

**Dancing Architecture:**  
The parallel evolution of Bharatanātyam  
and South Indian Architecture

by  
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A thesis  
presented to the University of Waterloo  
in fulfilment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of  
Master of Architecture

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2011

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## Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.



## Abstract

In her book, "Indian Classical dance", Kapila Vatsyayan describes dance as the highest order of spiritual discipline, the enactment of which is symbolic of a ritual sacrifice of one's being to a transcendental order. The Natya-Shashtra, a treatise on drama and dance, reveals the status of the performing arts as equal to prayer and sacrificial rites in the pursuit of moksha, the release from cycles of rebirth. Both dance and dancer function as a vehicle for divine invocation and are mirrored in the architectural surroundings.

To investigate this connection between dance and place, it is imperative to understand the mythical origins of architecture and temple dance. The Hindu philosophy of the cosmic man and its religious relationship with the Dravidian architecture of Tamil Nadu is the starting point of the discussion of a south Indian aesthetic. The Vastu-purusha mandala is a philosophical diagram that provides a foundation for Hindu aesthetics, linking physical distance, religious position and universal scale in both time and space. Used as an architectural diagram, it becomes a mediator between the human body and the cosmos. The temple, as a setting for dance performances, and constructed based on the mandala, shares this quality of immersing its participants into a multi-sensory spatial experience.

However, while the link between architecture and dance culture was explicit up to the 18th century, it is

less compelling in the context of modern south Indian architecture. With an increasingly unstable political landscape during the 20th century, architectural growth in south India during this period is almost stagnant. Unfortunately, this creates a break in the continuity and comparative evolution of dance and architecture, leading to the fragmentation and abstraction of dance in its modern form.

South Indian dance has since transformed into a prominent cultural symbol and various incarnations of the dancer have become the isolated yet important link, between tradition and modernity. As an evolving living embodiment of contemporary culture and identity, her transformation from Devadasi, to an icon of nationalism, to a choreographer of 'high art' provides the foundation for the reintegration of architecture in the cultural fabric. The culmination of this research aims to reinstate the importance of architecture as a cultural nexus in order to restring a fragmented dance, community and cultural identity.



## Acknowledgements

*Gurur-Brahma Gurur-Vishnu Gurur-Devo Maheshwaraha  
Guru-sākshat Para-Brahma tasmai Shri Gurave Namaha*

*Saraswati namastubhyam varade kāmārupini  
vidyārambham karishyāmi, siddhirbhavatu me sadā*

*Asatomā sadgamayā Tamasomā jyothirgamayā  
mrithyormā amurthagamaya Om Shānti, Shānti, Shāntihi*

O Master; you are the creator, the sustainer, the divine and destroyer.  
You are the omnipresent and the glorious transcendental divinity,  
I salute You.

O Divinity of learning, Giver of boons, Giver of form to desire.  
I am going to start studying, may it always be my success.

Lead us from darkness to light, from ignorance to truth.  
And from death to eternity, let peace prevail everywhere.

For my family.





# Contents

Author's Declaration	.....	iii
Abstract	.....	v
Acknowledgements	.....	vii
List of Illustrations	.....	xi
A note on content and language	.....	xvii
Bharata's Address	.....	xix
CHAPTER 1: Classical South Indian Architecture and Dance		
Introduction	.....	1
CHAPTER 2: The Foundations of Architecture and <i>Nāṭiyam</i>		
The Cosmic Man	.....	7
The <i>Nāṭya-Shāshtra</i>	.....	17
A Brief overview of <i>Bharatanāṭyam</i>	.....	24
CHAPTER 3: The Dancers		
<i>Apsārās</i>	.....	29
<i>Devadāsi</i>	.....	33
CHAPTER 4: Natarāja Temple, Chidambaram: A Case Study		
Dancing in the heart of the Universe	.....	39
CHAPTER 5: Evolving Identities		
Duality in Identity	.....	55
Sculpted Identity	.....	60
Divided Identities	.....	65
Collective Identity	.....	71

<b>Appendices</b>		
Appendix 1:	Glossary	..... 78
Appendix 2:	South India - A timeline	..... 82
Appendix 3:	Selected temple sites referencing the Natarāja image	..... 86
Appendix 4:	Selected temple sites referencing mythology and dance style	..... 87
<b>Bibliography</b>		..... 88

## List of Illustrations

2	<i>Fig. 1.0</i>	Sutharshinie Palaniandy, Arangetram, <i>Photography by Studio Narcissa, 2010</i>
2		Madhu Ravindra, Arangetram, <i>Photography by David Hou, 2010</i>
3	<i>Fig. 1.1</i>	Sutharshinie Palaniandy, Arangetram, <i>Photography by Studio Narcissa, 2010</i>
8	<i>Fig. 2.0</i>	Vāstu Purusha Mandala <i>Living Architecture: Indian by Andreas Volwahren</i>
9	<i>Fig. 2.1</i>	Development of ancillary shrine from cosmic circle and square <i>Brahmeshvara temple plan</i> <i>Living Architecture: Indian by Andreas Volwahren</i>
9	<i>Fig. 2.2</i>	Community designation as per Vāstu Purusha Mandala, by author <i>Based on text in Living Architecture: Indian by Andreas Volwahren</i>
11	<i>Fig. 2.3</i>	Annamalaiyar Temple Plan <a href="http://www.oocities.com/tiruvannamalainet/arunatemple.htm">http://www.oocities.com/tiruvannamalainet/arunatemple.htm</a>
11	<i>Fig. 2.4</i>	Thyagarājaswamy Temple, axonometric diagram <i>The History of Architecture in India: From the Dawn of Civilization to the End of the Raj by Tadgell, Christopher</i>
12	<i>Fig. 2.5</i>	Apsārās in dance pose, Natarāja Temple (top) <a href="http://wn.com/chidambaram_temple">http://wn.com/chidambaram_temple</a> Apsārā carvings, Natarāja Temple (middle) <a href="http://www.nrityavidyalaya.com/bharatanatyam/index.html">http://www.nrityavidyalaya.com/bharatanatyam/index.html</a> Dancing Shiva, Natarāja Temple (bottom) <i>Hindu India: From Khajuraho to the temple city of Madurai by Henri Stierlin</i>
13	<i>Fig. 2.6</i>	Carving of vīna player, Ranganātha Temple <i>Hindu India: From Khajuraho to the temple city of Madurai by Henri Stierlin</i>
14	<i>Fig. 2.7</i>	Apsārā carving, Jambukeshvara Temple <i>Hindu India: From Khajuraho to the temple city of Madurai by Henri Stierlin</i>
15	<i>Fig. 2.8</i>	Divine Hindu Trinity, author unknown <a href="http://www.artoflegendindia.com/hindu-trinity-p-21837.html">http://www.artoflegendindia.com/hindu-trinity-p-21837.html</a>
17	<i>Fig. 2.9</i>	Natarāja carving, Meenākshi Temple <i>Hindu India: From Khajuraho to the temple city of Madurai by Henri Stierlin</i>
18	<i>Fig. 2.10</i>	Performance content schedule, by author, 2010 <i>Based on text in The Theatric Universe by Pramod Kale</i>

- 19 *Fig. 2.11* **Components of stage presentation, by author, 2010**  
Based on text in *The Theatric Universe* by Pramod Kale
- 20 *Fig. 2.12* **Types of theatres, by author, 2010**  
Based on text in *The Theatric Universe* by Pramod Kale
- 21 *Fig. 2.13* **Comparative measurement systems, by author, 2011**  
Based on text in *Why not theatres made for people?* by Per Edstrom  
Images from: *The architecture of India* by Satish Grover; *Why not theatres made for people?* by Per Edstrom; *An encyclopedia of Hindu architecture* by Prasanna Kumar Acharya
- 22 *Fig. 2.14* **Kāraṇa sculptures, Natarāja Temple**  
[http://www.indianetzone.com/39/history\\_bharatnatyam.htm](http://www.indianetzone.com/39/history_bharatnatyam.htm)
- 24 *Fig. 2.15* **Sutharshinie Palaniandy, Arangetram,**  
*Photography by Studio Narcissa, 2010*
- 25 *Fig. 2.16* **Dance components, by author**  
Based on text in *The Theatric Universe* by Pramod Kale
- 26 *Fig. 2.17* **Types of Bhanga**  
<http://anilmenon.com/blog/2006/02/tribhanga-strike-a-pose.html#more-37>
- 27 *Fig. 2.18* **Bharatanāṭyam dance poses**  
<http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/sources-orientales/les-sources-orientales/index-le-bharata-natyam/les-adavus-unites-de-danse-du>
- 29 *Fig. 3.0* **Apsārās, celestial musician carving, Chidambaram Devi Temple**  
*Arrested Movement: Sculpture and Painting by Kapila Vatsyayan*
- 30 *Fig. 3.1* **Mural of Apsārās in garbha-griha, Brihadeeshwara Temple**  
*Arrested Movement: Sculpture and Painting by Kapila Vatsyayan*
- 31 *Fig. 3.2* **Urvasi Pururavas, Painting by Raja Ravi Varma**  
[http://www.citizendia.org/Urvashi\\_and\\_Pururavas](http://www.citizendia.org/Urvashi_and_Pururavas)
- 33 *Fig. 3.3* **Devadāsi of the middle ages, composite diagram by author, 2011**
- 34 *Fig. 3.4* **Rāmāyanā Illustration, by Sri Jagannātha Mahāpātra**  
*Wives of the God-King by Frédérique Apffel Marglin*
- 35 *Fig. 3.5* **Devadāsi painting, author unknown**  
<http://www.tribuneindia.com/1999/99dec12/sunday/head3.htm>
- 36 *Fig. 3.6* **Map showing temple additions by Queen Sembian Mahadevi**

*Redrawn by author, 2011, based on map found in Shiva Nataraja: Shifting Meanings of an Icon by Padma Kaimal*

- 40 Fig. 4.0 **Shivaganga Thirta (Holy tank), Natarāja Temple**  
*Photography provided by Digital South Asian Library*  
<http://www.earlychola.rajadeekshithar.com/dsalchidambaramshivaganga.jpg>
- 42 Fig. 4.1 **Natarāja Temple key plan, redrawn by author, 2011**  
*Based on plans in Temple Architecture in South India by Alan Croker ; Shiva Nataraja: Shifting meaning of an icon by Padma Kaimal; The History of Architecture in India by Christopher Tadgell*
- 42 Fig. 4.2 **Natarāja Temple inner prakara plan, redrawn by author, 2011**  
*Based on plans in Temple Architecture in South India by Alan Croker; The History of Architecture in India by Christopher Tadgell; Shiva Nataraja: Shifting meaning of an icon by Padma Kaimal; Chidambaram Temple map by Raja Deekshithar*  
[http://www.rajadeekshithar.com/spiritualvision\\_chidambaram\\_temple\\_map.htm](http://www.rajadeekshithar.com/spiritualvision_chidambaram_temple_map.htm)
- 44 Fig. 4.3 **Rāja Sabha, Natarāja Temple**  
<http://www.earlychola.rajadeekshithar.com/dsalchidambaramrajasabha.jpg>
- 45 Fig. 4.4 **Astral Body, aligning energy points of body and temple, redrawn by author**
- 45 Fig. 4.5 **Govinda Rāja mandapa, Natarāja Temple**  
<http://www.earlychola.rajadeekshithar.com/dsalchidambarammandapam.jpg>
- Vināyaka shrine, Natarāja Temple**  
[http://www.earlychola.rajadeekshithar.com/dsalchidambarammukkuruni\\_vinayaka.jpg](http://www.earlychola.rajadeekshithar.com/dsalchidambarammukkuruni_vinayaka.jpg)
- 46 Fig. 4.6 **Chit Sabha aerial view, Natarāja Temple**  
*Photography by Raja Deekshitar*  
<http://www.orientalarchitecture.com/india/chidambaram/nataraja.php>
- 47 Fig. 4.7 **Light painting, by author, 2010**  
*Based on Bharatanāṭyam adavu (gesture)*
- 48 Fig. 4.8 **Chit Sabha Plan, Natarāja Temple, redrawn by author**  
*Based on plans in Temple Architecture in South India by Alan Croker*
- 49 Fig. 4.9 **Annotated Natarāja bronze**  
*Based on text in Temple Architecture in South India by Alan Croker*
- 50 Fig. 4.10 **Conceptual diagram of the Hindu universe, by author**  
*Based on text in Nityasumangali by Saskia Kersenboom*
- 50 Fig. 4.11 **Visualization of the Hindu creative process, by author 2011**
- 56 Fig. 5.0 **Sacred geometries, by author 2011**
- 56 Fig. 5.1 **Primal vibration *Hrim* and corresponding Yantra of Goddess Bhuvaneshvari**  
*Yantra: The Tantric symbol of cosmic unity by Madhu Khanna*
- 57 Fig. 5.2 **Shiva as Ardhanareeswara, redrawn by author, 2011**

- 57 Fig. 5.3 [http://tantra369.blogspot.com/2008\\_07\\_01\\_archive.html](http://tantra369.blogspot.com/2008_07_01_archive.html)  
Copper Sri Yantra, South India 17th century  
*Yantra: The Tantric symbol of cosmic unity by Madhu Khanna*
- 60 Fig. 5.4 Devadāsīs of the revival period, composite by author, 2011  
(left to right)  
Rukimini Devi Arundale  
Balasaraswati  
Yamini Krishnamoorthy  
Anna Pavlova  
Uday Shankar
- 61 Fig. 5.5 Advertisement for dance records from Natana Niketan  
*Rewriting the Script for South Indian Dance by Matthew Harp Allen*
- 62 Fig. 5.6 “Her large liquid eyes”, drawing by Manjula  
*The Sanskritized Body by Coorlawala, Uttara. 2004*
- 65 Fig. 5.7 Daniel Phoenix Singh, Dakshina Dance Company, Washinton DC  
*Photography by Stephen Baranovics, courtesy Dance Place, 2008*  
<http://danceviewtimes.typepad.com/traiger/2008/05/east-west-masal.html>
- 66 Fig. 5.8 Advertisement for Devadāsi performance in London, 1838  
*At home in the world by Janet O’Shea*
- 66 Fig. 5.9 Rukmini Devi Arunadale 1987 stamp (top)  
[http://www.indiapicks.com/stamps/Music/Music\\_Main.htm](http://www.indiapicks.com/stamps/Music/Music_Main.htm)
- 67 Fig. 5.10 Chitra Sundaram, Photography by Satyajit  
<http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/viewArticle/367/809>
- 68 Fig. 5.11 Devadāsi protest, 2010, Photograph courtesy of The Star  
<http://themes.thestar.com/photo/09FPdGs0qi0j5>
- 68 Fig. 5.12 Devadāsi today, composite by author, 2011
- 69 Fig. 5.13 Devadāsi dance, *Devdās film still*, 2002  
<http://hafeez18.wordpress.com/2009/12/31/top-10-hits-of-madhuri-dixit/>
- 69 Fig. 5.14 Devadāsi in Bollywood, composite by author, 2011  
(left to right)  
1945 Rukmini in *Srivalli* (Tamil film)  
1948 Uday Shankar in *Kalpana* (Tamil film)  
1958 Padmini in *Going beyond three seas* (Russian film)  
1958 Vĵjayanthimala in *Sadhna* (Tamil film)  
1966 Vĵjayanthimala in *Amrapali* (an *Apsārā*) (Tamil film)  
1968 Padmini in *Thillana Mohanambal* (Tamil film)  
1977 Hema Malini in *Dream girl* (Tamil film)

1983 *Kamala Hassan in Salangai Oli (Tamil film)*  
1984 *Revathi in Vaidehi Kaathirunthaal (Tamil film)*  
1993 *Shobana in Manichtirathazhu (Telugu film)*

- 71 *Fig. 5.15* Aayiramkaal Mandapa (1000 Pillared Hall), Ekāmbareshwarar Temple  
Pancha Butha stala; Prithvi stala (Five rooms of elements; Earth)  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/seeveaar/3398458311/>
- 71 *Fig. 5.16* Koothāmbalam style Kalākshetra Auditorium, photographer unknown  
<http://kuchipudinotes.wordpress.com/2010/05/page/3/>
- 71 *Fig. 5.17* Tagore Theatre, photographer unknown  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/paulveltman/4607428114/>
- 73 *Fig. 5.18* *Bharatanāṭyam* Dancers, New Delhi, 2010  
*Photography courtesy of The Hindu*  
<http://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/metroplus/article777141.ece>





## A note on content and language

The following chapters look at the evolution of *Bharatanāṭyam* - a dance form originally developed in Tamil Nadu - and south Indian architecture, as a foundation for the discussion of a contemporary south Indian aesthetic. While references to a range of historical, socio-political movements and religious ideology are made, for the purpose of this research, the 'Indian identity' will focus on the south Indian Hindu community. These parameters are not meant to diminish the importance of other influences but is meant to curtail the analysis to a concise narrative.

### Pronunciation guide:

ā	as in far
ī	as in machine
ō	as in go
ū	as in rule
ai/ey	as in they



*Bharata's Address:*

*...Indra put his palms together, bowed his head and said:*

*"Gods can neither comprehend, assimilate nor use this art. It is impossible to entrust them with the execution of theater. However, there are humans who see farther and deeper than others, who are familiar with the mysteries of knowledge and who have trained their wills to perfection. These could understand this knowledge, use it and retain it in their memories"*

*After hearing these words from the mighty Indra, The Great One Surrounded by Lotus Flowers turned to me, Bharata:*

*"You with your hundred sons shall be the founder of this theater, o fearless!"*

*... Brahma then turned to Vishvakarman, his heavenly jack-of-all-trades and said to him:*

*"Create a house for the theater out of the holy measurements and drawings, o great thinker!"*

*Without wasting any time the heavenly jack-of-all-trades created a large theater, full of light, out of the holy measurements and drawings. The he proceeded to the great Brahma's court and with his palms together said:*

*"The theater is ready, Great Lord, if you deign to lower your gaze upon it."*

*Then the great Brahma hurried, together with Indra and all the other gods, to inspect the theater temple. When he had seen it, Brahma said to the heavenly host:*

*"Each one of you shall do his best to protect this theater temple."*

*Protection of the wall around the theater was entrusted to The Mood God and the sons of Indra, Varuna, Kuvera and Yama were placed in the four cardinal points with The Gods of the Violent Winds between them. The Sun God Mitra guarded behind the stage, Vahni the fire god guarded the costumes and the heavenly host guarded the orchestra's place. The four castes were appointed to guard the supporting pillars and the sun sons and storm winds guarded in between them. Phantoms were put in the rafters, heavenly nymphs in the hall and female spirits in all the rooms. The foundation was protected by the study back of the Earth and the Ocean's great waters. Kritana and Kala were placed at the foot of the stairs leading to the entrance and in front of the entrance stood the Dragon's Colossal Kinsman. The scepter of Justice was hung over the threshold together with Shiva's spear and two sentries, Fate and Death, guarded the door. Indra himself took up position close to the stage and the titans' combatants guarded the roof of the stage. The pillars holding up the stage roof were surrounded by phantoms, vampires, spirits and underworld giants. The titan killing Thunderbolt was attached to the spear The Piercer and the heavenly princes attached themselves to it with knots.*

*So did the gods prepare themselves for the disruptive magicians. In the middle of the stage sat Brahma himself. That is why flowers are strewn there yet today. The inhabitants of the underworld, spirits, gnomes and dragons stood guard under the stage. The play's hero was protected by Indra, the heroine by the Whispering River, the comedian by the word Om and all the other roles by the dancing Shiva...*

*... Finally The Great Father said to the gods gathered there:*

*“he that gives worship in the manner ordained [...] will be rewarded with radiant treasures and he will enter heaven!”*

*After having so spoken to the gods and the heavenly lords, the Great Father gave me this order:*

*“Mount the stage and make your sacrifice!”<sup>1</sup>*



# CHAPTER 1: Classical South Indian Architecture and Dance

## Introduction

In her book, “Indian Classical dance”, Kapila Vatsyayan describes dance as the highest order of spiritual discipline, the enactment of which is symbolic of a ritual sacrifice of one’s being to a transcendental order. The *Nāṭya-Shāstra*, a treatise on drama and dance, also reveals the status of the performing arts as equal to prayer and sacrificial rites in the pursuit of *mōksha* or release from cycles of rebirth. Both dance and dancer function as a vehicle for divine invocation and are mirrored in her architectural surroundings. The two physical models, dancer and architecture coexist as an intertwined system of Hindu philosophy. The following chapters examine the evolution of *Bharatanāṭyam*, a south Indian dance form, in parallel with a transforming south Indian and architectural identity.

At a conference in Toronto, presented by various dance performers, scholars and critics, I attended a lecture series on the practice of *Bharatanāṭyam* and its various incarnations. As life in India usually does, it included an examination of the political events of the time, cultural and religious shifts and of course, the various influences coming to India from the western world. After a few speakers and an intermission I questioned a few of the key speakers and began to notice a rather important point of omission in the discussion. While cultural shifts were identified, and intuitions recognized, there was no connection drawn between the dance and its immediate architectural setting, even given the rich architectural history of south India. I briefly consider the fact that perhaps the dance is uninfluenced by its surroundings, until a rather lively discussion questioned the appropriate terminology identifying the dance performers. The identity of the dancer was rooted in prefixes and in the specificity of their respective architectural settings: the temple dancer - *Devadāsi*, the courtesan - *Rājadāsi* or the film-y *nautch* girls. To investigate this connection between dance and place, I found it imperative to understand the mythical origins of architecture and temple dance.

My intention is to rediscover and understand the technical, artistic and spiritual complexity of ancient south Indian temple architecture and dance. My analysis will illustrate links between structure, symbolism and performance space, mapping out an intricately woven cultural fabric. An examination of the *Nāṭya-Shāshtra*, *Bharatanāṭyam*, the Chidambaram Temple, *Devadāsi* culture and the evolving political and religious landscapes will explore these cultural cornerstones in order to reinvigorate the discussion of contemporary south Indian architecture and aesthetic.





Fig. 1.0 *Bharatanātyam* dancer; S. Palaniandy

The Hindu philosophy of the cosmic man and its religious relationship with Dravidian architecture of Tamil Nadu is the starting point of the discussion of a south Indian aesthetic. The Hindu philosophy of creation is a complex and intertwining collection of symbols and details that are woven together as a comprehensive cultural fabric. The *Vāstupurusha* mandala is a philosophical diagram that provides a foundation for Hindu aesthetics, linking physical distance, religious position and universal scale in both time and space. Used as an architectural diagram, it becomes a mediator between the human body and the cosmos. The temple, as a setting for dance performances, and constructed based on the mandala, shares this quality of immersing its participants into a multi-sensory spatial experience.

As a living embodiment of this philosophy, the dancer is an integral representation of the third aim of Hindu existence. The *Nāṭya-Shāshtra* describes the characteristics of the *Bharatanātyam* dance. The dancer's identity is one that has been transformed over time and is integral to the understanding of the role of the performing arts for the south Indian community.

However, while the link between architecture and dance culture was explicit up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is less compelling in the context of modern south Indian architecture. With an increasingly unstable political landscape during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, architectural growth in south India during this period is almost stagnant. Unfortunately, this creates a break in continuity and comparative evolution of dance and architecture, leading to the fragmentation and abstraction of the dance in its modern form.



Once a prominent part of the cultural fabric, architecture takes a backseat to a dynamic and adaptable performance art. The Natarāja Temple in Chidambaram is studied to understand the position of architecture as a mediator, tying together the various facets of Hindu philosophy and culture. The design of the complex and inner shrines maintain and integrate the architectural program and spiritual aims on both a personal and cosmic scale. Here, architecture functions as artistic ‘play,’ mirroring themes explored by dances performed within the temple walls. Various iconographic references aid worshippers in their journey of enlightenment by consistently activating a collective narrative.

Socio-economic changes in the state of Tamil Nadu have also been a key element in shaping and transforming both architecture and dance. Evolving during the Aryan invasion, British occupation, and the development of nationalism, the Indian political landscape has been pivotal in structuring the Indian identity based on gender, caste and religion. While fundamental elements of *Bharatanāṭyam* are rooted in pre-medieval symbolism, identifiable with Hindu, Buddhist and Jainism, changes in the dance during the medieval period begin to classify various styles and codify choreography according to particular schools of dance and their respective regional influences. Because of such influences, it is imperative to look at political and social structures in order to understand the current status, artistically and socially, of contemporary *Bharatanāṭyam*, both in India and internationally.

South Indian dance has since transformed into a prominent cultural symbol and various incarnations of the dancer have become an isolated yet important link, between tradition

and modernity. As an evolving living embodiment of contemporary culture and identity, her transformation from *Devadāsi*, to an icon of nationalism, to a choreographer of ‘high art’ provides the foundation for the reintegration of architecture in the cultural fabric. The research explored in the following chapters aims to reinstate the importance of architecture as a cultural nexus in order to restring a fragmented dance, community and cultural identity.

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## CHAPTER 2: The Foundations of Architecture and Nāṭiyam

### The Cosmic Man

From the four faces of Brahma, the various arts emerged. From the west face, the art of music and dance was born, from the north face, the art of architecture. They were attributed to Shiva, the Lord of Dance and Vishwakarman, the architect of the universe respectively.<sup>1</sup>

The *Vāstu Vidyā*, a treatise on the science of construction, stipulates design and construction methods for small scale dwellings, to temple construction and city planning. The instructive manual finds its philosophy rooted in the *Vāstupurusha* mandala, a diagram in Hindu philosophy linking religion, building science, aesthetics and its community. Because of its application on multiple scales, the mandala becomes a vehicle through which other symbols are given meaning. Further still, this symbolism is deeply embedded in the artistic culture, ultimately revealing the human body, and *Bharatanāṭyam* dancer as a physical manifestation of architectural and religious philosophy.



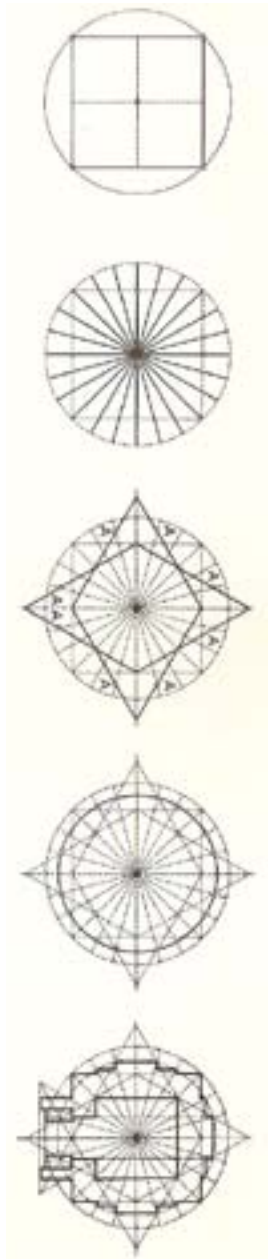


Fig. 2.1 Development of ancillary shrine ground plan, Brahmeshvara Temple, Bhuvaneshvar

Modeled on the macrocosmic scale of the universe, the city's site is a smaller manifestation of cosmic order. The type of site is broadly divided into *Jangala* (desert), *Anupam* (attractive country) and *Sadhāna* (average quality). The sound and slope of the land are also considered. A poor selection is a land sounding of jackals, dogs or donkeys. Land that slopes south, south-west, west and north-west are thought to result in death, suffering, poor harvests/poverty and war respectively.<sup>2</sup> The design of the cities also vary from the perfect square reserved for Brahmins, a swastika – representing a cyclical universe and *khetā*, for *Shudrās* – a plan with no proper city centre whose optical centre is buried in the town wall. Once the plan is determined, the city is further divided where the organization of the communities within the city's walls are also determined using the *Vāstu-purusha* mandala. (See Fig. 2.2)

Police Municipalities Administration Brandy and Wine Merchants	<i>Brahmin</i> (Priests) Astrologers Ascetics  Taste: Sweet	Markets Dwellings of Tradesmen
<i>Shudrā</i> (Untouchables) Soldiers Drivers  Taste: Bitter		<i>Kshatriyā</i> (Warriors) Palaces Court of Royal Guards Offices of leading civil servants  Taste: Astringent
Shepards Herdsman Fishermen Goalers	<i>Vaiśhyās</i> (Merchants)  Taste: Pungent	Goldsmiths Armories

Finally, with astrological influences and lunar cycles considered, construction begins. The development of the site proceeds with the land being sown with grain. Cattle belonging to the would-be residents are brought to the site, and cleanse the land as they graze and consume the harvest. The site is thus sanctified by the saliva, breath, hoof marks and urine of the sacred cows.<sup>3</sup> The undertaking of a city and temple both begin with this important ritual. Invested in the temple however is a complex set of design criteria and rituals, further developing the tenets set out by the *Vāstupurusha* mandala.

During the Chola period many temples were expanded as needed; after victories in warfare or for new coronations.<sup>4</sup> A period of successful rule was thus expressed through the artistic embellishment of temples and courts. Functioning as an important cultural center that provided employment and other community necessities, the prosperity of the community was also reflected in the architectural rendering of its religious public buildings. This also extended to investment in the other arts, with both palaces and temples employing women versed in the art of dance. While both were equally esteemed, they seldom shared dance artists.<sup>5</sup> Following the Chola period, there were 3 important factors influencing cultural development:<sup>6</sup>

1. the protection and support of Hindu culture
2. representatives of rulers are established in south Indian states; Telegu is adopted as the court language
3. a strong bias towards Sanskrit and Brahminic traditions

With a desire to maintain a strong empire against invaders, what resulted was a self-awareness and strict adherence of a caste-conscious society. The dependency on the divine to protect the kingdom also led to a renewed interest in ritual and sacrifice, frequently equating the King with God. Thematically, there was also a shift from an initial identification with fierce devotion - attributed to frequent warfare - to an exploration of eroticism in artistry. During the latter years of political stability, the arts were greatly influenced by legends pertaining to Rāma and Krishna.<sup>7</sup>

The Vijayanagar Empire directly contributed to the vast expansion of temple grounds and addition of many outer *prakaram* (temple circuits). (See Fig. 2.3) And at every temple addition, so too would there be an extension of the city. However, while cities were built of perishable materials such as unbaked clay and wood, with its increasing status in the community, temples were renovated and expanded using stone and brick for permanence (masculine buildings), while brick and wood were used primarily for domestic structures (feminine buildings) . The baking of brick attached a spiritual aspect to the material and as such, it was inauspicious to reuse bricks of ruined temples. (The importance of the transformation process attributed to fired brick is reiterated in the discussion of the Natarāja idol, in Chapter 4.) It is important to note that with any renovation specifically to the inner sanctum, there was great care taken not to disturb the original structure, maintaining the integrity of the original mandala. Thus, instead of initiating completely new construction, the maintenance of the original structure with additions and expansions of the temple grounds emphasized the continuity of design principles and an uncompromised sense of sanctity.



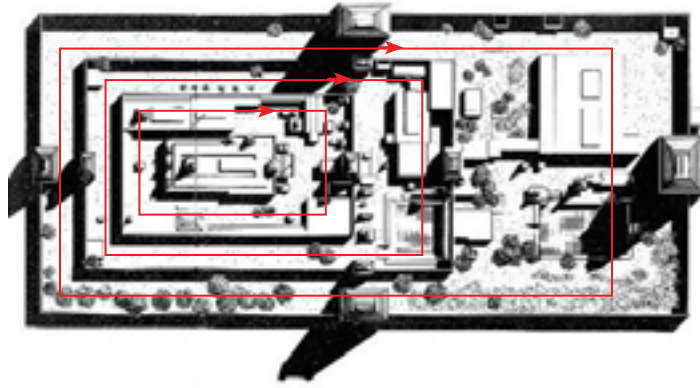


Fig. 2.3 Annamalaiyār Temple Plan, Thiruvannamalai

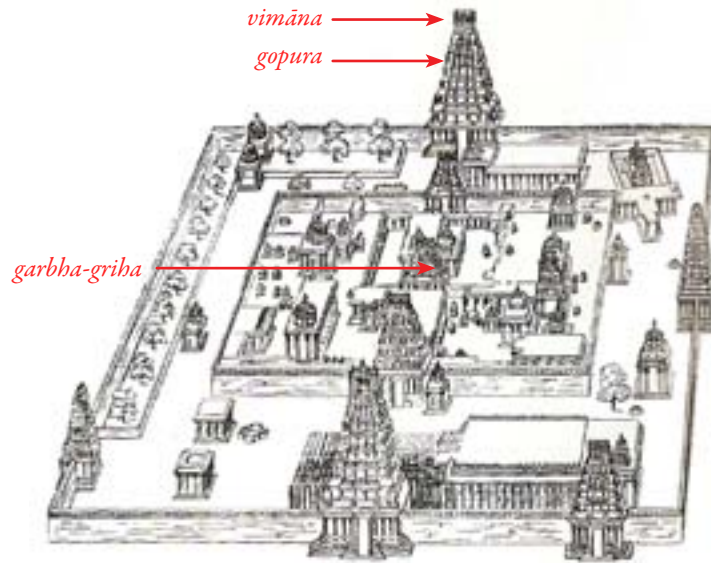


Fig. 2.4 Thyagarājaswamy Temple Plan, Thiruvarur

The temple was seen not only God's dwelling but was also a physical manifestation of the divinity it housed, comparable to sacred counterparts in the natural world. Through the siting of the temple and the execution of its plans and elevations, the form of the temple was linked back with those of the universe, where mountains, rivers and caves aligned the built complex to its cosmic axis. Derived from the mandala, the temple represented the mythical Mount Meru; surrounded by continents, oceans and supporting heavenly bodies, it is considered by Hindus to be the 'navel' of the universe. The adorned *gopura* or mountain-like superstructure of a temple ends in a *vimāna* or mountain peak, with the horizontal tiers of the roof with temple structure reminiscent of *boomi* or earthly strata. The dimly lit, unadorned massive walled sanctuary represented an architectural expression of a cave. (See Fig. 2.4)

Stemming from the grid of the mandala, mathematical calculations were used to determine the most harmonious proportion of space and auspicious time for the erection of the temple. The resultant from these calculations indicated the appropriate cast of the founder with the longevity of the temple structure dictated by the caste of the primary financial donor. It was believed, that if the temple measurements were perfect then perfection would be established in the universe. Through religious ritual and artistic embellishment, the temple is transformed from a place of worship into an object of worship.

As a physical structure, the purpose of the temple was to move man from *māyā* (illusion) to *mōksba* (liberation from the cycles of reincarnation).



The temple grounds acts as a *tīrtha* or divine crossing place, representing the transition from temporal to the eternal. This is physically manifested in the movement of priests and worshippers around the structure and the temple water features. As devotees move through each *prakaram* of the temple complex, they take part in a symbolic gesture of traversing stages of enlightenment. This progression, in line with the deity, is both symbolic and visual, culminating in the vertical ascension of the *gopura* and finally in the finial of the superstructure. The finial itself beyond repetition, symbolizes the absolute ultimate goal, *nirvāna* (absolute bliss). This journey takes visitors from a world of complexity to one of simplicity; a progression of sanctity as one nears the *garbha-griha* (inner sanctum). Once at the sanctum, *pradakshina* (circumambulation) of the idols and shrines re-emphasized this bodily participation.

The geometry of the mandala and astronomical calculations considered in the construction of cities and temples emphasize the importance of establishing a numerological connection between God and man. Just as the temple is the abode for divinity, so too is art regarded as a temporary reconstruction of celestial events. (See Fig. 2.5) Idols of the Gods and the statuary adorning the walls of the temple followed strict numerological ratios to achieve proportionally perfect sculptures. Not merely decorative, sculpture was seen an exploration in space, a representation of order succeeding chaos. Two ancient texts, the *Bṛihat-Sambhita* and *Mānasārā* document the classification of statuary using the *Tāla-Māna*, a system of sculptural measurement. This system is based on a *tāla*, the length of the human face or the span between the fully extended tips of the thumb and middle finger. (See Chapter 4: *Nāṭya-Shāshtra* for more on



12 Fig. 2.5 Carvings; Apsāras (top/middle); Dancing Shiva (bottom)



Fig. 2.6 Temple carvings; Apsāra playing the *vīna*



measurement systems) The texts also specifies various proportions and sculptural details attributed to different creatures. For example, eyelashes should be 98 in number, with hair on the neck and face discretely sculpted. The palms of hands should be lined with the five marks like that of a lotus, trident etc. One (*eka*) *tāla* is the proportion used for a particular class of *rākshasa* (demon) who is reduced to long arms with huge mouth in his belly. Five *tālas* is reserved for Ganesha, a deity with a human body and elephant head. Eight and ten *tāla* are used for man and superhuman beings respectively.<sup>8</sup> It is also interesting to note that *tāla* also means ‘beat,’ maintaining the tempo and rhythm of music and dance. Vocabulary thus reiterated the link between formal sculptural qualities and dance, as the concept of *tāla* measured both static physical distance and dynamic spatial movement in intangible and cyclical time.

Sculptural imagery decorated the entrances to temples and *prakaram* doorways with depictions of demons, Gods and erotic themes. Sensuality in sculptural detailing was expressed both as a spiritual exercise (*yōga*) and as an enjoyment and appreciation of physical pleasure (*bhōga*), both aspiring towards the same end.<sup>9</sup> Architectural and sculptural detailing of columns, parapets and various other structural details thus became additional sites for divine invocation. The ornaments adorning temple walls reiterated the oscillation between physical and spiritual realms. With Gods and demons depicted on tapering *gopura* were called upon to protect the temple. Flanking entrance-ways, friezes and columns of various shrines, images of ritual sexual exhibitionism become expressions of life, propagating fertility and the survival of the community. (See Fig. 2.7) Not just an empty vessel for activity, the temple and idols became



Fig. 2.7 Goddess Rati, consort of Kāma, the God of Love (above)

a receptacle animating deities in forms imagined by worshippers. Sculptures and idols were anointed with specific prayers and rituals in preparation for divine occupation. An ‘eye-opening ceremony’, *kannatharakaradu*, performed as the eyes were carved, signaled the ‘awakening’ of the stat-



Fig. 2.8 Hindu *Trimurti*: (left to right) Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), Shiva (the destroyer)

ue and its possession by the divine spirit. Much like a king surveying his land, during periods of agricultural harvest and festivals, the idol was taken on a tour of the community, giving those not admitted into temple grounds a chance to pay homage and receive blessings.

“God is everywhere, but just as we feel that an idol can be the focus for a God’s power, so there are certain days when your prayers are more readily heard and fulfilled.’ It was, I thought, a lovely idea: that just as there were sacred images and sacred places there were also pools of sacred time.”<sup>10</sup>

During daily rituals, the deity is awakened each morning through prayer. Priests perform rituals using prescribed *mudrās* (hand gestures), movements and *mantrās* (verses).<sup>11</sup> Worshippers follow the priest’s actions during these rituals at sunrise, noon, sunset and midnight, symbolically performing the rituals themselves. A pilgrim’s visit to the temple also includes a period of rest within the temple grounds, allowing for participation in community entertainment. This was typically a public performance of sacred songs, dance or the recital of ancient texts. With various shrines surrounding the main sanctum, the most important were the *mandapa*, free standing pavilions erected solely for the community’s engagement with the arts. These gatherings aimed to impart knowledge of virtues, behaviour, ethics, morals, courage and love, aiding participants on their path to enlightenment. Performances based on religious texts were revered as texts themselves; important in a culture where religion provided much of the underlying context for dramatic performances. Secular and religious content however often overlapped, allowing macro-cosmic themes to influence terrestrial reality. Theatre thus was another microcosm of ultimate reality, as plays and dance initiated and sustained multiple realities more experientially than its written counterparts.

The performers themselves became a physical representation of religious context and embodied the potential of movement and spiritual progression simultaneously. Through movements and gestures, they transformed pillared halls into sacred spaces, manifesting an infinite number of characters, transporting the community to a world of divine imagination. It is this conceptual realm of play or *lila* that embraced both physical sensuality and spiritual connection. This idea of 'play' also tied the community back to a universal scale, as the four major Hindu epochs were named after four throws in a traditional Indian game of dice: *Satya-Yuga*, *Treta-Yuga*, *Dwāpara-Yuga* and *Kali-Yuga*. While the illusion in itself was not the ultimate end, it provided the community a visual link between humanity and divinity. Understanding the divine spirit within one's self and its representations in art and architecture, allowed worshippers to participate in the divine cycles of creation, preservation and destruction.

<sup>9</sup> Banerjee, Projesh. 1982. *Apsaras in Indian Dance*. Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, IN, pg, 91

<sup>10</sup> Dalrymple talks with Srikanda Spathy as he describes his work and philosophy as a sculptor of stone idols. Dalrymple, William. 2009. *Nine Lives: In search of the sacred in modern India*. Bloomsbury Publishing, London, pg. 181

<sup>11</sup> Shankar, Bindu. (2004). *Dance Imagery in South Indian Temples: Study of the 108 Karana Sculptures*. Ohio State University, pg 65

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<sup>1</sup> Banerjee, Projesh. 1982. *Apsaras in Indian Dance*. Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, IN. pg, 29

<sup>2</sup> Volwahn, Andreas. 1969. *Living Architecture: Indian*. Grosset & Dunlap Incorporated, New York, US. pg, 47

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pg 50

<sup>4</sup> Kersenboom-Story, Saskia. 1987. *Nityasumangali: Devadasi Tradition in South India*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, IN, pg. 25

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg 27

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg 32

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pg 37

<sup>8</sup> Acharya, Prasanna Kumar. 1978. *An Encyclopaedia of Hindu Architecture*. J. K. Pub. House. Bhopal, IN. pg, 211



## The *Nāṭya-Shāshtra*



Fig. 2.9 Natarāja, Meenākshi Temple,

The origin of theatre is attributed to the time of the Vedas: the *Rgveda* – for dramatic recitation, *Sāmaveda* – for singing, *Yajurveda* - mimetic ritual enactment, and *Arthaveda* - for *rasa*. The first three are determined from ample literary evidence. However, it is believed *rasa* is grouped with the final Veda under general esoteric qualities and magical formulae.<sup>1</sup> (See Chapter 2: A Brief overview of *Bharatanāṭyam* for a detailed description of *Rasa*)

Considered the 5th Veda, the *Nāṭya-Shāshtra* is similar in structure to the *Purānās*, outlining human experience (activities, thoughts and feelings) through a mythical world view, theatre.<sup>2</sup> This treatise is one of the first attempts to codify the tradition of performing arts; alongside a variety of sciences such as literature, medicine and music.<sup>3</sup>

Beginning with Lord Indra's request for entertainment during a time of pleasure and suffering, it is the instinct to 'play' that brought about the art of theatre. Beyond entertainment, this 'play' offers a moment of rest for those in sorrow. It is an arena of teaching and examination of the phenomenology of the mind. It is a presentation of human nature, addressing the passing of the four stages of life. Not merely a mirror of everyday life, it is both presentational and representational of human existence and thus is meant to be enjoyed in the 'real' world.<sup>4</sup> As such, the text fluctuates between descriptions of an ideal performer/spectator and the real performer/spectator.

Between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century there was a strict consistency to the prescriptions of the *Nāṭya-Shāshtra*.<sup>5</sup> The conventions in stage presentation enabled a clear comprehension of the performance similar to clarity provided by a literary structure.<sup>6</sup> (See Fig. 2.10 and 2.11) The evolution of the document suggests of a codifying text documenting existing practices, rather than a instructional generator of dance culture.<sup>7</sup> While the treatise is regarded as the compilation of several authors, its current form is attributed to Sage Bharata. While there is no direct evidence to clarify the identity of this Sage, 'Bharata' is upheld as the author because of a secondary meaning: actor<sup>8</sup> Whether divine truth or a repository of historical thought, the authority and authenticity of the document remains undiminished.

In the 37 chapters of the treatise, the first half deals with *Rasa* and the second with prose. The latter includes the chapter on architecture - the most ambiguous of all the chapters. Confusing the text further, the document reads

as instructions for construction as oppose to an overall description of the buildings themselves, illustrated by the title *Mandaparidhanam*, 'Making of playhouses' as opposed to 'Description of playhouses'. In his book "The Theatric Universe" Pramod Kale attributes this to the limitations of an oral tradition. It is also interesting to note that the description of the theatre and its architecture are from the point of view of the performer and not the spectator, insinuating instruction to a specific group of individuals and not the general public. This emphasizes the status of theatre as much higher than public entertainment and is consistent with similar oral traditions employed by teachers of architecture, dance, music and other artistic faculties.<sup>9</sup>

The content of the performances differed from those of other ancient cultures. While European tragedies evoked a questioning attitude of a search for meaning in life's burdens, the *Nāṭya-Shāshtra* describes theatre as a celebration of life and a testament to the joy of divine worship.<sup>10</sup>

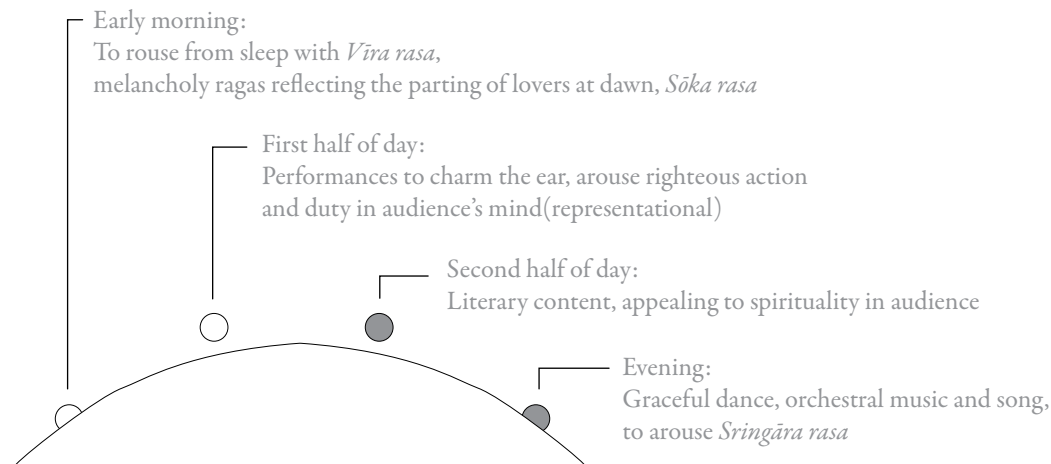


Fig. 2.10 Content/ Performance timings as described in the *Nāṭya-Shāshtra*

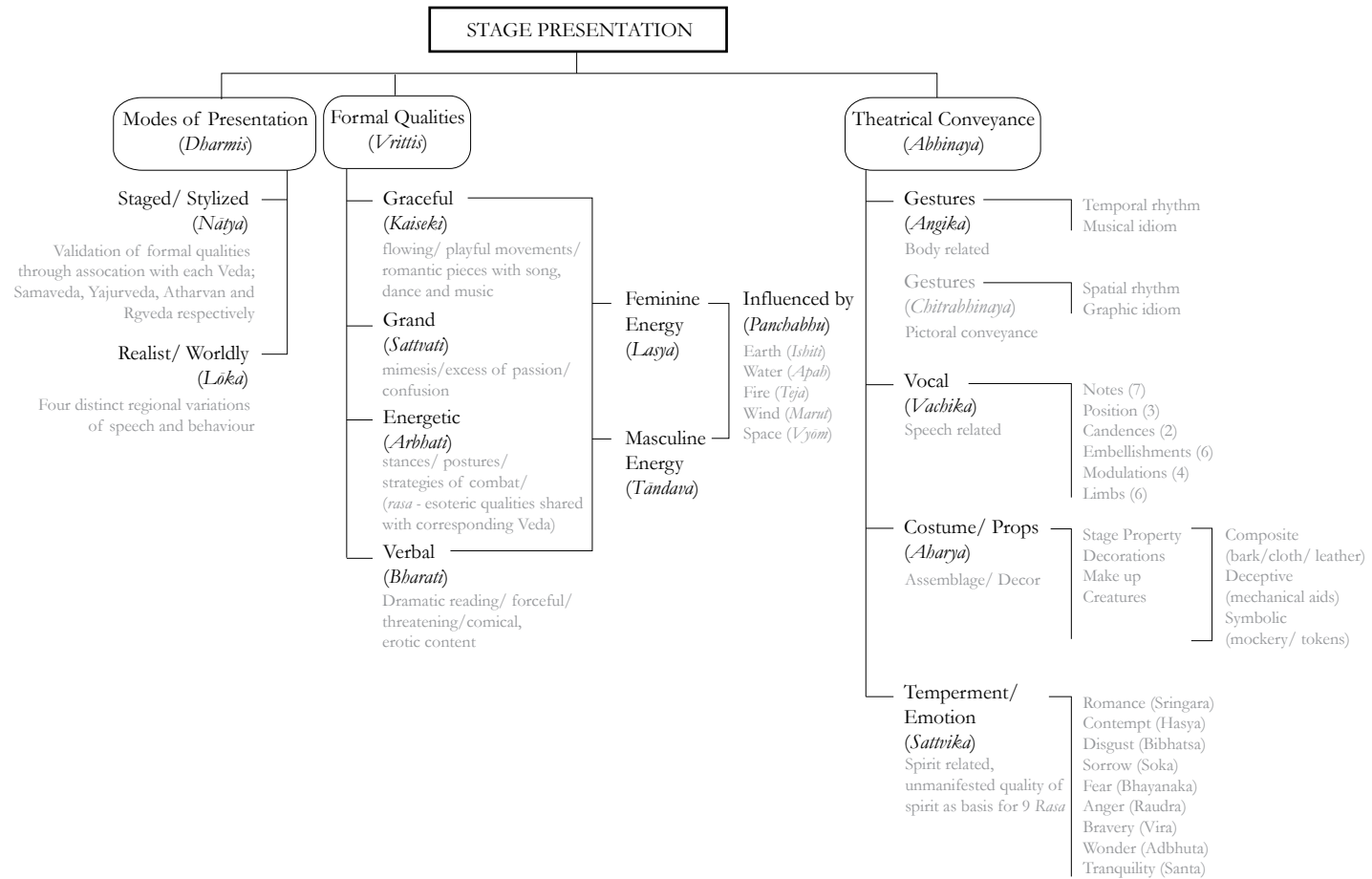


Fig. 2.11 Theatrical performance components as described in the *Nāṭya-Shāshtra*



As such, the spectators are not seen as merely citizens of the town but determinedly, devotees. That being said, there were selected restrictions pertaining to the performances. For example, content was dictated by the time during which the plays were performed. Musical plays were enacted in both temples and royal courts with a clear hierarchy of venues – common even in contemporary performances. Recitals at weddings and parties are often more respectable than those at restaurants or hotels, where audience members might be eating and drinking. Even lower on the list are venues where there is consumption of alcohol.

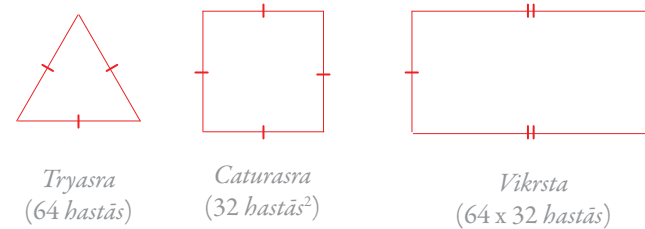
The *Nāṭya-Shāstra* also outlined the various characteristics of dancers portrayed in theatre:

- Courtesan - Obeys her master; quiet with poise; skilled in the 64 arts; devoid of all female blemishes; skilled in dance, sweet conversation and gentle attention
- Heroine - A young girl of high family and character; sweet, soft spoken; knowledge of musical rhythm
- Dancing girl - A condemned beautiful youth with no virtues; uncouth, arrogant and ill-mannered; full of blemishes

As a form of public theatre where families gathered, moderation was employed to preserve familial sanctity. With no outward kissing, embracing or lovemaking, even suggestive behaviour, biting, scratching, loosening garments, pressing of breasts, eating, sleeping and swimming were expressed without direct depiction, necessitating a coded method of representation.<sup>11</sup> Scene and location changes were enacted by circumambulating the stage and via hybrid scenic devices.<sup>12</sup> A versed spectator, skillful acting and a richness of

beauty and form were required to merit performances as an ornament of theatrical art.

There are 3 main types of buildings described in the *Nāṭya-Shāstra*. These are multiplied by 3 sizes, for a total of 9 types of theatres.<sup>13</sup> (See Fig. 2.12) The largest theatre, designed for the Gods is given the most description in the treatise, with only differences in the smaller halls described. Three types of temple architecture - *Layana*, *Gubādhāra*, and *Gubārāja* - are also derived from the descriptions outlined in the *Nāṭya-Shāstra*, referencing the rock-cut temples of Ellora and Ajanta among others.<sup>14</sup>



- Small (*Avara*): for Men (indicated above)
- Medium (*Madhya*): for Kings; ideally 52 cubits
- Large (*Jyestha*): for Gods; ideally 96 x 48 cubits

A theatre built for the Gods must be in the shape of a mountain cave but not a rough grotto, with two floors and small windows to restrict wind, in order to attain a depth and resonance of sound. The centre of the roof must be higher than the sides.

20 Fig. 2.12 Three sizes of theatres outlined in *Nāṭya-Shāstra*

*“Just as the holy Gods’ frosty mountain Meru can shake and tremble so shall you, creation of man, unshakingly support!”<sup>15</sup>*

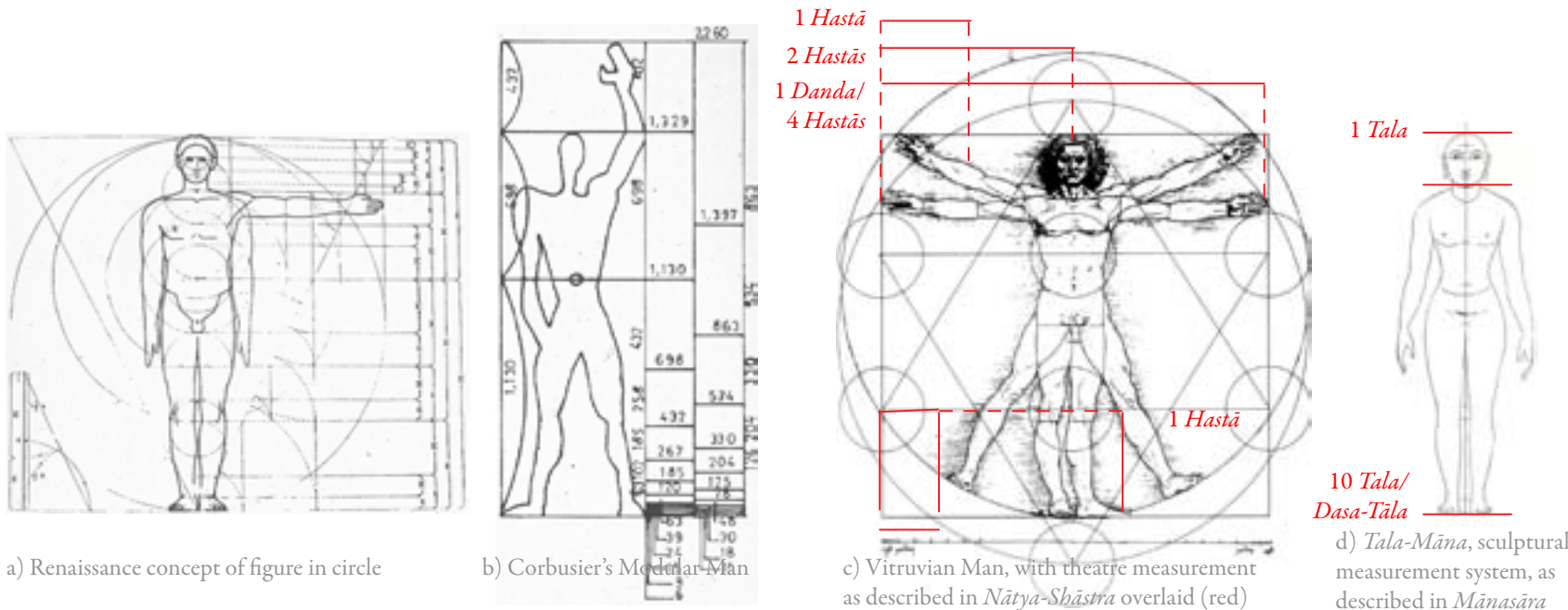
*“That which is built for man to walk in should be built according to man’s measurements.”<sup>16</sup>*

Similar to western traditions, architectural measurement was based on the human form. (See Fig. 2.13) This system invoked *Purusha* bound in the *Vāstu-purusha* mandala and the *Tāla-Māna*. In multiples of 8, indivisible particles - *paramanu*, measure *angulas*. (See Chapter 4: Natarāja Temple for details on *paramanu*) One *angula* measures a finger breath, a basis of architecture and sculptural proportion and measurement.

4 <i>angulas</i> = <i>tala</i>	84 <i>angulas</i> = <i>purusha</i>
10 <i>angulas</i> = <i>saya-tala</i>	(height of a man)
24 <i>angulas</i> = <i>basta</i>	106 <i>angulas</i> = <i>danda</i>

Once designed, the foundation of the site is anointed with aromatic flowers, fruits and sounds of musical instruments.

*“The first pole to be erected is the [Bhramin] pole anointed with buffalo milk, oil and mustard flour and you sacrifice milk as prescribed. After that adorn the pole of the princes with a crown and blood-red decorations and a sacrifice to noble born is made. The pole for the merchant caste in the north-west shall swell up with all it’s smeared on gold colour and the sacrifice for the wealthy shall drip with melted butter. The pole of the fourth caste shall be raised in the north-east and meticulously painted entirely in blue and sacrifices shall be made.”<sup>17</sup>*



a) Renaissance concept of figure in circle      b) Corbusier's Modular Man

c) Vitruvian Man, with theatre measurement as described in *Nāṭya-Shāstra* overlaid (red)      d) *Tala-Māna*, sculptural measurement system, as described in *Mānasāra*

Fig. 2.13 Comparative measurement systems based on the human form

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the inclusion and allusions to the human form are much of the focus of sculptural ornamentation. Included with theatre, sculptural and architectural instruction, *Nāṭya-Shāstra* also outlined the art of dance. 108 *kāranās*, or fundamental units of dance movement are described in Sanskrit couplets.<sup>18</sup> Taken directly from this textual description, they are depicted through iconic single postures along temple walls. (See Fig. 2.14) Although seemingly ‘frozen’ in stone, the *kāranās* represent a dynamic gesture, brought to light through extensive study by Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. These high relief sculptures are consistently presented as a collection of figures posed within boxed panels<sup>19</sup>, emphasizing their importance within the dance repertoire while differentiating them from other performance art imagery. The square panels are bound by a pavilion style roof supported on unadorned pillars.<sup>20</sup> The various scenes depict vigorous and energetic characteristics attributed to the masculine (*tāṇḍava*) style of dance. Specifically included in the carvings on the east *gopura* of the Natarāja Temple in Chidambaram are verses taken directly from the *Nāṭya-Shāstra*.<sup>21</sup> The inclusion of the sculptural panels specifically in south Indian temples indicate a popularity of the *tāṇḍava* style and its influence on dance in this region.<sup>22</sup> However, while modern south-Indian dance partakes of *mudrās* and *hastās* (hand gestures) outlined in the text, *kāranās*, as described in the *Nāṭya-Shāstra* are noticeably absent in popular dance repertoire. In her dissertation analyzing the 108 *kāranās*, Bindu Shankar also comments on the evolution of formal qualities of sculptures in various temples, a trend that would eventually be mirrored in the re-structuring and formalizing of the dance itself.



Fig. 2.14 *Kāranā* carvings, Natarāja Temple

The rigorous carvings at this temple and the specificity of the *Nāṭya-Shāstra* text reveals the deep knowledge and integration of literature, art, dance and architectonics. The following chapters explore these areas as branches stemming from a common philosophical root. The emphasis on a consistent framework ultimately aims to cultivate and guide the progress of architecture as one such branch.

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- <sup>1</sup> Kale, Pramod. 1974. *The Theatric Universe: A study of the NatyaShastra*. Popular Prakashan Pvt. Limited, Bombay, pg 44
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid, pg 3
- <sup>3</sup> Dasi, Indira. "Classical Indian Temple Dance." Bhaktivendata College. Web. 27 May 2010, pg 13
- <sup>4</sup> Kale, Pramod. 1974. *The Theatric Universe: A study of the NatyaShastra*. Popular Prakashan Pvt. Limited, Bombay, pg 34
- <sup>5</sup> Vatsyayan, Kapila. 2007. *Arrested Movement: Sculpture and Painting*. Wisdom Tree. New Delhi, pg 1
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg 6
- <sup>7</sup> Shankar, Bindu. (2004). *Dance Imagery in South Indian Temples: Study of the 108 Karana Sculptures*. Ohio State University, pg 57
- <sup>8</sup> Kale, Pramod. 1974. *The Theatric Universe: A study of the NatyaShastra*. Popular Prakashan Pvt. Limited, Bombay, pg 7
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, pg 36
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg 49
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, pg 42
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, pg 29
- <sup>13</sup> Edström, Per. 1990. *Why not theaters made for people?* Arena Theatre Institute, Varmland, Sweden, pg 50
- <sup>14</sup> Kale, Pramod. 1974. *The Theatric Universe: A study of the NatyaShastra*. Popular Prakashan Pvt. Limited, Bombay, pg 16
- <sup>15</sup> Translated from the *Nātya-Shāstra*, Sage Bharata describes a prayer uttered during the ritual erection of theatre structure. Edström, Per. 1990. *Why not theaters made for people?* Arena Theatre Institute, Varmland, Sweden, pg 56
- <sup>16</sup> Translated from the *Nātya-Shāstra*, Sage Bharata explains the reason for architectural dimensions. Ibid, pg 53
- <sup>17</sup> Translated from the *Nātya-Shāstra*, Sage Bharata describes the rituals to be performed at the erection of theatre structure. Ibid, pg 55
- <sup>18</sup> Shankar, Bindu. (2004). *Dance Imagery in South Indian Temples: Study of the 108 Karana Sculptures*. Ohio State University, pg 28
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, pg 24
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, pg 125
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, pg 123
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid, pg 76



## A Brief overview of *Bharatanāṭyam*

“The highest place among all the fine arts has been given to Dance. *Viṣṇudharmottara*, the ancient treatise, says that art conduces to fulfilling the aims of life, whose ultimate aim is Release (*Moksha*)... the king desires to learn the whole meaning of Art, but is told that he must first know the theory of Dancing... [the king] shall begin by studying music and song, for without knowledge of all the arts, their effect in space and time cannot fully be understood, nor their purpose be achieved.”<sup>1</sup>

Studying the development of *Bharatanāṭyam* reveals several periods of stylistic changes, occurring prior to and during the revival of the mid twentieth century, culminating in the explosion of modern period of influence and exposure. Prior to the revival, stylistic transformations undergone by the dance was a direct result of the development of various *bani(s)*. During the revival, the renaming of the dance as a result of political and social change during the 1950’s and the subsequent exploration in choreography during the late 20th century by global dancers led to the presentation of ‘classical’ south Indian dance as we see it today.

In her book “*Bharatanāṭyam: From temple to theatre*”, Anne Mari Gaston describes 18 different *Banis*, documented during the 1980’s. These groups were defined by their geographic location and predominant styles. She divides them into four categories according to shared characteristic and student-teacher relationship (*guru-shishya parambara*).



Fig. 2.15 *Bharatanāṭyam* dancer; S. Palaniandy

The four categories are as follows:

1. Tanjore Quartet/ (no *Devadāsi* lineage)
2. *Banis* with *Devadāsis* in lineage
3. *Devadāsis* of the 21st century
4. Recent innovations/ Revival of lost techniques

The proliferation of dance and music emerging from the Tanjore courts (15<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> century) would eventually become pivotal to the evolution of the dance. (See Chapter 5: The Revival for more information)

“Where Gods are praised, where the action is graceful, where men and women are indulging in courtship and sweet talk born of desire, in all such graceful and erotic phases, dance composition should be employed”<sup>2</sup>

The dancer not only affects life but calls it into being through the exploration of spatial orientation and rhythm. She manifests the external order and structure of the universe as an animated three dimensional representation of the *Vāstu-purusha* mandala. Because of her dynamic nature and unlike static positioning in a Cartesian grid, a dancer is able to assign qualitative characteristics to numerous directions, charging them with her movements and gestures thereby establishing a hierarchy of space. It is in the manipulation of technical elements and the expression of *rasa* that the dancer is able to define her metaphysical identity.

The facets of dance expression and performance are described through physical prowess and dramatic interpretation (See Fig 2.16). The drama of dance is *abhinaya*, the artists projection of this drama is *bhāva*, the audience experiences various *rasa* as the resulting sentiment. *Rasa* is not personal sentiment, but individual expression may be employed as a vehicle of communication.<sup>3</sup> 49 *Bhava's* influence the following 9 *Rasa's* explored through dance:<sup>4</sup>

1. Romance (*Sringāra*)
2. Contempt (*Hasya*)
3. Disgust (*Bibhatsa*)
4. Sorrow (*Sōka*)
5. Fear (*Bhayanaka*)
6. Anger (*Raudra*)
7. Bravery (*Vīra*)
8. Wonder (*Adbhuta*)
9. Tranquility (*Santa*)

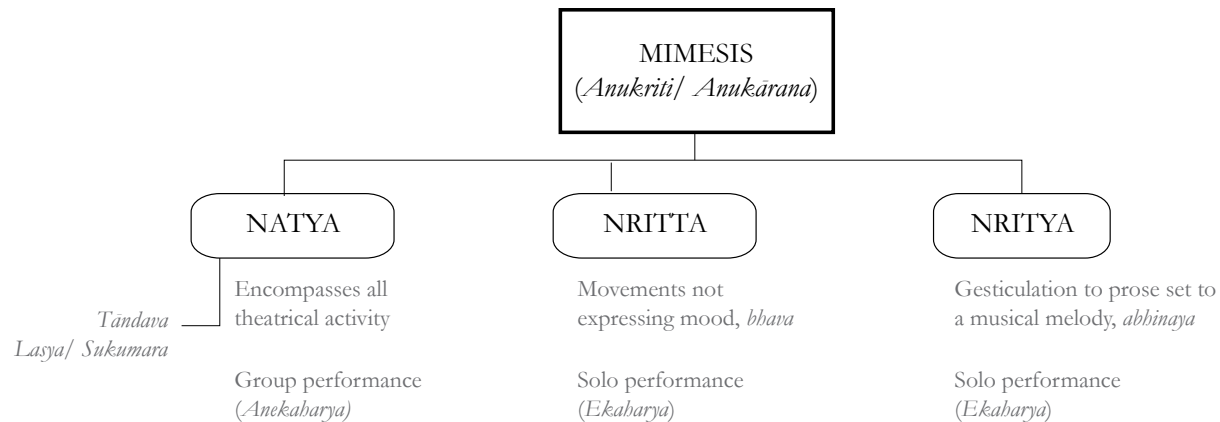


Fig. 2.16 Dance components as described in the *Nāṭya-Shāshtra*

Major limbs (*anga*) and minor limbs (*upanga*) are associated with specific *nritta* and *nritya* movements, with other limbs such as hands, have both types of movements.<sup>5</sup> The 9 *rasas* are used to portray 8 idealized heroes (*nāyaka*) and heroines (*nāyika*). One such personage, illustrates a joyous love, and seven others explore the anxiety and/or anticipation of separation. *Viraha* or longing of love in separation, was seen as analogous of the soul's search for the divine.<sup>6</sup> Erotic sentiment was commonly used as a vehicle of extreme emotion separate from the context of sexual arousal, reinforcing the need for an informed audience.

“Because there are several conventions and symbols in Indian classical dance that are found in the plastic arts, in particular painting and sculpture, an introduction to one facilitates appreciation of the other. To fully appreciate this integration one must be familiar with the conventions and the symbols common to them and recorded in Sanskrit texts.”<sup>7</sup>

Typically, the dancer traversed space along lines or in triangular formations, creating a symmetrical pattern where one half of the body was usually static. Each step was grounded and reinforced in the sound of her anklets as her feet danced through various rhythmic iterations only to return to the balanced *samabhanga* pose. (See Fig. 2.17) As such, she did not make use of ‘gliding’ footwork and was seldom completely off the ground, common to other dance styles such as ballet.<sup>8</sup> However, the exact use of stage space and how much of it was traversed through foot work and gestural movement varied from teacher to teacher.<sup>9</sup>

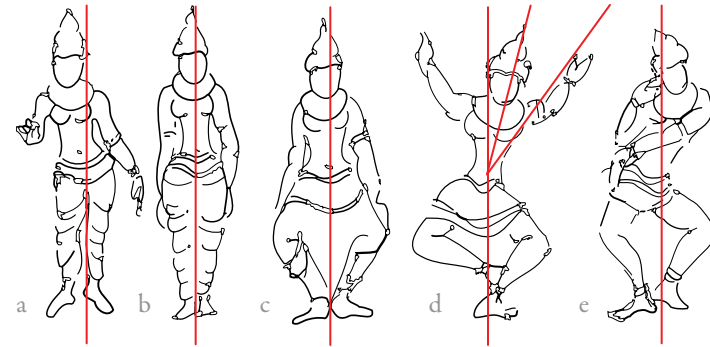


Fig. 2.17 a) abhanga b/c) samabhanga d) atibhanga e) tribhanga

While much of the lyrical content of compositions was based on religious texts, there was also a strong testament to poetry of the Sangam period (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E). Having a secular slant compared to its *akam* (sensuality/ love) and *puram* (heroism/ warfare) counterparts, there was an explosion of poetry countering the two genres. (See Fig. 4.10 for further information on the origin of poetic themes) The duality explored in such works further inspired other balanced opposites, in dance and in the philosophy behind it. While dance in south India was linked to religious content of a *Saivite* (followers of Shiva) heritage, modern compositions such as *Gita Govinda* by Jayadev initiated a tradition of dance content based on the worship of Vishnu in his incarnation as Krishna. This shift from *Saivite* content to themes of Krishna's love would ultimately unite northern and southern Indian schools of *Bharatanāṭyam* developing a national artistic continuity.

“The arts are not for our instruction, but for our delight, and this delight is something more than pleasure, it is the godlike ecstasy of liberation from the restless activity of the mind and the senses, which are the veils of all reality, transparent only when we are at peace with ourselves”<sup>10</sup>

Evolving alongside content was the structure of the performance. A typical concert repertoire follows:

- Allāripu*: devotion to Natarāja, God of dance
  - Ranga puja* (worship of stage)
  - Pushpānjali* (offering of flowers)
- Jatisvaram*: rhythmic pattern exploration
- Shabdham*: literal miming of lyrical musical content
- Varnam*: evoking *abhinaya*
  - Sthāyibhava* (dominant state)
  - Sanchāribhava* (transitory state)
- Padam*: interpretive of lyrical passage set to music
  - content usually that of a woman in a state of expectancy of separation/union with a lover
  - allegorical content of union with divinity/ lover
- Thillāna*: introduction of technical floor choreography
  - movement along lines, triangles, diagonals, circles
- Slokā*: invocation of God in a peaceful mood

Other compositions such as *Kirtana*, *Svarajati*, *Javāli* (Telegu tradition) and *Kurathi* (gypsy dance) were included as they came in/out of fashion.<sup>11</sup> Thus, dancers modified concert repertoire, catering to the public interest, maintaining their popularity and income.<sup>12</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century especially, tradition and ritual content were gradually replaced with more artistic tasks.<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 2.18 *Bharatanātyam* pose examples

<sup>1</sup> On the status of dance, among the arts. Banerjee, Projesh. 1982. *Ap-saras in Indian Dance*. Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, IN. pg, 138

<sup>2</sup> On the inclusion of dance in theatre described in the *Natya Shastra*. Kale, Pramod. 1974. *The Theatric Universe: A study of the Natya Shastra*. Popular Prakashan Pvt. Limited, Bombay, pg 143

<sup>3</sup> Schwartz, Susan. 2004. *Rasa: Performing the divine in India*. Columbia University Press, New York, pg 95

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pg 15

<sup>5</sup> Vatsyayan, Kapila. 2007. *Arrested Movement: Sculpture and Painting*. Wisdom Tree. New Delhi, pg 9

<sup>6</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 88

<sup>7</sup> On the importance of an informed audience. *Ibid*, pg 262

<sup>8</sup> Vatsyayan, Kapila. 2007. *Arrested Movement: Sculpture and Painting*. Wisdom Tree. New Delhi, pg 17

<sup>9</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 261

<sup>10</sup> Translated from *Abhinaya Darpana* of Nandikeshvara, on the purpose of language and gesture in the arts. Schwartz, Susan. 2004. *Rasa: Performing the divine in India*.

Columbia University Press, New York, pg 18

<sup>11</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 276

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pg 333

<sup>13</sup> Kersenboom-Story, Saskia. 1987. *Nityasumangali: Devadasi Tradition in South India*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, IN, pg 45





## CHAPTER 3: The Dancers

### *Apsārās*



“The hide of the black buck as garment worn,  
the little bells on the feet resonating with the tinkling sound,  
the consuming fire in the hand, held by  
long and sturdy arms swaying in rhythm,  
the charming Uma beholds the Lord tenderly.  
And the adoring celestials standing witness  
the graceful and blissful dance, the Lord performs  
at Perumbarrappuliyur, the sacred place renowned,  
to sing his glories, or not to be born”<sup>1</sup>

Fig. 3.0 Temple carvings; *Apsārās* (celestial dancers) and *Gandharvās* (heavenly musicians); 12<sup>th</sup> century Cholan dynasty





Fig. 3.1 Mural of *Apsāras*, (opposite); 10<sup>th</sup> century Cholan dynasty  
 Fig. 3.2 *Urvasi Pururavas*, painting by Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) 31

The status and longevity of dance as one of India's most prized art forms is seen in the variety of divine dancers included in the Hindu pantheon and in their inclusion as literary and sculptural ornamentation.

“When the time came to fashion the *Apsārās* he found that all the solid elements were exhausted. So he took the roundness of the moon, the curves of the creepers, the clinging of the tendrils, the trembling of the grass, the tenderness of the reed, tapering of the elephant's trunks, the velvet of the flower, the lightness of the leaf, the quick glance of the fawn, the clustering of the hives of bees, the joyous gaiety of the sun's rays, the tears of the mist, the inconsistency of the wind, the timidity of the hare, the vanity of the peacock, the softness of the down and of the parrot's bosom, the harness of the diamond, the sweetness of the honey, the cruelty of the tiger, the warmth of fire, the chill of snow, the chatter of joy, the moving of the turtle dove, the cooing of the *kōkila*, the hypocrisy of the crow, the fidelity of the *Chakravakes*, and the poison of the snake.

All those were combined and *Apsārā* was created”<sup>2</sup>

The creation of *Apsārās* is commonly attributed to Brahma (the Creator) and in some scriptures, to the son of Brahma, Vishwakarma, the supreme architect.<sup>3</sup> The name '*Apsārā*' is derived from *apah* (water) and *sarasah* (reservoir); together, becoming a reservoir of water, a cloud. These celestial beings link heaven and earth, as various myths speak of their descent to earth to disrupt the spiritual exercises of sages as a test of their virtue. They are symbols of exemplary beings of womanly virtue and most importantly as expressions of artistic faculty.<sup>4</sup> Thus, *Apsārās* are divided into two groups, worldly (*lōgika*) and divine (*daivika*).<sup>5</sup>

The three incarnations of *Apsārās* can be aligned to their *Devadāsi* descendents. The first most illustrious position held by celestial dancers as consorts of the divine is held by the *Devadāsi* temple dancer, who danced for the sole enjoyment of her Lord. The second incarnation, where *Apsārās* descended to earth for short periods of time forming relationships with mortals, can be likened to the *Devadāsi* forming sexual bonds with the patrons and priests of the community. The third class of *Apsārās*, were dragged to earth only to give birth to the mortal men who could no longer ascend to the heavens. As a lover for the common man providing lewd entertainment, the modern *Devadāsi* encapsulates this fall from grace.

“The actions of the *Apsārās* are imbued with sentiment. In order to appreciate this, therefore, the reader must be a man of taste. Those whose life has led them barren of impression and emotions are incapable of relishing the accounts. In that sense the stories may well be called an aristocratic art; because none but the cultured can appreciate it to the full”<sup>6</sup>

*Apsārās* were revered for their mastery of five traits; Beauty (*Rūpa*), Sentiment (*Rasa*), Sound of Anklet (*Shabda*), Touch (*Sparsha*) and Aroma (*Gāndha*).<sup>7</sup> These qualities are almost identically revered in performances by *Devadāsis* and *Bharatanāṭyam* dancers, with both performers using various faculties to invoke, *rasa*. (See Fig. 2.11 and pg. 25)

As the original personification of fertility and the ultimate symbol of femininity, *Apsārās* were a clear predecessor to the *Devadāsi*, upholding their claims of inheriting this dance art directly from the heavenly nymphs.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation of a hymn by the Tamil saint Appar on celestial dancers. Vatsyayan, Kapila. 2007. Arrested Movement: Sculpture and Painting. Wisdom Tree. New Delhi, IN, pg 13

<sup>2</sup> On the creation of *Apsārās*, from “The Digit of the Moon” a book series on Indian mythology. Banerjee, Projesh. 1982. Apsaras in Indian Dance. Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, pg 29

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pg 28

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pg 28

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg 32

<sup>6</sup> On the need of an informed audience in order to reap the rewards of a performance by the celestial dancers. Ibid, pg 137

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pg 31



## *Devadāsi*

A descendent of mythical *Apsārās*, *Devadāsis* became a mortal representation of the celestial, participating in religious rituals and community celebrations. As early as 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E. young girls were dedicated in temples for signing during rituals and festivals and as the wealth of the temple and kingdom grew, the number of girls that were ‘married’ to their temple deity grew rapidly. Under Rajendra Chola, the 12th century ruler of the Cholan Empire, 400 temple dancers were brought from the Bhrihadeeshvara Temple to court.<sup>1</sup>

One of the few prominent female professions, dancers held an important position in both the temple and royal court setting. Yet there was still a distinction when describing a dancer in a temple setting, *Devadāsi* or *Vishnu-dāsi* and a dancer in a royal court, *Rāja-dāsi*. Kalidasa’s literary works describe court dancing as early as the 5th century, at the *Saivite* Mahakala Temple in Madhya Pradhesh.<sup>2</sup> A distinction between classical and folk performances was also made

based on factors such as, the mode/duration of training, the occasion/ location of performance and the identity of the audience.<sup>3</sup> Although not the primary focus of this discussion, there are countless images, pages of literature and vast sculptural evidence to illustrate the popularity of dance in both courtly and village settings.

The *Devadāsi* culture was socially divided as a professional ethic (*vritti murai*) but did not have a separate caste (*jādi*). Entry into this profession was typically hereditary, but musical and dramatic qualifications were the determining factor of a dancer’s eligibility to perform. A female child was also to possess beauty, keen-insight, intelligence and a conduct of her own. Finally, her entry into the profession needed the sanction of temple authorities.<sup>4</sup> While seemingly unorthodox, the social organization of this community was a clear example of an active female community within a patriarchal society, expressing a greater duality of male-female drives, fundamental to Hindu philosophy.



Fig. 3.3 *Devadāsi* of the middle ages

First born female children of non-*Devadāsi* families were also promised into dedication, upon overcome illnesses, family misfortune or infertility. The *Devadāsi* community was divided as follows:<sup>5</sup>

*Periamelam* (big drum): Considered the ‘pure’ section of the community; male dominated instrumentalists

- *nāḍhaswaram, tavil, ṭṭu, cymbals*

*Chinnamelam* (small drum): Consisted of a ‘mixed’ community of female *Devadāsi*s dancers and male *Nattuvanar* and gurus, instrumentalists

- *mukha-vīna, mridangam, cymbals*

As part of the *gurukula* system, the dancer lived with her *guru* (teacher). If financially viable, a long narrow annex was built on top of the apartment compound of the teacher’s dwelling. Otherwise, a roof was constructed over the open terrace for the purpose of dance instruction.<sup>6</sup> The use of mirrors in the dance space is a much more modern addition and would reflect a multiplicity and facet-ting of the dance, a topic explored further in Chapter 5. Following the division of the communities, domestic organization was also specified:<sup>7</sup>

*Devadāsi* household:

A matriarchal household with residential authority, proprietary conjugal and celibate codes, usually consisting of 30 or more residents with a higher female to male ratio

*Guru/ Nattuvanar*’s household:

A patriarchal household with professional authority, consistent with the greater Hindu community’s political and ethical structure, usually a significantly smaller household with an equal number of male and female residents



Fig. 3.4 Seduction by courtesans, scene from the Rāmāyana

*Devadāsi* initiation rituals were to be commenced at the age of 7 and completed after first menstrual cycle: (Past the age of 14 girls would no longer be considered for dedication as their virginity may be called into question)<sup>8</sup>

1. Marriage ceremony (*Kalyānam*)
2. Dedication (*Muttirai*)
3. First dance lesson
4. Presentation of ankle bells at mastery of first dance, *Allāripu* (*Gejjai puja*)  
(Inclusion of this ritual meant additional fees (*guru dakshina*) but was sometimes included in an *arangetram*, negating additional costs/fees)
5. Debut recital (*arangetram*)
6. Selection of Patron



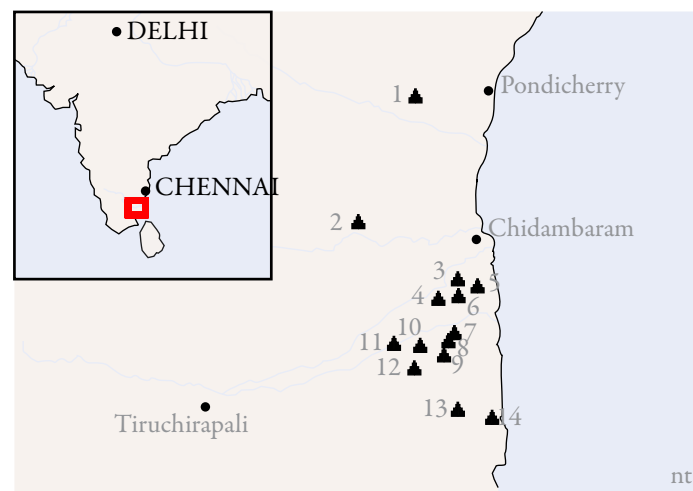
Fig. 3.5 *Devadāsi* and musicians, painting

In addition to her divine ‘marriage’ to the deity, a *Devadāsi* also formed relationships with prominent men in the community, linking the divine and mortal realms. A *Devadāsi*’s patron was selected by her mother and grandmother (*thāi kizhavi*) with only the eldest married son in a family being eligible as a patron. A high class family was desired, avoiding patrons of Muslims, Christians and men of a low caste.<sup>9</sup> Of course, a significant amount of money could overcome such hurdles. Her intimate connection with temple, and public acknowledgement of the liaison between dancer and patron institutionalized and de-eroticized the relationship, differentiating it from other sexual cults. A patron’s contact with the *Devadāsi* and physical proximity to the temple - *Devadāsi* dwellings were on the north side of temples<sup>10</sup> - gave him a religious purity and enhanced professional career opportunities while sanctioning the unusual lifestyle in conservative Hindu communities. A clear separation of domestic and artistic duties also upheld her status and respectability. Her high status was seen in strict public etiquette. The *madisāru* or 9-yard *sāri*, worn as bridal attire (even today) was based on the costume worn by the *Devadāsi* as a visual link to a *nityasumangali* (ever auspicious wife).<sup>11</sup> As such, she was welcomed at wedding festivities and beads from her own *mangalsūtra* or *thāli* (thread necklace worn by married women) were worn by brides desiring a long marriage. Ill-treatment of a *Devadāsi* was equivalent to spitting in a temple, turning ones back to shrines and looking greedily at temple property, offenses punishable by *panchāyat* (an assembly of respected community members).<sup>12</sup> Her funereal rites were also given high priority. Financed by the temple, deities observed absolution and processions paused in front of a *Devadāsi*’s dwelling as a sign of respect.<sup>13</sup>



While the ability to maintain a *Devadāsi* was seen as prestigious for a patron, offspring resulting from this non-domestic contract were not eligible for hereditary property from their father. They were however, also not considered illegitimate. As such, the *Devadāsi* enjoyed a significantly advantageous financial position as part of the *chinnamelam* community. In a seemingly backwards system for a predominantly patriarchal south Indian community, it was the matriarchal lineage that bestowed property and wealth to their children. Again, atypical to the greater Indian community, female children were prized for their ability to bring in revenue through temple service and patronage, while male offspring in a *Devadāsi* household would often leave the matriarchal household after marriage or significant artistic success. Her position within the community and greater religious context meant her wealth was worthy of being used in the construction of various religious and cultural institutions. Under the patronage of Queen Dowager Sembiyan Mahadevi, various existing wooden temples were rebuilt in stone<sup>14</sup> (See Fig. 3.6) and dancer's in the court of Rajaraja III (1298-1322) financed the addition of temple walls at the Vellaimurti Alvar Temple.<sup>15</sup> *Devadāsis* were also the only women allowed to adopt children, again usually adopting female children to continue in the *Devadāsi* tradition.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, the irony of this powerful female driven community was their frequent portrayal of 'the helpless woman' in love; although perhaps this character was most accessible to the general public who knew no other alternative.

These important financial and social advantages however began to unravel as men began to take on leading roles during the revival. The decline of courtly entertainment at the



1	Tiruvakkara	8	Aduturai
2	Vridhachalam	9	Konerirajapuram
3	Tirumananjeri	10	Tirunageshvaram
4	Tirukkodikaval	11	Kumbakonam
5	Mayuram	12	Tirunaraiyur
6	Kuttalam	13	Tiruvarur
7	Anangur	14	Sembiyan Mahadevi

Fig. 3.6 Temples built by Queen Dowager Sembiyan Mahadevi

end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century left the courts of Mysore with composers and musicians in the civic heart of cities. Compositions began to describe intimate relationships, possibly taken from the courtly subject matter explored by courtesans. Similar in structure to *padams*, poetry and music describing Krishna and his *gopis* (cowherd girls), embraced the idea of a romantic and sensual relationship as an allegory to union with the divine. The content of *Javālis*, a telegu tradition, would soon run directly opposite to the nationalist ideals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century revival artists. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a strong influence from Parsi theatre, *pāttugal* (songs)

and *mettu* (rhythm). The introduction of the gramophone during this time also enabled the inclusion of music of the *Devadāsi* without direct contact with the musicians. This would eventually be a crucial link between concert artists and film. Film in particular brought about a direct eye contact with the performer and his/her audience that was closer to original intimate dance settings compared with a contemporary dancer's gaze that rests above the audience in a darkened theatre.

“The distance between the audience and the actor was never more than 32 *hastās*, according to the prescribed instructions.”<sup>17</sup>

Through the late 17th and 18th century the end of empirical rule and overall political instability demoted these dancers from a position worthy of royal patronage, to secular entertainment finally reduced to a poverty ridden community. The medieval *Devadāsi* identity as a respectable, prized and even divine performer of the arts had been relegated to a distant past.

<sup>6</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 138

<sup>7</sup> Srinivasan, Amrit. 1985. *Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and her Dance*. Economic and Political Weekly, pg 190

<sup>8</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, p30

<sup>9</sup> Srinivasan, Amrit. 1985. *Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and her Dance*. Economic and Political Weekly, pg 180

<sup>10</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 41

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pg 34

<sup>12</sup> Srinivasan, Amrit. 1985. *Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and her Dance*. Economic and Political Weekly, pg 181

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pg 182

<sup>14</sup> Tadjell, Christopher. 1990. *The History of Architecture in India: From the Dawn of Civilization to the End of the Raj*. Architecture Design and Technology Press, London. pg, 93

<sup>15</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 53

<sup>16</sup> Srinivasan, Amrit. 1985. *Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and her Dance*. Economic and Political Weekly, pg 187

<sup>17</sup> In reference to the design of theatres described in the *Nāṭya-Shāshtra*. Further elaboration on theatre design is discussed in Chapter 2: *Nāṭya-Shāshtra*. Edström, Per. 1990. *Why not theaters made for people?* Arena Theatre Institute, Varmland, Sweden, pg 69

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<sup>1</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 29

<sup>2</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 27

<sup>3</sup> Schwartz, Susan. 2004. *Rasa: Performing the divine in India*. Columbia University Press, New York, pg 15

<sup>4</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 48

<sup>5</sup> Srinivasan, Amrit. 1985. *Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and her Dance*. Economic and Political Weekly, pg 183



## CHAPTER 4: Natarāja Temple, Chidambaram: A Case Study

Dancing in the heart of the Universe

Chidambaram;

*chit* - the heart or consciousness

*ambaram* - universe, ether or hall

Located in the Cuddalore district in Tamil Nadu, Chidambaram is home to the famous Natarāja Temple. The temple houses one of India's most iconic sculptures and represents the seat of one of Hinduism's sacred philosophies, finding bliss within the heart of man. The physical edifice of this temple and the mythology surrounding the sculptural iconography link the human body, architecture and dance. Together, they present cycles of life, death and the creation of the universe.



Fig. 4.0 Shivaganga *thirtha*

*“In the forest of Taragam dwelt multitudes of heretical rishis, following of the Mimamsa. Thither proceeded Shiva to confute them, accompanied by Vishnu disguised as a beautiful woman, and Ati-Sheshan. The rishis were at first led to violent dispute amongst themselves, but their anger was soon directed against Shiva, and they endeavoured to destroy Him by means of incantations. A fierce tiger was created in sacrificial fires, and rushed upon Him; but smiling gently, He seized it and, with the nail of His little finger, stripped off its skin, and wrapped it about Himself like a silken cloth. Undiscouraged by failure, the sages renewed their offerings, and produced a monstrous serpent, which however, Shiva seized and wreathed about His neck like a garland. Then He began to dance; but there rushed upon Him a last monster in the shape of a malignant dwarf, Muyalaka. Upon him the God pressed the tip of His foot, and broke the creature’s back, so that it writhed upon the ground; and so, His last foe prostrate, Shiva resumed the dance, witnessed by gods and rishis. Then Ati Sheshan worshipped Shiva, and prayed above all things for the boon, once more to behold this mystic dance; Shiva promised that he should behold the dance again in sacred Tillai, the centre of the Universe.”<sup>1</sup>*

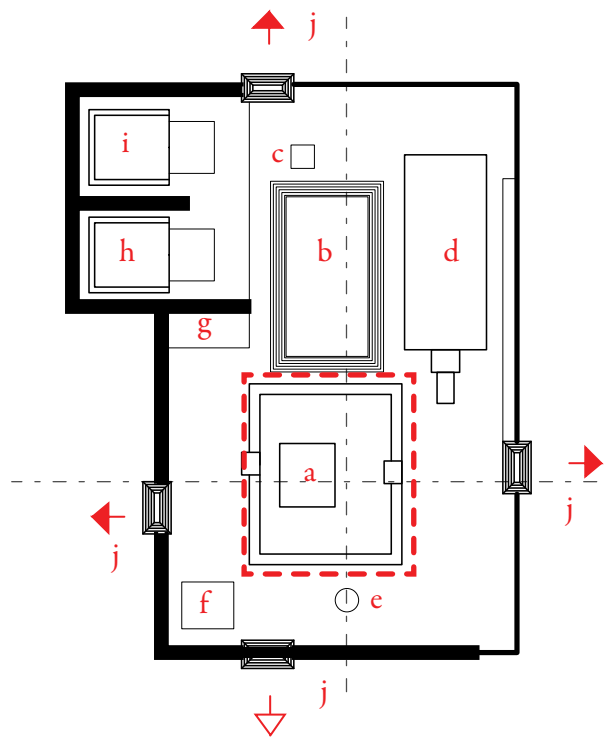


Fig. 4.1 Natarāja Temple: Key Plan



Key Plan

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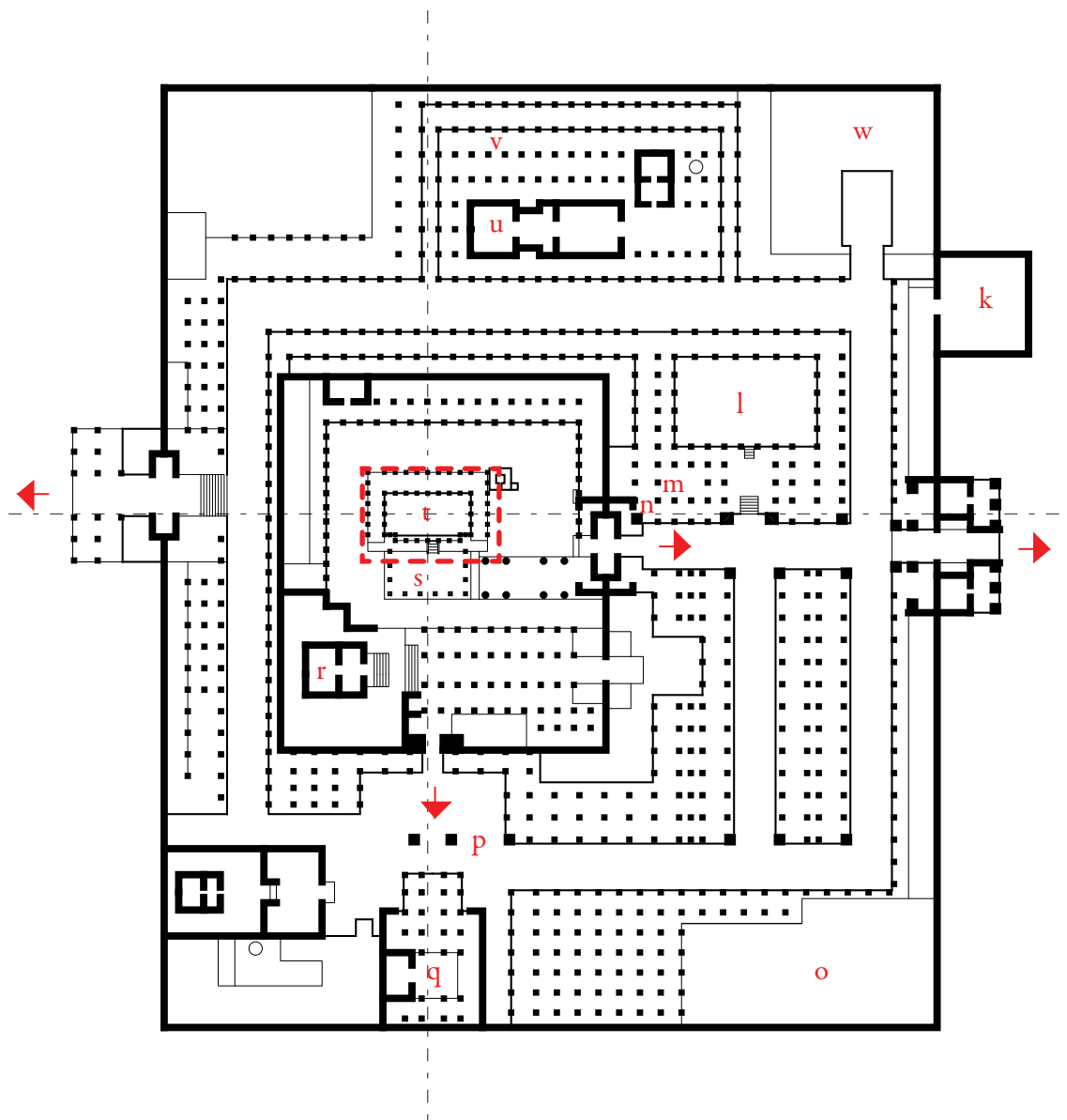


Fig. 4.2 Natarāja Temple: Inner *Prakara* Plan

1:2000

## Legend

a	principle shrine
b	Shivaganga <i>thirtha</i> (tank); Thiruvanaikāval <i>linga</i> visible during periods of low water levels
c	Temple of the 9 <i>linga</i>
d	<i>Rāja Sabha</i> (1000 pillared hall)
e	<i>Nandi</i> statue (Sacred Bull; Shiva's vehicle)
f	Mukkuruni Vināyaka shrine (Ganesh Temple)
g	100 Pillared hall
h	Shivakāmasundari shrine (Amman Temple)
i	Pāndya Nāyakan shrine (Murugan Temple)
j	<i>Gopura</i> gates
k	<i>Yāga Sāla</i> (Hall for sacrificial fires)
l	<i>Deva Sabha</i> (Hall for festival deities; for public worship)
m	<i>Navagraha</i> shrine (Temple of 9 planetary Gods)
n	Chandikeshvara shrine (Brahma Temple)
o	kitchen
p	flag mast
q	<i>Nritta Sabha</i> (Chariot-style Hall)
r	Govindarāja shrine (Vishnu Temple)
s	<i>Kanaka Sabha</i> (Golden Hall)
t	<i>Chit Sabha</i> (Hall of consciousness)
u	<i>Mūlasthāna</i> shrine (Lingam shrine)
v	gallery dedicated to 63 Nayanmārs (saints)
w	<i>Kalyāna Mandapam</i> (Marriage hall)

Believed to be established since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E and developed through a succession of regimes, the current form of the Natarāja temple is commonly attributed to the reign of the Cholas, with expansions to the *prakara* being part of a post- Chola period (1178-1218).<sup>2</sup> The temple complex spans over 13 hectares, with 4 *gopura* facing the cardinal directions.<sup>3</sup> With granite bases and a superstructure of brick and lime-work<sup>4</sup>, these *gopura* rise 7 stories and taper into the heavens. The gateways are offset anti-clockwise from the main axis of the sanctum and are embellished with sculptural representations of the 108 *kāranās* - particular to only four other temples in India<sup>5</sup> and appearing for the first time on all four *gopura*.<sup>6</sup> The east *gopuram* alone is embedded with smaller shrines, whereas the north, south and west *gopura* depict deities in various mythological scenes.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of this temple can be seen in its inclusion as part of at least 3 mythological temple sets: *anga stālāngal*, *pancha butha stala*, and *pancha sabhai*. (See Appendix 4) The *anga stālāngal* are composed of 8 temple towns corresponding to parts of the human body, Chidambaram embodying the heart. The *Pancha butha stala*, refer to temples representing the five elements, Chidambaram symbolizing *Akasa stalam*, space or ether. *Pancha sabhai*, refers to the temples representing five dance halls - Chidambaram is home to the *Kanaka Sabhai* (Gold hall), where Natarāja performed the *Ananda Tāndava*. The temple is also special in its inclusion of shrines for both Vishnu and Brahma<sup>8</sup>, making it one of the few Hindu temples that have shrines for the divine trinity. This temple is also the only place where the three states of being are represented together. Other architectural intrigues pertaining to this temple will be discussed by examining selected shrines further.





Fig. 4.3 Rāja Sabha

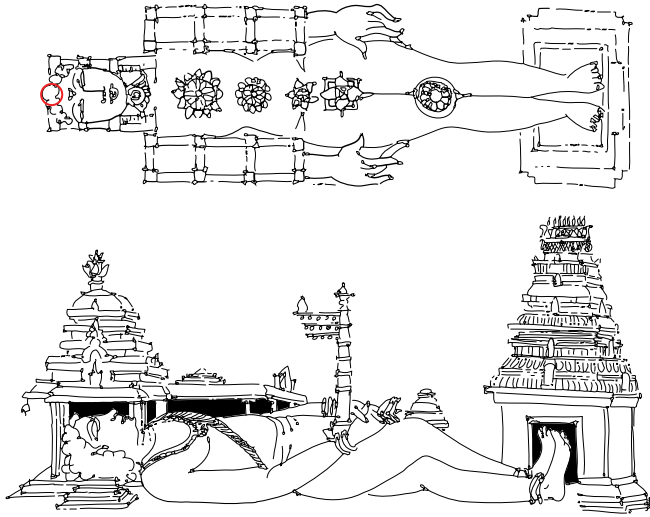


Fig. 4.4 Temple aligned with both human and astral body, according to the *Vāstu-purusha mandala*



Fig. 4.5 Govinda Rāja *mandapa* (middle); Vināyaka shrine (bottom)

The *Rāja Sabha* or 1000 pillared hall is the architectural representation of the *Sahasradhara* or Crown *chakra*, the 7<sup>th</sup> spiritual energy point in the astral body. (See Fig. 4.4) From its position at the head of the body, this energy center known as the ‘thousand petaled lotus’, is sometimes compared with the pituitary gland, regulating various bodily functions.

The *Nrrita Sabha*, constructed in the shape of a *ratha* (chariot) drawn by horses, is not surprisingly also based on the *Vāstu-purusha* mandala.<sup>9</sup> With the Vedas as inspiration for horses and the sun and moon for wheels, the chariot shape commemorates Shiva’s victory over 3 demon cities. This structure is also known as *edir āmbalam* (opposite hall) in reference to its position relative to the *Chit Sabha*.<sup>10</sup> Natarāja and Kāli are also said to have had a dance competition here. As Vishnu kept *tālam*, Natarāja danced the *Urdhava Tāndava*, lifting his right leg straight up. Seeing this, the fierce Kāli declines performing the provocative pose and remembers her peaceful incarnation as Pārvati, Shiva’s consort, and resumes her calm nature. Carvings on this shrine depict this legend among details of dancers, musicians and mythological figures.

The *Kanaga Sabha*, just south of the *Chit Sabha*, consists of a granite base, wooden doors and granite pillars that support a copper covered wooden roof.<sup>11</sup> This ‘golden hall’ is said to be ‘gold’ of a spiritual nature, allowing worshippers a glimpse of the cosmic dancer from a close proximity.<sup>12</sup> This is where daily public worship of the Natarāja icon is held. This temple, and the statuary within it represent a sublime culmination of centuries of technical, artistic and cultural development.

As the primary actor in the masculine *tāndava* or fierce dance, Natarāja is said to have performed 7 different *tāndava* dances. The name *tāndava* is a derivative of Tāndu, who instructed Bharata on *Kāranas* and *Angabhāras* (specific combinations of *Kāranas*) to be used in performance art. The name also alludes to the sound “*tando*” made by accompanying percussion instruments.<sup>13</sup> This multiplicity in meaning, reiterates a layered illustration of sound and space. (Similar to terms discussed earlier, such as: *pāda*, *tāla*, and *Bharata*) Among the 7 *tāndava* dances, Shiva takes on various forms corresponding to the sites described in the legends. For example, in the *Sandhya Tāndav*, Shiva is two-handed and dances during twilight at his heavenly abode of Mount Kailāsh of the Himālayas. Performing for his consort Pārvati as Gauri - the mother of three worlds, He is surrounded by a chorus of divinities with audiences from the heavens, earth and the underworld. A much more vigorous dance is attributed to Shiva’s incarnation as Vīrabhadra. He performs *Uma Tāndav*. Depicted with ten arms, he performs a wild and ecstatic dance in cremation grounds at midnight, often accompanied by Devi or spirits. Through this fearful dance, and on the ashes of the dead, Shiva releases souls from the cycles of reincarnation.

The *Chit Sabha* is the principle shrine of the Chidambaram Temple complex. Known as the ‘hall of consciousness’ and ‘the heart of man’, it represents ether and ‘the lotus of transcendence’. It is here, within the heart of man, that Shiva as the Lord of Dance, Natarāja, is believed to have performed the *Ananda Tāndava* - the dance of bliss. As the dance is one of transformation and regeneration, it embodies the dual nature of ferocity and nirvana. Natarāja is the fiery agent of change, dancing the benign ether into cycles of

creation and destruction. The cyclical order of universal nature directs the ruling geometry of the dance to be a dynamic clockwise spiral.<sup>14</sup> The shrine is a physical manifestation of this dance with the momentum of energy encompassing the five activities of the universe:

- Creation and evolution, *Srishti*
- Preservation, *Stbithi*
- Destruction and Involution, *Sambhāra*
- Illusion and Veiling, *Tirobhava*
- Deliverance and Salvation, *Anugraha*



Fig. 4.6 Natarāja Temple: Chit Sabha from above

The shrine itself is a wooden structure on a granite base. This granite plinth or *parvadam*, is symbolic of the dutiful Mount Kailash as it supports Shiva in the Himalayas.<sup>17</sup> The south facing sanctum does not culminate in a *gopuram*. Instead, it is crowned by a hipped curved roof covered in gold tiles, supports not one but 9 gold finials. (See Fig. 4.6)

“The key to this puzzle is found in the nature of Natarāja’s dance”<sup>15</sup>



*“The Spirit (purusha) playing,  
The Spirit longing,  
The Spirit with fancy (yoga-maya) creating all,  
Surrenders himself to the bliss (ānanda) of love ...  
Amid the flowers of His creation (prakriti), He lingers in a kiss...  
Blinded by their beauty, He rushes, He frolics, He dances, He whirls.  
He is all rapture, all bliss, in this play (līla)  
Free, divine, in this love struggle.  
In the marvellous grandeur of sheer aimlessness,  
And in the union of counter-aspirations  
In consciousness alone, in love alone,  
The Spirit learns the nature (svabhava) of His divine being...  
‘O, my world, my life, my blossoming, my ecstasy!  
Your every moment I create  
By negation of all forms previously lived through:  
I am eternal negation (neti, neti). . .’  
Enjoying this dance, choking in this whirlwind,  
Into the domain of ecstasy, He takes swift flight.  
In this unceasing change (samsāra, nitya bhava), in this flight, aimless, divine  
The Spirit comprehends Himself,  
In the power of will, alone, free,  
Ever-creating, all-irradiating, all-vivifying,  
Divinely playing in the multiplicity of forms, He comprehends Himself...  
‘I already dwell in thee, O, my world,  
Thy dream of me - ‘twas I coming into existence. ...  
And thou art all - one wave of freedom and bliss. ...’  
By a general conflagration (maha-pralaya) the universe (samsāra) is embraced  
The Spirit is at the height of being, and He feels the tide unending  
Of the divine power (shakti) of free will, He is all-daring:  
What menaced, now is excitement,  
What terrified, is now delight. ...  
And the universe resounds with the joyful cry I am.”<sup>16</sup>*

Mirroring the flow of life-giving blood to the heart through a network of veins and arteries, architectural passages and circuits direct worshippers to enter the sanctum.<sup>17</sup> Represented in 5 steps linking the *Kanaga Sabha* to the *garbhagriha*, devotees dissolve space between themselves and the divine through worship and prayer. Capped in silver, each step represents a syllable of the mantra “*Shi-va-ya-na-ma*” meaning ‘Hail to Shiva.’<sup>18</sup>

“If this beautiful Five-Letters be meditated upon, the soul will reach the land where there is neither light nor darkness, and there *Shakti* will make it One with *Shivam*.”<sup>19</sup>

Unlike other shrines, the *Chit Sabha* is not cubic but instead is based on a double square plan representing two chambers of the heart. (See fig. 4.8) The eastern half of the sanctum symbolizes visible light and unlike other Hindu sanctums is not dark but is consistently lit by *ghee* (clarified butter) and camphor lamps. On this level is also a crystal *lingam* (a phallic symbol with its female, *yōni*, counterpart), representing Shiva as Chandramaulishvara, supposedly formed from the crescent moon tangled in Natarāja’s matted locks. The *lingam*, is divinity in its ‘formless-form’<sup>20</sup> symbolizing fertility and propagation of life. This half of the sanctum also represents fire and houses a large statue of Natarāja.

The statue itself is made of bronze, a composite metal made of five elements (tin, copper, zinc, silver and gold) that are transformed by fire. The Lord ‘borne’ of fire, glows in the sanctum with his jewelry glittering in the candle light as if ablaze. The multi-armed Shiva “conveys a spellbinding sense of continuous motion.”<sup>21</sup> The iconic pose, attributed to the 8<sup>th</sup> century Pallava period, is a very literally mani-

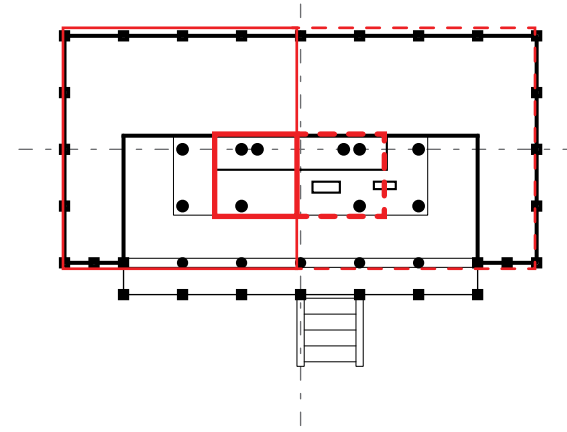


Fig. 4.8 Natarāja Temple: Chit Sabha Plan 1:400

festation of divinity having a ‘form’. The image of Natarāja represents a meeting point of religion, mythology, human physiology and cosmic order. This culmination in spiritual and physical aesthetic is precisely what is attempted and embodied in the art of dance. The various items held in his arms maps out the density of these intentions. (See Fig. 4.9)

The western half of the sanctum represents ether and sound. A hidden chamber, *pranava prakara*, is given life by the sound ‘*Om*’ as chanted by priests and worshippers. With each breath, they breathe life into the ritual, becoming performers, activating and participating in a spiritual exchange. The chanting and ritual prayers are akin to the beating of the heart which sustaining the human body.

The significance of the spatial design of the sanctum is seen in the parallel analysis of the principle of creation.

- 1 fire on the outer ring, ocean water on the inner ring, representing the extent of the cosmos
- 2 coiling cobra, representative of the Hindu dogma of reincarnation and Shiva's power over all creatures
- 3 Goddess Ganga, the Goddess of the Ganges is nestled in Shiva's matted locks, lessening her waters force as she descended from the heavens to flow on earth
- 4 *damaru*, two sided finger drum - time and sound, symbolic of creation with the division of one into two
- 5 *abhaya mudra*, hand gesture of preservation and protection from evil and ignorance, adhering to the code of dharmic righteousness
- 6 *gaha basta*, hand gesture pointing to raised left foot, symbolic of the liberation of the tired soul, deliverance from the world of illusion and grace, *mukti*
- 7 Apasmara Purusha, conqueror of the dwarf demon Apasmara, representing Shiva's victory over ego and ignorance
- 8 *omkārā* or *prahabha mandala* (enflamed ring), symbolizing the sacred syllable *AUM* uttered by Bhraman from which the universe was born, and the endless cycle of transmigration/suffering of the ego before salvation
- 9 unkempt matted hair, represents Shiva's rejection of society for a life of an ascetic
- 10 crescent moon, with its lunar cycles keep the God of Love, Kāma, alive to rejuvenate life
- 11 stoic expression, emphasizing Shiva's neutrality and cosmic balance
- 12 flame held in *hamsāsya* (hand gesture), the flame of destruction, purification and transformation a symbol of space and light
- 13 visualized as Ardhanarishwar Shiva; male (left) and female (right) earrings unite male and female energies
- 14 the cycle of creation, preservation and destruction is initiated by the foot touching the ground; life is symbolized by painting the foot in red henna, the auspicious colour of growth and fertility



Fig. 4.9 Annotated Natarāja bronze

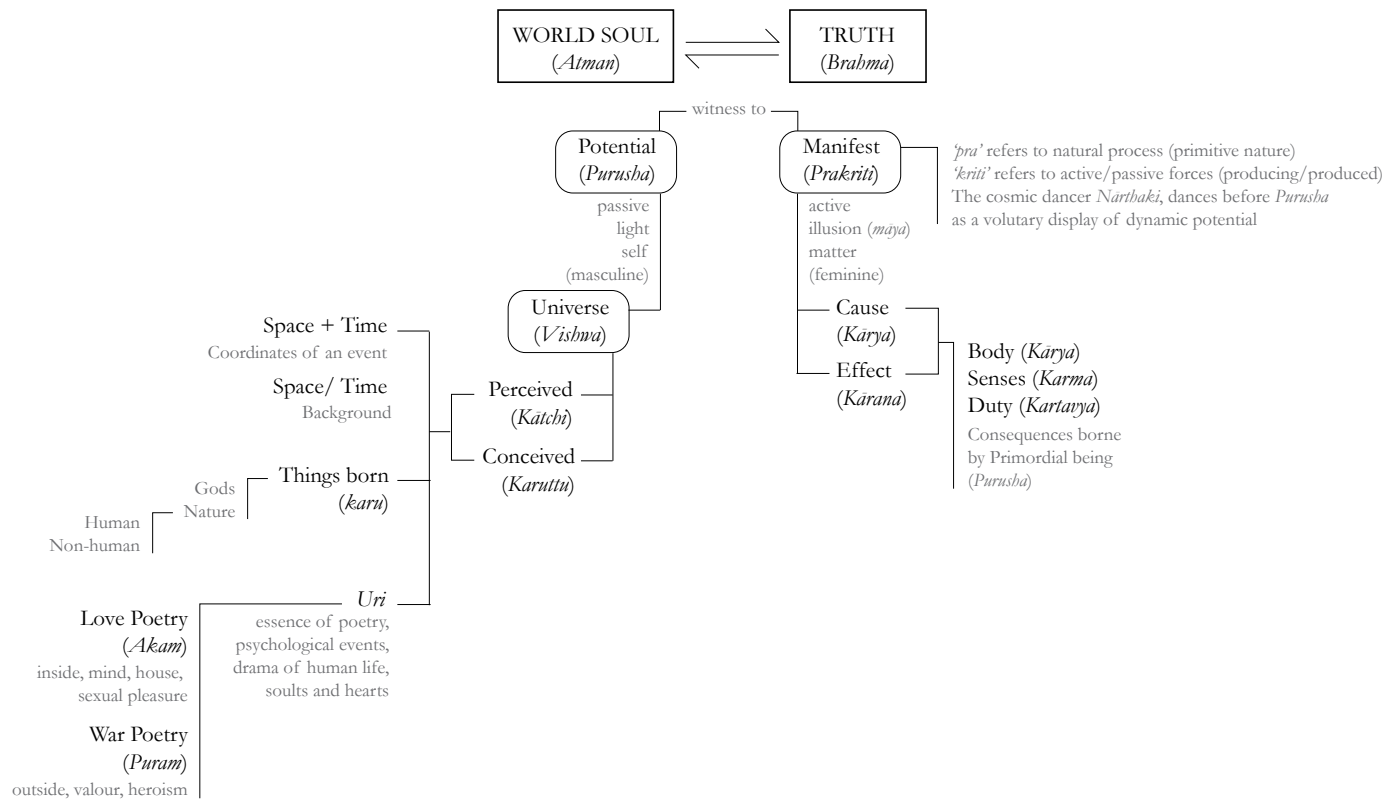


Fig. 4.10 Hindu conceptual diagram of the universe



Fig. 4.11 Visualization of the Hindu creative process



Both passive (*Purusha*) and active (*Prakriti*) forces are required to unite at the initiation of the creative process. (See Fig. 4.10) Visually abstracted, fundamental particles of space - *Paramanu*, are concentrated in a cubic form called *Moolam*. Because of the energy inherent in each particle, there is inherent energy within the cube of the *Moolam* and it is self-illuminated. This potential of light energy is vibrant and pulsates, standing on the cusp of action and at the beginning of time and creation. This concentration of energy finally bursts in a clockwise spinning motion propelling and replicating itself. Similar to the inherent awareness in a living cell, the *Moolam* is self-conscious desiring to express its inherent beauty. Stemming from this inherent attraction to itself, the chaotic explosions are brought to order or *seelam*, giving the *Moolam* definition. The succession of these steps spawns all creation, giving life to both the universe (*Viswa*) and the forces that perpetuate its existence, cause (*Kārya*) and effect (*Kāraṇa*).

The highest plinth in this shrine is dedicated to the supreme being himself, referred to as '*Rahasiyam*' or secret. Obscuring the view, is a black (outside) and red (inside) curtain that is perforated by square shaped holes radiating light to the rest of the sanctum, a symbolic representation of the bursting *Moolam*. Beyond this curtain, the supreme being is signified by a black wall - the absolute, being 'formless'.

The inclusion of divinity in its three forms is important as it reiterates the multi-sensory experiences in the various levels of transcendence. The 'formed' God provides a tactile connection to divinity through its physical presence and visually sensual nature. It also acts as a stepping stone for the worshipper, revealing a physiological link between

man and God. It also emphasizes the corporeal nature of the building through various architectural symbols as explained in previous chapters. The 'formless' divinity is a reminder of the intangible or perceived nature of the creative and destructive process. Finally, the 'formless-form' emphasizing an intermediary zone charged with potential energy awaiting transformation.

"The Supreme Intelligence, dance in the soul... for the purpose of removing our sins. By these means, our Father scatters the darkness of illusion (*māyā*), burns the thread of causality (*karma*), stamps down evil (*mal, ānava, avidyā*), showers Grace, and lovingly plunges the soul in the ocean of Bliss (*ānanda*). They never see rebirths, who behold this mystic dance... [*This*] perpetual dance is His play."<sup>22</sup>

My argument is that the dance of bliss is not only a mythological description of progression through spiritual enlightenment but reflects the fundamental physics underlying *all* creation. Moving not only through spiritual realms of transcendence but also through physical planes of existence, the dance is the dynamic connector between the soul's transmigration and the physical movement experienced by the human body in the earthly plane. The body participates in a basic progression of spirituality as worshippers enter the temple grounds and proceed to the inner sanctum.

Architectural cues, ornamental sculpture and the design criteria of the shrines, reiterate this rhythmic momentum. Far from a static edifice, the building itself is constantly participating in this movement, the culmination of which is visualized in the iconic Natarāja, representing a multi-sensorial transformation. This 'final' manifestation of dyna-

mism cycles back to the fundamental movement of energy, both spiritually and physically. Just as networks and bodily organs are necessary for a healthy physiology, so too are the interdependent components of south Indian culture needed for a strong community backbone.

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<sup>1</sup> On the origin of Shiva's dance at the *Kanaka Sabha* in Tillai (Chidambaram), by Umapati Sivam from the *Koyil Puranam*, a Tamil text on the founding of the Chidambaram Temple. Translated by Coomaraswamy, Ananda. 1918. The dance of Siva: Fourteenth Indian essays. The Sunwise Turn Inc. New York, US, pg 57

<sup>2</sup> Grover, Satish. 1980. The Architecture of India: Buddhist and Hindu. Vikas Publishing House Private Limited, Uttar Pradesh, IN. pg 100

<sup>3</sup> Croker, Alan. 1993. Temple Architecture in South India. Fabrications : The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. pg 113

<sup>4</sup> Deekshitar, Raja. The Temple of the dancing Shiva. 2007-2008.

<sup>5</sup> Deekshitar, Raja. Early Chola. 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Shankar, Bindu. (2004). Dance Imagery in South Indian Temples: Study of the 108 Karana Sculptures. Ohio State University, pg 120

<sup>7</sup> Deekshitar, Raja. The Temple of the dancing Shiva. 2007-2008.

<sup>8</sup> Deekshitar, Raja. Early Chola. 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Croker, Alan. 1993. Temple Architecture in South India. Fabrications : The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. pg 122

<sup>10</sup> Deekshitar, Raja. Early Chola. 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Deekshitar, Raja. The Temple of the dancing Shiva. 2007-2008.

<sup>12</sup> Deekshitar, Raja. Early Chola. 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Subrahmanyam, Padma, Dr. Some Pearls from the Fourth Chapter of Abhinavabhāratī: Karanās and Angahāras.

<sup>14</sup> Croker, Alan. 1993. Temple Architecture in South India. Fabrications : The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. pg 121

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pg 119

<sup>16</sup> Shiva's dance as spontaneous '*lila*' or play, is described via the poem "Le Poème de l'extase" (1905-1908) by Alexander Skyrabin translated by Lydia L. Pimenoff Noble. Coomaraswamy, Ananda. 1918. The

dance of Siva: Fourteenth Indian essays. The Sunwise Turn Inc. New York, US, pg, 62

<sup>17</sup> Deekshitar, Raja. Early Chola. 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Coomaraswamy, Ananda. 1918. The dance of Siva: Fourteenth Indian essays. The Sunwise Turn Inc. New York, US, pg 64

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pg 64

<sup>20</sup> Deekshitar, Raja. Early Chola. 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Shankar, Bindu. (2004). Dance Imagery in South Indian Temples: Study of the 108 Karana Sculptures. Ohio State University, pg 78

<sup>22</sup> The purpose of Shiva's dance is described in the Tamil text *Unmai Vilakkam*, translated by Coomaraswamy, Ananda. 1918. The dance of Siva: Fourteenth Indian essays. The Sunwise Turn Inc. New York, US, pg, 62





## CHAPTER 5: Evolving Identities

### Duality in Identity

The alignment of the human body with both the physical and celestial worlds is a theme explored in both south Indian art and architecture. Specifically, sexual imagery and erotic themes are consistently used as a metaphor for the union of the human soul with the divine, the importance of which is seen through the quantity and variety of artistic interpretation devoted to this subject. The motif of creation is evidenced most fundamentally in the erotic tension between male and female elements. This is present as much in geometry as in religious myth. The following discussion explores the symbolism and potential of both male and female energy as instruments of creation. Various iconographic symbols are considered to describe the joining of the sexes as a path to spiritual enlightenment.

As explained in Chapter 2, the anthropomorphic cosmic being contained within the *Vāstu-purusha mandala* is an example of the layered resonance of geometric form. Steeped in the sacred geometry is the representation of two forces uniting to initiate the process of creation. The circle, representing cyclical transformation, is a symbol of the feminine regenerative energy. Inscribed within it is the masculine square. The fusing of these two geometric shapes derives the various permutations of architectural construction. With the uniting of male and female energies, the mandala implies the presence of both male and female energy at the heart of all construction and each human being. Similarly, the *yantra* continues this idea in abstraction.

“By themselves, the constituent symbols of a *yantra* convey only partial meanings, and cannot carry the universe of meaning a *yantra* as a whole denotes. The symbolic syntax of the *yantra* reveals a ‘universe-patter’ of the totality of existence... This synthesis ‘allows man to discover a certain unity of the world and at the same time become aware of his own destiny as an integral part of the world.’”<sup>1</sup>

The *yantra* reflects the indivisibility of a combined male and female geometry. While specific deities may be represented by individually designed *yantras*, in its simplest form, a *yantra* is made up of two equilateral interpenetrating triangles.<sup>2</sup> As a representation of archetypal sound-body, *yantras* work in conjunction with specifically associated *mantras*, representing the sound-soul.<sup>3</sup> Similar to in the *Chit Sabha*, *mantras* and *yantras* are visual and aural symbols representing integrated sound and space. *Hrim*, a sound-symbol is an example of the united male/female principle, a vibration associated with the Goddess Bhuvaneshvari.

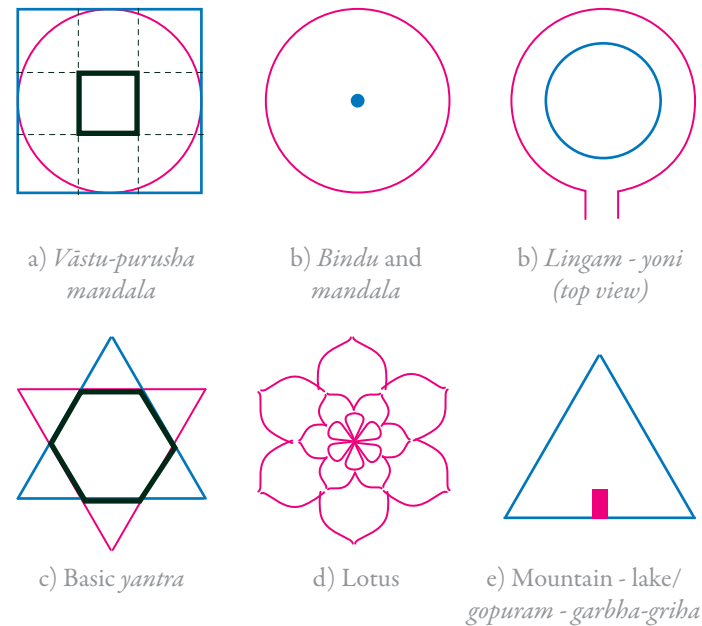


Fig. 5.0 Sacred geometries; male (blue) and female (pink) elements

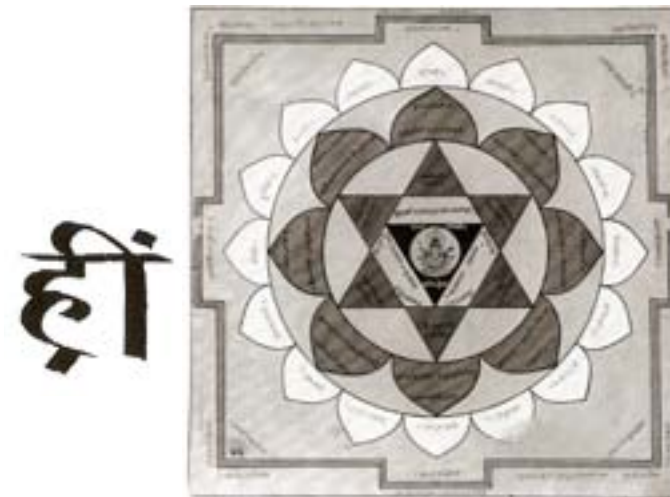


Fig. 5.1 Yantra of Goddess Bhuvaneshvari with primal vibration (left)



Fig. 5.2 Shiva as Ardhanareeswara; half male (right) and female (left)



Fig. 5.3 Copper Sri Yantra, South India 17<sup>th</sup> century; a 3-dimensional yantra used as a model of the mythical Mount Meru

One of the most common symbols of the fused male-female energy is the sculpture of Shiva as a *lingam*. The *lingam*, rising out of the embrace of the *yoni*, is often considered a very literal representation of the male/female sex organs and revered for its association with fertility. The obvious depiction of genital organs aims to elevate and sanctify the act of sex as a union of cosmic forces.<sup>4</sup> Sculpted on the shaft of the *lingam*, a face bearing both male (right side) and female (left side) features is sometimes found as a reference to Shiva as Ardhanareeswara;<sup>5</sup> a deity visually manifesting the duality of life, in human form. The specific inclusions of additional carvings on the *lingam*, further illustrates the neutrality in gender of the Absolute represented in this instance of ‘formless-form’.

In its three-dimensional representation, the yantra is also comparable to a lotus, where each of the triangular points are shaped into petals. The diurnal nature of the opening and closing flower is an allusion to the natural cycles of death and rebirth.<sup>6</sup> The regenerative aspect of the flower and its growth medium (water), align the flower with a predominantly feminine energy.<sup>7</sup> The status of the flower within the Hindu culture is also seen via literary and sculptural evidence, that likens the image of the divine to the natural beauty of the flower. References to ‘lotus-eyed’, ‘lotus-mouthed’, or ‘lotus-feet’ divinities are common descriptions.<sup>8</sup> The inclusion of a flower among the strictly mathematically derived geometry, links the natural, divine and mortal realms weaving them together in both literal and abstract reproductions.

“Three-dimensional *yantras* may be on a small scale, or on the scale of architecture.”<sup>9</sup>



The analysis of temple structure in Chapter 2, considers important architectural elements reflecting the journey of spiritual enlightenment. Often based on imagery from the natural world, they also convey the fusion of masculine and feminine creative forces. Based on the Himalayan range, a *gopura* directs the soul's progression into the heavens. With Mount Kailash as his heavenly abode, the mountain itself, becomes a sign of Shiva.<sup>10</sup> The corresponding feminine energy, is represented in - she who is born from the *parvada* (mountain) - Parvati, Shiva's consort. Just as the masculine mountain accommodates various iterations of the feminine spirit in lakes, waterfalls and rivers, the masculine *gopura* houses the feminine *garbha-griha*. Literally translated as the 'womb', it is not only a point of spiritual transformation but very physically represents a safe, quiet, dark place of incubation and birth. Together, the two architectural forms embody religious rebirth and physical movement and physiologically regeneration.

"Iconographically, the crypt and the cave are identified with the female uterus ... an area which inspires communion between ephemeral/ individual and eternal/cosmos... the area into which the initiate returns, enjoying his preformal or unconscious state after which he is to be reborn in the differentiated realm. It is within the crypt, a subterranean chamber or vault, that the miracle of life occurs: that the present state of existence ends and the new begins."<sup>11</sup>

Finally, with the mythical Mount Meru representing the navel of the universe, around which creation revolves, there is a return to the abstract. The fluidity in the philosophy behind *yantras*, *lingams*, *gopuras*, the natural world and humanity relates back to the same founding principles.

Tantric cosmology sees the human body as the ultimate *yantra*, revealing 7 points of body-psychic intersection. The fourth point, the *Anāhata chakra* is located at the human heart. During meditation, primordial sound and air are thought to be revealed at this *chakra* - a concept presented in the spatial and anatomical symbolism of the *Chit Sabha* of the Natarāja Temple in Chidambaram. As mentioned in the case study, an inverted 1000-petalled lotus is invoked in the 1000-pillared hall of the *Raja Sabha*, and is the symbol of the *Sahasradhara chakra*. The primordial 'male' spirit is only activated with the transformative energy of the feminine matter, *prakriti*.<sup>12</sup> As a meeting of male and female energy, the *chakra* is enlivened at the moment of transcendence, carrying the soul to the next plane of existence. Very physically, the Hindu devotee is thus an integral part of this chain of symbols.

A disciplined moral lifestyle is developed during the four stages of life, culminating in the union with the Absolute, liberating the human soul from reincarnation. This is achieved through adherence to moral law, comprising of the four aims of life: *dharma* (righteous duty), *artha* (meaning/wealth), *kāma* (love/pleasure) and *moksha*. The proximity of the final two aims of existence, is key to the fluctuating views of physical and divine love.

"The longing of hearts in love was taken as the most effective image to depict the yearning of the devotee to God or the seeking by the individual soul of the Supreme Soul"<sup>13</sup>

In the discussion of *Bharatanāṭyam* and *Devadāsīs*, it is obvious that the erotic and sensual content literally sought to align spirituality with the physical experience of love.

“The cultured person and in particular the courtesan of Sanskrit literature [...] was expected to be educated in sixty-four *kalās* (arts and sciences)”<sup>14</sup>

The dancer as a symbol of fertility is a key identifier in this equation, enabling her to straddle the transcendent and physical worlds. *Bakti* tradition and various *tantric* cults are evidence of the prevalence and acceptance of the erotic as sacred in the broader Indian religious community. The erotically charged dancer is an important character in the greater spiritual narrative, using sexuality as a tool to depict renewability as the procreative process. Spiritual ecstasy and regeneration find expression in the physical acts of copulation and procreation. Aside from the ‘performance’ of dance as sacrifice discussed in earlier chapters, the dancer becomes a physiological representation of potential. This comparison of transcendental renewal and the physical act of sex, relates back to the previous collection of symbols underpinning the theme of creation, where creation is defined as a union of opposites.

Symbolic architectural representations, sensual sculptural motifs and a deep integration of the role of male and female life forces in various Hindu myths are key to understanding the physical union of man and woman as a path to transcendence. The *yantra*, *mandala*, *Chakra* system and the significance of the *lingam-yoni* reciprocity are but a few instances of physiology being aligned with spiritual transformation. Creation as a result of union is a common theme explored in Hindu mythology and subsequently gives birth to many symbols that reference the original act of creation.

<sup>1</sup> On the scalable quality of imagery used in yantras to convey the cosmic and psychic. Khanna, Madhu. 2003. *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*. Inner Traditions, Vermont. pg 21

<sup>2</sup> Ravensilaw, E. C. 1852. Note on the Sri Jantra and Khat Kon Chakra, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 13 (1852), Cambridge University Press. pg 72

<sup>3</sup> Khanna, Madhu. 2003. *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*. Inner Traditions, Vermont. pg 37

<sup>4</sup> Frawley, David. 1994. *Tantric yoga and the wisdom goddesses: spiritual secrets of ayurveda*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. pg 54

<sup>5</sup> Ferro-Luzzi, Gabriella Eichinger. 1980. The Female Lingam: Interchangeable Symbols and Paradoxical Associations of Hindu Gods and Goddesses. *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Feb., 1980). The University of Chicago Press. pg 50

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg 48

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pg 48

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pg 48

<sup>9</sup> On the types of yantras. Khanna, Madhu. 2003. *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*. Inner Traditions, Vermont. pg 22

<sup>10</sup> Frawley, David. 1994. *Tantric yoga and the wisdom goddesses: spiritual secrets of ayurveda*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. pg 53

<sup>11</sup> On the symbolism of geographical settings as a representation of places of transformation. Knapp L. Bettina. 1978. The Dance of Siva: Malraux, Motion and Multiplicity. *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Andre Malraux Issue (Autumn, 1978) Hofstra University, New York. pg 360

<sup>12</sup> Hanna, Judith Lynn. 1988. Dance, sex, and gender: signs of identity, dominance, defiance, and desire. The University of Chicago Press. pg 110

<sup>13</sup> On the relationship between mortal and man with that between men and women. de Bary, Theodore. 1958. *Sources of Indian Tradition*. Columbia University Press, New York. pg 258

<sup>14</sup> On being dutifully educated as a path to spiritual bliss. Ibid, pg 259

## Sculpted Identity

The artistic culture of modern India saw movements for both the abolition of *sādir* and the revival of ‘classical’ dance during India’s fight for independence. In the early 20th century, the *Devadāsi* community was restructured into a new caste, *Isai Vellala*; whose name was derived from celebrated courtly bards and musicians (*isai panar*) and respected members of the non-Brahmin community (*isai kārar*).<sup>1</sup> *Sampradāyās* (family traditions) provided the financial and social patronage supporting artistic endeavors during this period of increasing religious, political and financial instability. This support was later taken over by anti-*nautch* movements, the Self-Respect movement (1925) and various missionary organizations with an agenda to emphasize the expulsion and transformation of the now deteriorated *Devadāsi* culture into a respectable artistic community. The focus was on rescuing young girls and women from a life of poverty, prostitution and submission within a collapsing social system.

The revival movement brought about two factions, divided by content and the performance of ‘classical’ south Indian dance, which until now had been under the term *sādir āttam* or plainly *sādir*. The juxtaposition of ‘classical’ and ‘conservative’ took centre stage. Balasaraswati and Rukmini Devi Arundale, led these two different schools of thought on the subject: a personal, people’s version of classical dance with the concept of *sringāra bhakti* having both spiritual and erotic connotations and a nationalist, spiritually chaste idea of devotion, geared to a middle class population; the latter being commonly associated with contemporary idea of classical Indian dance. The discussion of how much *sringāra bhakti* was to be expressed eventually turned into whether such sentiments were to be included at all. With the development of their respective styles, the two women spearheading the revival also had different opinions on stage presentation. In the 1940’s Arundale was keen to include a bronze Natarāja on stage during her performance, recreating a sanctified temple atmosphere. Balasaraswati however, found no such need, claiming the spirituality of the event was created in the mind. Both dancers thus presented their version of sanctified space as performances moved from temple to theatre.



Fig. 5.4 *Bharatanāṭyam* dancers of the Revival period: (from left to right) Arundale, Balasaraswati, Krishnamoorthy, Pavlova, Shankar



Fig. 5.5 Advertisement for dance records from *Natana Niketan*,  
School of *Kathakali* Dancing

An even more controversial figure in the *Bharatanāṭyam* world, Chandralekha would later say “It is a dance show, not a *puja*”, critiquing the inclusion of religious props claiming “worship is your own personal business”. Claiming the stage as ‘spiritual ground’ was also belittled by critics as they alluded to the practice of shoes being worn on stage,<sup>2</sup> a disrespectful practice for a sanctified space. Still others felt the presence of idols appropriate, in one instance a dancer even including both statues of Natarāja and Christ while performing a *varnam* composed specifically to include her Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>

Another challenger of ‘chaste devotion’ was the dancer Ram Gopal (1912-2003). He saw that sex as not absent from divinity, shedding light on examples of the *lingam-yoni* and the fundamental theory of creation evolving out of the joining of *prakriti* and *purusha* energy described in a variety of Hindu mythology.<sup>4</sup> Previously deemed visually offensive and indecent, male dancing was rare, and was strictly relegated to only masculine roles. Contributions by Ram Gopal to the *tāndava* aspect of dance through compositions such as *Nadanam Adinār*<sup>5</sup> paved the way for males taking on roles as dancers and choreographers.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1930’s Uday Shakar began a new tradition in choreography. He independently created dances which then provided inspiration for musical accompaniment. This shift in compositional structure allowed the dancer a variety of bodily articulation which did not restrain the choreography to repeated interpretations of a given poetic line. With no rigid metrical cycle to adhere to, the dancer was freed from reiterative sculptural poses and explored movement in all directions, levels and rhythmic permutations.



While the connection between dancer and God was commonly considered an individual show of devotion, there was plenty of evidence, in poetry, painting and sculpture to express this joy collectively as a group. This was revisited by revivalists with an increase in group performances and for the first time, allowed couples to dance together with their own sexual identity.<sup>7</sup> The Madras Music Academy (1931-1988) however still did not permit male *Bharatanāṭyam* dancers but in the 1950's allowed males to perform *Kathak* and 'oriental dance'.<sup>8</sup>

In 1950, *sādir* was officially renamed *Bharatanāṭyam* alluding to a 'pure' form of the ancient dance outlined by Sage Bharata in the *Nāṭya-Shāshtra*. Rukmini Devi Arundale, alongside her contemporary dancers, was instrumental in the transformation of the dance identity, specifically replacing the term *dāsi* (servant) with *devi* meaning 'goddess'. The revival transformed the deteriorated image of femininity within dance into a powerful image of womanhood, an important position within the greater patriarchal society. This simultaneously elevated the respectability of public dance by middle-class Brahmin wives and daughters, the first step in the molding of a new national identity.

Fearing the negative connotation in association with the *Devadāsi* heritage, many of the recitals of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century were not called *arangetrams*.<sup>9</sup> The importance of the *arangetram* however, would be seen beyond its reintroduction in the post-revival repertoire of *Bharatanāṭyam*, so much so, that other Indian dances, *Odissi* and *Kuchipudi*, adopted the tradition.



Fig. 5.6 "Her large liquid eyes" image by Manjula, as part of article by Sadanand Menon in the Sunday Observer, Madras Edition, 1984

For lack of textual instruction or choreography, dancers during the revival found themselves dependent on traditional *nattuvanars* and gurus for instruction. Previously, lineages of male teachers controlled and monitored access to the repertoire, establishing an important sense of continuity.<sup>10</sup> While *Devadāsīs* maintained an authoritative position in the household, as a dancer, she was still subservient to her *guru*.<sup>11</sup> The organization of his household followed the tradition of the greater community, where males trained as professionals while women were left to typical domestic duties. (See Chapter 3: The *Devadāsi*) *Gurus* hired dancers and were the recipient and distributor of earnings from secular event performances, solidifying a dancer's financial dependence on her teacher.

“Within this new configuration of audience/performer dynamic, the new Indian dance audience disassociated Bharatanatyam from its ritualistic temple roots and witnessed the art not as an interactive and transformative ritual, but as a ‘pure’ and crystalized art form”<sup>12</sup>

Now, non-hereditary dancers saw gurus and musicians as hired help, a status reflected in their payment.<sup>13</sup> However with growing middle-class interest in the dance, the demand for teachers provided them a much needed financial sustenance. Dancers transformed themselves from submissive students into active choreographers.<sup>14</sup> Because of this, *nattuvanars* in their new role, were considered as ‘one who conducts recitals’ and not necessarily as respected teachers.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps inevitably, popularity and interest in the dance overshadowed any questions regarding student qualifications.<sup>16</sup>

“If South Asian dance [was] to be mainstream, then it [had] to be uncompromisingly secular, in the western sense of being totally separate from religion. Being mainstream [meant] to dissociate theatre dance from community dance, which [reflected] ethnicity and religious allegiance and to establish South Asian dance as a professional pursuit.”<sup>17</sup>

The early 1980's, saw the artistic restructuring aligning itself with upcoming non-Brahmin political parties, *Dravida Kazhagam* (DK) and *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (DMK), facilitating a transformation of identity and stable financial contributions for both cultural and political groups. The success of this political alliance also benefited the abolishment of various issues such as *sati* practices, female infanticide, widow remarriage and raised the age of sexual consent, issues which until now, were not conclusively addressed. With the abolishment of temple dancing, and the respectability of *Bharatanāṭyam* reinstated, private events, public functions and the explosion of cinema provided a myriad of venues to reintroduce the dance. Still, both *Devadāsi* and *Bharatanāṭyam* dancers danced side by side until the middle of the 20th century.

An idealized past, combined with standardized dance instruction and performance as part of a nationalist itinerary ultimately became a successful model to foster a global and multi-cultural interest in south Indian dance. Still, following the revival, it was common for dancers from urban centres to travel back to temple towns looking for validation of their art.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Srinivasan, Amrit. 1985. Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and her Dance. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pg 176

<sup>2</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 317

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pg 321

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pg 94

<sup>5</sup> This dance is based on the story of Natarāja's dance at the Golden hall in Chidambaram. Dancers use choreography to mime Natarāja's performance. Allen Harp, Matthew. 1997. *Rewriting the Script for South Indian Dance*. *TDR* (1988-), Vol. 41, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997) The MIT Press, pg 81

<sup>6</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 102

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pg 79

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pg 290

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pg 314

<sup>10</sup> Coorlawala, Uttara. 2004. *The Sanskritized Body*. *Dance Research Journal*. Vol. 36, No.2. Winter. pg 54

<sup>11</sup> Srinivasan, Amrit. 1985. Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and her Dance. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pg 189

<sup>12</sup> Mitra, Royona. 2006. *Living a Body Myth, Performing a Body Reality: Reclaiming the Corporeality and Sexuality of the Indian Female Dancer*. *Feminist Review*, No. 84, *Postcolonial Theatres* (2006). Palgrave Macmillan Journals. pg 75

<sup>13</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 55

<sup>14</sup> Srinivasan, Amrit. 1985. Reform and Revival: The Devadasi and her Dance. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pg 198

<sup>15</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 109

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pg 224

<sup>17</sup> Stemming from (sometimes) violent debate regarding conflicting personal religious identities and persuasions in the British diaspora, the dance community found the need to withdraw such discussion from the public sphere. Royo, Alessandra Lopez. 2004. *Dance in the British South Asian Diaspora: Redefining Classicism*

<sup>18</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 334



## Divided Identities



Fig. 5.7 Daniel Phoenix Singh, Dakshina Dance Company  
Washington DC, 2008

As discussed in previous chapters, the evolution of this ‘classical’ dance is intrinsically linked to the meta-narrative that is part of the ever transforming south Indian identity. The deeply rooted integration between south Indian architecture, culture and religion proves increasingly difficult to be adopted into a modern system of science and individualism. The shift from *gurukulas*, to *sampradāyā* patronage, to today’s global accessibility of the dance leaves the dance without an overseeing central body<sup>1</sup> or alternatively with numerous institutions claiming authenticity. While this fragmentation affords the dance the opportunity for stylistic versatility and innovation, it also needs to address issues of artistic continuity and quality of teaching and performance. The selectivity of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century artists revived a floundering dance tradition, but in the process, created a significant break in the narrative of the dance. Its alignment with a western notion of ‘neo-classicism’ aesthetic bears heavily on choreography and design, challenging south Indians to maintain an important cultural identity across artistic, religious, political and geographic boundaries.

“Although inclusivity is a breakthrough for Indian dancers in the diasporas, this kind of multiculturalism is problematic in that the same tropes of ‘Indianness,’ originating as signs of difference during the Oriental period and now easily recognisable, keep circulating and get[ting] reified.”<sup>3</sup>

“The middle-class Indian female dancer, then, in an international context, is simultaneously both self/subject and an other.”<sup>2</sup>

Today, *Bharatanāṭyam* is a vehicle of identity. Coined in the mid-twentieth century and alluding to a philosophy expounded in the beginning of the Common Era, the current incarnation of *Bharatanāṭyam* is a far from rituals of spiritual devotion. The dance has developed into an iconographic representation of ‘Indian-ness’, linking and rooting communities and families back to a homeland overseas or back to a local ancestral village. There is an unquestionable interest in the dance as seen through its public popularity and financial investment. Middle-class Indian families happily send their daughters (and sons!) to dance class, considering it an important ‘cultural education.’ After a period of instruction, the *arangetram* (back by popular demand) is performed, completing their dance training.

“On a largely generalized but factual basis, contemporary female disciples are not made aware of its ritualistic beginnings in Sadir. Instead, they are expected to follow closely instructions as rendered by their gurus and to emulate them to perfection. Caught in this process of repetition and emulation, there is no place for the dancer’s intellectual growth and corporeal expression or a sense of self.”<sup>4</sup>

There are those however, financially and artistically inclined, who further their dance career professionally and/or academically. Unfortunately, this number remains small.<sup>5</sup> The rich historical context of the dance is easily overlooked in a ‘pay-per-class’ environment and overly simplifies many controversial issues surrounding affected communities.



Fig. 5.8 Advertisement for *Devadāsi* performance in London, 1838



66 Fig. 5.9 Rukmini Devi stamp issued in commemoration, 1987



Fig. 5.10 *Bharatanāṭyam* dancer Chitra Sundaram; wearing a tailored contemporary costume, she floats in a modern nondescript background

The result is a dancer performing in a cultural void, isolated from the philosophical and religious context that gave her definition as a cultural nexus. The implication however, is not to force every dance student to an in-depth history lesson but a broader vehicle for ‘cultural education’ should be employed.

“During the nationalist period and post-independence, India... found the need to desexualise the image of the nation and its people, particularly its women. If one was to metaphorically represent the colonisation of India as rape, or forced entry, then it becomes easier to perceive the desexualisation of the nation as a cleansing process from all things contaminated, foreign, and from all things western; as a process of healing wounds inflicted upon the nation. To purify the national identity of all associations with the profane, the image of Mother India as the non-sexual, strong and proactive protectorate rendered through the ‘Myth of Shakti’ was invoked again and again to compensate for the feeling of powerlessness by making it stand for the motherland... The cultural investment in Indian womanhood, in her voluntary abstinence and purity was made into a national myth.”<sup>6</sup>

Where active female potential concentrated on transformation of a spiritual nature, today’s *Devadāsi* identity is focused on the primal nature of sexual union. While the meaning of the term *Devadāsi* is usually the first concept defined in literature and film, the focus quickly becomes her current incarnation as a poverty ridden sex worker. The Yellama cult, and the Dalit community are victims of this identity crisis. These once exalted dancers are reduced to a *tevdia*, a common class of prostitutes.<sup>7</sup>



The dancer is no longer a sacred vessel of spiritual transformation or a revered symbol of fertility. Her procreative energy is no longer witnessed by God or bound in a respectably sanctified marriage. She entertains for pleasure and pleasure alone - a lifestyle not recognized in the dharmic path to spiritual and moral well-being. This distinction between sexual union as transcendent and copulation for physical pleasure or financial sustenance is imperative. Issues surrounding choice, safety, spirituality, and financial need are all important areas that need to be addressed for a healthy renewal of contemporary *Devadāsi* communities. The *Devadāsi's* counterpart, the revived *Bharatanāṭyam* dancer, also stands on unstable ground. She wrestles with a 'hybrid' identity amidst discussions of classical and contemporary dance. The enforced homogeneity during the revival successfully catapulted Indian dance onto the global stage but now stands to polarize professional dancers and those delivering 'traditional' repertoire.



Fig. 5.11 Semi-nude *Devadāsi* protest in Mumbai, 2010



Fig. 5.12 *Devadāsis*, from 1980's to 2010

Drawing solely on parallels in western dance tradition and a race for financial backing secularizes contemporary choreography and laces ‘heritage dancing’ with a negative connotation.<sup>8</sup> The ‘traditional’ dancer in full costume becomes a spectacle instead of a multi-layered diagram of south Indian philosophy. For the uninformed audience, her success is appreciated superficially in the execution of a performance without an appreciation for the expression of culturally relevant themes. Add to this, the world of Bollywood and cinema’s portrayal of dancers, both *Devadāsi* and *Bharatanāṭyam* alike, and there is a murky mélange of real and melodramatic characterization.

In south India however, *Bharatanāṭyam* dancers have an important advantage over the *Devadāsi* community in the preservation of their art and identity: an architectural context. What does this mean then, for a transplanted Indian community?



Fig. 5.13 *Devadāsīs* from the Bollywood film *Devadās*, 2002



Fig. 5.14 *Devadāsīs* and dancers in Bollywood film, 1940’s to 1990’s 69

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<sup>1</sup> Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 63

<sup>2</sup> On the identity of the dancer among the Western public - representing a south Asian woman, elite Indians and Indian emigrants - representing an identity based on class and community heritage. O'Shea, Janet. 2007. *At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage*. Wesleyan University Press, Connecticut, US, pg 127

<sup>3</sup> On the limitations of quickly accessible aesthetic references for a multi-cultural audience in the appreciation of a dance performance; necessitating this issue to be addressed in a political sphere. Royo, Alessandra Lopez. 2004. *Dance in the British South Asian Diaspora: Redefining Classicism*

<sup>4</sup> On the loss of ritual symbolism when dance moves from the temple to a proscenium arch setting. Mitra, Royona. 2006. *Living a Body Myth, Performing a Body Reality: Reclaiming the Corporeality and Sexuality of the Indian Female Dancer*. *Feminist Review*, No. 84, *Postcolonial Theatres* (2006). Palgrave Macmillan Journals. pg 76

<sup>5</sup> Shankar, Bindu. (2004). *Dance Imagery in South Indian Temples: Study of the 108 Karana Sculptures*. Ohio State University, pg 41

<sup>6</sup> On the transformation of woman's sexuality during the nationalist movement. Mitra, Royona. 2006. *Living a Body Myth, Performing a Body Reality: Reclaiming the Corporeality and Sexuality of the Indian Female Dancer*. *Feminist Review*, No. 84, *Postcolonial Theatres* (2006). Palgrave Macmillan Journals. pg 74

<sup>7</sup> Srinivasan, Amrit. 2010. Reform or Conformity? Temple 'Prostitution' and the Community in the Madras Presidency. In *Bharatanatyam: A Reader*. Soneji, Davesh. Oxford University Press, UK. pg 175

<sup>8</sup> Royo, Alessandra Lopez. 2004. *Dance in the British South Asian Diaspora: Redefining Classicism*



## Collective Identity

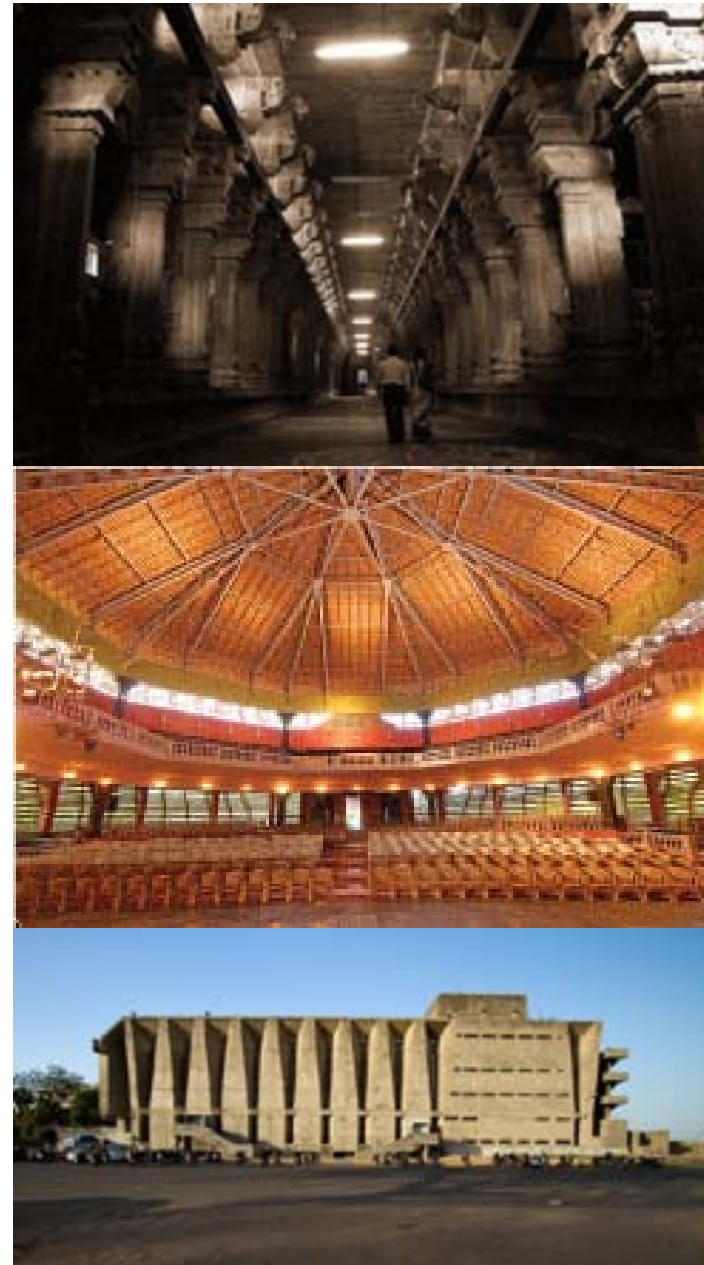
“The form, the gestural language, the structure of the dance, the physical edifice of the temple, and the physical form of the dancer herself become one with the content of the performance, the symbolic, transformative concepts that compose a unique relationships between deity and temple, temple and dancer, dancer and dance, dance and spectator. There is emotion, there is cognition, and both are experienced and discussed as unified activity”<sup>1</sup>

While ancient Tamil Nadu maintained its complex yet direct connection with the public through a consistently coded system, the rapid adoption of western architectural models, such as those of Corbusier and Khan, contributed to a fragmenting of vernacular architectural style. Where the vernacular system provided a holistic experience, permeating all spheres of public and private life, contemporary models for south Indian architecture do not. Traditional south Indian architecture is diluted and architecture is stripped of its sculptural embellishments in favour of streamlined expression of structure. *Gopura*, *prākara* and sculpted pillars of the middle ages find no place in a modern paradigm that re-codes ornamental symbolism into functional representation. Without a clear consistent broader cultural aesthetic however, the new narrative is isolated from its context.

Fig. 5.15 Aayiramkaal *Mandapa*, 15-17<sup>th</sup> century (top)

Fig. 5.16 Kalakshetra Auditorium, Architect: A. Nair, 1936 (middle)

Fig. 5.17 Tagore theatre, Architect: B. Doshi, 1967 (bottom)





“Modern man... has ‘desacralized’ the cosmos. The result of this ‘quantification’ is an alienation from within - a loss of subjective identify and of inner and outer force... man’s most vital need is to discover his own reality through the cultivation of a symbolic life”<sup>2</sup>

This thesis attempts to illustrate the deeply seated connection between ancient south-Indian dance and architecture. In doing so, we can see the symbiotic relationship of both of these arts and their mutual dependence in aesthetic expression. Following this relationship into the modern and contemporary period, we find dance adapting to the changing needs of the global artistic community. The discussions provided in the latter chapters of this thesis aims to invigorate a dialogue of a similar revival with respect to a contemporary Indian architectural language. Where architecture once followed a rich philosophical language, today’s architectural expression becomes pivotal in shaping aesthetic identity and in its ability to become a cultural nexus. Influenced by a multi-faceted expression of sculpture and dance, the articulation of form and surface needs to be conscious of textures and spatial qualities as they relate to the users.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German architect Gottfried Semper outlined a theory on architectural style that embodied many of the principles suggested by the ‘traditional’ south Indian aesthetic. For Semper, architecture was an active part of an ensemble similar to the primitive sense of communal gathering for dance and choreography.<sup>3</sup> The moment of awakening, beyond physical intoxication is attained through a collective experience that is not necessarily embedded in the exclusivity of high art. Tailoring *Bharatanāṭyam* as ‘high art’ and omitting knowable emo-

tion and recognizable elements widens the distinction between the general audience and educated connoisseurs. If one still considers dance as a vehicle to spiritual awakening, this isolated system of codification implies a transcendence reserved for a lucky few. Such deep rooted themes and their architectural expression demands accessibility. The influence of high modernism towards the early 20<sup>th</sup> century also accounts for the abstraction of the dance. This shift can be seen in the evolution or more accurately in the simplification, of the dance costumes of emerging ‘professional’ dancers. Textural variety is muted and haptic experiences are replaced with smoke machines and digital projections. With a specific lack of contextual juxtaposition, this ‘coding’ is ever harder to decipher and begs to be reinvented in its local settings. The evolving dance and culture necessitate a parallel evolution of an architectural context.

“This is a prerequisite for fighting back artistic hence cultural and social — marginalization. Shaped and sustained by difference, this “other” aesthetics is thus transformed into a discourse of dissent and subversion through which, by creating contemporary practices of political artistic production, the performative can have an impact on real social space”<sup>4</sup>

Drawing on drama and stage set design, both Semper and German architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel, saw architecture as a frame accommodating human experience. The tectonic of such a ‘frame’ absorbed the beholder and then directed their attention to the drama of life.<sup>5</sup> Architecture was not conceived as a back-stage, in front of and around which life unravelled - architecture was the art of construction, of the conditions of life. This is the project of architecture.<sup>6</sup>

“The spinal column through the various classical forms, particularly in Bharatnatyam, is held upright and the use of the extended arms marks out a very clear personal space, which is never invaded. Thus, there is no physical contact or any form of intimacy expressed with another dancer.”<sup>7</sup>

On an intimate scale, the space around the dancer's person is being negotiated in new ways. The role of desire and the erotic that tied the cosmic man to the spatial reconstruction of the universe (the mandala) is reverberated in the performance of dance. The movement of the dancer charges the space around him/her with this vital energy and erotic force, a force comparative to the sanctity of the temple sanctuary. This energy is thus constituted in the space of desire between the beholder and the eroticized body whether of flesh or of stone. Clearly, *sringāra bakti*, as expressed by a single dancer carries different connotations than when expressed by two or more dancers who share such intimate content in a close or overlapping spatial prox-



Fig. 5.18 *Bharatanātyam* dancers perform for the 2010 para-Commonwealth games in New Delhi

imity. The sacred nature of the dancer's immediate space can be extrapolated from the identity of those admitted within it - a consort, whether divine or mortal. The fertility of this space, comparable to the temples and caves, pulsates with the energy of life. Thus the sexual identity of the dancer becomes an important identifier of the surrounding cultural climate, especially surrounding female sexuality. In India, and for immigrant families around the world, this discussion is quite alive as a part of everyday negotiation.

“There is no doubt that modern venues, such as large concert halls, are less suitable for the presentation of expression (*abhinaya*) than the intimate settings of courts and salons of great houses, with the result that the importance of *abhinaya* in the dance has been reduced.”<sup>8</sup>

The previous discussions aim to emphasize the common philosophical roots shared by dance and architecture in order to provide a foundation illustrating the purpose and need of a revitalized architecture. At this scale, modern architects in India have depended on self-contained institutional campuses for freedom to explore new aesthetics. Financially and bureaucratically independent, these projects allow architects like Balkrishna Doshi and D. Appukuttan Nair, among others, to explore architecture with an appreciation for intimacy and monumentality. They transform community traditions of dance and drama into centres of cultural identity.

Site specificity as a spatial extension of the dance culture is undoubtedly a pivotal tool to anchoring a community. So much so, that even Gods are identified based on their context in a given physical or mythological narrative. The

juxtaposition and allegories of the built and un-built world is continually dealt with in south Indian temple architecture and plastic arts. Such a link reconnects the structure to a solid yet continually evolving environment. Taking cues from the surrounding natural world or a past landscape gives a universal appeal to an otherwise alien aesthetic. This link is crucial for the adaptability of both spiritual and secular performances where proximity and spatial relation are a major part of dance and symbolic movement.

With this contextual grounding, architecture can be viewed both as static artifact and as bridging city spaces through a type of choreographed movement. The rhythmic widening and narrowing of space, the articulation of thresholds and joints, the scale and variety of material and the quality of sound and reverberation are all techniques that contribute to the carefully orchestrated movement in south Indian temples. And yet, these same tools are still fundamental to contemporary design. The manipulation of energy boundaries, in both spaces of void and solid, create viable environments for the fertility of ideas. Articulated transitions through these spaces work to acclimatize and enable both body and mind for metaphysical transformations. Sensitivity and clarity of craft and rigorous dedication to the implementation of these ideas however is perhaps the weak link in contemporary south India, inevitably contributing to the proliferation of indifferent architecture.

“...the architect’s role becomes that of an aesthetic lobbyist, inculcating a new set of public values in the design... effectively revers[ing] the public attitude of indifference to architecture and instead promot[ing] a larger appreciation of the man-made environment”<sup>9</sup>

An investment in spatial experience and craft of design is the medium for the expression of a cultural resonance that moves the building from practical to extraordinary. The architecture of teaching, performing and experiencing the dance needs to accommodate multi-disciplinary insights in order to maintain a consistency in the collective artistic culture. As cultural institutions, contemporary performance spaces, need to consistently reflect these changing principles. The development of the *Nāṭya-Shāstra* as a codifying document speaks to the living and evolving nature of both dance and building elements forming a comprehensive whole, based on the principles of the mandala rather than a pre-envisioned generator of design. Architecture needs to undergo a type of regeneration similar to south Indian dance, as resistance to adaptability will only degrade the quality of all the arts. If modernity is concerned with the a ‘true’ representation of labour and material over embellished ‘play;’ it is even more imperative to attach to this engineering exercise a narrative that grounds the structural form and takes pleasure in the building’s function. Without architectural specificity, dancers are isolated from their cultural peers, becoming fragmented and losing an artistic inclusivity that was once a major component of south Indian dance. The cross-fertilization between music, dance, theatre and the community is lost. South Indian architecture needs to reclaim its position as the vehicle for education and inspiration, accommodating and reinforcing today’s complex contemporary narrative.

As explored in the earlier chapters, the integration of architecture with community life is powerful enough to suggest that one cannot separate it from the habits developed through collective experience. Modernity however, deval-

ued this integral relationship and saw collectivity replaced by individuality; a replacement so rigorous, that individualism eventually degraded into isolation. The architectural expression of this mutilated relationship can be seen in the explosion of indifferent architecture. Architecture, a fundamentally collective endeavour, finds itself responsible for the uniting of multiple identities. The shared experience between both audience and performer becomes a model of inspiration for the tactile manipulation of material and space. As a new generation revisits the psychology and philosophy of architecture and culture via digital media, there can be a new understanding of the human and ecstatic body as one. Understanding the Natarāja icon and the spatial analysis of the *Chit Sabha* as an example, this is undoubtedly a task full of potential. Similar to the relationship of temple and dancer, contemporary artistic institutions need to recognize and cultivate design models that reflect a meaningful unification and blending of architectural, cultural and moral languages.

For the generations of immigrants looking back home, and those living in a rapidly changing India; for those that look not only backward at a rich heritage but forward, towards a new artistic and cultural age; south Indian architecture has a responsibility to once again participate in the weaving of a contemporary cultural fabric.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederique Apffel Marglin is quoted, speaking of spiritually transformation success as an integration of form and content. Schwartz, Susan. 2004. *Rasa: Performing the divine in India*. Columbia University Press, New York, pg 50

<sup>2</sup> Khanna, Madhu. 2003. *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*.

Inner Traditions, Vermont. pg 24

<sup>3</sup> Hartoonian, Gevork. 2006. *Crisis of the object: The architecture of theatricality*. Routledge, London, UK, pg 39

<sup>4</sup> On the benefit of aesthetic difference and specificity of various south Asian dance genres. Royo, Alessandra Lopez. 2004. *Dance in the British South Asian*

*Diaspora: Redefining Classicism*

<sup>5</sup> Hartoonian, Gevork. 2006. *Crisis of the object: The architecture of theatricality*. Routledge, London, UK, pg 27

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pg 37

<sup>7</sup> On the strict spatial boundaries occupied by a dancer. Mitra, Royona. 2006. *Living a Body Myth, Performing a Body Reality: Reclaiming the Corporeality and Sexuality of the Indian Female Dancer*. *Feminist Review*, No. 84, *Postcolonial Theatres* (2006). Palgrave Macmillan Journals. pg 77

<sup>8</sup> On architecture's impact on dance. Gaston, Anne-Marie. 1996. *Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pg 58

<sup>9</sup> On a model for architectural transformation. Bhatia, Gautam. 1995. *Indian archetypes - institutional architecture in India*. *The Architectural Review*. May, 1995.



## Appendices



## Appendix 1: Glossary

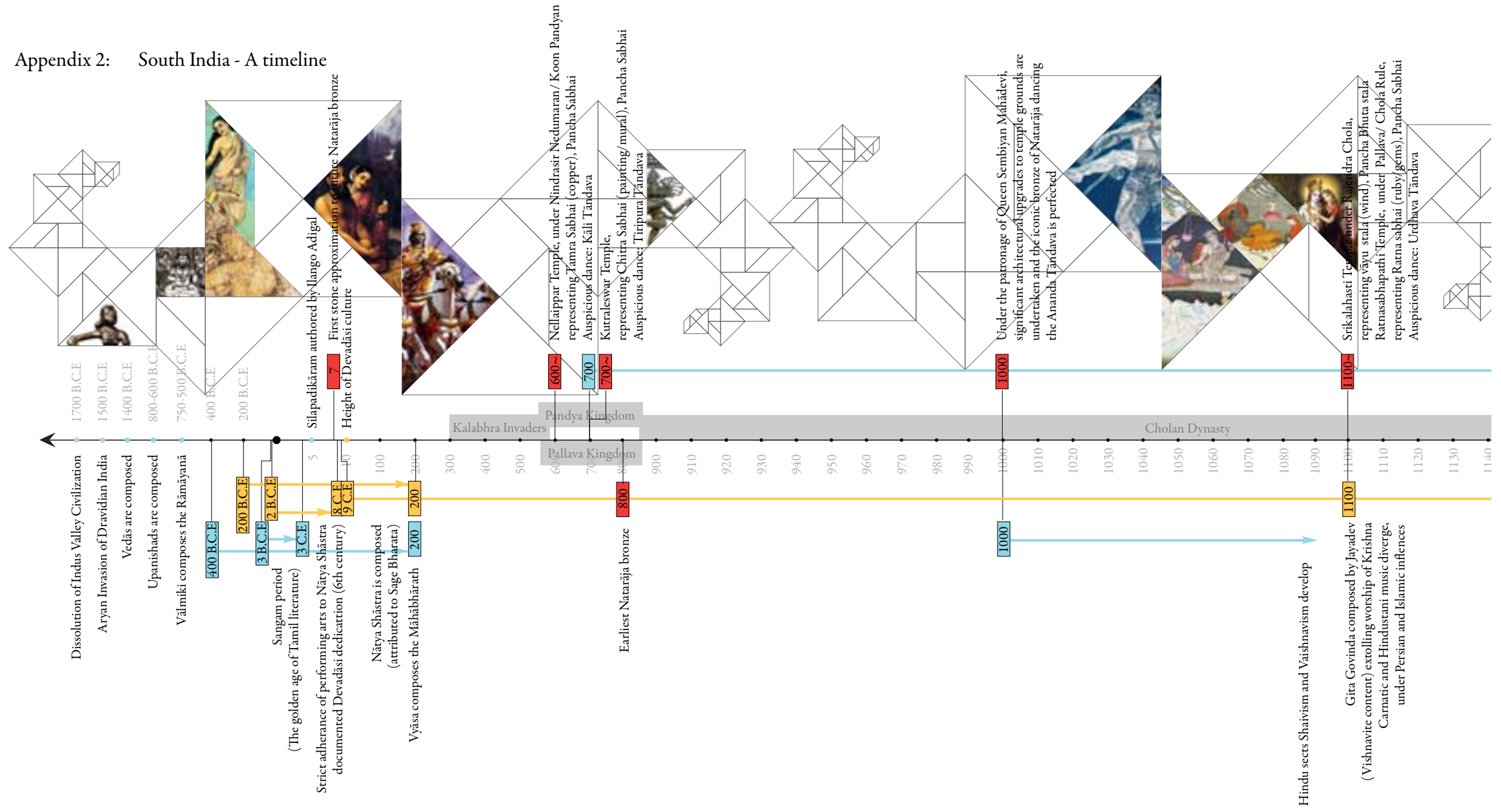
abhinaya	mimetic dance as a combination of movement and prose; drama	gurukula	education system; where student live with or in close proximity to the teacher, often performing household duties in exchange for education
angula	measurement equal to the width of a finger	<b>guru-shishya parambaram</b>	hereditary lineage of teachers and disciples in a given artistic tradition
anya-ranga	second court; theatre of a compound	hasta	measurement equal to length of forearm; 24 angula (also see mudrā)
apsāra	celestial dancers; predecessor to the devadāsi	<b>Hiranya-garbha jādi</b>	Golden-embryo; the origin of the universe term used to differentiate between different Hindu sects based on caste
arangetram	debut dance performance, traditionally the start of a dancer's career but considered a sort of 'graduation performance' in contemporary culture	javāli	dramatic piece preceding thillana in concert repertoire; short and overtly erotic
bakthi	devotion; Hindu movement of ecstatic, emotional and all consuming fervor	līla	play; creation is spawned as a result of divine play
bani	style; conventions of movement based on gesture, posture, choreography Example: Tanjore Quartet Bani/ Pandanallur Style, Kalakshetra Bani, Vazhuvoor style, Balasaraswathi Style/	lingam	male sex organ; a 'formed-formless' symbol of Shiva; often sculpturally depicted with female yoni
boomi	earth; world	kāranā	fundamental movement combination, consisting of a beginning, intermediate and end posture
brahma-sthāna	central part of village or town where a public hall is built for public assembly	madhya-ranga	the central theatre, enclosed courtyard, central part of a coronation hall
danda	measurement equal to 106 angula; 4 hasta	mandala	circle; a complex type of yantra
dāsi	servant	mandapa	detached single storied pavilion, open hall, a tower, a temple, theatre auditorium
devadāsi	female servant of God	<b>āsthāan-mandapa</b>	assembly room, an audience hall, a sitting room, a recreation ground with a pavilion
devi	general term for Hindu Goddess	<b>kalyāna-mandapa</b>	wedding pavilion
devālaya	a God's residence or dwelling	<b>mahā-mandapa</b>	central hall of a temple, entrance to main temple hall, the nave
garbha-griha	temple sanctum; the womb	<b>nātiya-mandapa (nritta-, -griha, - vesma, - sāla)</b>	two storied brick playhouse, theatre, music hall, dancing pavilion, used for enacting a drama; consisting of ranga-sirsha (stage-front),
ghee	clarified butter; used in many temple rituals; usually used as fuel for a small clay lamp or in a sacrificial fire		
gopi	cow-herd girl; devotees of Krishna; frequently portrayed dancing with Krishna; Radha, Krishna's consort, is one such gopi		
gopura	fortified extensive cowstalls, connected with the divine bull; gate-house; doors; gate tower, used for residences and temples alike		
guru	teacher		

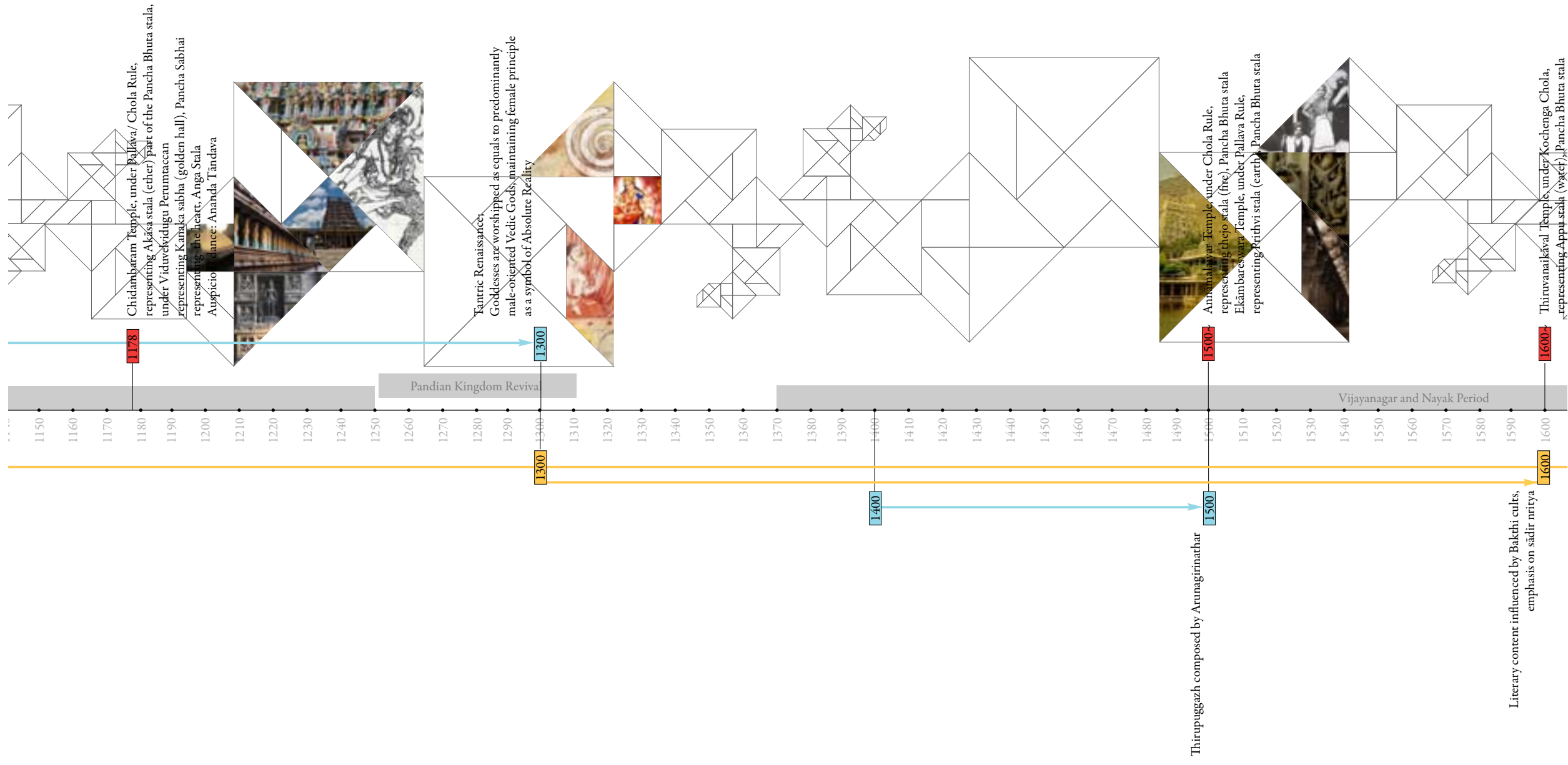
	ranga-pitha (place for acting), and nepathya-griha (green-room)		
preksā-mandapa (-griha)	viewing house; auditorium in a theatre, the front room or pavilion facing a shrine from where the deity can be seen; in large theatres attached to temples it should be semi-circular, mid size theatres attached to palaces, quadrangular, and small theatres for public triangular	nāṭta-sālā	(nāṭya-) detached building used as a music hall
ranga-mandapa (-mukha, -sinsha)	forepart of the stage, platform of wood	nirvāna	union with the ultimate being through moksha
sabhā-mandapa	assembly hall	nritta	abstract dance as a combination of movement and music/rhythm; movement of the body along its vertical meridian (Brahmasutra), seeks to achieve the perfect pose emphasizing timelessness, all movements return to a grounded and balanced pose sama (sculptural equivalent: samabhanga)
sringāra-mandapa	bed-chamber, pavilion or room where a temple deity is made to retire at night	panchāyat	gathering of 5 'panch' (or more) respected elders of the community assembled to resolved village disputes
sthāpana-mandapa	room or pavilion where the idol is installed after it is washed and dressed, a sanctuary	parambara	(see guru-shishya parambara)
utsava-mandapa	festive hall	pāda	'part' or subdivisions of a mandala; measurement equal to a foot or step
mangalsutra	(see thāli)	pradakshina	surrounding terrace or veranah, circumambulating path around a temple; circular road around a village or town
mantra	sounds, words or verses that are believed to aid in the soul's transmiration	prakṛiti preksha-nivesana	auditorium of a playhouse
māya	illusion; to be overcome in order to attain transcendence	prakāra	wall or fence enclosure; walled mound supporting a raised platform (prāsāda) for spectators
moksha	liberation from the painful cycles of rebirth and reincarnation	puja	religious ritual performed as a sacrifice
mudrā	symbolic gestures, typically made using one or both hands and fingers	purānā(s)	set of ancient Hindu texts, describing the history of creation, preservation and destruction; includes discussion of mythology, cosmology, philosophy
nattuvanar	director of dance recitals; through the recitation of syllables, while keeping rhythm with cymbals	purusha	cosmic man, bound in the Vāstu-purusha mandala; measurement equal to 84 angula (height of man)
nautch	anglicized form of 'nach' or dance; performed by young girls during the end of the Mughal Empire and during the British Raj	rajadāsi	female servant of the king
nāṭiyam	dance	rākshasa	demon
		rishi	seer; saint; sage; composer of various hymns and vedic texts
		sabhā	small secular assembly; palaces, audience hall for men
		sampradāya	'tradition'; religious/cultural lineage entered into

samsad	by initiation (in contrast to hereditary 'parambara')	vidatha	smaller/secular assembly; palaces; audience hall for women
sangita	assembly hall within a wedding pavilion	vimāna	literally 'mountain peak'; final finial atop south Indian gopuram; akin to the north Indian shikara
sari	music performance	yantra	geometrical figure based on mathematical calculations to represent various deities; ranges from dot (bindu) or inverted triangle in its simplest form; Sri Yantra/ Sri Chakra/ Navayoni Chakra represents Siva/ Shakti, Mount Meru and by extension - the universe
sati	traditional south Indian garment worn by women, consisting of a 4-9 meter long cloth, that is wrapped around the waist and then draped over the left shoulder	yonī	female sexual organ; often sculpted around the lingam; representing fertility
sādir/ cāthir	a funereal ritual practiced by some Hindu communities, where a widow joins her husband's body (voluntarily or by force) on the cremation pyre; it is currently illegal in India	Yellama cult	surviving devadāsi community in the state of Karnataka
sāla	predecessor of BharataNāṭyam, primarily solo female dance ritual based on artistic traditions of Tamil Nadu		
	storeyed mansions furnished with pavilions (max. 12 stories); divided into 6 classes: dandaka, svastika, maulika, chatur-mukha, sarvato-bhadra, and vardhamāna		<b>Deities</b>
Sri Chakra	(see yantra)	AtiSheshan	multi-headed divine snake, forming the bed upon which Vishnu lies in the primeval sea
sthapati	the chief architect, the master builder knowing all the sciences	Bharata	generally accepted author of the Nāṭya-Shāshtra; literally 'actor'
sthāpatya	house relating to architects or architecture; sculptural workshop	Brahma	part of the divine trinity, the creator; instructs Bharata and Tandu on the art of theatre and the Nāṭya-Shāshtra; God of knowledge; origin of the four Vedās, as they sprang from each of his four faces; (see Prajāpati)
tāla	measurement equal to the length of the head, from chin to the crown; rhythm/tempo	Brahman	Primordial being; ultimate absolute; personified in the divine trinity
thāli	an auspicious thread necklace, stained with turmeric, symbolizing a marital union	Bhuvaneshvari	aspect of Shakti; mother of the universe
tevadiya	prostitute; 'available for men'	Devi	a manifestation of the active female principle, prakriti; the root of all Goddesses, generic name given to a female deity
tirtha	crossing plane, inspiring transmigration from the earthly realm to liberation from reincarnation	Ganesh	revered for his intellect and as the remover of obstacles, invoked on the initiation of various tasks/ projects; Shiva and Pārvasī's second son; his vehicle is the mouse, representing the ability to gnaw through obstructions; the mouse is symbolic of the ātman (soul) living in the hole called Intellect within the heart of every man, hidden
vadhū-nāṭaka	theatre for females; a gallery; a balcony		
vāstu	architecture in the broadest sense; also implies sculpture, the handmaid of architecture		
Vāstu-purusha mandala	vāstu: bodily existence/site; purusha: cosmic being/source of all creation; mandala: closed polygonal figure		
vedi(kā)	hall for reading of Vedas; covered verandah; balcony in a courtyard; stage platform; terrace		

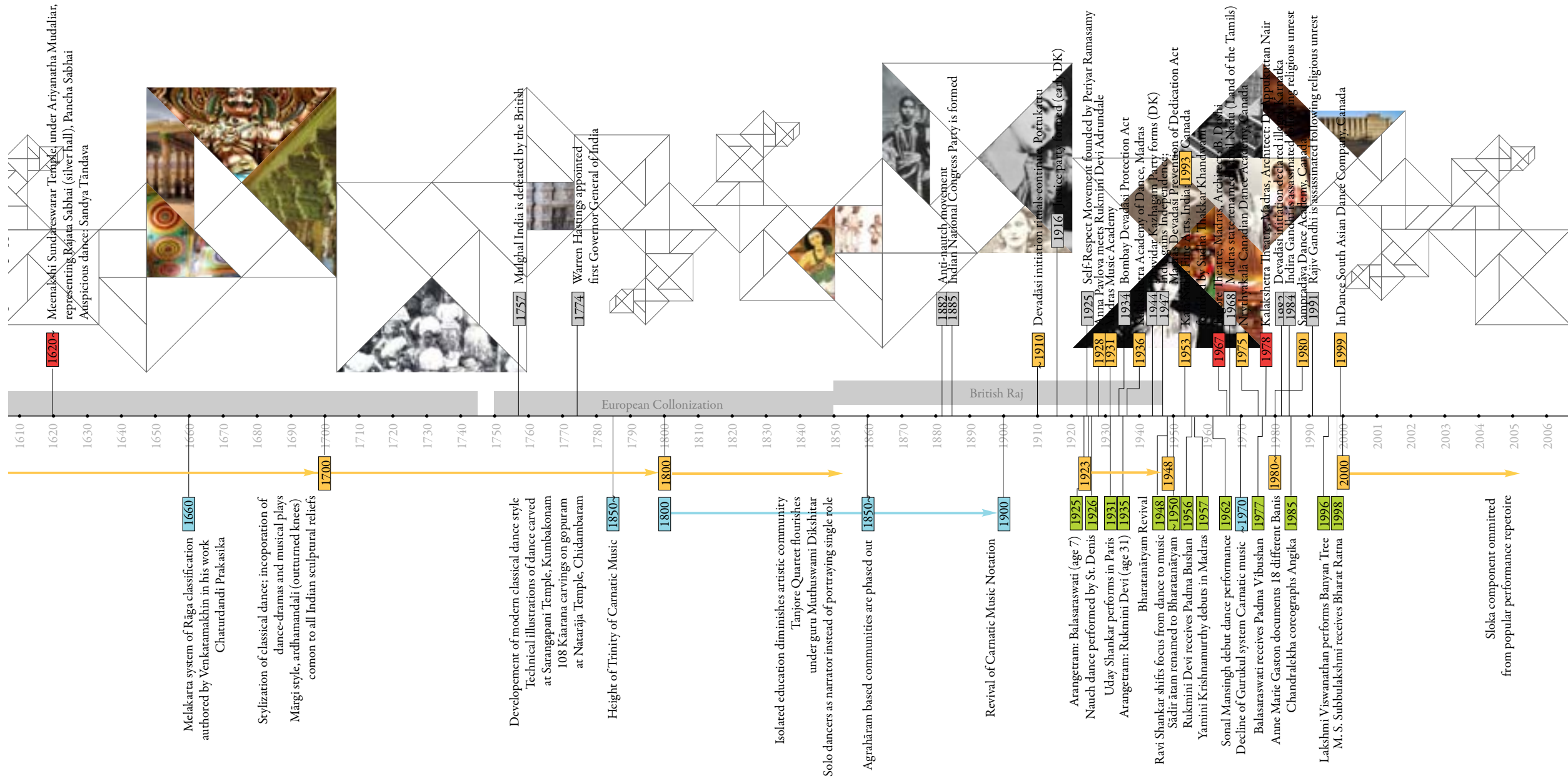
	behind illusion		
<b>Indra</b>	Lord of Heaven; King of Gods; requested a fifth science (the art of theatre) from Lord Brahma for people of all castes	<b>Prajāpati</b>	aspect of Shakti; daughter of the Himālayās Lord of Progeny; Primordial being; androgynous being, impregnated by fusing of mind and speech; guardian deity of the sexual organ; an abstraction of Vishnu
<b>Kāli</b>	fierce incarnation of Pārvati; Goddess of death; known as both ‘mother of the universe’ and ‘the black one’ she is the slayer of demons and is commonly associated with the active female energy in Tantric cults; she dances in cremation grounds with/without a fearful Shiva; often depicted dancing atop a prostrate Shiva; symbolic of rebirth as the outcome of destruction	<b>Rati</b> <b>Sati</b>	Goddess of sexual desire; consort of Kāma Mother Goddess; incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi; ideal wife and mother; at her self-immolation she is reincarnated as Pārvati
<b>Kāma</b>	God of Love; son of Vishnu and Lakshmi incarnates; Rati, is his consort; attended by a band of apsārās; after shooting a meditating Shiva with arrows of desire, Shiva falls in love with Pārvati, an enraged Shiva incinerates by flames from his third eye	<b>Shakti</b>	effective power of the female aspect of a given deity; consort and creative force of Shiva; identified with Kāli/ Devi
<b>Kārthikeya</b>	a form of Murugan, eldest son of Shiva and Pārvati; knowing only Shiva’s son could defeat attacking demons, Pārvati aroused Shiva, and his seed’s energy fell into the Ganges River transforming into 6 babies, Pārvati then held them tightly, merging the bodies while the 6 heads remained; reared by 6 Pleiades stars, represented by 6 heads, thus known as Arumugam (6-faced, in Tamil)	<b>Shiva</b> <b>Tāndu</b>	part of the divine trinity, the destroyer he who instructed Bharata in the art of the 108 kārānās, at Brahma’s request
<b>Krishnā</b>	incarnation of Vishnu; originating as a fertility God of herdsmen; embodies the cosmos - heaven at his navel, the stars his chest and the sky his eyes; known as ‘the dark one,’ often depicted as a blue-skinned youth, playing the flute and frolicking with Rādha and other gopis, also known as Gopāla	<b>Vishnu</b>	part of the divine trinity, the preserver; maintains time, order and moral balance through karma, correcting any imbalance as one of his 10 incarnations - 9 have occurred, one is yet to be manifested; his consort is Lakshmi
<b>Lakshmi</b>	Goddess of wealth and prosperity; arose from the churning of the primal sea of milk, Samudramanathan; reincarnated as Vishnu’s consort for each of his incarnations, epitomizing the ideal Hindu wife	<b>Visvakarman</b>	architect of the universe; creator of apsārās mythical originator of Vāstu, father of 9 artisans: goldsmith, blacksmith, utensil-maker, maker of shell ornaments, potter, carpenter, weaver, painter, and florist/ gardener/garland-maker
<b>Natarāja</b> <b>Pārvati</b>	Shiva’s incarnation as the Lord of Dance Goddess of fertility; reincarnation of Sati, Shiva’s consort; gentle in demeanor; youngest benign		

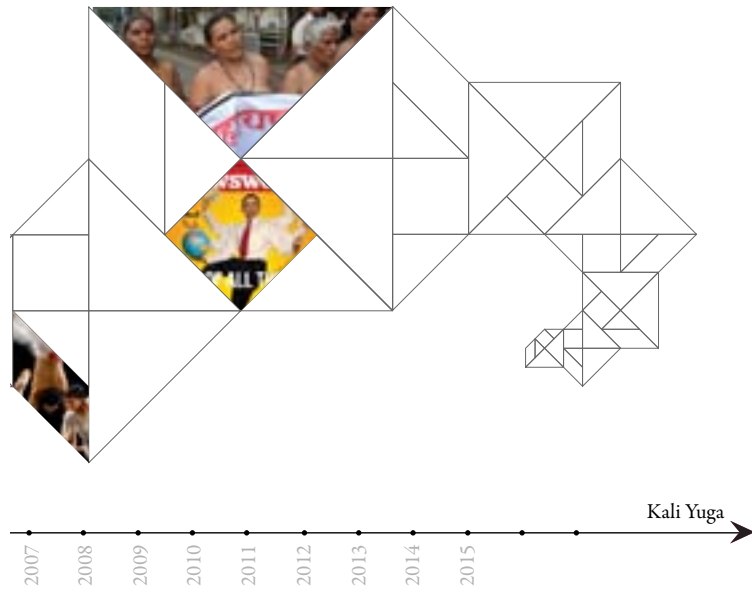
## Appendix 2: South India - A timeline

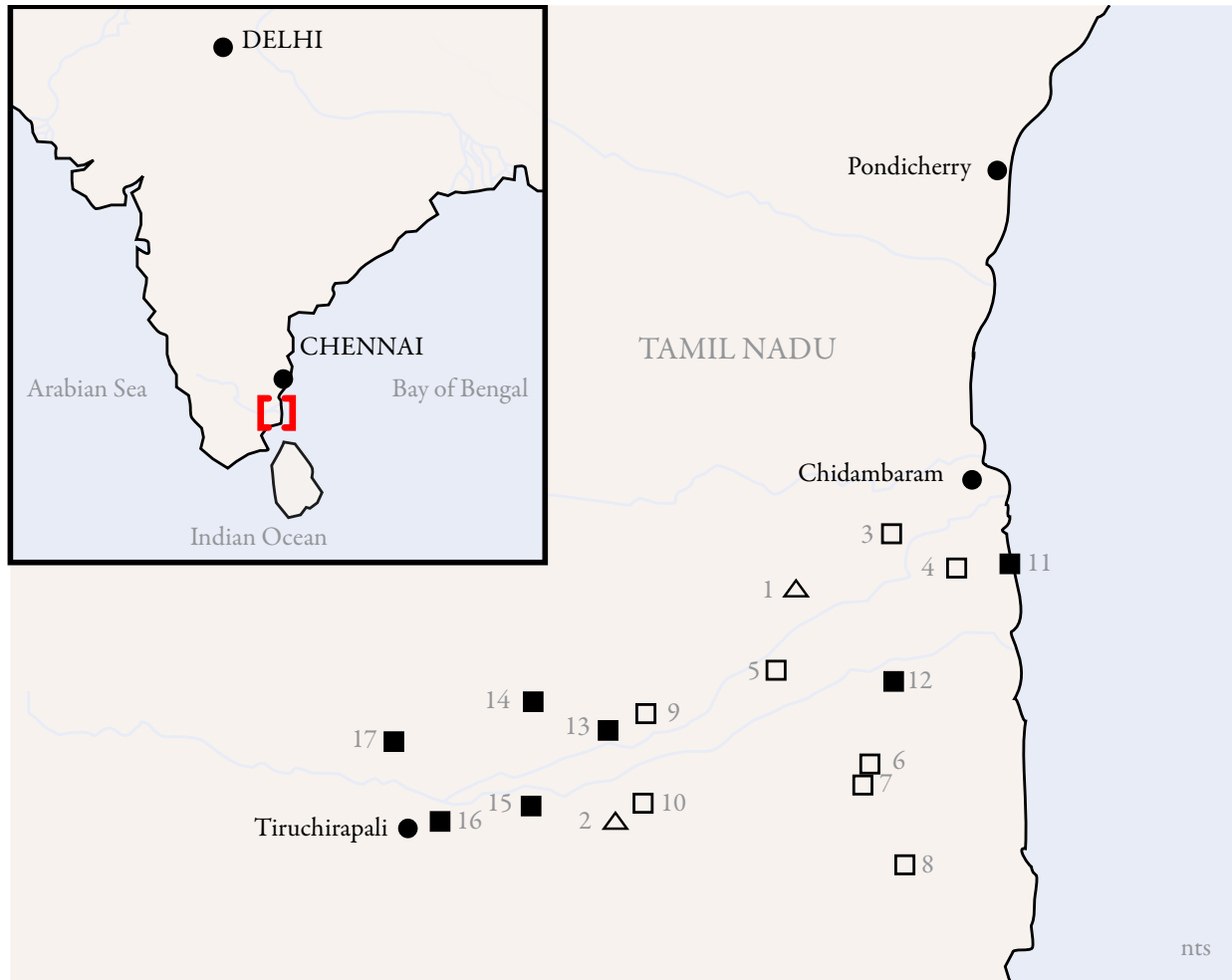












Chola temples with large Natarāja images

- 1. Gangaikondacholapuram
- 2. Tanjavur

Other temples with large Natarāja images

- 3. Udaiyargudi
- 4. Tiruvilakkudi
- 5. Tirupurambiyam
- 6. Kuhur
- 7. Nalur-Tirumeyjnanam
- 8. Tirurameshvaram
- 9. Govindaputtur
- 10. Karuntatangudi

Other temples with minor Natarāja images

- 11. Punjai
- 12. Tiruvadaturai
- 13. Kamarasavalli
- 14. Kilappaluvur
- 15. Tiruchchenampundi
- 16. Tiruverumbur
- 17. Turaiyur



Medieval temple towns

- Pancha Butha Stala
- Pancha Sabhai
- Anga Stala

Revival Cultural Centres

- Vaishnavite
- Shivite

Dominant Dance Style during the revival

- Balasaraswati (Sringāra Bakti)
- Rukmini Devi Arundale (Kalakshetra style)

- |                              |                          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ● 1. Sri Kalahasti           | ● 18. Kumbakonam         |
| ● 2. Kanchipuram             | ● 19. Srirangam          |
| ● 3. Thiruvannamalai         | ● 20. Srivilluputtu      |
| ● 4. Thiruvanaikaval         | ● 21. Ramanathapuram     |
| ● 5. Chidambaram             | ● 22. Vellore            |
| ● 6. Thiruvallankadu         | ● 23. Sriperumbudur      |
| ● 7. Madurai                 | ● 24. Chelgalpattu       |
| ● 8. Kuttralam               | ● 25. Nagappattinam      |
| ● 9. Thirunalveli            | ● 26. Thiruvarur         |
| ● 10. Thingalur              | ● 27. Thiruchirapalli    |
| ● 11. Kanjanur               | ● 28. Thiruvananthapuram |
| ● 12. Thirupullirukku Vellur | ● 29. Palakkad           |
| ● 13. Thiruvengadu           | ● 30. Coimbatore         |
| ● 14. Thirunageshwaram       | ● 31. Chennai            |
| ● 15. Thirunallar            | ● 32. Mysore             |
| ● 16. Thanjavur              |                          |
| ● 17. Alangundi              |                          |

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