

Basic Theory:

- **Summary of BhaRaTaNatyam**

'bhava' (emotion)
'raga' (melody),
'taala' (rhythm)
'Natyam' (dance)

Bharatanatyam is one of the 7 Classical dance styles in India and belongs to the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. In the past it was known by names "Desiattam" or "Sadir" and was practiced and performed in the temples by a class of dancers known as the Devadasis. It was a part of the religious rituals and has a long and reach past. The kings and the princely courts patronized the temples, as well as the various traditions sustaining the dance form.

Well known 'Thanjavoor Brothers', Ponnayya, Chinnayya, Sivanandam and Vativelu systematically regularized the modern Bharatanatyam. Adavus and Margam, as we practice today, were analyzed, named and grouped together by these talented musicians in early 19th century.

The main features of Bharatanatyam are symmetrical movements that are mostly executed either in straight lines or triangles and rhythmical patterns or the beats that dancer produces by means of different footwork following and even exploring and challenging the musical accompaniment.

Theory and technique of Bharatanatyam are based on the literal works 'Natyasastram' and 'Abhinaya Darpanam'.

Bharatanatyam is following Carnatic classical Indian music system. The instruments used are Veena, Flute, Mridangam and Violin.

Rhythmical accompaniment is provided by 'Nattuvanar' setting the Thaalam using hand symbols and reciting 'Sollukatu'.

Vocalist is setting the mood of the dance by singing out the lyrics of the song that dancer interprets through Abhinaya or expression.

Bharatanatyam's origion is based on a solo dance form, however it does have influence of Yakshagana and Kuruvanji traditional dance dramas.

- **Mythological origin of Indian Classical Dance:**

Mythological origin of Indian Dance is documented in Natyashastra -'Science of Dramaturgy' written by sage Bharatha, between 500 BCE and 300 CE.

*Bharatha attributes the origin of the art of Bharatanatyam to the Divine and devotes the 1st chapter, *to the* 'the making of dance':*

Indra, king of the Gods was concerned about the degradation of moral standards stemming from uncontrolled sensual desires, so *he* approached Brahma and asked him to create a from of pleasure that would provide entertainment while quelling these desires. So Brahma created the Natya veda, the fifth Veda, taking elements from each of the four traditional Vedas. When fifth veda was compiled it was taught

to *Bharatha* by *Brahma* with the instruction to pass it on to his sons (students) to be promulgated on the earth over the years.

Brahma also created 24 *Apsaras* or celestial female angels and taught them the feminine aspect of this dance.

Bharata Muni then choreographed a dance drama and performed it in front of Lord Shiva, who was so impressed with the new idea of using dance for the purpose of education, that he himself has contributed to the dance technique by sharing his dance of distraction to students of Bharata Muni.

Here is a quote from *Natya Shastra* –

"I have created Natya Veda to represent actions, ideologies and genealogies of both gods and demons. It will present to you the good and the evil involved in following the righteous path and in amassing wealth, etc. Natya, in places, will present righteousness, evil, peace, war, humor, ill-will, love, hatred, creation, destruction, etc (Appa Rao, 11)

Brief History of BharataNatyam:

Prior to its renaming in the 1930's, *Bharathanatyam* went under the names of *Dasi Attam* and *Sadhir*. Dancers of this art form were called '*Devadasi*', or 'servants of God'.

Hindu temples played the greatest role in developing and preserving this dance form for many centuries. The arts, including music and dancing were flourishing supported by the wealth and status of the temples, which were centers of the socio-cultural life at that time. '*Devadasis*' or dancers were respected and influential figures in the society and no social occasion or temple ritual would be performed without their participation.

With the decline of the temple support and due to the change in the hereditary nature of this profession, the dance form had moved from the temples to the courts and its content changed into more entertaining and erotic. This change brought the dance form to a downfall and as British colonization with its own moral values grew stronger, the dance became socially unacceptable and dancing girls even more so. In 1947, the *Madras Devadasis Act* was passed, it declared that a woman could no longer perform in the precincts of a temple or other religious institution. Any person who performs, permits or abets temple dancing would be punishable with imprisonment.

Fortunately, a growing number of dance enthusiasts interested in rescuing the dance form from degradation grew and thanks to those families of *Devadasis* and *Natuvanars* (dance teachers) who managed, within their family traditions, to preserve this beautiful dance. Today this art form has moved to the stage and gained image of highly stylized refined classical art form. Its popularity grows every day and it has already long ago spilled out of the boundaries of Indian borders and is being enjoyed, practiced and learned by dancers and dance lovers all over the world.

Dance enthusiasts that have saved and resurrected BharataNatyam:

E. Krishna Iyer, practicing lawyer by profession was born into Brahmin family, he strove to upgrade the status of dance at that difficult time.

In 1933, he along with other patrons of the dance form, decided to rename *sadhir* to see if it might change things. Deriving the '*Bha Ra Ta*' from its name, the dance form was to be called *Bharatanatyam*.

E. Krishna Iyer was a Bharatanatyam dancer himself, he would disguise himself as a female dancer and perform in public to propagate the art and remove stigma attached to it. By doing so, he would encourage girls from Brahmin families to take up the art and bring it at a higher level of entertainment on the best stages of the City.

In 1927 Krishna Iyer organized the first all India Music Conference in Madras that became an annual celebration of Arts including dance. He has brought some of the most outstanding performers from *Devadasi* background to perform on stage and thus stirring up a controversial practice and gaining a lot of success from young revolutionary minds of that time.

Here are Some the performers from Davadasi tradition that helped Krishna Iyer to change the status of Bharatanatyam:

Mylapore Gown Ammal, Tiruvalliputtur Kalyani daughters, Balasaraswathi.

Rukmini Devi Arundale.

Rukmini Devi was born in a Brahmin family in 1904 into a family with a theosophical background. Thus, she was exposed to a greater freedom of thinking at the time.

Rukmini married an Englishman Dr. George Arundale, 20 year older than her. Since Dr. Arundale was educationist, couple travelled far and wide giving lectures about Indian Culture. On one of thesetours, Rukmini met Anna Pavlova and showed interest in learning ballet. It was Pavlova who suggested Rukmini Devi to learn BhartaNatyam.

Later, with the help of Krishna Iyer, she met her future teachers Mylapore Gawry Ammal and Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai. Rukmini was 29 year when she started learning Bharatanatyam.

In 1935 she was the first lady from Brahmin family who had openly given public performance and has won wide acclams as well as strong opposition.

With the help of her husband family and other dance enthusiasts at that time, in 1936 Rukmini Devi has set up dance academy named 'Kalakshetra" and institution in support of Indian Arts.

Kalakshetra was not only created to teach new generation but to give opportunities to the dancers and *Natuvanners* from old dance tradition to come forward and safely practice and teach their art. Being the one and only institution of this nature at the time, Kalakshetra very fast gained respect and popularity, and at present is known as Institution of national importance.

Important terms, names and definitions in BharataNatyam:

- **Natya Sastra** – is considered to be the earliest known surviving text on stagecraft in the world. Written by *Bharatha Muni* sometime between 200 BC to 200 AD.

It Consists of around 36 chapters and 6000 sutras. Natya Shastra covers stage-design, music, dance, makeup, and virtually every aspect of stagecraft. *Natya* means theatrical art or art of drama, which includes dance, music and mind or emotion, hence the name of the *Natya Shastra*, meaning 'Science of Drama'.

- **Abhinaya (expression)** - is the medium through which the thoughts and emotions of the dancer or character are transmitted to the audience by the use of physical and facial gestures or other features. *Bharatha* classified *Abhinaya* into four parts, depending on the mode used to convey the message:

Angika - body

Vachika – speech

Aaharya – ornaments

Satvika - pure

- **Rasa** – sentiment or mood arising as a response to the emotions and actions produced by a dancer.

9 types of rasa:

Stringaram - love

Hasyam - humor

Karuna - sorrow

Roudram - anger

Veeram - valor

Bhayanakam - fear

Bheebatsam - disgust

Adbutam - wonder

Shantam - meditation

- **Bhava-** emotions produced by a dancer. Direct translation – to be or become.

Types of Bhava:

Sthayi Bhava – permanent;

Vibhava – case for emotion;

Vyabichari bhava – transitional mood

- **Characters in dance compositions:**

Nayaka – Hero or male main character in a dance composition

Nayika – Heroine, female character

Sakhi – a friend

- **Major Hindu Gods, commonly used in BharataNatyam compositions:**

Bramha – creator
Vishnu – preserver
Shiva (Nataraja, Chandrashekhara, Neelakantha)– destroyer

Saraswathi – wife of Bramha, goddess of Knowledge
Laxmi – wife of Vishnu, goddess of wealth
Parvathy – wife of Shiva, The mother goddess, female energy

Ganesha- son of Shiva, elephant headed god, destroyer of obstacles
Murugan – son of Shiva, god of war and Victory

Krishna – attractive one, cow hoarder, is the 8th avatar (reincarnation) of God Vishnu
Radha – Krishna's wife
Gopis – milkmaids attracted to Krishna and making Radha jealous

Rama- Supreme being, 7th avatar of lord Vishnu, main character of Ramayana
Sita – wife of Rama
Lakshmana – brother of Rama, devoted his life to protect Rama and Sita
Hanuman – monkey god helping Rama to find Sita

- **Mahabharata**

One of the major Sanskrit epics and the longest one in Hinduism. It is Believed to be written by sage Vyasa but most probably is a compilation of works by many authors, it was completed by around 4th century BC It has a story within a story structure and is widely used in Bharatanatyam choreography.

- **Ramayana**

Another major Sanskrit epic that is closely related to Hindu traditions and believes. It depicts the duties of relationships, portraying ideal characters like the ideal father, ideal servant, the ideal brother, the ideal wife and the ideal king. It is assigned to sage Valmiki. There are several versions of Ramayana in different languages. Ramayana dating to somewhere between 5th and 4th century BC.

- **Vedas**

Oldest scriptures of Hinduism not attributed any authorship and contain vast information concerning philosophy and religion. Single verse of Veda is called Mantra. Many Mantras are used today as prayers in every day Hindu life.

There are 4 Vedas:

1. The **Rigveda**, containing hymns to be recited by the presiding priest;
2. The **Yajurveda**, containing formulas to be recited by the officiating priest;
3. The **Samaveda**, containing formulas to be sung by the priest that chants;
4. The **Atharvaveda**, containing collection of spells and incantations, apotropaic charms and speculative hymns.

Fifth Veda is considered to be **Natya Veda** or Dance, it is a combination of all 4 Vedas.

- **Building blocks of Bharatanatyam:**

Natya – Dramatic aspect of Indian dance where pure technique is not used but only hand gestures and Abhinaya are the means of communication.

Nritta – Abstract dance that emphasize on synchronization of rhythm, time and dance movement. There is no poetic meaning to illustrate.

Nritya – Natyam and Nritta combined and produce perfect harmony of technique and expression.

Nritya can be classified as:

Tandava – masculine

Lasya - feminine

- **Adavu** – is a 'step', or a basic unit of movement (not restricted to just the foot), was derived from the root word '*adaivu*', a Tamil meaning 'combination' or 'the process of attaining a destination'.
- **Jaathi** – Combinations of Adavus or joined in steps.
- **Korvai** – Combination of dance moments joined together, ending with Thirumanam and fitted into particular Time cycle.
- **Thirumanam** – Can be referring to the ending movement in a sequence of Adavus (**Thirumanam Adavu**) or a sequence of movements that choreographed to specially composed **Sollukatu**.
- **Arudi** – Ending of dance phrases by short repetitive steps
- **Sollukatu** – phrases or syllables recited by a **Nattuvannar**
- **Bani** – different styles or schools of Bharatanatyam. Derived from different families that practiced dance in Temples:

Pandanallur

Kalakshetra

Vazhuvur

Tanjavur

- **Margam** – Complete set of dance items designed for what is considered solo Bharatanatyam performance. Margam was set by Tanjaur brothers in early 19th century.

Bharatanatyam Margam:

1. **Alarippu** – An invocatory rhythmic Nritta dance where dancer offers her respect to the Gods, Gurus and audience. It is composed in 3 speeds. Direct translation of Alarippu is to blossom.

2. **Jatiswaram - Nritta** dance where Jaathis or sequences of moments are choreographed to follow **Swaras** (musical notes).

Musical Structure of Jatiswaram:

Pallavi – repetitive line of Swaras that is repeated many times to showcase the intricacy of rhythms that can be fitted in.

Annupallavi – Change of swaras and tempo

Charranam – A new set of Swaras that is longer than Pallavi or Annupalli. There can be 3 or 4 charanams in Jatiswaram.

3. **Shabdham** – It is the first dance item in BharataNatyam recital that incorporates Natya or Dramatic aspect. Shabdham is a devotional piece that praises one of the deities. It is usually composed in Mishra Chappu (7 beats).
4. **Varnam** - Direct meaning of Varnam is “Colour”. It is a central and most important dance in BharataNatyam recital. Varnam incorporates the most challenging **Nritta** combinations and **Abhinaya** exhibiting wide variety of emotions.
5. **Padam** – A purely **Abhinaya** piece or **Natya**, exploring different shades of relationship between Nayaka (hero) and Nayika (heroine). Sringara Rasa or love is predominant emotion here. Padam compositions are very slow in tempo.
6. **Keertanam** – This dance is Nritya or combination of Abhinaya and pure movements. The main mood of the dance is **Bhakti** or devotion.
7. **Javali** - A faster tempo Abhinaya dance, where dancer can explore different “down to earth” emotions like: sarcasm, anger, humor. Lyrics are written in colloquial language.
8. **Ashtapadi** – A special dance item devoted to relationship between Krishna and Radha, written by Jayadeva. Abhinaya is used extensively and pure dance sequences are common in Ashtapadi choreography.
9. **Thillana** - Concluding item in Bharatanatyam recital. It is mostly Nritta piece with a small line in praise of deity at the end. Thillana shows the most intricate rhythmic patterns in the whole dance recital.

Dance Items that can be added to Bharatanatyam recital:

Pushpanjali – Invocatory dance, offering of flowers to the Gods, Gurus and Audience.

Kautvam - Opening Nritya dance in praise of God.

Natyanjali – Invocatory Item “offering of dance”.

Shloka – Can be performed at the beginning or end of recital. It is a prayer to the God without any rhythmic pattern in it.

Music and Rhythm in Bharatanatyam

Sapta Swaras (7 musical notes)

Sa	Shadja	Peacock's cry
Ri	Rishabha	Cow calling her calf
Ga	Gandhara	Goats bleat
Ma	Madhyama	Heroine's cry
Pa	Panchama	Cuckoo's song
Da	Daivatha	Horse's neigh
Ni	Nishada	Elephant's trumpeting

- **Raga** – In Indian Carnatic or Hindustani system Raga can be described as melody. There are 72 main or parent Ragas, they can give birth to more variations of Ragas.
- **Sahitya** – Words for musical composition or lyrics.
- **Laya** – tempo or speed of the musical composition. 3 variations: **Vilambita** (slow), **Madhya** (medium), **Druta** (fast)
- **Thalam** – basic reoccurring unit of rhythm of a composition. It has certain number of beats.
- **Akshara** – is the name of each beat in Thalam
- **Avarthanam** – One full cycle of beats in a particular Thalam

Saptha Thalam (7 rhythmical cycles)

Druva Thalam	1011
Matya Thalam	101
Rupaka Thalam	01
Jampa Thalam	1U0
Tripata Thalam	100
Ata Thalam	1100
Eka Thalam	1

Angams (limbs) of Thalam:

Laghu (1) – Counting fingers according to the number of **Jathis**.
Dhrutam (0) – One beat and waiving hand
Anudrutam (U) – One single beat

Jathis (drum syllable)

Tishram – 3

Chatureshram – 4

Kandam – 5

Mishram – 7

Sankirnam – 9

- Based on Talam family or laghu length – there can be 35 rhythms
- Each beat may be further divided into a number of counts. The number of counts per beat is called the **Nadai** or **Gati** of the tala, and can be 3, 4, 5, 7, or 9. The default is 4.
- Chappu Thalam – following count of a particular Jathi, hand clapping is used to keep the rhythm steady. Not necessarily every beat of a Jathi should be emphasized:

Directions for representing Jathis in rhythm:

Tishram - Ta Ki Ta

Chatureshram – Ta Ka Dhi Mi

Khandam – Ta Ka Ta Ki Ta

Mishram – Ta Ki Ta Ta Ka Dhi Mi

Sankirnam – Ta Ka Dhi Mi Ta Ka Ta Ki Ta

**Cosmic
Dance**