The term Tantra has a wide connotation. Originally, it must have stood for knowledge which is spread - ‘Tantrayate vistāryate jnānam anena’ ie-by which knowledge is spread or developed.

Tantra is deeply rooted in and is the ultimate manifestation of the principles of ‘Vedānta’. ‘Nat’ means to act. 12. As per the Tantras,

Śiva - He saw, he thought - May I be many. From the Brahman with Śakti issued Nāda (sound) and from Nāda appeared Bindu. The tantras also speak of 3 Bindus - Siva māya, Śakti māya and Śiva-Śakti māya.

Śiva promulgates his teaching in the world below in the tantrās which exist in the form of dialogues between Devatā and his Śakti, the Devi in her form as Parvati. Śiva and Uma are again attributed with creation of Nātya at the behest of Brahma wuo appealed on behalf of the Gods.Tantrā and Nātya are common to all castes, creed and both sexes. Nātya veda was evolved as common to all varnas (castes), social or religious barriers.

Tantra is deeply rooted in and the ultimate manifestation of the principles of Vedānta. Bīja, Mantra, Mudrā, Bhutashuddi, Yantra, Kundalini Yoga, Carya or religious and social rituals, construction and consecration of temples and images or Kriya, meditation, Dhyanaya, Dharma or contemplation, Guru and Diksha, Maya yoga or practical magic and Sadhana or devout hardwork. The consecration of the Sanskrit drama playhouse too followed the ritualistic consecration before construction of temples or places of worship, propitiation to the natural elements and respective deities to ward off obstacles and calamities and the offering of obeisance to the Guru, the Nātyācārya by the Shishyās, the Pātrā, the teacher and the taught.

The Guru-Sishya [preceptor – disciple] relationship is an indispensable part of any Vedic and Tantrik school of practice. Though theory can often be gathered from books, a living preceptor, who has already trodden the path successfully is
essential for all practice. It is based on the obvious recognition that disciples who are without practical experience of real spiritual life must receive competent instruction from a qualified person. There is also the dynamic magic of initiation to be considered. The Diksha rite, in which the Guru transmits something of himself to the Sishyā often increases or manifests his awareness. This Guru-Sishyā relationship is a very intimate one and needs to be so for the Sishyā's success. Actually it is a two-way process, for the Guru, in turn, is enabled to have a more intimate and deeper understanding of the disciple, and thereby is better able to guide and direct the course of progress. To become a Tāntrik Sādhu, or a Hindu Sannyāsin, ie - one who has renounced, one must first receive the Sadhu initiation (Diksha) from one who is already initiated as a Sannyāsin. This is the initiation of World Renunciation, where the disciple repeats the Praisha Mantra after the Guru. Once this Mantra has been spoken, the Sādhu must never again return to household life in this birth. Usually, a householder, following the path of Tantrā, takes Guru Diksha from any Tāntrik Guru, whether Sannyasin or householder.

A Nātya exponent represents histrionically, various characters, situations, stories, emotions, events, legends, epics, heroes, heroines and so on. The presentation is an ‘acting’ combined with dance and music. ‘Mantrā’ the terminology means to spread (knowledge - religious) and save (spirituality). Prose, poetry, literature used in Nātya are substituted by Māntric incantations, rendered sometimes in a normal manner, sometimes as a solemn recitation and at other times, within the mind in order to emphasize physical silence to raise the spiritual contemplation. The many Tantras written by great sages, seem as a direct reproduction of the words of the Gods and Goddesses (namely of Śiva and Śakti). But most of the performed dance and lyrics are popular notes of saint poets of later times like the Bhakti cult era. Sanskrit plays of ancient origin, devotional songs and Nātya repertoire songs composed by eminent classical musicians are rampantly used for dance and drama performances. Other than these are the same dance-drama presentations of extradited and adapted
passages or chapters from Śāstras, Vedas and āgamas. The great epics and few Upanishads have found their place in dance and drama presentations. The Nātya Śāstra is the most ancient known treatise on drama and has the unique position of being the authoritative text for Nātya and its various sub-terms like Nrittā, Abhinaya, Nrityā. The entire Śāstra is extremely definitive but yet provides ample scope for elaboration, picturization, improvisation and versatility to the artistes who have to float with the tidal changes in culture, society and environment. Tradition and history are the roots but the outlook is amazingly modern and this reflects the broad-mindedness and practical character of Bharata who had himself gathered the eternal truth and wisdom of Nātya from the Cosmic dancing divine couple - Śiva and Pārvatī.

The relation of rituals too to Nātya can be observed through the commonality of devotional songs called Bhajans (written primarily from the 14th-17th centuries), Keertanams (devotional songs), and Aarti that are sometimes sung in conjunction with the performance of the pūjā. 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 fulfillment. The Lord Supreme has gifted us this wonderful YANTRAM -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 connection between the two-Tantra and Nātya -the latter employs the body and the various qualifying and embellishing costumes, ornaments and accessories like stage -crafts, sets, properties, make-up instead of the former’s Yantras. Devotional songs and melodious -rhythmic chants are rendered in the latter while JAPAS, HOMAS, MANTRAS are essential feature of the former. 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 like the SAHRUDAYA PREKSHAKĀŚ. The RASĀ is realized only when the life forces and dramatic stories are first
appropriated within and then transmitted across to the world around the Rasikās, Bhaktās and others, in creative, ecstatic and emancipatory ways. But as in any other field, a lot depends ultimately on the dedicated ‘Śādhana’ and devotional temperament whether Tantra or Nātya. ‘Prose, poetry, literature used in Nātya are substituted by Māṇtric incantations, rendered several times in a normal audible manner, sometimes as a solemn recitation and at other times, within the mind in order to emphasize physical silence and raise the spiritual contemplation. The consecration of the Sanskrit drama playhouse too followed the ritualistic consecration before construction of temples or places of worship, propitiation to the natural elements and respective deities to ward off obstacles and calamities. Offering obeisance to the Nātyacārya by the Śishyas is also traditional and obligatory, as in Tantra practice where the Guru’s Pāda pooja and Archana is conducted. Teacher-student lineage is indispensable and this ‘cycle’ is maintained with devotion and passed on [student becoming fit to assume the role of ‘preceptor’] for all beneficial purposes which ensures the continuity for such divine traditions. Thus Tantra shares many similarities with Nātya Yoga.

Analyzing the practised form of tantric worship, a kind of meditative dance can be already discovered on close examination. Traces of subtle ‘Abhinaya’ and very mild ‘Nṛitta’ with geometric body movements can be spotted here or there. But the methods presented are far more demanding in terms of repeated intense oblations, worship and ritualistic practices. Nātya worship on the other hand is varied physically with Vyāyāmās, Angashuddi steps and differs based on the Ashtakarana lakshanās or characteristics for a good Narthaki, Nartaka and Sādhaka. Tantra mudrās are few - Nātya Hastās are varied. The practical uses or ‘Viniyogās’ are many. The healing potential of hands in both cases is developed. Tantra seen in this perspective and within the Indian background has been mostly confined and restricted to temple premises and priests, religious rituals, spiritual practitioners esoteric and occult believers. It rarely can be accepted and divorced totally from divinity, both within man and the Vedantic
spirit. The relationship between man and nature, man and god, and man and
man (god as man here) are borne in mind. As a result, Nāṭya has penetrated the
modern society, breaking social, religious, regional and language barriers and
has appealed to people from all national origin. But of course dance or drama
weaves an already written story often.

A Tantra Śāstra paradigm (Nāṭya 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 Puruṣa and Prakriti - the complete,
WHOLE, an undivided ‘one’. The dancer thus would become the dance or the
danced. This ‘Advaitic’ concept keeping as the base, one has to indeed enlighten
others for which the path of Bhakti or if we may call - Viśiṣṭ Advaita or even
Dvaita at times have to be experienced and extrapolated.

Yet another important common aspect is the broad-based spectra generously
giving sanction to all castes - varies and creed and both the sexes to practice
these Śāstras provided they have the required potential and dedication. This is
unlike other vedic practices only open to Brāhma castes. According to Natya
Shastra, Natya Yoga was initially practised by Narada and Gandharvas,
especially by Apsaras. The birth of Bhakti Yoga greatly modified the Natya Yoga
techniques. In the medieval times, Natya Yoga was practised by the devadasi's
and some temple Brahmins.

Nāṭya Śāstra with its practical application has been uttered by the self born
lord Brahma. It is conducive to auspiciousness. It is gracefully regulated. It is
meritorious, sacred and destructive of sins. He who listens to this, he who
performs this and witnesses it with attention shall attain that goal which is
reputed to be the goal of the Vedic scholars, that goals of those who perform
Yajnas and the goal of those who make gifts beautifully. Of all charitable and
pious rites this has been mentioned as the producer of great benefits. Indeed the
gift of a visual art is praised more than all other gifts. When worshipped with
scents, unguents and garlands gods do not get as much pleasure as with the
performance of dramas. The man who perfectly looks after the arts of music and dance attains the meritorious goal along with Brahmanical sages. Natya exemplifies another right-hand –Dakshinacharya Tantra. The Puja materials symbolically represented are those used in temple rituals. The sages who are the Rishis of Dakshina marg are the ones who are included in Natya Sastra as those who received initiation on Natya in the early stages of it’s origin from Natya Veda. The relation between Natya and Tantra is similar to Sakti and Siva. The Consciousness and energy play with each other, both are interdependant.

In the thesis, chapter one deals with Antiquity and Meaning of Nātya and Tantra while chapter two describes the Process, Practices and Methods followed in the two fields. Starting from Tantra origin, traditions, relation between Tantra and Vedas, History of tantra, Hinduism, Tāntric Guru Dattātreya, we move on to Natya origin and traditions, ancient and medieval history, the uprising and then compare the two traditions with historical parallels and correlate the two traditions, focusing on the common Vedic origin. Tantra practices include mantras, yantras commonly used and their significance and the meditational aspects of the Tanmātras, the Cakrās, the Guru-Śishya parampara and Natya practices cover explanation on technique, styles, music, terminologies used in the Śastra like Abhinaya and introduction to Rasa.

Chapter three highlights the Place of Symbolism and it’s relevance to Tantra Sāstra and Nātya Śāstra. We have topics on SriYantra, Yoginis, Nādis, Marmās, Breath, Sound, symbols of Hinduism, Tāntric Yoga and Mudrās, Tāntric Buddhism, Nātya Hastābhinaya, the symbol of Sanskrit theatre. Chapter four is on the Schools and Branches of Tantra and Nātya. topics covered herein are Śaivism, Śāktism, details on Vajrāyana Buddhism, highlight on Malabar school, the rationale behind the distinct dance styles. the traditional repertoire of Bharatanātyam, the style of music, Kundalini Śakti, types of Gurus, the corealtion between the beejaksharas of cakras worship and the syllables of dance. The next chapter is discussing the philosophy of Advaita and Viśisṭ Advaita in relation to Tantra and Nātya. And finally the conclusions.
PREFACE

Why this topic?

The journey as a dancer at a tender age begins. The student is learning the basics, moves on to stories and gathers varied aspects of a dance form within it’s repertoire. The students starts performing and covering a wide spectrum, beginning to explore dimensions, experiments with different styles of music, also with styles having contemporary significance. As experience develops, one feels like plunging into something beyond. The question come - What is that element, that essence or that principle that connects ONE to the dance, connects dance to LIFE, connects one to audiences, crossing all barriers.? Is it the body owning a spirit, that is wanting to express something or is it the spirit that has manifested into this form in order to express?

One realizes through this journey that although one may not believe in the Gods which are unique to the various religions, one cannot disagree with what is believed to be the good, positive energy and the presence of consciousness, all these being ‘universals. How has the dance started, the history of the dance, it’s infinite quality, it’s correlation with Indian philosophy, the Tāntrik and Vedic aspects, the symbolic representation of rituals and worship? Tantra is acquired, passed on and practiced by only the chosen few and everybody cannot be considered worthy of being accepted by it like any other rampant science or art. Although considered non-Vedic by many, it’s roots have to be Vedic just as any other branch of study with both knowledge and wisdom and several Vedic scholars have been adding on to them and giving commentaries. Tantras are considered as the direct words of Śiva to Śakti, imbued by the Rishis and other Gods and then gradually these paths and traditions that became varied in practice but remained the same in principle, reached the world of men. This last stage happened in the post-Vedic period and scattered to all irrespective of their caste or creed. Which among these ie- the deity, the belief, the method, the
procedure gets attached to which human, would depend on the Law of birth and
re-birth and these decisions seem to be the master plan of a higher authority
already determining our routes. Sometimes we succeed and at other times, we
falter but again it is to be seen as to how we are able to work out our Karmā. As
the dictates of Tantra [the plan, process method], Mantra [the corresponding
chants, offerings], Yantra [the diagrammatrical representations of the deities] are
well charted and chartered, it is better to involve only when ready. In common
parlance, dance art is similar to a tonic, a common multi-vitamin dose while
Tantra acts like an injected vaccine, a booster. It is better to know, either
beforehand or after some time [it may become difficult to know unless one tries]
and only a great Guru can judge whether the voltage capacity of the conductor,
here the Sādhaka, is low or medium or high. Else we may have the case of a fuse
that detonated a wild explosion........ not rare to find at all.

The process of art experience for a performing artiste

The following writings are based on self experience as a performing artiste
practising Nātya and interactions to understand the perceptions of other artistes
and those who regularly attend concerts and programmes to form an important
segment of today’s audiences, who are also expected to be among the
enlightened.

Art experiences or aesthetics, as understood by various schools gives one an
insight into the goal of drama but how is this process achieved ie -the technical
growth and transition of emotional states and transitory moods. What are the
essential pre-requisites for this becomes an incessant quest for an artiste.

Several books on Tantra have been written which interestingly expand the scope
of the subject and obliterate unwanted premonitions. Every letter of such books
makes us want to devour the vast wealth of our knowledge and hungry for
more. There is a sort of an unquenchable thirst to know and know again........WHAT IS ‘THAT’ WHICH IS KNOWN BY THE MYSTIC? The brain
does her job of assimilating in this manner, laying the academic platform, doing the tough analysis of subjects and drawing impressions. But CAN THE BRAIN ALONE LEAD ONE FINALLY TO THAT? Not really,……… no, …….it cannot as it just does not have that acumen.

Could self – realization be reduced to purely a biological enterprise? A function of the glands, parts of the brain, the neocortex? A Sâdhaka seems to fail everytime she/he tries to derive or know ‘THAT’ through the biological manager. Just by putting the books to rest for sometime and instead putting on the dancing bells, the Ghungroos or Selangai, the attempt to know starts. The music starts, the movement begin, accelerates, gathers momentum and despite all gnawing desires to know, one cannot hold on to any desire any further when one merges with the music which becomes a beautiful wave. The feet act instinctively and spontaneously, the tinkling bells on them ring loud into the ears like a reminder that they are now on a divine journey. Are they like the bells at the altar?

The biological heart no longer belongs to the dancer as she became someone else, felt him or her inside and moved around in this new character’s role to perform a myriad emotions, fleeting across the entire being as she swung her arms, turned, pirouetted, slided, swirled, stretched and stamped her feet swiftly according to the rhythm, the moods, the stories.

While portraying so many varying moods, the dancer indeed feels being flushed out of all pent up emotions. Finally, SOMETHING lands into her being while she continued to dance in the world of stars and played in the astral realm. She simply feels it filling her whole being and becomes the Sânta Rasā, a feeling of nothingness, emptiness, zero. This zero happens within, it is a complete zero and it remains the only truth.

The infinite seemed to encircle all the finite contained in the drama danced.
When the body consciousness disappeared, the highest truth of the BEING that IS was KNOWN. This then BECOMES the many. Is it the entity - the dancer who gets transformed in the form of the many roles? But the physical form was long forgotten by her when the dance took over. Then how is it that she still can recount and recollect HER experience?

Who is this NEW ‘I’ now? This ‘I’ which raised its head to see the DANCER and show her at the same time that the drama enacted was after all, unreal.............and the only true real that ever could be, is and will be is this ‘I’. The world seen by the biological eyes disappears and is absorbed into the frame itself. The natural elements seem to vibrate from within, the sky made the dancer agile, the water made her buoyant, the air made her light, the earth made her firm, the fire made her sparkle.............

Is THIS something that ‘I’ had already known, perhaps forgotten due to ‘Māyā’, the drama of the changing world, sustaining myself as a false i, given a so-and-so name. THIS had become THAT and distant due to ‘Māyā’. The formless took a form indeed and regained connection with it only when the latter could tune itself through dance. With the dancing came the discovery of THE ‘I’ and i re-united with ‘I’............Brahman............. I AM ! Is it what is known in ritual dancing, trance dancing, including dances like Bharatanātyam which originated as a ritual itself? Similarly, The Tantri [the temple worshipper using Tantra as integral part of worship] unifies with the innate spirit of the diety worshipped.

Hence, the thesis to co-relate the two wonderful streams .It is important to convey the wealth of our land and culture.

The underlying truths are getting eclipsed by the jet age culture.

Students turn away from the art, calling it a mere museum piece at a nascent stage. Lack of prodigious prerequisites is another cause. They hop on to a mystery tour mastery over the news organs makes on remain sangfroid and
became sapient as a savant. The popular dances today meander around a canter, a flexion bespeaking a gallivanting culture the pivot being how the body can be catapulted with celerity. They are also pretty candid about this trend. Whatever it is, it is important to have the involvement of the spirit, ascribing relative definitions of it though together with mind and body in order to realize the true meaning of dance. From the world perspective, some of the essential aspects of western singing in bringing the refrain to a crescendo, the passage from monotone, all voices with same movement in unison to polyphony, a combined yet individual melody with harmonizing effects has been deduced from the primordial unity of the ONE ABSOLUTE principle and hence loyally follows one of the loftiest philosophies. Oscillatory movements, whirls and swirls have in dance have prehistoric antiquity, intrinsic in man and nature expressing myriad emotions which is why dance, which is as spontaneous and natural as breathing became the mother of all arts [according to Curt Sachs, World History of Dance]. Later, the classical, vintage period of refinement made the dimension of drama as a “catch-all” creating terms like exponents and expositors to practise and audience, readers and spectators to eulogise.

Dr. V.N. Seshagiri Rao, Chairman, Dept. of Philosophy, Mysore University, has guided with meticulous precision, punctuated with memorable words on Advaita. In the process of trying to learn from scientists about physics and spirituality, Dr. Venkatachalam, University of Michigan, gave an insight into theory of relativity in his own words. Although brief, it gave an idea about the philosophical basis of this theory of which we all are always awed. It was an endeavour to identify the unvariant as against the variable. Clearly a study to discover the unchanging absolute while analyzing the changing relative. Dr. Sudha Gopinath, fellow, ICPR, gave a valuable insight into the distinct aspects of Indian philosophy. Dr. K.K. Balachander, Retd, Mumbai Univ. has shared his views and discussed several topics related to this thesis. I am grateful
to all of them and to my close family members, dance students and friends.

An academician or an historian would not be satisfied with a prori conclusion and would want to avidly collect observations from a posteriori experience. An artist who is privy to the intricate and integral nuances of the art form evidently aufait with it, can recount and recapture the truest experience of the heart, after a recital. Nevertheless it cannot be the exactly an equal feeling, as very often the artiste would land on a writer’s block, posed with an inexplicable experience, close to the mystical kind.............