Chapter - IV

Schools and Branches of Tantra and Nātya

1. Hindu Tantra

The term Hindu is heterogeneous, as Hinduism consists of several schools of philosophies or Darśanās. It encompasses many religious rituals that commonly possess the common goal of attaining the divine benediction but yet vary in practice. The Hindu faiths, practices and philosophies have evolved from the Vedic tradition. It has many diverse sects and subsects. In this century Hinduism is widely and popularly influenced by Advaita philosophy that believes God to be infinite and incorporeal. Hinduism is ultimately monistic, which considers the One Reality, the Universal and non-dual Brahman, behind all forms.

Hindus venerate an array of deities, considering them manifestations of the one supreme monistic Cosmic Spirit, Brahman. Some Hindus focus on a singular concept of Brahman (God) with one Godly form as in Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Śaktism. Īśvara, who is one and only one, is full of innumerable auspicious qualities; He is omniscient, omnipotent, perfect, just, merciful, glorious, mysterious, and yet full of love. He is the Creator, the Ruler and the Destroyer of this universe.

It is said that the term Hindu is derived from Sindhu i.e. the Indus River in particular. The religion literally flows like any river would do. In the Rig Veda, the Indo-Aryans mention their land as Sapta Sindhu. Another perspective on these (i.e. dharma, artha, kāma, mokṣa) is that artha [material wealth, prosperity etc.] and kāma [affinity to family, sensual pleasure etc.] are to be pursued like a river which is bounded by dharma [rightful conduct, righteousness, etc] and mokṣa [desire to get liberated from the cycle of birth, and death through single pointed contemplation to God and self-surrender] on the two sides.

Sanātana Dharma- Eternal Dharma, a traditional name of Hinduism, alludes to the idea of spiritual principles, transcending the mundane and material, representing a realm of pure consciousness. Hinduism teaches tolerance of other
religions, as expressed in the Rig Veda verse:

ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti
Truth is One, but sages call it by many names
Rig Veda 1:164:46.

Advaita philosophy holds that in order to worship the formless Īshvara, the devotee conceives a physical form of God in his mind for the sake of worshiping Him with love (bhakti). Among the six darshanas, Sānkhya is the four runner for Tantra. Purely academic and scientific, Sānkhya holds consciousness and matter as the dual entities. Tantra replaces the terms Puruṣa and Prakriti with Śiva and Śakti but with the core difference that these two become one finally. Tantra has more practical value as well and is monistic in essence although several myriad rituals and processes that have evolved, prevail.

Other important scriptures are the Hindu Āgamās, which are texts related to rituals and worship dedicated to Viṣṇu, Śiva and Devī sects.

Hindu Tantras exist in Vaishnava, Śaiva, and primarily the Śakta forms, among others. Āgamās, Viṣṇuism, Bhakti movements, Pancharātra, Śaivite Āgamas, Nathas, Pasupatās, Dattātreya bhaktās, Stotrās all form part of the literature. Hindu tántrik literature include tantras of the Śri Kula, the Kāli Kula, mantra Śāstra, Vaiṣṇava tantras and tantras ascribed to other sects, including magic.

Sir John Woodroffe, who under the pen name Arthur Avalon seems to have learnt from a number of Bengali tántriks and pandits. Woodroffe who translated several tántrik texts and wrote other books on the subject in the early 20th century, gives another classification, the divyās (divine), vīrās (heroes) and pashūs (the herd). It is only in vīraśādhana, he observes, that latā sādhana has a place or work ie - sādhana in the heroic mode may include sexuality. All the same, some tantras, such as the Brihad Nila Tantra, advocate a type of worship called Mahāchinachāra, which appears to have no rules whatever.

The traditions in different parts of the large sub-continent may vary widely. Many modern commentators define tántrik practice as well. Hindu tántrik practices are broadly classified as Right Hand (dakṣināchāra) and Left Hand (vāmāchāra)
according to the rites that are performed. Right Handed Schools are said to use either ritual substitutes or to avoid esoteric and magical practices completely. Schools of the latter involve rites such as the panchamakāra.

Cults of Śivā, Śakti, Ganapati, Viṣṇu and Sūrya are popular. Many of the texts describe themselves as dialogues between Śivā and Śakti. The Hindu tāntrik divisions have one common primary factor ie- the importance of the Guru for the disciple or Śishya. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism all share common philosophical and spiritual traits with Hinduism in varying degrees.

Taking a broad outline,

"At one end of the Tāntric spectrum we have highly unorthodox practices such as black magic that go against the moral grain of Hindu society (and that of most societies). At the other end we have Tāntric masters who decry all doctrines and all rituals and instead applaud the ideal of perfect spontaneity (sahajas). Most schools fall between these two poles; they are typically highly ritualistic but infused with the recognition that liberation springs from wisdom, which is innate and therefore cannot be produced by any external means." [1]

2. Concepts and practices associated with Hindu Tantra

The whole Universe is a creation of a Divine Consciousness (Śivā) and his active willpower (Śakti). Māya, the illusory nature of the universe is conceptualised as Māya Śakti - the divine mother who causes humans to identify with illusory forms, preventing them from seeing the fundamental reality of their inseparability of the divine. Māya Śakti is held in considerable regard in Tāntrā and the attaining of ultimate realisation takes place in active concert with her.

The primary assumption is that everything is a manifestation of the divine. What is normally considered impure and immoral are thus accepted and even utilised in transgressional practices, to further spiritual evolution. This results in embracing of opposites. Tāntrā is widely recognized to be a system rejecting the orthodoxy of brahmanism and the hierachy of the caste system. It believes in non-
acceptance of the caste system, class or gender. The Guru occupies an indispensably divine position in Tantrā and the presence of a Guru is an essential condition for Tantric practise. Tantric practise is said to be a difficult route to enlightenment but can be simplified by an enlightened navigator, an experienced master who will initiate the aspirant and guide him in his spiritual journey. Yet another distinct feature is that the Dikṣā /special training or revelation of Mantrā etc. has to be maintained in secrecy. The oral transmission of the tradition by the Guru to a worthy pupil is a course demanding devotion, diligence, meticulousness and sincerity.

Tantra is, yet mouldable. It changes with each moment and environment. It especially depends on the nature of the practitioner.

In traditional pockets of Tantric practice in India, such as in Assam, West Bengal, in Siddhanta temples of South India and in Kashmiri Śiva temples up north, Tantra has retained its true form. Its variance in practice is seen where many tāntrics are known to frequent cremation grounds in attempts to transcend their worldly attachment to life, while others perform more acceptable acts. The difference between right-hand and left-hand Tantras is that the former propitiates the fundamental principle of the universal self employing symbolic acts of worship and ritual while the latter endorses the direct involvement in several acts, also of forbidden nature, the difference between the right hand and left hand tantras. But what is common to them all is the intense secrecy in which their rituals are kept and the almost godlike reverence paid to the Guru, who is seen as the pinnacle of mastery in Tantra. More wide-spread practices to which all religious people commit themselves are pooja and worship through devotion. At the same time, more occult yogic practices involving sacred rites continue. Tantra openly rejects many aspects of the caste system and patriarchy. Despite this, Tantra was accepted by some high-caste Hindus, eg- Rajput princes.

3. Features of Śaivism

Śaivism is a branch of Hinduism that worships Śiva as the Supreme God
Followers of Śaivism are called Śaivites, Śaivas and so on. The belief is that the entire creation is synonymous with the creator, both actually meaning that Śiva is both immanent and transcendent. This concept contrasts with the religious traditions in which God is seen as fundamentally different from the creation and above the creation. Śaivism acknowledges the existence of many other deities but these are all manifestations of the Supreme One. This type of spiritual view is called Monistic Theism. Śaivites believe in the formless and hence, the devotees often worship Śiva in the form of a lingam, symbolizing the entire universe. The anthropomorphic manifestation is Natarāja, the Divine Dancer who dances with dynamism throughout boundless time and space to create, sustain and destroy the universe. Yet another benevolent, eloquent and meditative form is that of the south-facing Dakśinamurti, the silent teacher. The Dhyāna Mudra where the tips of the thumb and index finger touch each other, the mounds of GURU and ŚUKRA are joined, again symbolic of unity of male and female principles resulting in perfect balance and control over senses. There is also Hari-Harā, half-Śiva and half-Visnu; and Bhairava, who wields the trishula, the trident symbolizing desire, action and wisdom. Śiva can create the Universe by His Sankalpa –penance. From the fifty-two sounds of Śiva’s Damaru [the hour-glass shaped instrument that He plays] were created the original sounds or bija-mantras which created the Universe. The entire Universe is Natarāja’s school and playground of dance. He is the dancer as well as the ‘spectator’. When the dance begins, its sound accelerates the world’s activity and when it stops, the world gets absorbed and HE remains in ATMANAND.

It is relevant to note that the twelve Jyotirlingas’ shrines in our country are among the most important for Śaivites. Major theological schools of Śaivism include Kashmir Śaivism, Śaiva Siddhanta and Viraśaivism. It is believed that the greatest author on the Śaiva religion writing in Sanskrit was Abhinavagupta, from Srinagar, Kashmir, c. 1000 CE who is acclaimed for his equally brilliant contributions to study of Nātya Śāstra.

“Resounding with music and dance and surrounded by bands of Yoginis and
Siddhās. This pen-picture highlights the image of Abhinavagupta as a Tantrika and Yogi, teacher and artist. The notions of Śabda, Nāda and Nātya, Dhvani and Rasā acquire in Abhinavagupta a characteristic depth on account of their suggestive reverberations within the grand philosophical universe he helped to systematize and elaborate. In fact, it could be said without exaggeration that Indian philosophical thinking reached its highest peak in the writings of Abhinava. His practical and theoretical interest in the arts led him to lay down the abiding foundations of a truly Indian aesthetic.” [2]

Saiva Siddanta-

The Tirumandiram of Sri. Tirumular contains certain chapters which describe the Dance of Shiva in such powerful, devotional and beautiful verses that we can well establish Natarāja –the King of Dance as THE Causal Spirit WHO [giving a ‘personal’ touch to the ‘impersonal’] creates, controls, protects, sustains and dissolves/destroys to complete several three dimensional cycles. This yogi gave the famous dictum ‘Anbe’ Sivam, God is love. The religious and spiritual path of thirumular came to be known as Saiva Siddhantam. Nurtured by the Nayanmars, it has played an important role in the development of Tamil culture and the dance form of the Bharatnatyam that evolved from the temples of Tamil Nadu. Central to this philosophy is the triangle of Pati, God, Pasu, individual sole and Pasa, the bondage. The difference between the three entities is real in existence, but they are inseparable from supreme Realty in Tantra to, verses 411 to 420 say that Nandi support everything in the world and verses 431 to 430 say that the Lord is the creator of mysteries Tantra Nine seems to present a picture of the divine vision which is the ultimate aim. Verses 2649 to 2721 describe the super subtle sound manifestation in the five syllable panchakshara mantras and that darshan of the dancing posture of the Lord is the highest bless. The dances are of many kinds and lead to jnanodayam (2813 to 2824), and sat-chit-ananda(2825 to 2834). Saiva Siddantha practices are highly systematize and deeply mystic. It seems the objective of Tirumoolar and all saints of the same order to be able to see this dance of the Lord through deep penance, concentration and yogic postures and
breathing, hand gestures and subtle communication with divinity. The height at which this dance is placed calls for purest devotion and a fine degree of practice indeed. Tirumandiram is an authoritative Sutrā and Shāstra and has to be read, re-read and understood by dancers of this divine art of Bharatanātyam. This saint who is believed to have travelled actually from the north and then settled in the south before giving such a text is another example of a yogic scholar just like Abhinavagupta, practicing Tantrā and simultaneously well aware of Nātya.

4. The rituals
According to Śaivas, Śiva is experienced in the Nirbij Samādhi state as the attributeless form, nirgunarupa ie-Parameśwara Himself. Śiva is the supreme God among the trinity - Brahma, Vishnu and Śiva. His consort Pārvati, his sons Ganapati and Murugan are also worshipped in the temples. One of the most famous hymns to Śiva in the Vedās is the Sri Rudram. The foremost Śaivite Vedic Mantra is the five-syllabled “Aum Namah Śivāya.” The sacred syllable Om is used during the worship profusely. The five syllabled word Na-ma-si-vā-ya is considered holy and devotees consider it their duty to repeat it several times. Certain portions of the Vedās such as Rudram and Chamakam are adoratory to Śiva. The sacred ash, Bhasma, forms an important part of worship. Śiva is bathed in it. This is distributed to the devotees who wear it on their forehead and other parts of the body with reverence. The Tripundra refers to the three horizontal stripes of holy ash symbolic of knowledge, purity, penance and also the three eyes of Śiva which are the sun, moon and fire. Wearing the Rudrāksha during meditation is another prominent feature in this school of belief. There are many temples dedicated to Śiva. Their architecture, lay-out, the location of various idols, methods of worship, are all strictly prescribed by books called Āgamās and the Śaivāgmās fomed the roots of the treatise on dramaturgy.

5. Śaktism
It is only when Śiva becomes endowed with energy, Śakti, that He becomes active. The concept of Advaita or non-duality as per the āgamas accepts māya, illusion as the energy of the supreme Consciousness. Śaktism is a denomination of Tantric Hinduism that worships Śakti or Devi while not negating the importance of masculine and neuter divinity (which are however deemed to be inactive in the absence of the Śakti). In pure Śaktism, the Great Goddess, or Mahādevi, is worshiped as nothing less than the highest divinity, Supreme Brahman Itself, the "one without a second," with all other forms of Divinity, female or male, considered to be merely her diverse manifestations.

The Śaktās conceive their Great Goddess as the personification of primordial energy and the source of all divine and cosmic evolution. She is identified with the Supreme Being, conceived as the Source and the Spring. She is the ‘Controller’ of all the forces and potentialities of Nature. This female-orientation is marvelous and unique.

It was during development of Śaktism that the many religious Tantras, were written. In the Tantric view, one could simultaneously consider oneself a Śaktā (a devotee of Śakti), a Śaiva (a devotee of Śiva), and a Vaiṣṇava (a devotee of Viṣṇu). Tantra is strongly associated with Vedānta and Sāmkhya philosophies and is ultimately monist, though there is a rich tradition of Bhakti yoga growing all along. The feminine energy (Śakti) is considered to be the motive force behind all action and existence in the phenomenal cosmos in Hinduism. The cosmos itself is Brahman, the concept of the unchanging, infinite, immanent and transcendent Masculine potentiality, Puruṣa is actualized by feminine dynamism, Prakriti, embodied in the Goddesses who are ultimately the ONE.

Devi Māhātmyam is the chief text which combines Vedic, Upaniṣadic philosophies and develops the Tantric worship in a laudatory form of Śakti religion. The immanent Mother, Devi, is focused on with intensity, love, and self-dissolving concentration in an effort to focus on the true reality underlying time, space and causation. Ego and desire of the Samsāra [world] entwine the soul in māya (illusion) and it is Maya Śakti, alone who can free the bonded individual, thus freeing one from the karmic cycles of birth, death and re-birth. Soundaryā
Lahiri and the Lalita sahasranāma are other Śākta texts. These ancient hymns with their powerful suggestions, invoke the possibilities of our divine depths. When repeated, they activate our spiritual potentials and bestow benign effects.

Kāli, Durgā Parameśwari, Bhagawaty, Uma and Parvati are the famous forms in which the Goddess is personified in the temples. Durgā is an epithet of Mahādevi, or the "Great Goddess," the combined power of Parvaty with the other popular, wealth and wisdom bestowing Goddesses, Sri Lakshmi and Sri Saraswaty. Durgā is celebrated in the Devi Māhātmya. Kāli is the goddess of destruction and transformation, as well as the devourer of time, as her name implies (kāla means "time," and also means "black").

6. Śāktā worship

This is heavily influenced by the specific science of proper action, the Tantra. Śakti is worshipped in several ways in the course of a puja (worship ceremony), including offerings of sweets and flowers, chanting mantras, using mudras, and typically offering some sacrifice. Devi is most powerfully worshipped by chanting her core [bijā] mantra, different for each goddess. The Daśa MāhāVidyās [ten wisdom Goddesses] is itself an intensive study. The ten Mahāvidyās are popular in Bengal, Assam, Kerala and some other parts of India. In the Kashmir tradition, while Kāli may be hailed as the Ādyā Śakti, her forms in works such as the Tantrāloka of Abhinavagupta and the Chidgaganachandrika, entirely differ in name and image from Daksina Kālika, the Kāmakala Kālika, and other of her forms encountered in many Bengali texts.

Animal sacrifice is performed in some places in India, including such major temple sties as Kālighat in Calcutta, West Bengal, in Kāmakhya, Assam. In addition, according to various traditions, the animal is said to achieve a higher level of rebirth. The head is offered to the goddess, the blood is used to bless icons and worshippers, and the meat cooked and served to the worshippers and poor as
prasad. Those who are against animal sacrifice use a pumpkin or melon instead, which has become a popular and acceptable substitute. Śaktism is also fused with local beliefs in villages throughout India. In the South, she [Mother] is known as ‘Amma’ and in parts of rural Bengal, she is known as ‘Tushu’.

“When she, the ultimate Śakti, of her own will assumed the form of the universe, then the creation of the cakrā 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”.[3]

The most important material that accurately presents the traditional Indian Śakta worship and the position - of the Kundalini available today is Sir John Woodroffe's (pseudonym Arthur Avalon) The Serpent Power, first published in 1919 and reprinted a number of times since then. This is actually the translation of two important Indian texts and their commentaries, the Sat-Cakra-Nirupana, written in 1577, and the Padaka-Pancaka, containing descriptions of the centers and related practices, and Gorakshashatakam, which gives instructions for meditating on the chakras.

“Chapter XVII of the treatise says that it is only when KuNdalini is awakened that Mantra practice is successful. KuNdalini abides in the Mūlādhāra making a soft indistinct sound. By constantly leading her up to the Brahmarāndhra and back again the mind itself becomes dissolved (Manolayā). It is by doing YoNi Mudrā that Kundalini can be awakened and led up.

All defects in the Mantra are cured by the doing of Yoni Mudrā. Different directions are given as to how the defects in a Mantra can be cured. At verse 50 directions are given as to how the Śādhaka should pray for the boon for which he has been doing Śādhana. Verse 70 gives the Mantra of Mahishamardini. Verse 100 says that a good Śākta is she whose conduct in life is in accord with the teachings of Advaita. She should be devoted to the Guru, firm in her resolve and always be ready to do good. Her devotion (Bhakti) should be prompted by Sattva Guna. She
should be free from malice, be guileless and kind to all, skillful, dignified and helpful to the Sadhaka; she should be beautiful and young, noble with faith deeply rooted. A graceful woman like this adorned with fine clothes and ornaments and the like is alone competent to be a Duti. It is considered only right that the Sadhaka should employ, a beautiful and young woman to mediate between himself and his Ishta Devatā as a Duti or emissary. Verses 118/24 give the Mantra of Bhāgamālinī” [4]

Common variations in practices of the Śaktās include visualizing the deity in the act of sexual union with a consort; visualizing oneself as the deity; and/or "transgressive" acts such as token consumption of meat or alcohol. Occasionally, ritualized sex may be undertaken. This accounts for tantra's negative reputation in some quarters, and its association in the Western world primarily as a collection of sexual practices. Tantra had originally been looked down upon by orthodox people as antisocial and immoral. But positively, many today see it as a celebration of social equity and feminism. The ancient symbolic sense of the words dakšina and vāma was based on the distinction between the way of knowledge and the way of ānanda. The Lord of Yoga is usually, the Purusha, the conscious Soul who knows, observes, attracts, governs. But in Tantrā it is rather Prakriti, the Nature-soul, the Energy who is the powerful executive in the universe. The Tāntric Yogin pursued the aims of his discipline, - mastery, perfection, liberation, beatitude through mastery of this energy with a specific form of worship. Instead of withdrawing, he confronts, seizes and conquers.

In the Kaula and Vāmāchara schools of tantra the panca makāra, or five Ms, is a ritual sacrament in which several Hindu taboos ritually broken in order to free the practitioner from a conditioned mind created by convention. The five substances involved are:

1 madya (wine)
2 māmsa (meat)
3 matsya (fish)
4 mudrā ( parched grain)
maithuna (intercourse)

But over a period, as is the tendency with Prakriti, Tāntric Yoga largely lost its principles and became a thing of formulae and occult mechanism.

“There are doctrinal as well as ritual differences between the two divisions of Śakti worshippers:-

1. The followers of Dakśinacara believe in the absolute equality of Śiva and Śakti and hence their faith is called Samaya mata. During creation and maintenance of the world, Śakti element predominates and after Pralaya till creation starts again, Śiva element predominates. The followers of Vamacara believe that Śakti is always predominant and they do not recognize a separate Śiva-tattva, represented symbolically by the figure of Śiva lying under the feet of Śakti.

2. The Samayins believe that in the Kundalini-yoga, sahasrara is the goal and worship the Devi internally, whereas those who worship in the two centers called Kaulas [Muladhara is called Kula] believe that after reaching Sahasrāra, the Kunalini returns to Muladhara and sleeps there.

3. Samayins follow the Samhitas of Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatkumara, Suka and Vasista, called Subhagama Panchaka while Kaulas’ texts are Parasurāma Sutrās and sixty-four Tantras.

4. The Rishi of former is Dakśinamoorty and their Devatas are Kameśwara and Kameśwari while Rishi of latter is Bhairava and Devatas being Ānandabhairava and Ānandabhairavi.

5. The worship is according to Kalpa-Sutras of Vedic tradition and milk and fruits are offered. Kaulas have independent Tantric rites and offer Pancha-makāras. In many cases, harmless substitutes for panca-makāras like honey, ginger, coconut are used. In extreme sects, Uttara Kaulas, those abominations which have brought Śaktism into disrepute are associated.” [5]

7. Yogini Cult
Tantric manuscripts dealing with the worship of extraordinary goddesses called Yoginis contained worship in circles and directions to the royal patrons to promote this cult.

“And Siva said: If a KING worships the Yoginis with total devotion, O Devi: His fame will reach the shores of the four oceans, Of that there is no doubt” [6]

The yoginis who are dressed and skilled as dancers, possess magical powers.

Yogini cult flourished as an important manifestation of Śākta-tantricism and the propitiators acquired magical and supernatural faculties [Ashta-mahā-siddhis] through damsels called yoginis with a view to the destruction of enemies. These consist of ANIMA [power to become ‘minute’ in size], MAHIMA [become gigantic], LAGHIMA [weightlessness], GARIMA [heaviness], PRAKAMYA [making others comply to one’s wishes], IŚITVA [body and mind control], VASITVA [control over natural elements, KĀMAVAŚAYITA [fulfillment of all desires]. Some of these Yoginis possessed forms with tiara of skulls and headdress of snakes. Through the process of transformation over the ages the yoginis [sixty-four mostly and sometimes eighty-one and forty-two] gained supremacy particularly in the eastern zone of India. Matsyendranath has expounded it in his famous work Kaulayananirya which has become the authoritative text of the cult.

“The different shape of Khajuraho temple was due to the narrowness of the ridge on which it was erected. Each of these temples has sixty-four niches assigned to sixty-four yoginis. At Bheraghat, the number of niches is greater indicating the association of the sakta deities other than the yoginis. The existence of sixty-four yoginis in all these temples prove that the number sixty-four was prescribed here as for the sixty-four Bhairavas, sixty-four art and sixty-four ratibandha (modes of sexual enjoyment)”. [7]

The process of royal patronage in ancient India was a three-cornered aspect with the king, temple and the artist who was the craftsman, sculptor, musician, painter, architect or dancer. On the one hand, artists choose to remain anonymous and on the other hand, their social position rarely allowed them this choice as they
worked in the background for the King. In the temples, it is observed that the
dancing figures form protective circles (mandala) around the center where the
deity, mostly Śiva is placed. Temples like Khajuraho followed Śaiva Siddhānta
sect, the four fold way of jñāna, charya, kriya, yoga. The Ramappa temple has
twelve bracket figures, a-genius class, dancers in trance with rhythmic
concentration and seminal intensity. Another tántric feature of Guru offering
religious knowledge to disciples is an important motif in the temples complex and
the iconography

8. Buddhism

Modern Tantra may be divided into practices based on Hinduism and Buddhism.
Buddhism (also known as the Dharma or Buddha Dharma, meaning
approximately: The Law or Law of the Awakened One) is a practical philosophy,
focusing on the teachings of the Buddha Śākyamuni (Siddhārtha Gautama), dated
mid-6th to the early 5th century BCE. Buddhism spread widely in India and
propagated into Central, Southeast, and East Asia. Today, Buddhism is divided
primarily into three traditions: Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.

The spiritual discovery is called bodhi - literally, "Awakening" (more commonly
called "Enlightenment"). Any person who has become awakened from the "sleep
of ignorance" by directly realizing the true nature of reality is called a Buddha.
Śākyamuni is said to have been only the latest of many of these; there were other
Buddhas before him and there will be others in the future. At the age of 35, he
attained Enlightenment and became a Buddha.

Buddha is generally considered to be a person who discovers the true nature of
reality through years of spiritual cultivation, investigation of the various religious
practices of his time, and meditation. According to the Buddha, any person can
follow his example and become enlightened through the principles of
righteousness or "Dharma" and putting them into practice with a virtuous life,
and purifying the mind. The aim of Buddhist practice is to put an end to this mass
of suffering we call existence.
"I teach one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering" (The Buddha). To achieve this state (Nirvāṇa), it is necessary to follow the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Middle Way, eventually arriving at an understanding of the true nature of all things to put an end (nīrodha) to all ignorance and unhappiness and attaining liberation, Nirvāṇa.

Buddha’s doctrine of dependent origination is accepted by the various schools of Buddhism which states that any phenomenon ‘exists’ only because of the ‘existence’ of other phenomena in a complex web of cause and effect. It believes in Flux or change that is the constant permanent truth. Buddhist schools are usually divided into two main branches: Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Vajrayāna is sometimes named as a third, but is more commonly considered a form of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The Mahāyāna (Sanskrit: "Great Vehicle") branch emphasizes infinite, universal compassion (maha-karuna), or bodhicitta - the selfless, ultra-altruistic quest of the Bodhisattva to attain the "Awakened Mind" (bodhicitta) of Buddhahood so as to have the fullest possible knowledge of how to lead all beings into Nirvāṇa.

Emptiness (Śūnyata) concept can be understood either as the lack of a fixed nature of substance or phenomena and the inherent emptiness of all that is worldly, nescient and painful

9. The Noble Eightfold Path

Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering. Craving which is the origin of suffering leads to REBIRTH.

The way leading to the cessation of suffering which is The Noble Eightfold Path which consists of:

1. Right View
2. Right Intention
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

10. Emergence of the Vajrayāna/Tantrayāna/Tibetan Buddhism

There are differing views as to just when Vajrayāna and its tāntric practice started. In the Tibetan tradition, it is claimed that Buddha taught tantra, but as these are esoteric teachings, they were written down long after the Buddha's other teachings. These practices, scriptures and theory were transmitted to China, Tibet, Indochina and Southeast Asia. The Mahāyana can also on occasion communicate a vision of the Buddha or Dharma which amounts to mysticism and can indeed give expression to a form of pantheism (God).

The Vajrayāna or "Diamond Vehicle" (also referred to as Mantrayāna, Tantrayāna, Tantric Buddhism, or esoteric Buddhism) shares the basic concepts of Mahāyāna, but also includes a vast array of spiritual techniques designed to enhance Buddhist practice. Vajrayāna practice harnesses psycho-physical energy as a means of developing powerful states of concentration and awareness. These profound states are in turn to be used as an efficient path to Buddhahood. Using these techniques, it is claimed that a practitioner can achieve Buddhahood in one lifetime, or even as little as in three years. In the Tāntric or Vajrayāna aspects of this system, by harnessing the energies of the body, emotions and mind, including, joy, wrath and sexual energy, one realizes not the end in itself but a potent means to the ultimate goal of realizing the true nature of reality, emptiness or Śunyata. This is the path to attaining complete spiritual enlightenment and
relief from the endless suffering of life. It is unfortunate that modern age neo-
Tantra ritualizes only sexual practice often misrepresenting Tantra while
authentic Tantra literally sensualizes even a ritual.

In addition to the Theravāda and Mahāyāna scriptures, Vajrayāna Buddhists
recognise a large body of texts that include the Buddhist Tantras.

Vajrayāna Buddhism exists today in the form of two major sub-schools: Tibetan
Buddhism and Shingon Buddhism.

Vajrayāna is practiced today mainly in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia,
Kalmykia, Siberia, areas of India, and - in the Shingon Schools - in China and
Japan. Japan's Shingon sect, practices tantric veneration of the deity Vairocana.

“The original form of the stupa was a simple hemisphere with its convexity
upwards and crowned by one or more umbrellas. Later they became more
complex and elongated, especially in regard to their capitals. The details of many
of the Lamaic Chaityās are capable of an elemental interpretation, symbolic of the
five elements into which a body is resolved on death. Thus, vide figure in margin
modified from Remusat, the lowest section, a solid rectangular block, typifies the
solidity of the earth, above it water is represented by a globe, fire by a rectangular
tongue, air by a crescent – the inverted vault of the sky, and ether by an
acuminated circle. The Chaityās of Sikhim are mainly of two forms. Each “
chhorten” consists of a solid hemisphere – the true relic holder – which stands on
a plinth of several steps. The hemisphere is surmounted by a narrow neck
bearing in a lotus-leaved basin a graded cone usually of 13 tiers, which are
considered to represent umbrellas – the symbol of royalty; they are by others said
to represent the 13 Bodhisattva heavens of Nepalese Buddhist cosmography”.
[8]

The Bodhisattva ideal of Mahāyāna Buddhism is represented historically and
mythologically by Avaloketishvara, Tāra and others. The Dalai Lama and other
Tibetan teachers use this power exclusively to help others.
Tibetan Lāmas, the priests use bells, the drum, a bowl of the skull and other things during ritualistic worship.

“Having wiped the ‘mandal’ tray with the right arm or sleeve, take a fistful of rice in either hand, and sprinkle some on the tray to lay the Foundation of the Universe of mighty Gold. Then set down the large ring, which is the Iron Girdle of the Universe. Then in the middle set down a dole or rice as Ri-rab (Mount Meru). Then in the order given in the attached diagram (Plate XI) are set down a few grains of rice representing the 38 component portions of the Universe, each of which is named at the time of depositing its representative rice. The ritual for all sects of lamas during this ceremony is practically the same. During this ceremony it is specially insisted on that the performer must mentally conceive that he is actually bestowing all this wealth of continents, gods, & c., & c., upon his lamaic deities, who themselves are quite outside the system of the Universe”. [9]

11. Tantric practices in temples of Kerala – Malabar School

The priests in Kerala include categories like Tantri and Sāntikas who undergo initiation to the pooja system by a qualified guru or a acharya. Such a Guru must be a sādhaka with mental and physical capabilities, thorough knowledge on scriptures, mode of worship, including the intricacies of the tantrā. The priests have to follow the daily routine like yagna, vratha, mandala mantra japā, nyāsa, mudrā, dhyāna etc. The esoteric mudrās are incantations, positioning of the fingers in religious worship, possessing occult meanings and magical efficacy. Various āsanas of yoga are incorporated and step by step procedure is followed. Specially prevalent mudrās amidst the Kerala Tantris, there are several unique gestures to invoke the deity. These are like Dehashudhdhi (Brahmānjali mudrās), Ganapati vandana (Vandana mudrās), Dhyāṇa (Anjali mudrās), Dikbandhana, Naivedya, Anganyasa (Astra mudrās), Anganyāsa (Hridaya, Śiro, Śikha, Kavacha, Netra and Mriga mudrās). Manasa Puja is through Jala, Gandha, Dhupa, Pushpa, Deepa and Surabhi mudrās. Galini and Garuda mudrās are for Sankhapurna while Avāhana, Samsthapani and Sannirodha mudrās are for Avahana.
Abhaya, Varada, Padma, Śankha, Parashu, Cakrā, Śula, Gadha, Kapāla, Sara, Chāpa, Vajrā, Śakthi, Kheta, Khalga, Jnāna, Yoni, Ankusha, Yoga, Navanitha, Murali, Vināyaka, Shivalinga and Oordhā mudrās are all used for Ayudha Nyāsa during Peetha Puja. Bhooshana Nyāsa uses the mudrās of Śri Kaustubha, Makuta, Kereeta, Śrivalsa, Makarakundala of two types. Lastly, during the Naivedya phase of Prānahuti are the Prāna, Apāna, Vyāna, Udāna and Samāna mudrās.

Even the three gunās of shruśti, sthithi and samhāra are represented in the rites through various mudras. Palms are clapped at three points, the eight directions are propitiated, breathing exercises are practiced and parts of the body are assumed to be re-born , having the qualities of the deity. Concluding into the atmaradhana or the self-pooja ,this kind of worship enlightens us on the importance given to the body and the mind being an integrated instrument, fine-tuned towards self-liberation.

The Tāntric Śāstra, based on Vedās, epics and purānas is called Sādhana Śāstra of liberation. Literally, these words contain mystical formulae while āgama sticks to tradition propagating worship of Śiva and Śakti. Samhitas are specially devoted to Visnu. Tantras very often derive from these two classes of literature and it is the Śaktas who strictly practice Tantra. Tantras relating to Vedic class is the daksina marga while non-vedic is the vāma-marga. Among the three important Sampradāyas in the country the Kerala sampradāya is certainly more Vedic than Gowda (Bengal) and Kashmiri. Of all important Tāntric works in Kerala, Śankaracārya’s Prapancha Sāra Tantra seems most popular. Yet another famous text is Tantra Samuchāya by Chennas Narayanan Namboodiripad. This basically deals with the rituals, temple architecture purification rights, meditation, festivals etc. Temples are constructed, sites are consecrated and the deities installed only in accordance with the rules prescribed in the Sāstrās. An important portion is the Valiambalam used for conducting Homās, Kalamezhuthu Pātu (ritualistic dance) and for performing arts including Chākyār Koothu, Ottam thullal etc. The mystical geometric yantra of Śri Cakrā may be secretly preserved in the dark
chambers in many Bhagavathi devi temples and worship is done meticulously by those who have traditionally mastered Śri Vidya deeksha. Kerala temples have the unique Koothambalam in the front and right side of the principal deity. Generally these are built on the basis of one of the Nātya gruhās in the Nātya Śāstra, the Vikrushta Madhya style. The interior darkness of the sanctum-sanctorum or the garbha-griha illuminated by air, dim burning of lights inside the parcel of space suggests beautifully the idea of mystery that envelopes the universe and the spirit that moves behind the veil of mystery, a purely tantric concept. Every space within the temple forms part of the body of the principal deity, both gross and subtle, sthoola and sookshma respectively. Coming to these sculptural images in these temples, it is interesting to note the aesthetic value given while specially carving the figurines of deities. For example, bow shaped eyebrows, lotus petal or fish like eyes, pupils like the full moon, ear like the conch, tooth as pearl, neck as a conch, shoulder as bamboo, arm as a sugarcane piece, foot as tortoise, knee as the crab, face shaped as a mongo or full moon etc are endless. Every details measured to perfection ensures the uniqueness in the deities. One cannot but appreciate the forms given to our gods. For example Ganesha sankalpa bears certain characteristics like his weapons which are the axe, chakra or the disc, club, trident, spade and in his hands are sweet meats, flowers and kalasās. Most deities possess abhaya or varada poses which offers blessings, protection, fearlessness and boons to the devotees.

Śakthi worship exemplifies the tantra mode to the maximum. The countless ramifications of Śakti is represented through the idol with the weapons, divine dress and ornaments and the manifestation and source of all energies of virtues as well as evil in nature. There are ten classifications of the goddess categorized under mahavidyās, vidyās and siddha vidyās.

From the above, we can inter-relate practices in dance, especially the hand gesture with a worshipful gesture of the priests of Kerala. In Kerala, ritualistic temple arts like theyyam, thullal, koothu etc have all along borne religious influences and artistic perception at the same time. Similar to these are also the ritualistic dances
or the bhootas in Mangalore district. Many of them have, even today preserved their traditions of being very grounded and performed in the temples or during religious festivals alone. In these dances practiced in Kerala temples the procedure of tāla or rhythmic beat is based on the works of Bharatā’s son, Kohlan. Tāla has three essential parts which are viz. kāla – time, kriya- action and mana-measure making it a rhythmic action in stipulated time sequence. Some take the view that Geeta or music is brahma and tāla is māya. It is relevant to observe that this Sopāna sangeetha of the Kerala temples follows some differences from the common Carnātic music in the mode of Rāga and Tāla paddhati or pattern.

12. Tāntric connotations in emergence of schools and branches of Nātya

Some of the earliest scriptures are the Śaiva Āgamās relating to the period before 6th Century B.C. and which seemed to have formed the basic philosophy for even the Nātya Śāstra. Although, the concept of the Tantrās were age-old, they actually became known much later only which is why Nātya Śastra remains the earliest treatise on a kind of worship or pūja through the medium of Nātya or drama. In the delineation of the nātya, the dancer who portrays these Gods has to represent each and every characteristic of the form in adherence to these deities of the temples.

“The Tiruvilayādal Purānam explains the meaning of Bharata as a combination of Bhāva (expression), Rāga (musical mode) and Tāla (rhythm). It was usual in olden days to begin a Bharata Nātyam performance with a rhythmic recital, which was called melaprapti. The musicians and the nattuwanar conducted this introduction and certain special rāgas and tālas were prescribed for it. Beginning with drumming on the mridangam, the instruments would be played and then the nattuwanar would beat the time with the jalrai (cymbals) and recite the sollukattus (rhythmic syllables). In between, a song of invocation called the thodaya would be sung. This was followed by more sollukattus and a mangalam.
Then the four fundamental rhythmic syllabi tha, dhi, nom were recited in various time measures, which ended the preliminary ritual, before the dancer entered”.

Devi Bhāgavatham says that worship is of two kinds – External and Internal, External is itself divided as Vedic and Tāntric, but both streams being closely intermingled. Vedic Yajna and Tāntrik Pūja have the same aim, Vedic Philosophy and Tāntric rites complement each other on many occasions and we can observe in this context that a Nātya Pūja is derived from the Nātya Yajna. There seems no difference finally between the Vedic Brahman and the Tāntric Śakthi principles. Analyzing the divisions among Pujas we can categorize Nātya as one which is Śādhāra(with a basis), Naimittika (performed on special occasions), Sātvika as well as Rājasika (internally as well as externally based).

The spirit of worship of the Svābhāvika (natural) type, aimed at Brahman consciousness is expressed in Sri Śankarācārya’s Soundarya Lahari – O Mother, May my prattle be a Japa, hand movements be the Mudrās, my body movement your circumambulation, my food your Prasad, my sleep your prostrations and every sense organ be filled with surrender and awareness of your consciousness. A complete Pūja should have both External and Internal worship and Nātya Śādhana necessitates the same if it has to fulfill the highest order and Truth. In Bharatanātyam, the Rasā is generously spread to connect with stories relating to several deities in most performances and only when a typical dance drama is performed, there is concentration upon one or two deities. In Tantrā, the Ishta Daivam, the favourite venerated deity is either Śiva or Śakti or both or other deities singularly or as couples. Though there are small chants invoking deities of directions and smaller deities, the chief one is one or two alone. The Sāyujiya [Rasā here], the joy is internal, inconspicuous and can only be inferred by others. Sudden display of divine power, oracular predictions or convulsive dancing or trances etc cannot be considered as performances per se. The external tools of Abhinaya used in Nātya is not conspicuous. Āngika with the limbs, head, gestures [Angās are the major limbs of the body which include the head, chest,
sides, waist, hands and feet. Upangās are the minor limbs, which include the neck, elbows, knees, toes and heels. The upangās of the face include eyes, eyebrows, nose, lower lip and chin]. Vachika with the vociferous songs, Āhārya with the characteristic attire, Sātvika with its emotional states using the subtle mind, sensed to portray difficult emotions, all these are not displayed publicly in Tantrā but are present in subtle levels, are implicit and not explicit. Nātya Śāstra, the treatise has explicitly, categorically stated many aspects of dramatic experience but has also left ample room and scope for improvisation according to changes in times. There are many unsaid truths that are understood from certain passages.

“The verbal imagery provides the foundation and is the bedrock of the Abhinaya; the movements are the superstructure which a dancer creates. The capacity of the dancer to conjure up a whole world of similies and metaphors, distinguishes a competent dancer from a great dancer, because a great dancer is a poet in movement. Such is the power of the great artist of Abhinaya. Traditional Gurus have spoken about the art of Abhinaya as the art when the human body is capable of the smoothness of butter. The dancer’s movement is that prism which facilitates the seeing of the spectrum of the colours but it is never complete unless both the dancer and the audience experience the luminosity of the one light” [11]

The music of the unstruck mystic sound called Anāhata Dhvani heard by Yogis in meditation is the bell during worship equivalent to the ghunguru in dance. Yet the external symbol is only supposed to lead one into the resonance and reverberation of the unheard sound that is absorbed with the Anāhata Cakra residing in the heart. To make any practice successful, it is absolutely necessary that the Śādhaka is deeply and fully aware of the meanings of the chants or the songs as well as the correct procedure of execution. One should become imbued with the spirit of the worship and the corresponding manifestation of experiences of rituals. The Tāntric rituals observed are akin to those performed during consecration of playhouse in the Nātyaśāstra. We notice that the portrayal of a
deity as a common man (to make it easy for identification with devotees) is a feature in both Nātya and Tantrā. The latter in the form of Bharatanātyam has several dance songs which treat the Lord as a loving husband or even consent otherwise i.e one who has committed breach of faith etc.

Hence we can gather that the physical entity, the body form is never negated but it rather used as a Vāhana - a vehicle that promotes spiritual awakening. The embellishment of the body as an Apsarā, the use of Abhayā and Āngikā (with its ancillaries and auxiliaries) Abhinayā at the relevant places are all integral part of Nātya. In Tantra, gratification of senses and material needs without arousing limits of perversity have a definite purpose and meaning too. The Tāntric system is in its aspiration one of the greatest attempts yet made to embrace the whole of God manifested and unmanifested in the adoration, self-discipline and knowledge of single human soul. Dance means movement externally and internally, cutting across dimensions, creating a feeling of spacelessness by using space aesthetically and to the best extent. Nātya has a lineage like Tantra, bearing Vedic. The pūja methods of the Āgamās too came of age around the same time and one cant help notice the similarities of Āgamic Pūja and the Nātya Pūrvarangās. The latter performed by priests, including the SUTRADAR emerged as an indispensable part of a programme and is just like a dramatised act taken out of the Vedic Yagna but without sacrifice or fire but instead ,with flowers, worship materials and symbolic offerings. The Jarjarā, the weapon of Lord Indra that is used for the success of the programme is like Yupa used in Vedic times and the Dhwaja of the Āgamic times. The Lords represented on it is also the trinities, followed by the serpents like Śesha and Vāsuki. Here again, the similarity is noticed between the Jarjarā and the Cakrās that were emphasized later in the Tantrās, especially the allusion to the serpents on the lower levels of the Jarjarā and Lord Śiva at the top .

Abhinavabharati, Mahesvara Abhinavaguptacarya’s commentary, is a beacon light for the Nātya Śāstra because it has all the qualities of an ideal commentary.
Abhinava’s study of Nātya Śāstra, aesthetics in particular is most outstanding and gives a Tāntric edge which we can trace to his other opus, Tantrāloka.

Religious devotion, observes Abhinava, implies 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.

“The imitation theory is also clearly contradicted by certain arts – dancing, for example – which obviously do not imitate anything in real life. He [artiste] is immersed in the aesthetic experience to the exclusion of everything else; the task of generalization carried out by the poetic expression breaks the barrier of the limited "I" and eliminates in this way the interests, demands and aims associated with it. By side with the practical meaning, but one must not forget that, while the mystical experience is perfect fullness, in which the knots of "I" and "mine" are already completely undone, in the aesthetic experience the process of undoing has only just begun. Often a man, says Kālidasa in a stanza quoted by Abhinavagupta, "in the act of admiring in happiness beautiful shapes or listening to sweet sounds, feels in himself a keen disquiet. Does he, perhaps, recall, in his soul, affections of past lives, deep within his spirit without his knowledge?" The disquiet to which Kālidasa alludes, is, observes Abhinavagupta, an unobjectified desire; it corresponds to what is, metaphysically, the desire which induces consciousness to deny its original fullness and to crumble in time and space. The religious and the aesthetic experience spring from the same source. This is the tenor of two stanzas, almost certainly by Nāyaka, quoted by Mahimābhatta, a rhetor of the 11th century. A Kashmiri like his forerunners, Abhinavagupta unified the scattered voices of earlier philosophers into a masterful synthesis, embracing philosophical speculation and mysticism as well as aesthetics” [12]

A clear insight into the Cakrās indicates how the syllables in our dance movements like recitation of nattuvangam for NRITTA originated. It is obvious that the beeja/seed Mantras of each Cakrās according to tāntric Yoga were very well known and practiced by the sages of yore and were absorbed into dances.
“Just as a flower born of magic, has, as its essence, solely the present, it is correlated neither with what came before nor with what comes after......... Ordinary life also, is specially evident when we are assisting, [to a performance ] or during certain religious ceremonies (the tāntric cakrās), which must be celebrated in common. In these assemblies, the distinction between one's own Self and the Self of other people, which is founded on the multiplicity of bodies, minds and so on, ceases for the moment to exist, and, beyond them, takes rise a psychological unity, correctly realized as a subject unique and more powerful than the preceding separated individualities. The consciousness, which, considered separately also, is innately made up of beatitude, attains, in these circumstances – during the execution of dancers, etc- a state of unity, and so enters into a state of beatitude which is full and perfect. In virtue of the absence of any cause for contraction, jealously, envy, etc. the consciousness finds itself in these circumstances, in a state of expansion, free of obstacles, and pervaded by beatitude.

This is the reason why, during the celebration of the cakrā, 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”.

13. Elements that broadly classify the schools –The ‘Rationale’ behind the distinct styles

A classical dance school is a symbol of purity and a place for worship as in a temple through the medium of dance. Any indisciplinary action in the vicinity of classical dance training sessions would be close to being sacrilegious to the puritan minded Gurus who could not easily condone such lapses in those years.
In modern Bharatanātyam parlance, it is common to ask a danseuse which school she belongs. Broadly called the Tānjore, Pandanallur, Vazhuvur, Mysore and so on. The basis of these classifications are as follows-

Elegance and grace are the hallmark of this style which originated in the village of Vazhuvoor. Poses are often introduced in the pieces especially in the tillana to add space in time. The jatis or nṛttā units have more kārvais or gaps than usual to signify a sense of time being suspended and this gives the dance an exciting quality.

The body from the waist up is slanted slightly forward to give more dimension to the body. The adavus or dance units are done smoothly without too many jerky movements to give an impression of effortlessness and elegance and beautiful leaps mark every jati.

Abhinaya or narrative expression is subtle with more nātyadharmi or naturally stylized expressions and there is no obviousness in the presentation. The hands, eyes, and expressions are used in unison to express eloquently. Lāsya, or grace, is predominant in this style. Traditionally, a performance in the Vazhuvoor style begins with a Thodaya mangalam in praise of Lord Gnāna Sabesar of Vazhuvoor. It was made popular by Vazhuvoor Rāmiah Pillai who was the first from this tradition. In the Pandanallur pani, abhinaya is more ritualistic and as per the Sāstra (i.e. in conformity with the rules as set by the ancient texts) than realistic, so the spectators are supposed know the rules to appreciate it. The Pandanallur style of Bharatanatyam stresses on deep sitting positions, it’s lasya (feminine dance style) of padams is rather slow and difficult to perform, it is performed on three levels: in deep sitting positions, on the ground, in standing positions and while moving or jumping. The distinctive characteristics of the Melattur style of Bharatnātyam are that the feet are not stamped hard against the floor, a complex variety of sounds are produced by anklets, the items that were dedicated to medieval kings or patrons are not performed, natural (spontaneous) and highly expressive abhinaya, wide amplitude of movements, emphasis on sringara bhakti, emphasis on crisp adavus, accuracy of jathis/gathis, fluid variations of patterned
korvais, dramatic elements (characterisation).

Tanjore style or Thanjavur style, the sine quo non of which is "aesthetic grace", is a homogeneous blend of vigorous dynamism and lyrical grace. During the period of the Tanjore Quartet and decades thereafter, Bharatanātyam dance was performed both in the temple and in the courts of kings, princes and landed gentry. Apart from being offered as upacāra or a ritual, the dance was performed in processions in order to tune in the minds of worshippers towards God. In the first half of the 19th century the dance tradition was revitalized and defined anew through the contributions of the four talented brothers (known today as the Tanjore Quartet), Chinniah, Sivanandam, Ponniah and Vadivelu. By coordinating their diverse talents, the four managed to organize all the basic dance movements of pure dance into a progressive series of units of motion called Adavus, in a systematic order. These blended with sequences in a musical composition. These were well integrated and aesthetically creative and progressive.

Temple ritualistic numbers that are performed at the beginning like the Kavutvams in praise of Ganesha, Subramanya, Natarāja, Kāli, etc are a distinct contribution of Tanjore school and the recitation of the Nattuvāṅgam syllables in these pieces are quite different from the Sollkattus in other Jatis of Varnams, etc. The rich cultural hub of Tanjore gave the Tanjore quartet and several great musicians and composers. Tanjore Quartet's concept of a Bharatanātyam programme's format is meant to resemble the structure of a Hindu temple: in alarippu the dancer passes through the gopuram (outer gate), then in jatiswaram crosses the ardhamandapam (midway hall), in sabdam passes through the
mandapam (great hall of worship), and finally enters the heart of the temple in the varnam. The traditional order of the Bharatanātyam recital is certainly the premeditated and correct sequence in the practice of this art as it unfolds the spirituality inherent gradually through accentuating the finer aspects in the corporeal. The renowned Sri Panchapakesa Nattuvanār who was the Samasthana Vidwan of Thanjavur and Ramanathapuram courts was also honoured by the royal houses of Baroda and Mysore. An adept in Abhinaya he is credited with compiling in Tamil the "Abhinaya Navaneetham ", a monumental treatise on Abhinaya, a practical guide specially on Hastābhinaya.

His only son Bharata Vidwan Kuppiah Pillai was the prime architect of Sri Rājarājeswari Bharata Nātya Kalā Mandir, regarded today as an institution par excellence for Bharata Nātyam. His "Kamala Chakram", a lotus wheeled compendium depicting the matra -based complex 108 talas, besides the popular 35 ones, is invaluable to all students of music and dance.

The Kalakshetra style is a form based on Pandanallur and, to some extent, Tanjore styles and has been pioneered by Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale. Purely on the style of presentation of the technique [the scientific aspects] and the tools employed for expression based on the large spectrum of the dance style itself which, although has these styles, nevertheless, bears a stamp of the common title –Bharatanātyam. An Arangetram is a milestone, providing the structure and circumstantial thrust for the probability of a dance career as long as one does not rest on ones laurel.

"Upaniṣads propund -Devo Bhuta Deavm Yajet -Become a God in order to worship God. The spoken word was the manner in which learning was perpetuated, for the teacher is the prior form; the pupil is the latter form, and knowledge is their junction. There were rajadāsís, who danced before the
dhvajasthambham (the sacred flag staff of the temple); alankāradāsi, who performed at social functions; devadasis, who danced regularly in the temples and the swadasis, who only performed on special religious occasions like the kumbhābhiṣekam (the rite of consecrating by sprinkling water from a pot usually when installing a image). They are also knows as adukala mahal, natakamahal, and dever kanningayar and used to have sacred duties like fanning the image of God, lighting the kumbharati (sacred lights), in fact, many of the duties of the priest.

When the young dancer was first dedicated to the temple, a ceremony called bottukattal was performed. This implied the marriage of the girl to the deity, and a golden tāli, the symbol of marriage, was clasped around her neck”. [14]

The evolved technique includes Nrittā - pure dance movements, Abhinaya or expression and Nrityā, a combination of abhinaya and nrittā which is expressional dancing. The Nātya Śāstra-based dance styles were sacred Hindu ceremonies originally conceived in order to spiritually elevate the spectators.

14 . The Tradition followed by the schools

Bharatanātyam is mostly a solo dance, with two aspects, lasya, the graceful feminine lines of Uma and movements, and tāndava , the dynamic dance of Śiva , masculine aspect. The dancer has to concentrate on the character, situation and emotions and depicted with help of abhinaya and sātvika bhāvas and then the rasās spread to spectator thereby enveloping him in emotion that expressed by dancer and inacted. The enjoyment of spectator in whom aesthetic joy or rasā is created is the goal. Actor is directly in contact with character while spectator is indirectly in contact with character.

Thus Sātvika abhinaya, mental condition of dancer, as manifested as Sātvika Bhāva is the root of the intense feeling that generates in dancer while enacting the various bhāvas which create corresponding rasā into hearts of spectator. Nrityā
dance without Sātvika abhinaya would be soulless. Just as various tastes like bitterness, sweetness when added to food causes its Swāda to be enjoyed by person whose is taking it, it is Sātvika Bhāva that creates enjoyment ultimately. The dancer has to use appropriate movements of angās, upangās and pratyānga [the various limbs] and modulation of the Vācika abhinaya [oral transmission]. The descriptive [artistic aspects]part of the dance schools’ style may be similar as they are poetry based, yet the characteristic nuances and intricacies vary in the sense that some may be more Loka Dharmi [audience–friendly] than others that are more Nātya Dharmi [stylized]. These Dharmis are based on stylization of movement.

1) Nātya dharmi – It is conventional. It has get gestures, formal principles – which they should follow. Kathakali is the famous example among classical dances. The Pandanallur and Kalakshetra styles follow this to a larger extent.

2) Loka dharmi – It is more realistic. Bharatanātyam uses both styles in varying degrees, especially the Thanjavur style. Kathak has more realism as it narrates a story as if in common parlance.

The physical and visual manifestation varies from style to style according to content as well. Daily life and natural behaviour is contrasted with artistic excellence. The concept of theme is applicable to both Nātya and Loka to stylize a theme to make it super natural in form and content. The more you stylize a theme you get higher degree of Nātya and more you got to reality, closer is the degree of Loka. Purely temple arts, even Odissi are bound by bhakti bhava and hence the technique need not be stylized for after all they choose to depict the Premātma Bhakta [Love-filled devotee] longing to be one with ultimate and to merge with Him (Jivātma and Paramātma). The dance is therefore full of deep devotional feeling and dancer’s body is merely a vehicle to perform this great Sādhana. The dancer in such cases is a disinterested narrator who possess a detached attitude to the actual narration taking place. In the Puri temple in
Orissa, the devadāsis or maharis who trace their roots to the celestial nymphs Urvashi and Rambhā, use to have two years of training and were then married to the God of the temple.

In all such type of dances, there is a lesser degree of Nātya Dharmi while Kathakali inspite of being a religious art, forms a theatre of imagination, where actors dance in their otherworldly and fantastic costume. The gorgeous makeup through extreme stylization in movement is what transforms them into supernatural beings. Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa ascribes the Supreme Spirit with two states; the nature of the world (prakriti) and its taransformation as the apparent (vikriti). Prakriti is His invisible form and Vikriti is the aspect (ākara) in which He pervades the universe. Today, Bharathanātyam has a preponderance of women among the dancers and all these compositions aptly suit them. None of the numbers in a margam repertoire could ever be non-descript or monotonous. Aharya abhinayā covers all paraphernalia that adorn the danseuse. In Nātya Dharmi styles there is panoply of elegant and appropriate costumes.

Today, Aśtanāyika (the eight heroines) is a favourite theme for depiction. One example is the Abhisārika, who boldly faces the ignominy of being chaffed as fickle minded. Her illicit liaisons provoke insinuations from public. The artist has tremendous scope to suggest the expressions more than openly declare. Laconic speech, augmented by gestures, employed with brevity postulates the benchmark of a genre of the stylized ‘classic’. Ostentatious abhinayā is superfluous; hence it helps to refrain from excesses. Amongst the heroines the common feature is the element of adoration and love, leading to rancour, which however strong, makes her finally relent. Her obduracy in most of these songs would end in acquiescence. In the exposition of a khandita nāyika, i.e. a heroine who is furious, offended and hurt, the finer expressions would be glances of an unspoken reproach or a tacit condemnation of the capricious disposition of the lover. The expression of such anger should be incisive and not abrasive beyond the decorous parameters of the customary dance form.
The kings considered the propagation of arts as a panacea to their kingdoms. “The word Purvaranga, being a technical word connected with the production of a natya on the stage, shows that the art of abhinaya was quite in an advanced stage at the time of Hāla. The Avandānasataka, a Sanskrit Buddhist work describes the performance of a Buddhist nātaka. The description of the nātaka in this work is enough to show that the age which produced it witnessed considerable development of the art of abhinaya. The mention of the word ‘natācarya’ in the sense of master-nata or the professor who trained the natās (and was consequently the director of a party of natas) gives us good reason to assume that the art of a natā had by this time become important enough in the eyes of the people to accord to its teacher the venerable title of ācarya which was generally to be given to a teacher of sacred works like the Vedās and the Vedāngās etc. The treatise on abhinaya which can be called the earliest is the Natasutrās of Silālin and Krsasva mentioned by Pānini (ca.600 BC”. [15]

. In Sauśtavam, the basic aesthetic posture of Bharatanātyam, the back is held erect, the torso is bent a little forward from the waist keeping the body taut, yet relaxed. Bharatanātyam has two aspects, Lāsyā, the graceful feminine movements, and Tāndava, the forceful masculine aspect. Typically a regular repertoire would traditionally include:

1. Ganapati Vandana - A traditional opening prayer to Ganesh, who removes obstacles. An invocatory prayer to the Adi Devata to remove obstacles.

2. Alārippu - This is an invocation to the Gods to bless the performance and the God in the dancer’s self as well, which is what the movements denote. A presentation of the Tāla punctuated by simple syllables .

3. Jatiśwaram - An abstract dance where the percussion sets the beat. Here the dancer displays her versatility in elaborate footwork and graceful movements of the body. A joyful melodious dance, the dancer displays her command over footwork and graceful movements of the body.
4 - Šabdam - The dancing is accompanied by a poem or song with a devotional or love-theme. Mild expression now sets in as Abhinaya gets introduced. The dance, when it has a love theme, could be either Bhakti or Rati Sringāra [love for God or Consort]

5. Varnam - The center piece of the performance. It is the longest section of the dance punctuated with the most complex and difficult movements. Positions of the hands and body tell a story, usually of love and the longing for the lover. Varnam is the quintessence of Bharatanātyam. The piece-de-resistance, it shows the command of the danseuse in all the chief aspects and proves her mettle with elaborate movements and expressions. Usually, love themes are taken. Varnam, most important in a repertoire, musically has special features too. This is a special item which highlights everything important about a rāga; not just the scale, but also which notes to stress, how to approach a certain note, classical and characteristic phrases, etc. Though there are a few different types of varnams, in essence, they all have a pallavi, an anupallavi, muktāyi swaras, a charana, and chittaswaras. They are sung in multiple speeds. Danceable Varnams are Pada Varnams while those suitable only for concerts are Tāna Varnams. In concerts, varnams are often sung at the beginning as they are fast and grab the audience's attention.

6. Padam - Probably the most lyrical section where the dancer "speaks" of some aspect of love: devotion to the Supreme Being; or of love of mother for child; or the love of lovers separated and reunited.

7. Jāvali or Devarnāma – Love songs, short and sweet separation and union with lovers and various moods, songs in praise of the Gods and their descriptions, feats, historical legendary episodes etc; usually the compositions of Haridasas and other saint composers.

8. Thillāna - The final section is an abstract dance when the virtuosity of the music is reflected in the complex footwork and captivating poses of the dancer. - The conclusion final section is a breezy grand finale with aplomb. Accentuation is given to the five Jātis of four beats -Chatuśram, three beats -Tiśram, seven beats -
Miśram, five beats -Kantam and nine beats -Sankirnam and captivating poses of the dancer. The performance opens and concludes with the chanting of a few religious verses as a form of benediction. There are many type of compositions. Geethams and Swarajatis with their own peculiar composition structures as learning exercises and there are many other forms of compositions like Padam, Jāvali and Thillana and the Kriti which are Carnātic songs varied in structure and style, but generally consist of three units:

1. Pallavi. With opening one or two lines.
2. Anupallavi. The second verse, generally also two lines.
3. Charanam. The last and longest verse that beautifully wraps up the song. There can be multiple charanas.

The performance concludes with the chanting of a few religious verses as a form of benediction. The poets have beautifully waxed lyrical about many parables associated with mythological, historical and legendary figures. Odes like Tirupugazh follow a set prosody while dramatic presentations of epics, include prosaic dialogues. The Sanchāris in Bhavas are akin to paraphrases that amplify the meanings with varying interpretations. The jugalbandhi in Tillāna builds up to a fever pitch. This item is performed with a jubilant panache and ardour as the permutations and combinations of well-aligned steps fall in tandem. It is analogous to the northern tarana. Varnam is of paramount value in the repertoire. The various Sanchāris or transitory moods are homogeneously based on the predominant Sthāyi Bhava. The kings are praised for their chivalry, being archetyped heroes. In direct contrast the heroes in some of the Jāvalis or love-songs could be a mere renegade or a turncoat. The hero, the nāyaka may be projected as callous and indifferent to the wanton and forlorn heroine who pines in separation and yearns to unite.

Two Aspects

Bharatanatyam has essentially remained ekāhārya, that is, a dancer in a single
costume portraying indirectly or directly more characters than one, regardless of
their gender. It has two aspects to it, namely:

- Nrittā, or the purely rhythmic, which is confined to footwork and the
  movements of the body and the hands; and in which, absent emotion, there
  is no portrayal of sentiments, scenes or events; and

- Abhinaya or mime, which is conveyed through histrionics, body language
  and gestures and facial expressions, the suggestive language of creativity
  and imagination.

These two aspects are, however, not unique to this dance form alone.

15. Rhythmic Features of Nātya and the significance of music

Rhythm brings out the special charm of pure dance. The movements relax the
dancer’s body and the mind coordinates with her limbs. Rhythm induces the
capacity to concentrate and become single-minded.

Added to this is the joy of melody which, even without word or syllable, has a
special power to unite us with our being. Melody and movement come together
as well as compositions with words and meanings. All put together will enable
the expression of the myriad moods of Bharatanatyam.

Though Abhinavagupta was a great religious figure and a devotee of Śiva, his
scientific temperament is seen in his explanation for the term tāndava.

“The karanaś are said to be units of dance performed by Śiva according to the
Natya Śāstra, when Bharata produced the drama Tripuradaha (“The Burning of
the Three Cities”) at Kailasa before Śiva, this great God was reminded of his own
dance which he performed in the evenings. He asked Bharata to include this in his
production and made Tāndu teach the art to Bharata. Bharata says that the dance
art came to be called tandavam because Bharata’s teacher was Tāndu. While
commenting on this, Abhinavagupta takes on on a pragmatic approach. While there are some authorities who associate Tandu with Nandikesvara, Abhinavagupta says that the percussion instruments which produce sounds like “Bhan, Than” etc. are important for nritta. He reckons that the term tāndava is derived from the sounds like “Tando” produced through the accompanying drums”. [16]

In the myths of antiquity, music stands out among the arts as one of the prime sources of ritual. At the outset, each instrument appears to have clear symbolic connotations, because music cannot be dissociated from life or religion. The strings were held to represent various levels of cosmos. The principles of materiality and spirituality tune in towards a euphoric vibration. Music symbolized birth, fertility, education, ceremonies and so on.

Even the Greek music-god Apollo imposed harmony between desires and reason, by channelising human drives through a heightening of consciousness and spirituality. The origin of the musical chord signifies blending melody with the breath and sometimes a soprano and a tenor aulos or double – tibia were paired in practice. Apollo’s seven-stringed lyre evokes the seven vowels of Greek alphabet. The tripartite Goddess reigning the air, earth and netherworld were shown through instruments. The lute and harp are both seen to play in heaven and hell, the two fold aspects. The ambivalent nature, of existence in both celestial and terrestrial led to the division in presentation, emphasizing the superiority of spirit over matter and knowledge over sensuality.

“In South India, there are many varieties of time measures which are called tālās, and tempo which is called layā. The three varied speeds are vilamba kāla (slow), madhyama kāla (medium) and druta kāla (fast). In order to make the rhythmic times measures clear, six angās (limbs) have been devised: Laghu, drutam, anudrutam, guru, plutam and kākapadam. The Laghu is performed by one beat of the hand (ghatam) and three (or more) counts of the fingers starting from the little finger towards the thumb. It sign is I. The Drutam is performed by one beat of the hand and a wave of the hand in the air (visarjam). It sign is O. The
anudrutam is performed by one beat. Its sign is U. The Guru is performed by a beat and a circling movement of the hand to the count of eight. Its sign is 8. The Plutam is performed by a beat, then a circling movement of the hand and a downward movement to the count of twelve. Its sign is 1/8. The Kākapadam is performed by a beat, a waving of the hand on all four sides to the count of 16. Its sign is +. The seven principal tālas are Druva, Matya, Rupaka, Jhampa, Triputa, Ata and Eka. In utilizing the different time measures the laghu, drutam, and anudrutam are used. Guru, plutam and kākapadam are used only in some rare compositions. The laghu is utilized in all the seven talas, changing according to the rhythmic measures or variety known as jāti, that is in Units of 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9. These jātis are then called Tiśra laghu, Chaturaśra laghu, khanda laghu, Miśra laghu and Sankirna laghu, in each, a beat of the hand and finger counts according to the time measure”. [17]

Three kinds of Layās (tempo) are adopted called Sthira, Madhya and Druta (slow, medium and rapid respectively) befitting the gait of the different characters.

Bharatanātyam is performed today on the westernized prosenium stage in art centers alongside the continuous cultural events in temples as in Chidambaram, Brihadeeswara, Khajuraho, Konark, cave temples etc.

**Hence, the art has assumed both sacred & secular status.**

In the recent history of this art, during the height of the anti-nautch crusade in 1925, a seven-year old named BALASARASWATI was presented for the first time at a temple in Kanchipuram. The cognescenti present there were awestruck with her mastery at that tender an age. In the years that followed, Balasaraswati became a role model for dancers as she easily was the greatest classical dancer of her time. Balasaraswathi, rated as a virtuoso par excellence by the cognoscenti used to dance extempore, enriching the audience through exquisite expressions.

"Balasaraswati made the public Bharatanātyam conscious, not by conscious efforts
as a torch-bearer or a reformer but by the beauty and eloquence of her dancing. It was left to others to fight prejudices and stupidity, do research, delve into the past. But Balasaraswati made us aware of the living miracle of Bharatanātyam to be seen and to be enraptured." [18]

Balasaraswati highlighted the importance of music and said that the Śāstrās have confirmed that an individual dedicated to dance must be equally dedicated to music and must receive thorough training in both the arts. In an interview, she has also disclosed that in demonstrating the art of Bharatanātyam abroad, she has made a special point of showing audiences how delicately linked is the realisation of movement to rāga expression in abhinaya, including the subtle expression of gamakā-s, intonation of sruti, and the unfolding of improvisation in niraval. In the same way that we look for perfect blending of rāga and tāla and of rāga and bhāva in abhinaya, so also it is essential that the rāga and the sāhitya be perfectly matched and in accordance with the necessities of expression in the dance.

16. The school of Tāntric worship of the Chakrās

Both the Kaulās and the Samayins follow the yoga of Chakrā worship with subtle differences.

“All religions and disciplines in India which use largely the psycho-physical method, depend more or less upon it for their practices. When one does Yoga, this force uncoils itself and rises upward to meet. It is by ascending through these in our consciousness and receiving a descent of their energies that it is possible ultimately to reach the Supermind. This is the method of Tantra”. [19]

The subtle body is composed of seven cakrās or energy centres. Chakrā means “what revolves” and hence signifies a wheel. The cakrās are also called lotuses, as they are shaped like flowers and composed of different petals. Each petal of a cakrā relates to one of the prime letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. Each chakrā governs a certain element, sense organ, organ of action, prāna (life force), and function of the mind. Each has a physical counterpart through a physiological
system, nerve plexus and endocrine organ.

1. Muladhāra Chakra

The Earth Chakra has four petals consisting of the mantras vam, sam, sam, and sam. It is the seat of the earth element or solid state of matter, whose governing seed syllable (bijā mantra) is Lam. The Nattuvangam cymbals have originated from such Beejākshara Mantras

2. Svādhishthāna Chakra

The Water Chakra possesses six petals consisting of the mantras bam, bham, mam, yam, ram, and lam. It is the seat of the water element or liquid state of matter, whose governing seed syllable is vam.

3. Manipura Chakra

The Fire Chakra possesses ten petals consisting of the mantras dam, dham, nam, tham, dam, dham, nam, pam, and pham. It is the seat of the fire element or radiant state of matter, whose governing seed syllable is Ram.

4. Anāhata Chakra

The Air Chakra has twelve petals consisting of the mantras kam, kham, gam, gham, nam, cam, cham, jam, jham, nam, tam, and tham. It is the seat of the element of air or the gaseous state of matter, whose governing seed syllable is Yam.

5. Vishuddha Chakra
The Ether Chakrā has sixteen petals consisting of the vowels of the Sanskrit alphabet: am, am, im, im, um, um, rm, rm, Irm, Irm, em, aim, om, aum, am, and ah. It is the seat of space, the element of ether or the etheric state of matter, whose governing seed syllable is Ham.

6. Ājna Chakrā

The third eye has two petals (by some accounts forty-eight), consisting of the mantras ham and khsham. It is the seat of the mind-space or mental ether (which underlies the elemental ether). Its seed syllable is ksham, meaning patience, peace and fortitude.

7. Sahasra Padma Chakrā

The Crown Chakrā has thousand petals and is the seat of the spirit (Atman or Purusha). Its seed syllable is Om. It is the seat of consciousness or consciousness-space that is the origin of the mental and material ethers.

17. The Kundalini Śaktī

“Veda and Vedānta are one side of the One Truth; Tantrā with its emphasis on Śakti is another. The process of the Kundalini awakened rising through the centres as also the purification of the centres is a Tāntric knowledge. In our yoga there is no willed process of the purification and opening of the centres, no raising up of the Kundalini by a set process either. Therefore, there is a Tāntric knowledge behind the process of transformation in this Yoga. In the Tantrā the centres are opened and Kundalini is awakened by a special process, its action of ascent is felt through the spine. Here it is a pressure of the Force from the above that awakens it and opens the centres. There is ascension of the consciousness going up till it joins the higher consciousness above. This repeats itself (sometimes a descent also is felt until) until all the centres are open and the
consciousness rises above the body. At a later stage I remains above and widens out into the cosmic consciousness and the universal self. In our yoga there is no willed opening of the cakrās, they open of themselves by the descent of the Force. The ascension and descent of the Force in this yoga accomplishes itself in its own way without any necessary reproduction of the details laid down in the Tāntric books” . [20]

In Nātya too, the power is similarly awakened spontaneously.

Kundalini, an important part of Hindu Tantrā is based on the principle that the embrace of Śiva and Śakti created the Universe. The whole Universe is a part of Śiva, and any part of it contains the entire universe. In our body, Śakti, resides in the Muladhāra, at the base of the spine. Due to Tamogun, she is asleep, and must be awakened. The seven cakrās(or energy centers in the body), correspond to the Worlds Śakti created. As the persons Kundalini rises through the higher cakrās, ever subtler and virtuous states are realised. Kārmic impurities create blocks preventing Kundalini from rising. Yogic āsanās are helpul just as Nātya Viniyogās and prayogās are helpul in consciously or unconsciously raising the Kundalini Śakti. In fact, In Bharatanātyam, the basic posture, the Araidandi shapes up the body as a yogic Mahā Kumbhā with all the Cakrās in perfect opened –up position, enhancing the flow of energy.

“the divine Energy is polarized into a static or potential form (called kundalini) and a dynamic form (called prana). The latter is responsible for maintaining all the life processes that make embodiment possible. The former is the infinite pool of Energy coiled into potentiality at the base of the central pathway, in the lowest psychoenergetic center. This cakra is the normally closed plug-hole to the infinite storehouse of Energy (and Consciousness)”[21].

The classical Indian music scale –the Saptaswaras can be used to locate the psychic centers. ‘SA’ Corresponds to Muladhara, ‘RE’ to Swadhishthana, ‘GA’ to Manipura, ‘MA’ to Anahata, ‘PA’ to Vishuddha, ‘DA’ to Ajna and ‘NI’ to Sahasrara.
“It is interesting to follow the author in his discussion of the relevant areas of the Tantra System. He lists seven chakras which are below the muladhara: atala, vitala, bsutala, talatala, mahatala, patala. “They represent evolution from basic structures to mineral life, then plant, lower animals and so on”. He cites parallels to the conception of chakras in other traditions. He traces the correlation between the chakras and the kyo shos or pressure points in the Japanese judo (esoteric) as also in the acupuncture points in shiatsu (a therapy from Japan). So also he mentions how Kundalini is known to the Kungs in South Africa as “n/um”. To the Chinese it was known as ‘spiritual fire’ and to the American Indians as ‘hurakan’. He quotes, from A Mystic image by Joseph Campbell, the experience of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa: how the activity of Kudalini feels like the various movements of an ant, a fish, a monkey, a bird or a serpent. He adds a valuable chapter on the system of acupuncture and shows a close correspondence between their techniques and the operations of the bandhas, notably the moola bandha”[22]

The Tantric system is in its aspiration one of the greatest attempts yet made to embrace the whole of God manifested and unmanifested in the adoration, self-discipline and knowledge of single human soul.

“The ascent of the Goddess power in the body is associated with the progressive dissolution of the elements—a process that is called laya-krama (“process of dissolution”) or laya-yoga (“discipline of dissolution”). In the present context, the technical term laya refers to the resorption of the elements into the pretemporal and prespatial ground of nature (prakriti-pradhana) In principle, laya is effected as the kundalini rises from center to center. Its arrival causes each center to vibrate intensely and to function fully, but as it goes to the next higher psychoenergetic center, the departure of the Goddess power leaves the previous center or centers as if void. The reason for this is that at each center, Shakti works the miracle of a profound purification of the elements (called tattva), rendering them extremely subtle. The final phase of dissolution occurs when the serpent power reaches the topmost psychoenergetic center, when the subtle matrix of nature is dissolved
into the *para-bindu*, which is the into the supreme point of origin of the individuated body-mind. Dissolution (*laya*) is fundamental to Tantra-Yoga. Hence we can read in the *Kula-Arnava-Tantra* (9.36):

Ten million rituals of worship equal one hymn; ten million hymns equal one recitation [*of a mantra*]; ten million recitations equal one meditation; ten million meditations equal a single [moment of] absorption (*laya*).”[23].

18. Guru

The bestower of Knowledge and Wisdom, the tree bearing the branches……..the Guru.

A teacher instructs, a Guru inspires. The Guru sets an example to eulogise and since Nātya is a spiritual pursuit, the teachers are called Gurus after some years of experience and through their well trained disciples. Tantra Gurus are indispensable in order to tread the best and safest path. Both Tantra and Nātya open up a broadbased spectrum generous enough to accommodate all people irrespective of any caste, sex, or creed provided they have the required potential and dedication. The disciples gain knowledge at the feet , near the Guru literally and in the ancient Gurukula system, the disciples offered diligent and arduous service to their Gurus to receive blessings. This relation is unique and of hishest value in both Nātya and Tantra.

There are twelve types of Gurus according to Swami Narayanandnanda.

1. “Dhatuvadi: One who leads the disciples through the practice of various kinds of sadhanas.
2. Chandana: Like a sandal tree, he transforms others by his sheer proximity.
3. Vichara: He refines the intellect and teaches the disciples to distinguish
the true from the false, the eternal from the transient.

4. Paarasa : Like the philosopher’s stone he reaches the disciple to the goal by his mere touch.

5. Kachchapa : Like a tortoise he effects changes by his mere glance.

6. Chandra : He operates like the rays of the moon on the moon-stone

7. Darpana: His being reflects the Truth to the disciple

8. Chhayanidhi: Like the mythological precious stone of the name, his very voice turns the baser nature into the divine

9. Nadanidhi : Like the mythological precious stone of the name, his very voice turns the baser nature into the divine.

10. Krauchapakshi: This bird feeds its young ones by just thinking of them; the Guru of this type does likewise.

11. Suryakanta: Like the concentrated rays of sun focused on an object, his glance suffices to lift the disciple to his goal.”[24]

The Guru occupies a godlike position in Tantra and the presence of a Guru is an essential condition for Tāntric practice. An emphasis is placed on secrecy and the oral transmission of the tradition by the Guru to a worthy pupil. This profound word leads us to the luminaries who became immortalized as Gurus to show the light and pave the path for disciples. Almost all these gifted, blessed, illustrious votaries have treaded the path of Tantra and inculcated the spirit of love and devotion by INTEGRATING and aligning artistic disciplines within their system. This was the best way to bring them close to solving problems of this world by communicating their thoughts to common mankind and elevating them. We can cite the recent example of Sri Ramakarishna Paramahamsa who had knowledge of the highest kind and translated his divine experience into poetry and danced it with great mirth. There are several saints in this century who enjoyed music and dance of the classical and divine kinds and perpetuated them, also in the institutions started under them, if any. Shirdi Sri Sai
Baba was an expert in all yogic and tântric practices but nevertheless taught devotion with Nāmasankeertanam.

The Puranās are depicted through Nātya and in them are contained, a myriad feats and deeds of the Gods which are impossible and unfathomable unless the miraculous Siddhis are mastered by them. This underlines the inherent Tantra in the Universe which is absorbed by the ones on whom grace has been bestowed by that ONE SUPREME Tāntric magician, called ISWARA, BRAHMAN or by any other name. Man, being a part of this whole, can also become a master and Tantra is a design to understand the process, to understand the Leelas, their symbolic meanings and enjoy the world, which is a divine play.

Today, if man can produce gadgets to reach across miles, why is it tough to understand that gadgets are only material evidence and substances to make-believe, whereas the Rishis, Munis, the Gurus and seers do not require any such material to reach across, even to other galaxies, worlds and witness as well as participate in the astral realms and the causal realm, simultaneous with earthly existence. Ordinary men have to shed layer after layer of earthly bondage in order to realize the divine potential and power, hidden within them. In this sense, Nātya, which contains Tantra as its nucleus, has been designed in such a way that it’s sincere practice, naturally cleanses both the practitioners and the surroundings, as if clearing the mirror to make it easier to grasp the SELF in the reflection.

Tantra forms the innermost layer of the truth while Nātya fills up the truth and these Gurus epitomize such TRUTH. They are beyond but have taken human forms, they are ON this world and FOR this world’s elevation but are not IN this world. The way of Tantra and the way of Nātya lead to the same goal of supreme self-consciousness. An adept in either or both
streams has to however shed the ghost of his ego in order to scale the heights and realize the summit. Hence, we discuss Tantra and Nātya in the background of the most important Darshanās known and followed in the present times.
Notes and references

[1] George Feuerstein, Tantrā: The Path of Ecstasy


[3] Yoginihridaya I, 6-11. This is Sir John Woodroffe's (Arthur Avalon) introduction to a Sanskrit edition of the Kaulavalişinirnaya in Sanskrit.


[9] Ibid…………. Page 84


[12] THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE ACCORDING TO ABHINAVAGUPTA by Raniero Gnoli.. By Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series office pages 20, 23, 25, 26, 28

[13] Ibid………Page 36, 39, 41

[14] UNDERSTANDING BHARATANATYAM - Mrinalini Sarabhai Darpana Publications-1996 page 1, 6 and 7, 26, 29/30


[16] Dr. T.N. Ramachandran’s “Dance karanas of Bharatanatya Sculptures in


[20] Ibid…. . . page 39,40,449

[21] See Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), Shakti and Shвkta (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), pp. 694ff. This volume was first published sixty years earlier.


[23] From the essay Kundalini: Awakening the Serpent Power by George Feuerstein which has been reproduced on yoga-age.com with slight changes from Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy ,Georg Feuerstein, Marek Kohn , (published by Shambhala Publications in 1998),