dancers participated in dance festivals and other prestigious events held by temple trusts / official tourism and culture departments, but not as dedicated *devadasis*.

Temple inscriptions provide undisputed social records of prevalent practices. One of the most important inscriptions is the 12th century inscription at the Brhadesvara Temple in Tanjore records the event when the ruler, Rajendra Chola ordered four hundred dancers to be brought from nearby temples to be attached to the Tanjore Temple. The inscription names all the temples both Saivite and Vaishnavite, that had dancers attached to them⁶. An inscription dating to the reign of Kulottunga III (1205-18) establishes that there was a time-table for the presentation of dance and the dancers took turns: “the assignment of a fixed period in the day for every dancing girl to perform her services by turn in the temple”⁷. The word *Nritta* is found in the inscriptions

as early as the 9th century. The Manne Copper Plates (802 AD) mentions the word *nritya* while referring to “a subordinate of Rastrakuta Govinda III called Srivijaya who made a grant to those engaged in the service of dancing and singing in the *Jaina Basadi* at Manyapura, -*viśasini-viracita-nritya-gita-vadya-bali*”⁸.

Manuals on Temple Rituals are a rich source of documentation. P V Jagadisha Ayyar describes dance as a ritual in temples. One such description in a temple in Ramesvaram records a ritual with accuracy: “At 4.30 or 5 am (the *puja* begins) the dancing girl (*muraikari*) officiating for the day, with *rudraksha* beads in place of jewels, dressed up as a Brahmani and her hair uncombed ... open up all the doors to the *mahamandapa*. Later the god is taken in procession preceded by musicians and attendant dancing girl ... the dancing girl repeats a *tevara ujal* or verse in honour of Siva.”⁹. A number of these manuals also state the reasons for which dance was performed in the temple. Such manuals form part of the literature or written evidence available as documentation. None of the manuals associate temple dancing with prostitution. While most of the texts refer to dancing girls in temples as *ganikas*, they were also known as *devaganikas*, and there are instances where *devaganikas* and *devadasis* are the same.

With Indian classical dance gaining much respect and importance in the early 20th century, it also encouraged a few serious dance scholars to embark on critical analysis and writing on the subject mainly in English. There is some research in the history of the dance form, the life of the devadasis, and textual

analysis. People have tried to draw parallels between development of different aspects of Indian art such as temple art, paintings and performance arts as a method of understanding the hoary traditions of our cultural heritage. But all these are sporadic, yet dance research is much unexplored area. Esteemed scholars and historians like Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, Shri Motilal Khosla, Dr. Mandakranta Bose, Dr. Sunil Kothari, and Dr. Kanak Rele have provided rich works of in-depth serious studies. Their published books, as well as articles in significant journals have been internationally acclaimed. Foreign scholars such as John Erdman, Anne Marie Gaston, Phillip Zarilli and others have contributed significantly to the area of dance research. Specific organizations given to the study and dissemination of the performance arts produce magazines and journals devoted to these arts. These include Shruti (Shruti Foundation, Chennai), NCPA Journal (National Centre for the Performing Arts, Mumbai), SNA Journal (Sangeet Natak Akademi), certain publications of Marg, the oldest cultural publication of India, Attendance (Dance Annual of India) and so on. With the proliferation of computers and the popularity of the Internet, there are several sites devoted to dance such as www.narthaki.com, www.kutcheri.com, etc. In recent years younger generations of dancers like Leela Samson, Lakshmi Viswanathan, and Jayalakshmi Eshwar have also written on dance in general. Yet there is very little in-depth writing on the development of dance after it came on the secular stage. The major gap here is the inability to get any concrete information on the development of classical dance styles. Compared with the long traditions and amount of dance and teaching of the performance genre, we have almost

no written word. But still the written word has provided concrete support in the area of dance documentation.

Notes:

1. The Devadasis of Tamil Nadu : A Study, R. Nagaswamy Sangeet Natak No 9 : July-September, 1990
2. Sachau, Edward C, 1879 The Chronology of Ancient Nations, London, William Allen and Co. Vol. I: ix; Vol.II: 157
3. Tavernier, translation by Ball 1925: I, 127-8
4. Swell Robert, "A Forgotten Empire (Vijayanagar)" 1906, page 288.
5. P G Sundaresa, JMMA 1932: 122.
6. South Indian Inscriptions 1985:II.II: 259-60.
7. State Inscriptions of Padukkottai 1929:20, no. 169.
8. Hema Govindarajan "Dance Terminologies" pg. 27
9. P.V. Jagadish Ayyar " South Indian Shrines" Pub, 1920, 922, Page 193.