

Chapter - 5
Nritta in Bharatanatyam

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Going into the historical development and technical textual basis of Bharatanatyam in the earlier chapters, we know that the communication of the dance style comprises all four *Abhinaya*, namely *Angika*, *Vacika*, *Aharya* and *Satvika*. They are portrayed through the well defined and codified techniques of the *Nritya* and *Nritta* as well as the *Natya*. Before going into the details, it is necessary to understand them. All the three seminal texts on Dance - *Natyashastra*, *Abhinaya Darpanam* and *Sangita Ratnakara* - have comprehensively defined *Natya*, and *Nritta* with the later two defining *Nritya* in great detail. The three terms express Bharata's categorization of the body movements according to the extent of preferentiality or its absence. Dance is part of dramaturgy and to be employed as an ornamental overlay upon drama.

आस्येनाळ्म्बयेद् गीतं हस्तेनार्थे प्रदर्शयेत् ।
चक्षुर्म्यौ दर्शयेद् भावं पादाभ्यां ताळमाचरेत् ॥ ३६ ॥

(Dance should have songs and *abhinaya* with emotion and *tala*. The song must be sung and its meaning to be shown through hand gestures and emotions shown through the eyes as well as the *tala* to be followed with the feet).

There is general agreement that *Natya* uses body movements that are meaningful and complement the text or spoken matter of the drama. *Natya* derives from the word '*nata*' that means 'moving', *avaspandana*, i.e. quivering or acting. *Natya* can also mean *abhinaya*. *Natya* runs the entire gamut of *abhinaya*, including dialogue, interpretation of moods and mime,

music and decor. As it touches the four planes and with its unique blend of aesthetic and physical appeal, touches the audience's innermost feelings, he explains that it can help the viewer extract the fullest joy from the beauty of art.

Since *natya* needs subtle physical movement, its need for *satvikabhinaya* or the act of mental communication is greater. *Natya* has recourse to *rasa*, i.e. *rasa* is expressed by means of *natya*. Thus *natya* has a) audio-visual b) expression of *rasa* c) abundant possession of *satvikabhinaya*, and d) the *Nata* as its performer. *Natya* consisted of body movements carrying meaning which was reinforced by verbal accompaniment. This system of body movements bearing meaning suggests the term *natya* denoting dramatic art.

Nritya signifies an art that combined beautiful movements with referential meaning attached to them but with no verbal articulation. *Nritya* is often described as movements that use the body to mime expressive emotions or meanings, but without verbal accompaniment. *Nritya*, emphasis is placed on *abhinaya* and gestures to communicate meaning or a message. It is a combination of *abhinaya* and *nritya* and in the Bharatanatyam *Margam*, items like *Sabdam*, *Varnam* and *Padam* are classified as *nritya* items. *Nritya* refers to that interpretative portion of the dance which utilizes the language of gesture. *Nritya* as interpretative dance is not merely an imitation of human behaviour. Though it is largely dependent on the accompanying *sahitya*, *nritya* makes eloquent use of *hastas*, to convey different meanings. *Nritya* combines pure dance and interpretative dance for the enactment of the theme and consequently employs histrionic themes with ideas and emotions that are

reflected through the expressive arts of *abhinaya*. *Nritya* is the soul of a dance style and *abhinaya* demands a personal involvement, an individual inspiration and an aptitude that far exceeds the framework of any teaching pattern.

Nritya is defined as pure dance where stylized movements without meaning of any kind were performed to music and especially rhythm. The origin of *nritya* is traced to the *Natyashastra*. The entire Chap. 4 of *Natyashastra* is devoted to *Nritya*. It is believed that during a performance of a play, or *ratya*, Shiva was among the audience and it was he who suggested that *nritya* should be added to the preliminaries of the play. Shiva did this in order to enhance the beauty of the performance and not to convey any message. When the sages asked Bharata why *nritya* was created if it had no connection either with the songs or the meaning of individual words or sentences (NS 4.262-3), Bharata explains that the purpose of *nritya* is not to convey meaning but to produce beauty, and thus captivate the mind of the audience. (shloka NS 4.262-3). This, he explained, was achieved with a series of short compositions called *angaharas* made up of various movements called *karanas*.

The movements of the body, quite devoid of all kinds of *abhinaya*-s (gestures) in the manner prescribed in connection with *angika* (*abhinaya*), are known as *nritya* by those well-versed in dancing. Basically therefore, one can conclude, from these definitions of the three most important texts referring to dance, that *nritya* is pure and abstract dance, with beautiful body movements comprising footwork and movements of limbs, neck, head, hands, etc. The *hastas* are not intended to convey any meaning but are important contributions

in the grace and variety that the dance offers. These movements do not communicate *rasa* and *bhava* of any kind. *Nritta* is completely dependent on *angikabhinaya* and is a specific and technical part of a dance item, even though it is often termed as a decorative element of the item.

नृतं तत्र नरेन्द्राणामभिषेके महोत्सवे ।
यात्रायां देवयात्रायां विवाहे प्रियसङ्गमे ॥ १३ ॥

नगराणामगाराणां प्रवेशे पुत्रजन्मनि ।
शुभार्थिभिः प्रयोक्तव्यं माङ्गल्यं सर्वकर्मभिः ॥ १४ ॥

According to AD, *Nritta* is performed on all celebratory and auspicious occasions such as festivals, coronations, marriage, *grihepravesha*, get-togethers with family and friends, birth of a son, starting on a *yatra/dev-yatra*, and beginning of a new venture.

In contemporary times too, *nritta* is danced as complementary to joyous celebration, often with large groups of dancers. For example in the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics, one dance item featured the entire story of the development of this continent from the original home of aboriginals to a progressive, developed nation. But a performance of this dimension danced by hundreds of performers and watched by thousands made excellent use of body language/movement with *Angika Abhinaya* in telling their story.

नृत्तप्रयोगः सृष्टो यः स ताण्डव इति स्मृतः ।
ऋषय उचुः - यदा प्राप्त्यर्थमर्थानां तज्जैरभिनयः कृतः ॥ २६१ ॥

कस्मान्नृतं कृतं ह्येतत्कं स्वभावमपेक्षते ।
न गीतकार्थसम्बद्धं न चाप्यर्थस्य भावकम् ॥ २६२ ॥

कस्मान्नृतं कृतं होतद्रीतेष्वासारितेषु च ।
(भरतः) - अत्रोच्यते न खल्वर्थं कंचिन्नृत्तमपेक्षते ॥ २६३ ॥

किं तु शोभां प्रजनयेदिति नृत्तं प्रवर्तितम् ।
प्रायेण सर्वलोकस्य नृत्तमिष्टं स्वभावतः ॥ २६४ ॥

As per NS, Dance is brought into use because it creates beauty. Dancing is an art consisting of beautiful body movements, mimetic or purely decorative, that are performed to the rhythm and accompanied by vocal or instrumental music or both. *Nritya* has no connection with the meaning of the accompanying song, and is not expected to evoke any mood, thought or sentiment. This art of *nritya* that was created is known as *tandava*. *Nritya* as an art that evokes a sense of beauty and consists of a series of short compositions called *angahara-s* made up of various units of movements called *karanas*. From the very detailed and full description of *karanas* and *angaharas* that Bharata provides, we get a clear picture of the process and technique of dance. *karanas* are movements of the hands and feet (shloka NS 4.30) and constitute the basic units of dance. About 6-9 *karanas* can go to make the *angahara* which is the basic dance sequence. These *nritya* sequences were used by Bharata as adornments preliminary to the performance (*purvaranga*) and such a *purvaranga* was called *chitra*. (NS 4.15-16)

नृत्तताळ्याश्रयम् । (Dasharupaka, sh 1-7-13)

(Nritya depends on tala and laya)

गात्रविक्षेपमात्रं तु सर्वाभिनयवर्जितम् ।
आङ्गिकोक्तिप्रकारेण नृतं नृत्यविदो विदुः ॥ (SR sh. 7.29)

(*Nritta* has no *abhinaya*; it is only movements of the body with highest *angika* are *nritta* as said by the experts of dance.)

भावामिनयहीनं तु नृत्तमित्यभिधीयते ॥ १५ ॥

The dance with no emotion or *abhinaya* is called *nritta*.

जवः स्थिरत्वं रेखा च भ्रमरी दृष्टिरश्रमः ॥२७॥

मेघा श्रद्धा वचो गीतं पात्रप्राणा दश स्मृताः ।
एवंविधेन पात्रेण नृत्यं कार्यं विधानतः ॥२८॥

(A dancer must have the inherent sensibility which can be enhanced by training. Agility, steadiness, sense of line, practice in circular movement, a sharp and steady eye, effortlessness, memory, devotion, clarity of speech, musicalness - these ten are the essential qualities of a dancer.)

पाष्णिना वा पदाग्रेण समस्तेन तलेन वा ॥ ३०५ ॥
यत्ताडनं भूतलस्य कुट्टनं तदुदीरितम् ।

(If the heels or the ball of the foot (all toes) or the sole of the foot strikes the floor, it is called *kuttanam*).

Nritta as a superior art form that does not look for any purpose and considers it entirely as a metaphysical concept, 'a self-subsistent creation free from any practical aim' on the ground that the first dancer, Siva, and his dance are entirely self-contained and, therefore, self-referential, are the views of editor David Smith in his study of Ratnakara's *Haravijaya*. *Nritta* can be conceptually equated to Modern Dance today in that it is abstract and the body speaks its own language of movement. It is rhythmic but these rhythms may

not be cyclical and it may follow its own rhythms. On the one level, *nritta* is the basic depiction of dance, an expression of the self and not necessarily telling a story.

Most dancers and writers on dance down the years have more or less agreed in some form or another to these definitions of *nritta*. Mrinalini Sarabhai defines *Nritta* as reflecting the mood of the musical composition while not utilizing *rasa* or *bhava*. Jon B Higgins describes *Nritta* as designed to delight the eye without suggesting any frame of reference other than the various co-ordinated movements of the dancer's body. He also correctly maintains that *nritta* is taught as a combination of basic dance motions called *adavus* for which there is a corresponding pattern of phonetic syllables. Dancer Ram Gopal is very firm in his individual opinion that *nritta* is rigid stylization consisting of pure dance movements entirely in the realm of *angika abhinaya*, that evoke neither mood nor sentiment. Scholar Projesh Banerjee in his book, "Dance of India" describes *nritta* to be of three kinds – *Vishama*, *Vikata* and *Laghu*. *Vishama* consists of many acrobatic feats like that of rope dancing. *Vikata* consists of movements of a person in a dress which strikes awe and terror in the hearts of the beholders. *Laghu* dance constitutes graceful upward trippings and movements of like nature. Whereas K. M. Verma in his interpretation of *Abhinavabharati*, a commentary on the *Natyashastra* by Abhinavagupta, classifies *Nritta* into two groups further divided into 7 classifications. One has *Suddha-nritta* (consisting *angaharas* and *recakas*), *Gitakadyabhinayonmukka-nritta* (*nritta* accompanied by song but very little general *abhinaya*), and *Gana-*

vadya-talanusari-nrta (*nrta* accompanied by song, music and general *abhinaya*). The second group has *Uddhata-nrta* (with *abhiraya* of superior quality often with one basic masculine *rasa* like *veera*, *raudra*), *Masrna-nrta* (same as *Uddhata* but the *rasa* here is feminine, such as *kruna*, *sringara*) *Misruddhata-natta* or *Masrnamisrituddhata-nrta* (the *rasa* is mixed with emphasis on *Masrna*), and *Misramasrna-nrta* or *Uddhata-misrita-masrna-nrta* (the *rasa* is mixed with emphasis on *Uddhata*).

Nrta and Angikabhinaya

Nrta technique in Bharatanatyam is completely dominated by *angikabhinaya*, which is defined as acting by means of body movements. Nandikeshwara's *Abhinaya Darpanam* is a text used extensively by the Bharatanatyam dancers. It concentrates exclusively on *angikabhinaya* where not only are the movements described but also the uses to which these movements may be put in dance. These are body movements composed by combining the different movements of individual body parts or *angas* (major limbs), *upangas* (minor limbs), and *pratyangas* (smaller parts like fingers, etc).

तत्र आङ्गिकोडङ्गैर्निदर्शितः ।

Angikabhinaya is shown through different parts of the body

तत्राङ्गिकोडङ्गप्रत्यङ्गोपाङ्गैस्तेषां प्रकाशतः ।

The *abhinaya* shown through *anga*, *pratyanga*, *upanga* is called *angika*

त्रिविधस्त्वाङ्गिको ज्ञेयः
शारीरो मुखजस्तथा
तथा चेष्टाकृश्वेन शाखाङ्गोपाङ्गसंयुतः ॥

Angika Abhinaya has three aspects or divisions, that which is expressed by the limbs, that which is expressed on the countenance, and that which is expressed by the movements of the body. This *Angika Abhinaya* is expressed, thus, by *Shakha*, *Angas* and *Upangas*. The term *Shakha* is applicable when the expressions are made first by the head, face, shoulders, thighs, hands, and the feet, as if they are branches of *Angika Abhinaya* (NS 47/XXIV). The term *Anga* applies to some major limbs of the body. They are the head, the hands, the waist, the chest, the sides and the feet. *Upanga* is a term that applies to some minor limbs such as the eyes, the eyebrows, the nose, the lower lip, the cheeks and the chin. When the *Anga* moves, *Pratyanga* and *Upanga* also move accordingly (AD sh 48).

The emphasis on *angikabhinaya* in *nritta* also calls for the dancer to be in a fit physical condition to be able to execute all the dance movements with grace and agility especially during the scintillating *nritta* items as they are predominantly *laya* and *tala* based. This importance of regular exercise or workout sessions for dancers has been acknowledged even in the *Natyashastra*. Chapter 10 of this treatise has extensive discussion on how the limbs must be exercised and which ones need specific exercises. Perfect posture that is, *Anga-sausthava*, is most important for ease in the execution and carriage. "Perfect posture is the main quality which the student should aim at attaining. Like *yoga*, perfect posture helps in balancing the inter-

relationship between the body and the mind, which is the central component for dance. The dancer should learn to feel and control the distribution of the body weight on the feet as per the movements. Proper posture and positioning of the feet give rise to efficient and effective movement. Good posture is attained by daily practice. The main goal is to move with minimum strain on the limbs with flexibility and maximum efficiency. Warm up exercises prepare you mentally with positive attitude, ease and confidence. Some of the exercises are, breathing to develop stamina, stretching muscles and joints, lateral bending of the spine to develop its flexibility, burning fat and making the body light, ensuring greater blood supply to the brain, removing fatigue, strengthening the knees and leg muscles, and gaining and retaining balance while executing the dance.

'Balance' is the key word that describes the physical aspect of *nritta* in Bharatanatyam. All positions are structured around a central imaginary line and at the end of a dance unit, the dancer returns to this central line. Balance is also interpreted in terms of every movement pattern being performed on the right side first and repeated on the left, thus giving a visual impression of completeness.

The *angasausthava* awareness of the performer demands that the correct basic posture of the dancer in *Ayatamandala Sthanaka* (basic half-sitting posture). It has the dancer holding head steady and looking straight ahead with a level gaze, shoulders pushed back (not raised artificially), to open out the chest so that back is erect. The arms spread out parallel to the ground and the stomach pulled in with the pelvic bone pushed in.

NRITTA OF BHARATANATYAM

The *angikabhinaya* constitute the following kinds of body movements as described in the AD which is adhered to by the Bharatanatyam dancers along with the learning from the teacher. Daily recitation of AD is important for grasping and imbibing the text and its practical usage.

Shirobheda : Movements of the Head

Drastibheda : Movements of the Eye

Grivabheda : Movements of the Neck

Asamyukta hasta : Gestures of one Hand

Samyukta hasta : Gestures of Both Hands Together

Padabheda : Standing Postures with *Hasta*

Sthanaka : Simple Standing Postures

Utplavana : Jumps

Chari-s : Different ways of walking, or moving of feet/soles

Gati-s : Different ways of walking

All of these are described in detail in Chapter 8, *Angika Abhinaya* and Labanotation.

In addition, there are other kinds of movements which show direction, the striking activity, by various parts of the body that are an important part of *nritta*. These include -

Hasta Rechaka (how to move or throw the arm.)

1. *Udvardana* : moving the hand from down to up
2. *Parikshep* : throwing the hand away from the body
3. *Vikshep* : moving the hand from up to down
4. *Parivartan* : moving the hand in a circular motion
5. *Visarpana* : bringing the hand nearer the body.

Hasta Prachara (how to hold the hand)

1. *Uttal* : palm facing upwards
2. *Adsthal* : palm facing downwards
3. *Tirthak* : edge of palm/hand facing upwards
4. *Urdhvamukha* : finger tips pointing up
5. *Adhomukha* : finger tips pointing down

Hasta Karana (how to move fingers so as to close and open hand)

1. *Aveshthit* : beginning with the index finger (*tarjani*), slowly closing the palm, one finger at a time
2. *Udhveshthit* : reversing the above movement, opening with the index finger
3. *Vyavartit*: beginning with the little finger (*kanishthika*), slowly closing the palm one finger at a time
4. *Parivartit* : reversing the above movement, opening with the little finger.

***Paadabheda* (feet positions)**

1. *Udghatit* : lifting the heel and striking it again and again on the ground
2. *Sama* : the full sole of the foot is flat on the ground
3. *Agrasthalasanchar* : touching the ground with the toes while lifting the heel
4. *Anchita* : the heel is on the ground, the rest of the foot is raised, toes pointing upwards
5. *Kunchita* : the heel is on the ground, the foot is raised, but the toes are bent in pointing to the ground.
6. *Suchi* : touching the ground with only the top of the big toe.
7. *Pakshastha-trayastra* : the feet are turned sideways

These are the ways of moving the different parts of the body as described in various texts and regional languages compiled above. Using these movements the *nritta* of Bharatanatyam is expounded, beginning with the *Adavu*-s.

Nritta and Basic Body Positions

Bharatanatyam has three main Body positions.

- (1) The *Sthaanaka* or *Samapaada* position is where the whole body, with the head, eyes, nose, neck, shoulders, torso and legs, is in an upright position. The hips and stomach are pulled in and shoulders stretched back. The arms are folded back with the wrists at the waist and the hands in *petaka*, the palms facing outwards.



(2) The *Aramandi* or *Araimandi* or *Ardhamandi* is the half-sitting position where the dancer 'sits' to almost half the height of the legs. The torso is held erect with the hips and stomach pulled in. The feet are at an angle of 180 degrees with a two-inch gap between the ankles. The knees are in the *kuncita* position that is bent and pointing to the right and left sides respectively. When not in use, the hands rest at the waist.

(3) The *Murumandi* is the complete sitting position and is also called *Mazhumandi*. The dancer sits on raised heels, balanced on the toes. The knees open out pointing to the sides, with the thighs and the calves touching each other. The hips rest on the heels and the hands rest at the waist, if not in use.

There are three basic Arm positions.

(1) *Natyarambha*: The arms are extended to the sides in such a way that the armpit, elbow joint and the wrist joint are in a straight line, at equal height from the ground. The shoulders are stretched back and not raised. There is a slight curve at the elbow. The hands are in *Pataka hasta*.

(2) *Chaturastra*, the second position, the arms are flexed with the elbows pointing to the sides and both hands facing each other at the breasts in the front. The shoulders are stretched at the back.

(3) The arms are flexed in a way that the wrists are at the waist, the back of the hands at rest at the waist in *Ardhacandra hasta*. The shoulders are stretched at the back.

There are five Palm positions.

- (1) *Adhomukham* or *Adhastala* (facing down),
- (2) *Uttanam* (facing up),
- (3) *Agratastala* (facing front)
- (4) *Svasammukhatala* (facing back or oneself)
- (5) *Parshvagata* (turned to the side).

There are three basic Feet positions.

- (1) *Tatta* position where the entire foot is flat on the earth
- (2) *Natta* position where the heel is in contact with the earth and the rest of the foot is raised.
- (3) *Kutta* position where the foot balances itself on the toes.

The Tala system in Bharatanatyam

The dance follows the Carnatic music system. Since the dance movements are referred to as performed in time and space, the very essential rhythmic cycles are provided by the *tala*. The dancer performs to *tala* or the base rhythmic pattern. *Tala* is derived from the word for the palm of the hand, the beating of which originally indicated a measure of time. *Tala* forms the backbone of music and dance. The dullness or the briskness of a piece is dependent to some extent upon its *laya* or tempo.

The ancient Sanskrit text, *Taala Dasha Pranas* offers a complete study of *tala* of Carnatic music system. The word, *dasha* means ten and *prana* means pulse.

This indicates that there are ten inherent elemental of *tala*. These ten *pranas* are, *Kala, Marga, Kriya* (*Sashabda* and *Nishabda*), *Angaa* (*Ugghu, Drutam, Anudrutam, Guru, Plutam* and *Kakapadam*), *Graha* (*Sama* and *Vishama*), *Jati, Kalaa, Laya* (*Vilabita, Madhya* and *Dhurita*), *Fati, Prastara*.

Bharatanatyam follows the *Saptatalas* or the seven *talas* and five *Jatis*.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Dhruva</i> | 1. <i>Tishra - Takita</i> |
| 2. <i>Mathya</i> | 2. <i>Chatushra - Takadhimi</i> |
| 3. <i>Tripata</i> | 3. <i>Khanda - Taka takita</i> |
| 4. <i>Rupaka</i> | 4. <i>Mishra - Takita takadhimi</i> |
| 5. <i>Jampa</i> | 5. <i>Sanjirna - Taka tak ta takadhimi</i> |
| 6. <i>Ata</i> | |
| 7. <i>Eka</i> | |

These *jatis* are named in terms of the beats they represent

These came into practice from the time of *Purandaradasa* (1484-1564) who was a great musician-saint of Karnataka of the 16th century. Each of them can use any of the five variations or *jatis* creating a total of 35 *talas* to work with.

The *khali* beats are not counted. Basic to all metrical compositions are the *matras*. *Matras* are sub-divisions or pulses within the steady beat. If the beat is 4/4, the thought is always toward 16 inner *matras* or 4 *matras* to each of the 4 beats.

The most common *tala* used in adavus are the *Chatusra jati Tripata tala* (also known as *Adi Tala*) and the *Rupaka tala*, executed these days as one *anudhrutam* and one *dhrutam* (beat + beat and a wave). In the *Chapu tala* only

anudhrutam is used. The *Avarthana* is one full cycle of counts in a particular *tala*. For example, if one takes the *Adi Tala*, when 8 counts are complete, then one *Avarthana* is complete. The next 8 counts will be in the second *Avarthana*.

The complete Bharatanatyam performance is an ideal coming together of several elements. Whereas the language of the dance is itself made up of such complicated grammar, elements like the accompanying music and song infuse the performance with a lively sense of joy and delight. The following example of a creative coming together of an innovative guru and an extraordinary dancer is a case in point.

Adavus

The only Sanskrit work which refers to *adavu-s* is *Sangitasaramrita* by King Tulaja written between 1763-87¹. Here, the names of the *adavu-s* are given in Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu with their description and the relevant *sollukot'us*, the rhythmic syllables. 'Adaivu' from which the word *adavu* has originated, in Tamil means 'serkkai', or "combination of steps and gestures. Scholars have noted inscriptional evidences relating to *adavu-s* also. An inscription belonging to the reign of Parekesari Kulattunga III (1178-1223 AD) mentions the gifts given to Devaradiyar (Devadasi) for Tirupattadaivu and Meikattadaivu. (Srinivasan K. R. , Inscription in the Pudukottai State, Inscription no. 162, pg 135, Eng. Trans. Part II, Pudukottai Durbar (1946))².

यतो हस्तस्ततो दृष्टिर्यतो दृष्टिस्ततो मनः
यतो मनस्ततो भावो यतो भावस्ततो रसः ॥ ३७ ॥

(Where the hands go, there should go the eyes, for where go the eyes there goes the mind, where the mind goes there follows sympathetic imagination and where rests the imagination, there is the flow of aesthetic enjoyment.)

It clearly emphasizes the direction that body turns to and faces at a physical level before the joy can blossom in the mind, at a metaphysical level.

Nritta consists of *Adavu-s*, the building blocks of Bharatanatyam. The multiple permutations and combinations of *adavu-s* create a variety of body movements.

The *Adavu* is a combination of three units - *Sthana* (the definite posture of the body in time and space), *Chari* (movement of legs and feet) and *Hasta* (*hasta mudras* or hand gestures). The *hastas* most commonly used in *nritta* are *pataka*, *tripataka*, *suchi*, *katakamukha*, *mushti* and *alapadma*.

The different types of *Adavu-s* basically refer to groups of movements categorized by the different types of actions of the feet and floor-contacts in the execution of rhythmic patterns. Each type is also identified by its own *sollakuttus*. The *Adavu-s* is also characterized by three types of feet strikes - the *Tatta* (flat foot strike), the *Natta* (ball of foot/toes strike) and the *Kutta* (the heel strike).

With a few exceptions, all *adavus* are executed in the *araimandi* position. But *adavu-s* are also executed in standing (*samapaada*) and full sitting (*mulumandi*) positions. Combined with these three leg positions, are three arm positions - *natyarambha* (extended arms, hands in *pataka/tripataka*), *chaturastra hasta*

(flexed arms, hands in *katakamukha*) and hands at the waist. These combinations offer nine different positions.

Adavus are referred to by specific names but they may vary. These are,

1. *Tatta Adavu (tai ya tai yi)*
2. *Natta Adavu (tai yum tat tat)*
3. *Ta Tai Tai Tat (Pakkam) Adavu*
4. *Kudittu Mettu Adavu (tai ya tai hi)*
5. *Tat Tai Tam (Korvai) Adavu*
6. *Tat Tai Ta Ha (Khutta) Adavu*
7. *Tai Ya Tai yi (Sarika) Adavu*
8. *Sarical Adavu (tai tai ha ta)*
9. *Mandi Adavu (tangad tat tat dhin na)*
10. *Utplavana Adavu (dhit ten ta ta tai)*
11. *Tadhi Gina Tom*
12. *Tirmanam Adavu*

The *Adavus* are to be learnt with the great precision. They need to be practice in all the three *kala*-s or speeds. The body positions have to be precise. The well-defined rules, rigidity of technique and the art of precisicn are evident in the construction of the *Adavus*. Everything the position of the feet, the distance between the heels, the bending of the feet, the posit on of the body, arms and head, are set. For chest and technically accurate performance, strict attention is to be drawn to every minute detail. Different schools of the style have slight variations but the certain basic principles of stance and posture, of

line and movement, are common to all forms of Bharatanatyam. *Nritta hasta-s* is used in the *Adavu-s*. There are about fifteen groups of *Adavu-s*, classified as per the movement patterns.

Korvai : When the *adavu-s* are combined together beautifully and woven into a garland of movement sequences to a given *Ala*, one gets a *korvai*. *Korvais* can be danced to musical notes or *sollakattus*. The *korvai-s* in *Jatiswaram* are danced to *swaras* while the *korvai-s* in *Tillana* are danced to the song.

Jati : After the *adavu*, the next important sub-division of a single movement is the *jati*. When the *korvais* are executed to the accompaniment of *sollakattus* recited by the nattuvanar, it is known as *Jati*. *Jati* cannot be separated from the *adavu* but the point of their difference is that while the *adavu* takes its reference from the *karana* of which it is a part, the *jati* is involved with the *adavu* in that it refers particularly to the movement of the feet. The floor is beaten by the foot of the dancer and this 'beat', made in unison with or in counterpoint to the rhythms of the accompanying musicians, can come through contact with the toes or heel or the sole of the feet. The foot can also make sliding movements, turning motions and kicking extensions. *Jati* enhances the dance of the lower limbs where the foot-beats are produced in combination with leg movements. Basically, *jati* is the dance equivalent of the Tamil *sollukkatu* in music. *Sollukattus* are meaningless syllables chanted by the accompanying singer during a *jati*. They are the spoken imitation of the sound of the ankle bells, the beat of the feet, or any other accessory by which time is outwardly expressed. These syllables substitute for notation and serve to facilitate memory and

execution of long and complicated *jatis*. Since the dancer also needs a drummer among the musicians, it is important to remember that the drummer has his own *jatis* which are called *chollu*. These have a different syllabic code notation which are onomatopoeic to the drum sounds. *Chollu* corresponds to drumbeats as *sollukattus* do to foot beats. *Jatis* are performed in three speeds - starting speed, doubled speed and quadrupled speed.

Tirmanam : The *tirmanams* represent the most brilliant bursts of complicated dance rhythms that technically 'end' a section of the dance. Their musical counterpart is the *codas*. *Tirmanams* are technically a rhythmic formation of alternate long and short phrases repeated three times, and performed in three increasing speed. A new rhythmic complexity is introduced when a *tirmanam* of a particular *tala* is fitted into a *tala* of a different rhythmic construction. This requires considerable skill and clever adjustment as the *matras* of the *tirmanam* are a different number from the *matras* of the *tala* unit. Unlike the *jati*, *tirmanams* must be restricted by the symmetrical phrase pattern of 'long short' repeated three times. As soon as the *tirmanam* is finished the dancer's hands return to her hips in the characteristic basic Bharatanatyam stance, retreating to the back of the stage and pausing for a brief while before the next movement begins.

Nritta Items in Bharatanatyam

The basic *nritta* items in the Bharatanatyam repertoire are the *Alarippu*, *Jatiswaram* and *Tillana*. The Tanjore Quartet is credited with having structured the *Alarippu-Tillana Margam* of modern Bharatanatyam. Short *nritta* passages

are also danced, interspersed in the predominantly *abhinaya* items such as the *Varnams* and *Shabdams*, but the *nritta* component is as much as half of the entire item. The *adavus* are woven into the movement fabric in an artistic manner forming these sequences of pure dance that create fascinating patterns of great visual beauty. Just as Classical Western Ballet originated in the French Court and hence its technical terminology is in French, similarly for Bharatanatyam, the technical terminology is mostly in Tamil.

Alarippu : The traditional Bharatanatyam *Margam* begins with the *Alarippu*. This is the shortest and simplest item in the *Margam*, of about 3-5 minutes' duration, and is in the nature of an invocation, offering obeisance to the Gods as well as the present audience. It follows an equally simple tune and rhythm. *Kapila Vatsyayan* describes it as a "...dance of invocation with little musical content, but one which seeks to execute a number of concentrated and yet elemental rhythmic patterns"³.

Alarippu is also often described as the gradual flowering or opening of the body, a kind of warming up exercise before the actual dance begins, readying the body for the more difficult poses and movements to come. "The dancer stands erect, and beginning with movements of the head, neck, eyes and eyebrows goes on to the shoulders, arms, and hands, then the torso, and finally the legs and feet, involving all progressively in frenzied projection. The limbs sharply trace lines and angles"⁴. *Alarippu* is usually set in Ghana ragas like *Nattai*, *Gaula*, *Hamsadhvani*, *Gambhirnatta* since it is to be performed at the commencement of the performance⁵. Balasaraswati, who

trained under Guru Kandappa Pillai, has said, "Guru was a strict disciplinarian and concentration on teaching was important. Unnecessary movements of the limbs were not tolerated. Silence was maintained while practicing. Artificial smiling while performing *Alarippu* was not permitted."⁶

Jatiswaram: Jatiswaram follows the Alarippu as a more difficult item of *nritta*. The musical content has a combination of *swara* passages in a *raga* and *tala*. The groupings of *jatis* (rhythmic syllables) are followed by the *swara* groupings. The musical structure follows three movements - *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and *charnam*. The composition is set to any of the five *jatis* (3,4,5,7,9) of the metrical cycle patterns of Carnatic music. The dance patterns are in terms of the *adavus*, the primary dance unit and conditioned by the nature of the *swaras* and the duration of each *swara* in the *tala* measure. The popular *ragas* for compositions are Kalyani, Hindola, Bhairavi, Todi, Sankarabharanam, Hamsanandi, Vechaspathi, etc.

Tillana : *Tillana* is danced towards the end of the *Margam* as an abstract *nritta* item that closes the performance. It builds from basic rhythm patterns that gradually reach a complex crescendo. The *Tillana* is the most difficult and also the most beautiful of the *nritta* items, full of sculptural poses, complex movement patterns that showcase the talent, grace and elegance of the dancer. Every *adavu* is often rendered in two or three tempos to accentuate the beauty of the poses and the scintillating *teermanams*. The movements and rhythm are choreographed to the accompaniment of sound syllables with a single line constituting a recurring central motif.

In addition to these basic items of pure *nritya*, the *nritya* items like the Varnam and Shabdams, have *nritya* sequences interspersed with the *sahitya* pieces. Their execution is equally important.

Notes:

1. Sastri Subrahmanya, The Music Academy, Madras, (1942).
2. Marg publication, Bharatanatyam.
3. Vatsyayan Kapila, Classical Indian Dance in Literature & Arts.
4. Khokar Mohan, The Splendour of Indian Dance.
5. Dr. S. Bhagyalakshmy, Approach to Bharata Natyam, Oriental Institute Series, pg.171.
6. Higgins, J.B., The music of Bharatnatyam pg.23. Excerpt from a letter written by Balasaraswati to A. S. Ramen, in reply to his questionnaire, January 1971.