Chapter - VI

Conclusions

1. ‘By those who know the nātya-tantra, it is used to denote female dance [lāsyā]’. [1]

The above sentence clearly associates Nātya with tantra. Nātya Sāstra is itself a kind of Tantra Sastra. Other than Nandikeswara’s statement as above, the epitomic personage Abhinavagupta calls Rasāyana [the science of art, of the rasās, or of vegetables juices, etc.) , more or less the Indian equivalent of alchemy, an esoteric science.

The dancer has to concentrate on the character, situation and emotions and depicted with help of abhinaya and sātvika bhāvas or the emotional states and then the rasās reach the spectator thereby enveloping him in the emotion that is expressed by and enacted by the dancer. The Sanskrit word abhinaya is made up of the prefix abhi ‘towards’ and the root ni ‘to carry’. Thus it means representing (carrying) a play to (towards) the spectators. It is the doctrine of suggestion that lies at the basis of ancient Indian plays and indeed of all other arts of India. It is only when the actor or dancer has Sātvikābhīnaya that he can guide the enjoyment of the spectator in whom sentiment or rasā is created directly through the bhāva expressed by the dancer and actor. Actor is directly in contact with character while spectator is indirectly in contact with character. To evoke rasā in the spectator is the aim and object of the ancient Indian playwright. The term rasā has been translated as ‘flavour’, ‘sentiment’ or ‘poetic sentiment’. It is possible to make a statement of it, even with a static pose of sculpture, created with skill and in accordance with Silpa –Sastra. Rasā in dance has to be generated through a process, stage by stage. In dance drama, the speech, the action, the surroundings, everything builds up the final creation of Rasā.
The spectators who watch, absorbed, a performance of dancing, of singing feel that it is a real sea of nectar. It is for this reason that those who teach the true nature of performances say that, in these, a real state of identity of all knowing subjects takes place. This is the state generated, having a perception of a full and perfect ānanda or beatitude. In the Nātyaśāstra, we can see that stark realism is avoided by the ancient dramatists. They gave imagination and fancy utmost scope. Total absence of painted scenery from the stage is significant; but positive efforts to depict Rasā through suggestive use of colour in the costume etc. enhances the dearth, if any. It would be relevant here to observe the Rasās described in the 53rd Shloka of the Soundaryalahiri, the great work on Tantrā of Devi Upāsana by Śankara and the Sivānandalahiri. In both these works, the emotional states are described with episodical instances. The worshipper of Devi using this Tantra would have to meditate upon this form of Devi. The Devi experiences deep love for her Lord, yet, she gets filled with anger and disgust at the Ganges and the moon atop her beloved Lord, fear at the sight of the serpents, compassion at her devotees and courage while protecting them, humour with her companions while chiding one another and wonder on hearing her Lord’s stories.

While the artistic flavour, taste or in Nātya sets within the palate of the dancer and seeps into the spectator and can give him similar experience by the flow of EMPATHY, the taste or Rasā in Tantra like what is mentioned in Tantra nine of the Tirumandiram [BLISSFUL beatitude while witnessing the Dance of Siva] remains purely exclusive to the Śādhaka, elusive to others who do not know of it and cannot be partaken and relished by others unless and until initiated fully, without which, any such attempt will not be a success.
Indian theorists on the subject believed that the highest aesthetic enjoyment is not possible without giving the greatest possible scope to imagination. No amount of making things appear as real to spectators, can be successful unless the latter would call imagination to their aid. In this connection, we may add Sylvain Levi’s apt remark – “Indian genius produced a new art which the word rasa summarizes and symbolizes, and which condenses it in one brief formula: ‘the poet does not express but he suggests’.

As spectators, we feel the thrill of pleasure which the most terrifying narration excites in us, a sense of horripilation, and we are all enjoying the sweetness of sad tales, after shedding tears ourselves.

Divine experience and aesthetic experience are one and the same experience, a flash, a glimpse and taste of ECSTASY. With self-surrender, the Nātya Śādhaka transports himself and others to the ecstatic reign of the supreme consciousness. The spiritual, unifying practice of Nātya Yoga – Bharatanatyam dance, here in particular helps to cleanse the mind of its ‘vasanas’ or bonding emotions. The science in Bharatanatyam provides opportunity to break free of mundane bondage and unleash the spiritual FIRE. It’s relation to gravity is seen in the prominent grounding in body movement which occasionally takes flight, directed both upwards and wide across cutting through space and keeping tune with rhythm all along; a rhythm that oscillates between slow and fast tempo but yet stays well-coagulated. A variety of artistically conglomerated expressions of emotions forms the major part of ‘story-packages’ in the dance. Feelings that encumber our otherwise peaceful living, constantly encountered by us are emoted and depicted in dance and it is here that the balancing act of Nātya yoga becomes ‘panacea’. Drama represents true life itself providing a platform for release from attachments that cling, for recognizing the permanent as against the temporal and incorporating the rhythm and harmony of dance into life to attain bliss. There is imitation, mimicry, representation and also the expression of pure joy with movement that is geometrically appealing to both the gross and subtle mind and senses. A Tantrā paradigm (Nātya can also be called as one such paradigm)
exemplifies conception of supreme personality of God the dual aspect when the God himself becomes the Universe beyond Purusha and Prakriti - the complete, WHOLE, an undivided ‘one’. This ‘Advaitic’ concept keeping as the base, one has to indeed enlighten others for which the path of Bhakti has to be experienced and extrapolated.

Nature of this Rasā in Tantra is different. “.......during the celebration of the cakra, etc., no individual must be allowed to enter who does not identify himself with the ceremonies and thus does not share the state of consciousness of the celebrants; this would cause, in fact, a contraction of the consciousness. The purpose of the yogin is to identify himself with this transcendental object. Religious devotion implies therefore a constant drive towards an end which is outside it and, as such, is the very antithesis of the aesthetic experience, which is perfect self-sufficiency. When the ears are filled with the sound of sweet song or the nostrils with the scent of sandal-wood, etc., the state of indifference (non-participation, impersonality, etc.) disappears and the heart is invaded by a state of vibration (spandamanata; for the significance of the term spanda, cf.p.60, n.1). Such a state is precisely the so-called power of beatitude, thanks to which man is “'gifted with heart'” [2]

According to the Śaïva of Kashmir, heart is consciousness itself. The aesthetic and the mystical state of consciousness are not only characterized by a particular bliss or repose, they are also accompanied by a sense of wonder or surprise. The word expressing this wonder, i.e., chamatkara is frequently found in Indian literature. V. Raghavan observes that originally the word chamatkara was an onomatopoeic word referring to the clicking sound we make with our tongue when we taste something snappy, and in the course of its semantic enlargements, chamatkara came to mean a sudden fillip relating to any feeling of a pleasurable type. The objects which arouse
this state may indifferently be a food, an alcoholic drink, a drug, a sexual contact, a song, a dance, and so on.

The importance to Yogic Consciousness and transmission of energy is given great emphasis by Abhinavagupta in the analysis of Rasā. Prajāpati descends on the artistic mind.

"Like the Creator", he says in the Abhinavabhārati, 1,4, 'the poet creates for himself a world according to his wish. Indeed, he is amply endowed with the power of creating manifold, extraordinary things, originating thanks to the favour of the Deity, the Supreme Vocality. It has been said that no non-seer can be deservingly called a poet, and one is a seer only by virtue of his vision. This is the purpose of Bharata. Thus, as regards the dramatic performance, the poem or the mind of the spectator, the root is only this, viz., the Rasā which lies within the poet. This is, as it were, the seed. The poet is, indeed comparable to the spectator, for, as Anandavardhana said, "if the poet is pervaded by Rasā, etc(see above, p XLVIII). The poem, for its part, is, to say, the tree. The activity of the actor, that is, representation, etc., is, as it were, the flower, and the tasting of the spectators, the fruit. Therefore, all is pervaded by Rasā." Rasā fills the poet entirely with itself, and is spontaneously translated into poetic expression, like a liquid which overflows a vase – if a pot is not full, it cannot overflow – or like the natural manifestation if a state of mind (interjections, exclamations, etc). In other words, artistic creation is the direct or unconventional expression of a feeling or passion "generalized", that is, freed from all distinctions in time and space, and therefore from all individual relationships and practical interest by an inner force within the poet himself, the creative or artistic, pratibhā. This state of consciousness expressed in the poem, etc., is transferred to the actor or the reciter, and to the spectator. All three – poet, actor and spectator – in the serene contemplation of the work of art, form in reality a single knowing subject, merged together by the same sensations and the same purified joy". [3]
Bharatanātyam can induce such immense power in the practitioner that a sort of healing happens from within, due to the very movement involved in dance. This movement being stylized in the classical dances, there is enhanced channelizing of energy in a positive upward direction. The constant stamping of feet, enhanced by involved expressions of the face, limbs, muscle and heart kindles the serpent power when individual ego has been reduced to ashes by the fire in the dance. This dance offers beatitude in a subtle, symbolic yet highly significant manner and there is a gentle transmission to audiences.

There is hardly the intention to derive this with any personal command at all as the higher command will drive forward every action making it sublime. Feeling of nothingness after a performance promises a new beginning and a fulfillment in eternity.

Healing through Chakrā – breathing exercises, transcendental meditation is commonly heard of these days. Dance is not just one such isolated unit but encompasses a whole lot of these exercises combined in a dynamic rhythmic style that is enjoyable and exhilarating other than the main purpose of being enlightening. Nātya is a fulfilling Tantra of the highest order. It is upāsana, sādhanā, japa mantrā, yoga with āsana, prānayama, viniyoga, mudrā, all integrated.

Persons of great culture and education are of the superior order and they are responsible for the proper reaction to success or otherwise in regard to the deeper aspects of the Nātaka presented. Ordinary persons are more concerned with the superficial aspects. Perfection cannot be an end in itself and all products of human engineering and artistry are bound to alter with time. Thus in paintings, the notions of completion and fulfillment are made relative and uncertain. It is increasingly irrelevant to academically classify artistic disciplines into visual, spatial, acoustic, movement etc because the mutations and interrelations cannot be accounted for with a static approach. All categories would solicit co-existence.
and co-operation of many “sensory organs”, gross as well as subtle. Schematic division becomes inoperative in such situations. The communion of all the arts contributes to cohesive transcendence as the most perfect vibration of the noumenon lies within the depths of a primordial silence of phenomena. A choreographer obeys his inner voice and composes from a locus within the outer boundaries, admitting to anarchy in music and dance. Rhythm is inherent in nature of which man is an important part. Viceversa, man is composed of nature as well, meaning that his Prāna, life force is activated by the five elements of fire, water, ether, earth, sky along with mind and consciousness. There is an element of dance in every human endeavour as Tāla is the root everywhere. Cosmos, the origin of which is traced to Dhwani or sound, vibrates with Tāla. Just as Śiva without the central vowel becomes Śava or Corpse, there is life only when Nāda unites with Bindu. Sound waves unite with energy and rhythm is thus tapped. When this rhythm is kept as the basic quality of an enterprise, one can imagine the extent to which it can expand and create endlessly. When the causal force itself has become an identity of an enterprise, one can again imagine as Bharata rightly said –the creator of drama on this stage is likened to Prajāpati Himself. When dance is mastered, the essence of this spirit is simultaneously intergrated into the body-mind system.

- The word Tantra is itself the be-all and end –all and its branches are varied ‘prescriptions’ to achieve this. Nātya is one such powerful branch. Natya Tantra –Natya is the NAME with Tantra as the SURNAME..........One who is well versed in the scientific doctrine ,a specialist is a Tantrik and one who is the wire ,the cord, the cable ,the tough sinew who strings man to the bow of eternity is the tantri .While the former is essentially scientific, the latter is essentially artistic .It is tough for one to be aware as well as proficient in all aspects of this Sastra at the same time and hence ,the role of TANTRI as a performer is more predominant [Natya also falling under the category of the Arts even if it is as good a science] and with some degree of working knowledge of all aspects , the presentations are made in collaboration
with similar TANTRIS who are experts in other allied aspects. Bharata Muni provided the base for Natya Tantra and was a great Tantrik as well as became a successful Tantri as he could perform his own doctrine. Participation in body, mind and spirit is thoroughly essential to even remotely know the experience of a Tantri or a Tāntrik. The former is the special title given to the priests of Kerala temples that are made on principles of Vāstu-Tantra and who utilize this discipline in propitiation of the deities and the latter is given to both ‘discrete’ and ‘discreet’ practitioners in either caves, forests, homes or any other place without ordinary onlookers, aiming to unite with the Supreme Spirit. Siddhis are attained ie- magical powers to create, manifest, benevolently attract good and destroy evil etc. but the term Tāntrik also covers malevolent seekers who cause harm and destroy peace. These days, all Nātya practitioners may not look for spiritual joy but take it up as a medium to attract and derive fame, wealth and glory, again constructive and not destructive.

Although Tantra is often mistaken to be non-Vedic, it is actually the essential principle of every branch of philosophical knowledge. It is the deeper ‘meaning’ found in Veda itself. The belief in Parabrahman, the Universal Self is the starting point of any branch of Tantra and all these Tantras teach how to become a spiritual master step by step in a scientific manner. Nātya Sāstra teaching the various aspects of performances, stage craft, gestures, etc is scientific in temperament. Being practical in application, this theory definitely provides scope for experimentation, room for improvisation so that one gets proof of its significance through practice. Tantra has to be practiced or none of the goals therein can be realized, but it cannot be exhibited per se except when it is performed as a Nātya-Tantra. Tantra has to be practiced within a holy ambience, whether in a forest, a cave, a temple or even on a stage. That is why Bharata insists that totality of purpose and objectives can be achieved only when the consecratory rites are complied with and the artiste and spectators rise up to that occasion of maintaining the vibratory filed. Whatever be the scientific theory, it comes into relevance and importance if and only when it is practiced. Discipline is
but an indispensable characteristic as there is need for indoctrination and instruction, system and orderliness, training and control, rules and codes. An art is an expression of creative skill, aptitude, talent and expertise but necessitates the technique, the craftsmanship, the science behind it which codifies and provides the keys to this. Latent raw material in the human being is grouped in this manner. The art and the Science are hence co-existing and this is obvious when we observe arts as Bharatanātyam. Tantras that prescribe scientific plans of actions have been embellished over ages by the seers using their own aptitude, skills, intuition and beliefs or these Tantras would not have been this popular or practicable. Just as a scientist acts finally with readings coupled with his own intelligence, Tantra or Nātya speak volumes of this truth.

True knowledge of any subject can be acquired only when one realizes through discovery and intuition...........EUREKA!! I have known it!

The endeavour here has been to establish a correlation between Nātya and Tantra and it is leads towards establishing the common goals of the two. Nātya gives the opportunity to perform a kind of magic, stories retold through ages, yet having aesthetic appeal, value and relevance to society and spreading social upliftment and a positive message. Nātya is co-related to Tantrā in every aspect. Our artistic talent is harnessed scientifically towards presenting an artistic performance. Tantra comes from the Sanskrit verbal root tan, meaning ‘to weave’. Nātya Śāstra is Nātya Tantra as every chapter is linked like a ‘loom’ wherein threads are woven diligently to create the canvas of drama. Tra comes from trayate, which means ‘to liberate’ from illusion or māya.

Both Tantra and Nātya are enabling us to do action in this world and at the same time, they have an enormous presence of the other-worldly with surrender to super-consciousness. This means that while one is on this world and of this world, one can still remain outside this world. It is the highest order -belong to the world by dwelling but try not to get possessed by delving in it.
Naty and Tantra are not about leaving life but about weaving the realities of life with truth. Once you remove all false notions and inhibitions, conditioning and education, then you have a raw human being, truly spiritual. When we carry too much baggage of definitions and conditions imposed by society, we cannot turn towards spirituality because we will limit ourselves within the lines of what has been taught to us. The person who begins following religion enjoys the beauty of rituals, but the essence is spiritual. When you begin to dissect you somehow do not genuinely enjoy.

Tantra is a way of life itself and Nātya reflects life itself. Both characterize a metamorphosis of dualism and monism. One has to be free in mind and spirit to attain supreme bliss of spirituality leaving aside dogma but again, with discipline which is the channel. We absorb Tantra so that it becomes part of us. The technique of Tantra creates vibrations from nature / prakriti, but if we then use it for something that goes against nature, the negative consequences will backfire. The working pattern of nature using energy is at times altered but not changing it as this would mean interfering with the elements.

Bharatyanatyam is considered one of the most beautiful forms of dance in the world and a yoga in itself. Yoga in India from time immemorial is considered the best medicine for good health and the unique corrective for many physical and mental ailments. Bharatanātyam is an art wherein every part of the body is used—eyebrows, cheek muscles, toes and so on. As one reads through the pages of the Nātya Śāstra, one is wonderstruck at the variety of every possible movement of the body and limbs conceived of by man and so methodically systematised and codified by the sage. In fact, that when we view the various styles of dance in the world, most movements are recognized already in Bharatanatyam.

The various schools of Bharatanātyam may differ—but this difference is just superficial. Fundamentally they are all the same and along with all other forms of
our art pertain to and pertain towards one spirit—a spirit that can be called Divine; a spirit that is omnipotent and omniscient. Because of this universal and spiritual quality it appeals to one and all. The painter finds colour in it; the sculptor, beauty in the form; the religious, a spiritual appeal, and the philosopher, esoteric implications. It is thus a universal art. As long as man can feel, as long as he can pray and think, this divine art will continue to live and capture the hearts of millions. In Nātya, there is an unconscious vibration created, forces of attraction automatically embellish the dancer when she/he uses the various gestures and creates geometric shapes and forms like pyramids to draw energy. A dancer portrays emotions and expresses ideas through the vehicle of her art. Naturally the portrayal would carry no weight if devoid of facial expression. ‘Tāla’ or rhythm, lies at the very foundation of all dance-forms. Without a complete awareness of ‘tāla’, a dancer cannot perform well. Inspiration is necessary for the dancer and this comes through the medium of music. There is music in dance and dance in music.

The dance-artist must enter into the spirit of every movement and gesture and look and should not do so in a mechanized and mechanical manner. She must merge with the inner spirit or ātman of the human personality. Her look and gesture and rhythm indicate this. She cannot express the soul of a bird, animal or a human being by exhibiting merely external peculiarities. She cannot express the Divine Soul by merely indicating the weapons or the ornaments of a God. Hence, she must, when dancing in accordance with Kriti (musical piece) enter into the bhāva (the emotional urge) which is the soul of the song. The excellence of a dance consists in the perfect harmony of soul and heart and head with eyes and looks and gestures and bodily movements and rhythmic feet. The dancer must weave Mudras into the dance as a supreme poet weaves words into a lyric. Only then can her intuition vibrant. Perfect poise, self control, symmetry and harmony are needed. Traditional art cannot rest on any artificiality but has to be originally felt to be rendered in a spontaneous manner. In Bharatanatyam, the traditional forms from Alārippu to Tillāna have definite contours and cannot be meddled
with, though even within the traditional boundaries there is room for the display of originality and creative presentation. Just as there are grace-notes in music there are grace-gestures in dance and innovativeness can be displayed in them. In the realm of abhinaya there is no limit in elucidating the songs taken up for presentation and interpretation through dance or to the freedom of the artist to invent new gestures to portray new situations, incidents and ideas. It is wrong to suppose that Bharata has fixed finally and rigorously in Chapter IX of his work all the finger-gestures in a final and a literary manner. He has nowhere forbidden new symbols and gestures for new ideas. There is as much ample room for the exhibition of Manodharma (aesthetic individuality and creativeness) in the art of dance and in the art of music.

There can be no dance without music. Music is an integral part of dance. Music can be very soothing to the nerves. It is known that once when a great musician sang a particular melody, it brought rain and another singing a different melody, melted rocks. We have anecdotes from real life centering on the power of the saint-poets ‘music’. If nature could be stirred with music, then surely the rational mind of man is bound to react instantaneously. We have melodies for the different times of the day, for the different seasons and so on, which touch the depths of the soul. “When you mention music in speaking of my temple it is because you have been visited by a divine analogy”, says Eupalinos to Phaedrus, as coated by Paul Valery. Plato, in the ‘REPUBLIC’ made music one of the fundamental disciplines of his educational programme interalia, highlighting the moral values that it entails. The foremost elevation of mind could be facilitated. The symbiosis of various instrumental styles, like percussion and string, balanced the contemplative with the palpable. The sound of the ancient instruments of Egypt kept natural calamities away. The vigorous shaking of instruments conglomerated an array of magical powers, conjuring that movement should never cease. Creatures should arise from the state of torpor, recharged to recapture and radiate the rapturous sign of life. The joie de vivre or the lively
enjoyment of life became communicated in the common jargon of dance and muzak. Music and Dance carry this Tantric flavour of tapping energy sources. Tansen could light lamps with his singing by creating a vibration in the lamp’s wick and fire ensued. Tantra is mainly a play of such vibration. Tantra, it’s connotations and practices and uses denote that a classical dancer is in fact practising a kind of symbolic and meditative Tantra too. The core discipline required, the directions suggested and assumed, the benediction at every stage, the concentration of musicians, dancers, actors, audience collectively enjoined by the spectacle and the end result of harmony lead to a high order of Consciousness. It is breathing, it is alive and also true. There is the hypnotic trance-like state and dynamic pulsating states in both Nātya and Tantra, thus giving an opportunity to enjoy the many while knowing tranquility in unity. Any fine art is an example of refinement in rendition. Art of superior quality touches upon both gross and subtle senses and gently vibrates the nuclei of artistes and awakens energy in the spectator. It’s spiritual essence and content are directly proportionate to the possibilities of transcendence and peace accentuated all around. In a dance drama, there is an extremely colourful, life-like spectacle having an excitingly euphoric quality that is infectious.

To remember the famous story of a boy on the 100th floor, watching marbles being played by children on the ground way below and wondering why they were pulled to each other; the boy descended to notice a curved pit that caused this attraction movement between the marbles. We all carry immense energy within us, but we are not aware of this. It has been accepted that a subtle energy body interpenetrates the physical body upon which principle, several medical practices like acupuncture are founded. Kirlean Photography of the 1970s captures images of the light energy emanating from living beings. In its higher phases, it creates the halo around saints. The subtle body has a spine through which energy flows out of nadis or nerve tubes. Chakras are processing centers of this energy and are vibrant with vigour in physically healthy, mentally creative
and spiritually awakened people. Sanskrit is called the language of the Gods as it creates positive energy to which the power or Śakti responds. Śakti has categories of Paraśakthi, Jnānaśakthi, Ichchāśakthi, Kriyāśakthi and so on. “When she, the ultimate Sakti, of her own will assumed the form of the universe, then the creation of the chakra revealed itself as a pulsating essence. From the void-like vowels with the visarga emerged the bindu, quivering and fully conscious. From this pulsating stream of supreme light emanated the ocean of the Cosmos, the very self of the three mothers” - *Yoginihridaya I, 6-11.* This is Sir John Woodroffe's (Arthur Avalon) introduction to a Sanskrit edition of the Kaulavalinirnaya in Sanskrit.

Some Tantric texts prescribe ways to derive specific results, catering to material desires like prosperity, accomplishment of tasks, winning over enemies etc. Thus, there are several Tantric Homās, Japās, rituals performed with such motives. Similarly, one finds that in the field of the arts, there is a great degree of commercial motive gained these days. Unlike the popular art forms that highlight corporeality, treating the body as one attractive force and using movement that express several themes or ideas basically with body language alone; in the traditional classical arts, the entire focus is on achieving spiritual satisfaction. It is the desire to reach out and enhance others that requires a microscopic analysis ensuing a macroscopic appeal and fulfillment.

Spiritualizing the practice of dance leads to this. Spiritualizing every aspect including the sensuous and erotic can also lead one toward enlightenment. Here lies the path to physical and emotional freedom but spiritual desire which would not actually bind in the narrow sense of the word. Universal Power of God can be experienced in many aspects of life. The principle of yoga [unity of jīvātman with paramātman] is fundamental to achieve this state. Divine love can be experienced in the unconditional love of a mother for a child, often a favourite theme in dance presentations. This kind of love in this world has the quality of being eternal and perpetual as man and his progeny, generations together, will go
on as long as the cycle of life goes on. Unique experience of divine love with the consorts are found in Radha and Krisna, another favourite theme in dance. The perfect love with the masters or Sadgurus in human forms is incomparable and elevates the lives from Prārabdha –Karmā. Again, devotional poetry is a favourite theme. The above instances are three types of Sringara, Vatsalya, Rati and Bhakti.

It is good for mankind and the world at large when the arts reach higher goals on a positive scale, but when the practice is diluted, the whole theory of sublimity would become a farce. One cannot afford to forget how it all began.

While it may not be difficult for artistes to either experience this ecstatic state themselves or accept that it is possible to attain the high spiritual states through Sadhana or dedication, it may be also transmitted to sincere audiences who are intensely connected to artistes with an intangible cord, the livewire through which Rasānubhāva flows. Certainly one requires some degree of spiritual background or inclination to be drawn into the spiritual energy of creative contemplation.

Without anubhava or personal experience, one will sink into a quagmire of preachings and teachings. Accept guidance through the Guru, who is His instrument and experience the practice with a clear understanding. Realise that YOU ARE responsible for YOUR own growth and must experience every reality for YOURSELF in order to reach the Divine consciousness.

A CONTEMPLATIVE DISCIPLINE AND AN ART PROCESS ARE CONNECTED

The human body is certainly one piece of classic engineering designed to enable positive physical and mental and above all spiritual enhancement. It is well upon the individual to understand, utilize and then usher in great sense of fulfilment. The Lord Supreme has gifted us this wonderful Yantra -our body and we have to
neither pamper nor neglect it but to generate, nurture and promote it's well-being. This key factor is noticed both in the practice of Tantra and Nātya.

The renowned Guru of Bharatanatyam, Guru Kalyanasundaram gives the example of the Tirumandiram of Tirumoolar to identify Śiva’s dance as a pure Tantra. Artistes of repute like Dr. Sonal Mansingh, Ms. Sashwaty Sen [foremost disciple of Pandit Birju Maharaj] , Dr. Padma Subramaniam share their views on this subject. They had the common opinion that Tantra which is the starting point of every religion is the underlying spirituality as also that meditational power that enforces Nātya.

According to the greatest doyens of Bharatanātyam, Balasaraswathi, "The greatest blessing of Bharatanātyam is its ability to control the mind. Most of us are incapable of single-minded contemplation even when actions are abandoned. On the other hand, in Bharatanatyam, actions are not avoided; there is much to do but it is the harmony of various actions that results in the concentration we seek. The burden of action is forgotten in the pleasant charm of the art. The feet keeping to time, hands expressing gesture, the eye following the hand, the ear listening to the master’s music and the dancer’s own singing - by harmonizing these five elements the mind achieves concentration and attains clarity in the very richness of participation. The inner feeling of the dancer is the sixth sense, which harmonizes these five mental and mechanical elements to create the experience and enjoyment of beauty. It is the spark, which gives the dancer her sense of spiritual freedom in the midst of the constraints and discipline of the dance. The yogi achieves serenity through concentration that comes from discipline. The dance brings together her feet, hands, eyes, ears and singing into fusion which transforms the serenity of the yogi into a torrent of beauty. The spectator, who is absorbed , in intently watching this, has his mind freed of distractions and feels a great sense of clarity. In their shared involvement, the dancer and the spectator are both released from the weight of the worldly life and experience the divine joy of the art with a sense of total freedom." The dancer learns the intimate
connectivity between the movements of the physical, emotional or mental and the spiritual realms. Nāda Yoga, or the meditation on sound is to focus on certain sounds and move according to them in order to achieve a certain state of consciousness. Therefore, the musical instruments used for the meditative dance in Nātya Yoga are the ones that can produce the mystic sounds described in Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras.

But as in any other field, a lot depends ultimately on the dedicated ‘Sādhana’ and devotional temperament whether Tantra or Nātya. The word ‘Sādhana’ implies that to attain a thing is to know it in it’s ultimate sense by BEING that thing and this necessitates substantial exertion. Sādh in Sanskrit is to exert. The dancer thus would become the dance or the danced. The Tantri unifies with the innate spirit of the deity worshipped. A deity has a new value after the power-infusing rites. The saints are always in a spiritually vibrant level of existence. Some of our temples of great antiquity ever emanating spiritual power were established by the great Yogis of yore. The rites are meant to heighten the spiritual level of the performing Tantris through certain prescribed disciplines and transfer the spiritual power to the vigraha and realize the inner energies of the deity. The idol is no more a mere stone or metal but a nuclear center of subtle spiritual power which activates the divine potentialities when one establishes communion with it through worship. The symbolic and mystical geometrically shaped Yantra is charged with powerful Mantrās in the forms of chantings, decantations, incantations and offerings. The whole ritual, prayer, worship suffuses with energy as the correct plan of Tantra is executed. Nātya consists of religious and spiritual allegorical presentations primarily. Although it’s significance according to Nātya Śāstra of Bharata is linked to everyday life representation encompassing nature, beauty and various characters; it’s ‘sine qua non’ is the sublime unification of individual and Universal spirit. The common coining of Nātya YOGA as synonymous with Bhāratanatyam is since ages, not without sufficient ground. The experiment leads to an incomparable experience. Nātya Yoga, popularly known as Dance Yoga, the all-inclusive spiritual path of action, is a combination
of mainly Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga with few elements of Hatha Yoga and many elements of Raja Yoga.

Those practising Nātya Yoga believe that the fastest way to realize all the intricate aspects of Bhakti is by enacting various ‘Lilas’ with devotional songs, which require one to master one's emotional states. One is expected to devote all one's actions to the Supreme as a sacrifice. The stage performances are an opportunity for the dancer to feel the pulse of the spectators so long as they are ‘sumanasa’, which require a great deal of intuition and self-control.

The dancer strives to be guided in every smallest move by the various ‘devas’ that are supposed to be established in various chakras. The shackles and barriers of the physical and material are destroyed and the Sādhaka transcends to a divine realm and with him also the closely empathyzing groups of people called the Sahrudaya Prekshakās. Those practising Nātya Yoga are expected to perform 108 karanas, in addition to standard asanas and pranayamas, as well as meditation practises that involve various visualizations that lead to the internalization of the dance. The number 108 is highly significant, again adapted from our worship, the sacred chants totalling to 108. Another number that is significant in Tantra is seven which is equally important in music, dance and yoga.

Analyzing it’s pure movement aspect ie- Nrittā, Bharatanatyam is a grand spectacle and has aesthetic appeal due to several factors. Though basically defined as art, there appears evidence of application of laws of science and mathematics even if not blatantly observed by many, with reference to movement, anatomical structure, callisthenics, kinetics or the relation between the body motion and forces acting on it, geometrical shapes, forms and designs, calculations of various rhythmic beats with their logical permutations and combinations. All these are required to be framed, composed, choreographed with scientific temper and carried out with artistic splendour and joy. Vedic and Tāntric incantation is a methodology of sound modulations. Nātya Śāstra exhibits a familiarity with the
notions of space measurement, sound intervals and metre and tempo of music. A lot of scientific study of the poetic works, meaning and interpretation, knowledge of languages such as Sanskrit, mythological epics and legends become a prerequisite for successful dramatic production. Bharata seems well acquainted with Patañjali’s Yoga Sūtras and the Tantra practices enumerated in these Sūtras. Vedic mathematics, geometry, shapes and algebra were developed. Any dramatic enterprise becomes worth cherishing only when it permeates into every layer of our mind, creating a humanized atmosphere, vibrating and gathering momentum to ultimately surge into the realm of spirituality. It is but for sure that both technique and the sincerity and involvement together contribute to the excellence in the overall body language of the dancer. Rasā, corresponds with the motor and sensory systems equally. The psychical and the physical work in confluence, each leading to the other.

Call it art or call it science? One is imaginative, subjective, psychological, creative and the other is technical, objective, testing, observing, experimenting, material, evidential, logical. Eg- An artiste would describe a tree while the scientist would give it’s dimensions. This application seems co-relative as one cannot do without the other. Reason as against faith or rather reason and faith. An invention, a creative design, plot, indigenous and original work presupposes the existence of other data, material, ideas, people, etc depending on the object. This means that a skill is employed in the process, an artwork. There cannot be invention of anything non-existing. Invention connotes a concoction while discovery connotes unexpected result of search. One who invents becomes a scientist while one who creates become an artiste, both truly meaning the same. The science and the art are employed together for success. Where from springs great art? From the abode of feeling, HEART, capable of faith which actually speaks through art. Wherefrom springs the science? From the region of the rational brain capable of reason which actually speaks through science. This topic can also be called alternatively, the science of Nātya and the art of Tantra as a co-relative study.
Indian art in particular having such deep overtones of religion and spirituality has to start with belief /vision and then arises the physical realm of ‘seeing’ and this is similar to the basic principle that any Yogi or seer would follow. Hence, it may take years to develop technique [steps, movements and Abhinaya using the limbs] as the body level of mastery has to be raised with practice while it actually takes just a few moments to get correctness in expression by the face when the mind co-relates with the enacted expression of the character of the play. The simplest feeling of surrender to the art and the divinity therein would evolve this process but it is seen that students these days aquire the skills of technique faster and take longer time for the expressive aspects due to restraint and lack of deep understanding of the stories or the element of devotion , inherent in the compositions. The similes, metaphors and alliterations that were created by the poets are even unimageneable for the students these days when everything is measured in terms of speed, tempo, grandeur and showcased for an audience challenged by time constraints themselves.

The Tāntric practice of kundalini Tantra Yoga attempts to unify Śiva and Śakti by raising the serpent power from the lowest Mūlādhāra to the highest Sahasrāra Chakras through special breathing and meditation. Classical dance forms originated with divine intervention and evolved from ages due to the introspection of sages and sculptures and images of temples surely possess a high degree of specialization with regard to exercises, postures, movements, attire, gestures and language. The form of the Padma-pada ,lotus -like opened feet and knees in half-sitting posture or “Arai –Mandi” is a replica of the Mahā Kumbh [the golden pitcher ]image wherein the Chakras [lotuses /wheels] are balanced well. Nātya Yoga with the Tandava and the Sukumāra dances has the innate seed to blossom into a fruitful tree. It is here that there is unification of Śiva and Śakti - male and female principles, matter and spirit, energy and consciousness are all in play during this dance. Pure Knowledge—Consciousness is Purusha (male) Śiva, the Self, and the equipments of the individual and the confusing
universe of endless plurality constitute Prakriti, (female) Śakti, the non-self. The combination of of Śiva and Śakti (Male-Female) is creation. This glorious concept, and all its sacred implications, the man-woman form of of Śiva - Ardhanārīśvara presents in art -form, the significance in realizing the macrocosm and the microcosm as the mere play of the ONE SELF in and through the non-self. Ardhanārīśvara concept in dance is obviously Tāntric  in name and form as it represents the oneness, equality, complemetariness of Prakriti and Purushā. The duality between male and female only exists in form and this unites to become one whole formless self. THAT THOU ART is the highest realization in Tantra.

During Nātya Śādhanā, a feeling of being One and the same, yet different ; different yet one and the same - can be observed repeatedly while eg- a Bharatanatyam danseuse is in action and is depicting the polarities like soft and fierce, big and small, beautiful and ugly, man and woman. Since we are referring to practices of Nātya, we can extend it to studying the choices open to the practioners, if we broadly categorise them as men and women. It has been averred several times that Tantra and Nātya are open to all people, irrespective of differences based on caste, creed, sex but on the whole we have more men practicing Tantra especially as priests while we have more women practicing Nātya. The austerities to be observed in temple worship make it difficult for women to take up the role of priest due to biological reasons. Yet there are few temples which do have only women as the priest.Nātya cannot be termed as only feminine or only masculine by nature as the origin itself gives equal footage to both these aspects as being incorporated in dance. Although, it is maintained that Śiva performed the Tāndava or dynamic role and Uma performed the Lāsyā or gentle role, their direct disciples imbibed the Tāndava and Lāsyā equally in order to master the dance drama. Śiva also is seen to perform the Kaisiki [graceful] style by Bharata and Uma is known to perform the most fierce dance as Kāli.

It is interesting to analyse this concept of roles assigned for men and women in the social context. Every human is made of both these components. Just as Puruṣa is mistaken by ordinary people to be male and Prakriti to be female, the active
dynamism is associated with man and the passive softness with woman since ages. On the other hand, Sānkhya reveals that it is actually Prakriti who acts while Puruṣa remains quiet. In this scenario of mistaken identity, women continue to be suppressed especially in Indian society and rare instances of courageous women wins laurels but if she violates accepted parameters, she is insinuated. Qualities of kindness, warmth, compassion are also extolled in a man but are appealing only if veiled in his inherent, habitual ‘manliness.’ Here comes a GENDER gallery of contrast and congruity. Today, if a woman could carry herself well with elegance and grace alike, she becomes a true beauty, if she exudes confidence, courage and determination, she becomes a true example, if she can fight a battle and also nurse the wounded, stand up boldly yet shed tears, she becomes a legend. But in the name of equality with men, if all that men do is imitated and women counterfeit their appearances to deliberately create a semblance as a habit, although in conformity with changing norms, it is rather a poor approach, betraying ignorance of the actual beauty possessed by them.

It is after all the dominance of Prakriti in her form as woman that makes it simpler for her to don many roles when compared to a man. Those days, women were not allowed to chant mantras, perhaps because of the fear that they would easily master them faster and develop spiritually much higher than their counterparts. The fact remains that the form of a man makes it more essential to develop spiritually when compared to a woman who already bears the supreme spiritual quality of an inborn “Mother” The corollary of the above is noticed in the world of Bharatanātyam as well. The whole universe is the dance of the Supreme Dancer, Natarāja, the ascetic yogi and destroyer of ignorance and evil. Ordinarily, the dance of Śiva, Lord Natarāja [even the dance pose] requires the highest brilliance, sheer pulsating tempo and a powerful vocabulary. If at all one is capable of reproducing this, then maybe one or two shades of the cosmic dance becomes visible in the dancer. This ‘Tāndavam’, performed by dancers, whether male of female, exudes delight and aplomb. The other dance aspect of ‘Lāsya’ which is the graceful and charming element is equally delectable but care has to be taken while
performed by a male dancer to see that this effect does not linger beyond the stage limits and seep into his personality, lest he gets a synonym of the crude word ‘effeminate’. To tackle the situation, a pragmatic reaction without emotional bias or penchant is essential. With reference to this, we see that in the Nātya Śāstra, the description of the Kaisiki style of the blue-throated lord (Śiva) consists of elaborate gestures (Mridu Angahāras, movements of limbs), sentiments (Rasās) and emotional states (Bhāvās). Actions (Kriyās) are called its soul. The costume has to be charmingly beautiful and the erotic sentiment (Śringāra) is its foundation. But Bharata points out that it cannot be adequately portrayed by men and women can practise it properly. It is being commonly observed that male dancers are keeping very good standards of performance, enacting various roles and challenges of depicting heroines of varied types. But the dilemma arises when the kind of dancer articulations usually associated with women, look exaggerated within him. As a result, people may refrain from enrolling young boys into this dance form as although subtle, any transformation affects the overall personality. Added to this is the difficulties usually faced by artistes of the logistic kind due to which we have fewer men willing to take up this profession. Kings patronized the arts those days but now, the conditions for the growth of these arts are not that easy.

Male dancers rarely performed those days but often taught as Nattuvanars. It is again related to the Puruṣa - Prakriti dualism embodied in the dualism of the human nature. Puruṣa [the macrocosm] remains unmoved whereas Prakriti [containing the Puruṣa’s atom or seed as microcosm] is permitted to oscillate. It was felt that a woman's body is better suited for performing this dance, while a man's mind is better at analyzing and teaching it. Learning from the traditional lineage of male Gurus gave the girls the best training to dance and blend the dualities cohesively. Bharatnātyam or any other dance form cannot be gender specific and has space both for the male and female and it is true that outstanding male dancers have come up during the last many decades. This is a good trend against the kind of popular dances seen these days in the fast-track world which
are so explicit that there is no need to suggest as nothing seems hidden or to be represented through a symbol at all.

Although bearing similarity to HINDU religion, considering the attire and the stories portrayed, Bharathanātyam is a dance form which speaks a universal religion. It’s intricacies can be understood by anyone with a open mind who wishes to receive. It’s beauty lies in the form itself which encompasses almost all possible variations of body language and idiom and reaches out to all clustered with the light of empathy flow between the artiste and the audience. The Vedic stories, style of rendition and appearance, although basically Hindu harp on a universal law applicable to all, commonly dealt with by all in mundane lives and propound universal truths of love, devotion, beauty, brotherhood and peace. Hence, the religious end here is characteristic of Vedānta, that all religions are leading to the same destination through different paths. The artiste dons many images and returns every time from role to role and has to maintain the involvement in the many parts with the one same base with equilibrium throughout. It is with years of such good practice that one transcends and sees the oneness below the surface.

It is the goal of a dancer to unite with the divine spirit through the medium of dance, trying to explore the higher dimensions and also obtaining a mystical experience. The challenge lies in demystifying this experience itself in order to communicate to the viewers. It is here that lies another core difference between Tantra and Nātya. Whether right-handed Tantra or left-handed Tantra [Dakṣiṇācāra or Vāmacāra], Śaktā, Śivā, Suryā, Viśnu, Kumārā, Ganesā, Dattāreya or any other cult or path, the practice is limited to self-experience. This can be shared with followers through dialogues, discourses, telepathy and meditation. This is transmitted by the mere presence of the enlightened seers [almost everyone who has risen to the topmost Guru level has understood and gone through Tantrā and it’s Yoga] causing joy, enlightenment and benefit to others in society. These Gurus often advise the path of Bhakti, the sweetest, safest
and surest in Kaliyuga, not without sufficient reason, and may offer Diksha to some devotees depending on the eligibility and also necessity for such a course.

The great mystics and saints in every religion, whether Vajrayāna Buddhism, Sufism or Hinduism have set the precedent and prescribed either prayer or meditation or both. Prayer, it is said, is talking to God and meditation is when we see, listen and feel God through our inner ear, our inner eye and heart for which the mind has to be in single-pointed concentration. It is not an exaggeration to say that a good danseuse performs the role of a Tantri, worshipping with Mudrās and offering the self before the Lord as the Yogi, the body harnessed as the Yantra here. The artiste reaches far and wide and serves the purpose of sages and worshippers through the art itself, an art which is a discipline like Tantra with scientific connotations and applications as well but is more popularly and used due to it’s appeal to the fine and subtle senses and the mind. Seeing the movements made by the practitioners of Tantra Pūjā, especially in temples of Kerala, we see the Mudras being used often to convey esoteric messages while communicating with the divine. The Buddhist monks of the Vajrayāna order use gestures of the hands while performing rituals and play instruments simultaneously. They [either the priests and monks themselves or people who are appointed specifically for these functions] perform ritualistic dances, some which are convulsive and others soft, before temple deities as a part of the temple worship, A supernatural meaning and symbolic denotation can be ascribed to all these traditional practices.

Although there were strict initiation rules in earlier times in all ritualistic arts that had extended to classical forms which have emerged in their full forms much later, this ritual became generally less austere and stringent as compared to Tantra initiation. The difference is also that Nātya Tantra with all it’s divine origin and intricacies is learnt, practiced, performed, taught. All the other Tantras are also learnt, practiced and taught but lose value if performed for an audience. An element of secrecy is always maintained in Tantra and none or hardly any from outside are usually allowed to observe closely, interrupt or mediate,
question or try to understand the methods that can mystify. The dos and the
donts when it comes to ritual, hand gestures, sacrifice, offerings etc. has to be
borne well in mind. Tantra Mudrās are few - Nātya Hastas are varied. ‘Viniyogās’
are many. At the same time, the healing potential of hands in both cases is
developed. One has to remember that when the Mudrās are taught, they have to
be practiced in privacy. Dance Hastās on the other hand, [which have originated
and become varied from the Mudrās] hold no such secrecy and whatever healing
potential they create or magnetism they add on, it is all simultaneous and
spontaneous in the dance execution. Dancers, immersed in the dance energy may
not be distinctly aware of what is the extent of positive energy caused by these
Hastās. But in Tantra, since there is no external pressure of trying to entertain,
trying to bring in others, trying to share emotions, the energy levels created in the
practitioners of austerities could definitely be of very high potency, electro-
magnetic and severely dynamic. The word Tantra also means to spread religious
knowledge but only with the truly qualified, devoutly sincere and adventurously
self-confident people who are willing to expand, explore and discover boldly,
with direct introspection and intuition, well prepared to answer the divine call,
join hands with the supreme energy that can create, sustain and destroy and be
free from the fear of death. Hence, all the more the necessity to observe the
regulations under the guidance of competent and positively charged mentors, else
the result could be threatening and disastrous. Wrong practices can churn out
negativities like madness, obsession, malpractices and hardly achieve any of the
goals meant from the Tantra, thus adding on the anathema attached to the word
Tantra. On the other hand, despite some degree of damage of authenticity of
Natya, being caused by those, who without sufficient knowledge or endowment
of the raw material [talent] still are practising and propagating misconceptions on
the technique or nature of the art, the mere exercise involved in the ancient art
could be in one way or the other beneficial and preserve it’s value from going
extinct in the modern world.

A modern student of dance may not even have traditional belief in the
popularized Hindu gods such as Ganeśa, Kriṣṇa, Rāma etc., then how is it even vaguely possible to know Śiva and Pārvati, Viṣṇu and Lakshmī, Brahmā or Sarasvatī. Our religious Gods and Goddeses are not mere myths or beliefs but are symbols of eternal truths that have meaning and power, way beyond the clutches of time or space. Our ageless and priceless traditions including our dances are harnessing these truths and hold a charm when mystified and an appeal when demystified through innovative methods. Lofty ideals and thoughts get conveyed and interpreted through an artictic and aesthetic medium, much to the wonder of the public. The principles of creation, sustenance, destruction as an endless chain is represented by the trinities and their consorts are their working energies. The origin of Nātya itself assembles all these symbolic powers and the essence is based upon the unity between opposing principles of soft and loud, slow and fast, Lāsya and Tāndava, Śiva and Pārvati. And obviously, when these two unite, it is Tāntra. Besides this, when there is spread of religious knowledge, it is Tantra. Nātya has been through ages, attempting to spread religious knowledge alone. Earlier on, they used to symbolize Vedic worship by symbolically treating the stage itself as an area of sacrifice. Ritual dances were in co-ordination with the chants and prayers. Events, episodes followed from the Purāṇas. Then after the advent of the historic and deified heroes whose lives were extolled as exemplary, Nātya borrowed from their epics. All along, the idea has been maintained that Nātya improves the lives of common man by offering entertainment as well as education. Even the songs that were specially written for the dances had a homogeneous composition, attuned to take off to the higher spheres. Later, love songs on the Gods were added, here again, treating the Gods as approachable, benevolent, lovable, adorable and sometimes fallible too, committing mischiefs and errors like a normal human would do. It is only later that, secular knowledge has been added on through stories on Kings, dynasties, histories and much later on through many other narratives, poems on topics other than these.

The rendition, having evolved out of a tradition such as these, should not become
reduced to an exercise that caters to entertainment and should be pointed towards positive release of higher Chakrās or energy circles. Dance gives ample scope to become a Tantri who is worshipping the deity. If Tantra is the Dravya [content], Nātya is the Rūpa [form]. Can there be any dance without sound or symbol? A meditative dance like the martial art of Tai-Chi and other trance dances follow the unheard music and create distinct symbols. In Bhartanatyam too, the silence between the music, the freeze in sculptures are all examples of silent speech.

In this respect, what Bharata prescribes for a Nātya enterprise is a wholesome, well appropriated mixture of many beautiful aspects. The same outcome of Rasanubhava is achieved as through the mystic practices of Tantra worship which use the principle of personification of Goddesses and Gods eg -through symbolic Mandala inscriptions and Thangkas [Tibetan Buddhism], inscriptions and drawings, deities and worship, charms and amulets energized with divine powers, Mudrās and gestures, veneration of the occult deities and holy chants and Mantrās, some of which are common to several religions. The point of communication with the divinities would happen while these divinities are created, manifested, absorbed [the order of these may differ from person to person] and projected to communicate with the seekers and followers. Each of them are charged with an almost dramatic expression of feelings of protection for worshippers, anger to destroy enemies, compassion to save the suffering devotee, love of motherliness and similar ‘bhāvas’. It would actually be the hand of Godliness, Spirit, Energy, Consciousness that would be acting through the medium of Śādhaka upon whom ‘Grace’ has been showered. This grace cannot be taken for granted by an ‘Ego’ but sought with absolute self-surrender by which alone can the Divinity accessed, tuned in and reflected. In dance, these divinities are accessed in first person by taking on their characters, roles, episodes and events, in second and third persons by treating as fellow humans with feelings of love, anger, fear, disgust, humour, wonder, courage, compassion either addressing them directly or communicating about them to others, all through their songs in praise and awe as well as songs containing any other element as the
theme. The dividing line between the dancer and the character vanishes for sure but comes back when another scene or character is portrayed or when the entire spectacle ends. In some dances, the dance drama extend to more than a day and continues and the artistes are expected to follow some rules until the course of the event in order to get well charged. Assembling together and decoding these through dance enables the artiste to reach the common man who wishes to view a comprehensive, enjoyable, enlightening work of art. Both inspiration and imagination will add on to completeness. Better the genius, the greater the fulfillment out of this. In this manner, the goal of uniting with divine spirit becomes possible as one gets freed from the material cocoon, the emotional web during and after the sublime dance. One witnesses the individual ego getting dissolved into the Cosmic Ego.

Bharata and all other sages who contributed to creating and preserving Nātya treatise definitely would have been masters over Tantra principles already. Although Tantra treatises became known and promulgated much later than Nātya historically, Nātya treatise whether written by Bharata alone or a host of many Rishis /sages, it surely has been derived from widespread and deep-sighted knowledge of past, present and the future. It is a Nātya Veda and a Nātya Tantra. It is a combination of all the other pre-existing Vedas and Bharata’s knowledge flows from the combined blessings of both Śiva and Pārvati.

The theories of Tantra and Nātya are to be applied in intensive practice resulting in thorough knowledge of the subject matter, mastery over oneself, the elements that one is made of and blissful happiness which are the prime goals of life.

"We can understand the evolutionary process from the transcendental plane to the earth realm through an analogous model furnished by modern cosmology. At the "time" of the Big Bang, the world existed in a state of unimaginably condensed ball of energy, sometimes called "quantum vacuum." Suddenly (and for no known reason), some fifteen billion years ago, a chain reaction occurred in this original
high-energy soup which led to the creation of hydrogen atoms. This event coincided with the emergence of space and time and the gradual formation of our spatio-temporal universe, with its billions of galaxies, supernovas, black holes, and quasars, and the cold dark matter interspersed between them. Within this unimaginable vastness are planet Earth and the human species—both products of the original flash from chaos to cosmos or, in Indian terms, of Shiva's ecstatic dance".[5]

16. The dance form of Bharatanātyam can induce such immense power in the practitioner that a sort of healing happens from within. The holistic therapeutic doctors are commonly of the opinion that dancers consciously or unconsciously open out the Chakrās due to the very movement involved in dance. This movement being stylized in the classical dances, there is enhanced channelizing of energy in a positive direction. Since the classical arts offer beatitude in a subtle, symbolic yet highly significant manner, there is generally a gentle transmission amongst audiences that is woven out of the artistes. Unlike the popular loud cultural forms that highlight corporeality, treating the body as one attractive force and using movement that express several themes ideas basically with body language alone, in the traditional classical arts, the entire focus is on achieving spiritual satisfaction. There is hardly the intention to derive this with any personal command at all as the higher command will drive forward every action making it sublime.

Healing through Chakrā—breathing exercises, transcendental meditation is commonly heard of these days. Dance is not just one such isolated unit but encompasses a whole lot of these exercises combined in a dynamic rhythmic style that is enjoyable and exhilarating other than the main purpose of being enlightening.

India being one of the oldest civilization in the world, it is obvious that its cultural tradition will be deep-rooted and closely related to man’s life, values and beliefs. Indian art has been almost always linked to its religion and philosophy. Although
trends have changed in the arts, the truly Indian has an ethnic flavour of joy, colour, unity in diversity and celebration of life. Be it is the fine arts or performing arts, the distinct differences in style and rendition merge into the universal principles of harmony, symmetry, beauty and aesthetics. In fact the last, aesthetics, is a subject that has been extensively dealt with by Indian Scholars, thinkers, sages and mystics in various treatises and shastras. The form and content given equal importance within the larger background of spirituality is what touches the soul. The framework of time and space in the physical and mental levels is transcended towards the higher realm of timeless and spaceless consciousness. Some of the best works in Indian artistic and cultural traditions are created out of single-painted concentration and introspection leading towards the domain of energy all over. They all universally talk of Rasā. The importance to Yogic consciousness and transmission of energy has been the greatest contribution by Abhinavagupta through his theory of Rasā.

It is without doubt that energy is the factor that spirituality is after, termed as Static Consciousness [Purusa] converted into moving, wavering nature [Prakriti]. Even the profoundest theories like reincarnation or life after death finds a place through the substratum of energy, because if the body which is a mass of particles itself has been dissolved and disappears, then what survives is only purest energy which lingers until the next mass gets assembled. We name this energy as Śakti and it’s atomic light as Śiva. Dance is Śiva and Śakti.

In India, art has religious and philosophical undertones. The Indian mind tends to interpret all happenings in the world in philosophical terms. And philosophy here is in turn closely interwoven with religion.

The present Indian society offers many facets of education be it the conventional education system, or the traditional Vedic system. The tastes of today’s youth on a fast-track are like the Mexican wave, the monetary and lucrative gains form the acid test of growth. Often the cornerstone in the development of children and
choice of careers itself is how much material is procured. Unfortunately, they are gauged on the basis of this dictum and get stressed out as a result. From one dance form to another, from the sublime to the ludicrous, The cafeteria approach of today’s quicksilver genset has led to a conflated identity and the canons have been replaced or released, if not subverted. The trend today is to conjecture a hypothetical presentation, a mixed bag which is flavoured with a touch of nonsense making any unequivocal interpretation appear unlikely. Lyrics chosen or written for dances ,especially in the glamour world ,are becoming colloquial and common place.

Dance is an art form characterized by use of the human body as a vehicle of expression. Dance has been described as "an exciting and vibrant art which can be used in the educational setting to assist the growth of the student and to unify the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of the human being”. Dance is an immediately instinctive, direct and natural ‘move’ for most people--no special equipment is needed. Dance may be used as one of many windows to the history, religions, and customs of people. Rhythm and movement are the life-breathe of dance. At some time or another ,each one of us has exhibited our emotions through movement as rhythm is within us .

A systematized and stylized form of movement and synchronized with rhythm, acquired through training, makes dance an entertainment on the stage. A combination of these factors have a therapeutic value. Indian classical dance, with its rich heritage and foundation of the Spiritual, is especially well suited for dance/movement therapy as it is an effective vehicle for the expression of emotions, authenticity, spontaneity and connectedness. It is popularly said that "Movement doesn't lie." Practice of yoga and allied contemplative arts including classical dance would keep one quick off the mark to all situations, astute, well articulated and energetic. The methodology and modus operandi is scientific although this art revolves in a beautiful and imaginative world. Dance is a powerful form of direct communication. It can be used symbolically to represent
hidden emotions, release anxiety and serve as a vehicle to integrate body, mind and spirit.

Nātya is a fulfilling Tantra of the highest order. It is Upāsana, Sādhana, Japa Mantra, Yoga with āsana, prānayāma, Viniyoga and Mudrā, all integrated with appeal to aesthetic sense as well. Rhythm is inherent in nature of which man is an important part. Viceversa, man is composed of nature as well, meaning that his life force, prāna, activated by the five elements of fire, water, ether, earth, sky along with mind and consciousness. There is an element of dance in every human endeavour as Tālā is the root everywhere. Cosmos, the origin of which is traced to Dhwani or Sound, vibrates with Tālā. Just as Śiva without the central vowel becomes Śava or Corpse, there is life only when supreme Nāda unites with Bindū. Sound waves unite with energy and rhythm is thus tapped. When this rhythm is kept as the basic quality of an enterprise, one can imagine the extent to which it can expand and create endlessly. When the causal force itself has become an identity of an enterprise, one can again imagine as Bharata rightly said –the creator of drama on this stage is likened to Prajāpati Himself. When dance is mastered, the essence of this spirit is simultaneously integrated into the body-mind system.

True spirituality in the arts highlights love, peace, co-existence, tolerance, positivity and is actually the fundamental essence of all religious of the world, beyond the shackles of regional and religious differences. The significance and glory of Indian music and dance lies in its divinity, purity and ethereal basis that gets portrayed through a myriad emotions using a variety of songs, episodes, epics and moods which are producing a magical ambience and culminating in a resonance of peace and bliss.

“Among the references to some of his contemporaneous traditions, Abhinavagupta’s reference to “Dombikā” is interesting from both technical and sociological points of view. This is performed by a single danseuse (nartakī) and in
short it seems to have been erotic in nature, designed as an entertainment for the royal audience, to win favors. It certainly involves mastery over music and dance, in which the prince is himself addressed indirectly or directly as the Lover.

Abhinavagupta then analyzes the results of performances from the mundane perceptible and the spiritual invisible levels. From a yogic angle the result of singing is not considered as tangible. But that of programs like Dombika, is its vicinity. It is merely worldly (laukika), thus being a gross physical object of pleasure to the senses along with an economic advantage. This is the level of perceptible fruits a). But Abhinavagupta himself criticizes his contemporaneous Dombika as not even fulfilling the above needs. Apart from the entertainment value and vocational advantage of these arts, Abhinavagupta glorifies the fruit of true art. It has an intangible fruit. The very entry of the danseuse (nartākī) is meant to please the Gods. The gratification of the spectators is the core of the subject of rasa in nātya. But it must cater to the goals (purusārtha) of life: dharma, artha, kāma and moksha. Otherwise nātya would merely become a means for living. While commenting on Pushpāñjali (“offering of a handful of flowers”) and rules regarding the theatrical Preliminaries (pūrvaranga), he says that while performing the dance-gestures (abhinaya) for Pushpāñjali, one’s looks must not be diverted towards the audience. It is not addressed to the spectators. It must be performed looking into one’s own soul. This lights up the core of the monastic philosophy of Kashmiri Shaivism. While enunciating the fruits of nātya and its study (phala-śruti), he says that the dancers, actors, sponsors, and financiers and spectators are all purified from their sins and attain unlimited benefits, including the realm of Shiva (Śiva-loka), merely through nṛttta. In the colophon at the end of the chapter, he refers to himself as a “a supreme Shaiva teacher” (maheśvarācārya), whose ignorance is being burnt by the three eyes of Shiva, which are the sun (sūrya), moon (candra), and fire (agni)”[6]

We could enhance our lives and those of many others by extensively
propogating Nātya Tantra to induce positive, united, healthy and peaceful living. In this age of speed, commerce, trade, material comforts and likewise a high degree of negative impulses and abuse, spiritual education would make a concerted effort towards conciliation amongst people. While painting, sculpture and other beaux-arts including architecture are static, music and dance are dynamic with relation to the means employed in expression. The former is grasped instantaneously when the artist becomes a ‘live wire’ and the latter implies an unfolding in time.

Nātya, a kind of meditation is intended to establish a link with the HIGHER CONSCIOUSNESS. Tantra is the ‘loom’ wherein threads are woven diligently to create the canvas of drama. Nātya is co-related to Tantra in every aspect.

Nātya Śāstra is Nātya Tantra.