Chapter - 3

Literature as Dance Documentation
Chapter 3

Literature as Dance Documentation

As with the visual arts, references to dance in literature can also be seen at several levels of documentation. But unlike in the visual arts where dance is featured in an 'unconscious' manner most of the time, written texts are the authentic documentary evidences describing the dance techniques. At times they also describe dance activities in society and prevalent dance practices. Sometimes this literature comes to us as technical texts or instruction manuals detailing different aspects of techniques and presentation. Also there are interesting stories about dancers and their lives. There is a vast literature in the form of poems and songs that have been used by dancers and choreographers for artistic activity. The accounts of travelers visiting different parts of India and their descriptions of performances they have seen as well as the inscriptions on the walls, pillars and stone-slabs, provide insights into the contemporary dance scene.

On the examination of these literatures, general as well as specific to the performing arts that were written over the centuries, one finds numerous references to all aspects of dance and related activities. The Natyashastra of Bharata Muni, the most comprehensive of texts on the performing arts of India, dates back to the early Christian era, we have references of Panini's Natyasutra and Astadhyayi traced back to even before that, though they are no longer available. Some inscriptions dating back to 1st century BC support the antiquity of dance and music practices in India. For example, the
Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela, king of Orissa, dated end of 1st century BC refers to him as proficient in Gandharvaveda. Samudragupta's famous victory inscription at Allahabad (about 330-375 AD) describes him as surpassing Narada and Tumburu in gandharva and lalita.

Looking at the history and development of art and culture in India, one is able to identify two distinct periods. One is from the beginning of the Christian era till the end of about 10th century AD, predominated by Sanskrit literature and the arts influenced by the same. The second begins after the 13th century with the coming of Prakrit and later, Apabhramshya languages which encompassed regional specialties and varieties within the mainstream activities. In the first period, Sanskrit exercised a firm hold on the intellectual life of the people. Its rich literature endowed the development of all arts in the country with unity and continuity. The first period also seems to have upheld the Natyashastra's tenets of dance, music and dramatics as being integral to each other where the poet and the dramatist were equally well versed in the technical intricacies of Performance. The second period saw a marked development of regional styles stemming from the main trunk. Though based on the Natyashastra these allowed individual developments of special groups of people and geographic areas as per their own cultural needs. The Sangita Ratnakarac, following the Natyashastra, added the desi in all areas of dance and dance-related activities.

**Technical Texts on Dance**

The performing arts have been an integral and important part of Indian life from the earliest times. It is given the status of the Fifth Veda in the Natyashastra of
Bharatamuni, an extant text on dramaturgy. Here "Natya" comprises music, dance and drama. The four-fold area of communication, abhinaya (angika, vachika, aharya, satvika), for any dramatic presentation, is given in amazing detail. The descriptions of body movements in the context of movement of each part of the body and the possible variations therein are described with a great clarity. This forms the basis of later developments in dance and for detailed documentation. Following the dictums of the Natyashastra from the 2nd century AD till now are a number of technical texts of dance in Sanskrit and a few in regional languages. Though they follow the Natyashastra, the prevalent performing practices are cohesively accommodated and taken into account from time to time. From all areas of India and during all periods of time one finds such texts written by experts. The Abhinav Bharati (10th century AD) of Abhinavagupta, commentary on Natyashastra, makes the concepts of the Natyashastra even clearer. Sharangadeva’s Sangita Ratnakara (13th century) highlights the extension of the Natyashastra tradition while describing the desi variations. Nandikeshvara’s Abhinaya Darparam is a comprehensive text that is followed by most contemporary dancers and dance gurus.

By the 13th century, dance had its own existence and was no ancillary to drama as was the case during the Natyashastra time. The concept of nritta already existed and nritya was established, each with their own individual identity. This is reflected in the appearance of numerous works on the art of dance and music from all four corners of India. Visnudharmottara Purana (5th century), Manasollasa (12th century) of Someshvaradeva, Sangitasamayasara
(12-13 th century) of Parshvadeva, Nṛttaratnavali (13th century) of Jayasenapati, Sangitamakaranda (13-14th century) of Narade, Sangitopanisatarsarodhara (14th century) of Sudhakalasa, Sangitadamodara (15th century) and Hastamuktavali of Subhankara. Nrtyaratnakosa (15th century) of Maharana Kumbha, Nrtyadhyaya (14th century) of Asokamalla, Eharatarnava of Nandikeshwara, Rasakumudi of Srikantha, Nartananirnaya (late 16th century) of Pundarika Vitthal, Sangitadarpana (17th century) of Damodara, Sangitanarayana of Purusottama Misra, Sivatattvaratnakara of Basavaraja, Natyaasstrasamgraha of Govindacarya and Sangitasarasamgraha of Ghanashyamdaś - all these deal with dance in detail. In some of the other texts the treatment as given in the Natyashastra as Dance being ancillary to drama in the context of natya, is continued such as in Dasarupaka of Dhananjaya which elaborates the ten different kinds of plays, Sṛngaraprakasa of Bhoja, Natakalaksanaratnakosa of Sagaranandi, Natyadarpana of Ramachandra and Gunachandra, Bhavaprakasa of Sharadatanaya which explains histrionics, Sahityadarpana of Vishvanatha Kaviraja, etc. In the Natyashastra, Bharata Muni has taken into account only the Margi style. If the regional varieties existed they were not incorporated in the Natyashastra. Later writers like Dandin, Bhoja, Saradatanaya, Sagaranandin and several others have referred to regional dances.

The techniques of dance that is body movements, postures e.g. described in these texts, co-relate to the contemporary performing practices of dance, which are part of the oral tradition. As life changes from one breath to the next, so does the oral knowledge, allowing the maximum creative freedom to an artist.
Similarly the text also allowed ample freedom to the practitioners. Take for example, the Janita Chari. As per NS (sh. no. 24 chap 11.) is described as "Musthi hand held on the breast and another hand moved round. The feet to be Talasanchara."

As per SR (sh. no. 938,) it is described as "One hand is kept on chest with musthi and the other moves in a beautiful way. One foot is in agratalasanchara". Both these describe the Chari with the same name. NS says Talasanchara, which would mean moving or sliding of the whole tala (back of foot). This is normally interpreted as, that with one leg stationary and without any weight shift, one can move the other leg practically by about a foot. As per SR it is agratala that is the ball of the foot and offers a little more movement.

In both these cases there is no indication of direction, where the leg neither extends nor is any concrete information on the movement and placements of the hand. Each artist, guru, teacher, choreographer of any style and any gharana is free to use it in the way that pleases and does justice to their need.

Stories narrating Dance, Dancers, Themes etc.

From the earliest times till now, dance has continued to be an integral part of Indian life. Dance is performed on all special occasions of life like childbirth,
weddings, coronation of a king and even death. The social and professional
dance and dancers go parallel at times and meet on the crossroads. Kings and
temples patronized the talented dancers. Amrapali, Vaishakhi, Vasantsena,
Madhavi, and such others were the pride and prized possessions of their
kings. Stories about their lives, their dance, its technique, its teaching, its
social relevance all are vividly described by no less poets than Ilango,
Kalidasa, Bhasa, Bana, Vararuci, Bhavabhuti, Harsa. Rajasekhara,
Damodaragupta, Jayantabhatta and in contemporary times, K M Munshi and
many others, in Sanskrit as well as in the regional languages. These fictional
stories could have been a part of poetic imagination but they were supported
and reflective of the existing cultural situations. The royal and state patronage
exists even today within the democratic Indian society, only changing the
titles. They also cover those literary texts that are probably fictional stories
where either the main female character is a dancer or where the story features
sequences where dancers or a dance performance forms a pivotal part of the
story. In addition there are the already existing innumerable legends and
stories in the Epics and Puranas that form the backbone of the sahitya and
themes used in dance and dance-drama performances. Here are a few
examples from our vast literature providing important links to dance and its
development through the centuries.

King Harshavardhana of Kanauj, a student of dancing and patron of dramatics
and dance (early 7th century) wrote a play, Patnavali Natika, where there is
an actual performance of a dance, which appears to be a folk-dance.
performed on Holi. Madhavi’s Arangetram in Silappadikaram (Ilango, 2nd century AD), Malvika’s Sabha Nrutya in Malvikagnimitra (Kalidasa), Arjuna’s dance (in disguise as Bruhanalla) in King Virata’s palace in the Mahabharata are outstanding examples of detailed descriptions of dance training, performances and relationship of the teacher and the taught.

King Harsha of Kashmir’s (11th century) interest in dance and music is referred to in Rajatarangini. This text has numerous references to dancers, dance teachers, dance legends and the relationship between dance and temples. There are specific mentions of the names of the dancers attached to temples such as Kamala of Paundravardhan in the temple of Kartikeya, Sahaja and Kayya attached to another temple. Ksemendra’s Brhatkathamanjari provides many examples of dancing girls and stories related to them. The Harsacharita of Bana, talks about five types of Goshthis - kavyagoshthi, galpagoshthi, gitagoshthi, nrityagoshthi, and vadyagoshthi. It also elaborates the different kinds of dances, who danced them and what were their characteristics. There is detailed information about musical instruments and the importance of tala. The anklets of the dancers played a significant role in keeping the beat.

In the famous Tamil text of 2nd-3rd century, Silappadikaram by Ilango, Madhavi is said to be in the line of descent of Urvasi and is called Vanavamakal (divine woman). Madhavi’s arangetram takes place before the king. Later Madhavi also performs in the Indra Festival. This text has extensive references to technical terms connected to dance and performing.
arts like *natya, ranga, pindi, varam, kararam, mandala* as well as Tamil technical dance terms such as *elir kai, tolir kai, arangu, izhippu* and many more suggests the prevalence of and familiarity with the classical dance art. They seem to be well integrated in regional practices of dance of that time. This text also has references to other classes of dancing women (other than devadasis) - *kaval ganika* (women guards), *kalattiladum kutt* (dancers in the military camp), *adal kuttis* (dancers who performed *ahakkuttu* or *srngara* dances like *padams*), and so on. “It appears that by the time of the *Silappadikaram* the three-fold classification of dancing girls as *ganikas, kuttis* and *adal siladi* - corresponding to the later classification *tahyilar, patiyilar* and *devoradiyal* - had come into vogue”.

Most importantly, *Silappadikaram* contains extensive chapters on dance (*Arangetru Kadai*), music and musical instruments (*Kadaladu Kadai, Konalvari, Venir Kadai*), and folk dances (*Archiyar Kurava*). The text also includes a mention of an authoritative text or dance called ‘*Jayantam*’ which laid down the prescribed rules for the dance. Dance was known as *Aadal*, but more popularly as *Kuttu*. Madhavi’s *arangetram* is described minutely. The chapter on dance elucidates in great detail, the proficiency of the dance teacher and his skill as a choreographer and musician, and the principles of stage management. The text also explains the classification of two distinct dance types, prevalent in that era, the *Aham* (*Ahakuttu*) and *Puram* (*Purakuttu*). Under *Ahakuttu*, twin concepts are explained such as *Aryam* and *Tamil*, and *Iyalpu* and *Desi*. Further *Santi Kuttu* was divided into *Chokkam* or
Suddha Nrttam (pure dance, later nritta) and incorporated the 108 karanas. The other was MeKuttu that incorporated Desi, Vadugu and Singalam. It had three divisions - Sama Kuttu, Vanmai Kuttu (tandava) and Menmai Kuttu (lasya). Under Purakutu, come three moches - Perunatai, Charyay, and Bhramari. Silappadikaram as a story incorporated both existing streams of dance, classical and folk.

References to dance and dancing abound in Sanskrit literary texts. The Sanskrit kavya literature and natya literature often has elaborate descriptions of dance performances in highly technical terms. Both kavya and natya literature often consist of dramatic verse which adapts itself easily to dance interpretations. These poet-dramatists appear to be extremely well versed in the principles of dance as codified in the Natyashastra. In Malavikagnimitra, the well-known natya of Kalidasa, Malvika is a princess who is a trained dancer and her performance is the high point of this work. Malavika’s actual performance is the focus of this literary work and as such there are innumerable descriptions of her repertoire, the accompanists, her performance itself and of the dancer’s own technical prowess. Ganadasa, the dance-master describes Malavika to be very quick if understanding and dexterous in practice of expressive movement (‘bhavikam’). Detailed technical references to dance are also found in Malavikagnimitra. At the court of Pushyamitra (circa 150 BC) there is a ‘preksagrha’ (theatre) and a separate hall for practice of music and dance. There are two royal dance masters; Haradatta is under the patronage of the king and Ganadasa under that of the queen. They are called ‘natyacharya’, ‘abhinayacharya’ and ‘nartayita’. They were not only gurus but
also performers. Ganadasa ascribes the two-fold dance (tandava and lasya) to the Ardhanarishwara form of Shiva. The work of the dance masters was called 'natya', 'abhinayaavidya', 'shilpa' which meant art or craft at that time. The performer was called 'patra'. Both dance masters differentiate between 'sasra' (theory) and 'prayoga' (performance). The well-known historian Anand Coomarswami suggests that dance was not only patronized but also even learnt and practiced by the royal and noble ladies of the court.

In Abhijnana Shakuntala, Kalidasa has given exact stage directions which are illustrative of the care that the poet-dramatist took to make sure that the play was performed correctly. What is however most interesting is his creative adaptation of dance hastas and movements to express what is physically not possible to show on stage. In Vikramorvasiyaa, another work by Kalidasa, dance and especially music is discussed in more technical detail. In this work, Urvasi, the accomplished dancer, dances all the eight resas with great virtuosity. In fact Kalidasa's entire body of literary work is highly embellished by extensive references and descriptions of music and dance. His similes in Meghdutam and Ritu Samhara invariably use images of dance. In Meghdutam, there are descriptions of the dances by the women of Ujjain, the sound of thunder invite the peacocks to dance, and of the gracefulness of women dancing in Alkapuri which are explained with dance terminology. In his Raghuvamsa, a description of creepers compares them to the hands of a dancer forever moving in gesture and where the hum of the bees offers the music. In a truly extraordinary simile, the movements of branches of a young
mango tree are compared to that of a young dancer just starting to learn abhinaya! In the famous Mrchchakatika, the courtesan- heroine, Vasantsena is an expert in dance and her movements are often described in terms of dance. From the 11th century, there are writers like Somadeva (Kashmir) who wrote Kathasaritasagara and Jinavallabh of Rajasthan author of Sanghapattaka, have referred to dancers performing in temples in their works. While Kathasaritasagara actually features two devadasis called Sundari of Kanchanpura and Rupanika of Mathura, the Jain Jinavallabha describes dancing girls distracting monks in the derasars of Rajasthan.

Literature used in Dance/Dance Sahitva

For nritya and abhinaya items and dance dramas, the narrative is danced. The dancers and gurus have usually taken recourse to the extraordinary wealth of the existing Indian Epics, Puranas and legends from which to create and choreograph an item. The direct narratives and their interpretations have remained the eternal sources. For example, the Draupadi Vasta Harana or the Sita Swayamvara are danced and choreographed by almost all. They are so much part of our life that they become the direct links of communication in all styles of performing genre. Famous poet-composers have written and composed items suitable for dance performances. Each dance style can boast of special compositions, which are immortal.

Devotional Hymns composed by Saivite Nayanmars and Vaisnnavite Alvars (7th century) have often been used by dancers. The Tevaram hymns of Sambandar and Appar refer to the daily nityapujas by the Brahmins where they
recited the *Vedas* and the girls danced. In fact a number of *Tevaram* hymns are full of the *sringara* tradition. The contribution of the musical stalwarts like Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar, Shyamashastri, Purandaradasa, Kshetragya in South India and Surdas, Tukaram, Jayadeva, Mirabai, Shankardeva in north India have enriched the repertoire of Indian *Dance*.

Bharatanatyam repertoire is rich and offers a lot of selection, with varied emotions and themes due to the rich compositions of the Musical Trinity and others. Muthuswami Dikshitar (1775-1835), composed and wrote the famous *varnam*, “Roopamujuchi...” (Ragam todi, talam adi), which is a must for all dancers, if not for performance, definitely for training. Vadivelu (of the Tanjore Quartet) was a disciple of Muthuswami Dikshitar and used many of the Dikshitar compositions in his dance choreography. He shifted from Tanjavour (after the death of Maharaja Sarfoji in 1832) to Travancore, taking with him his compositions, choreography and dancers. He gave Maharaja Swati Tirunal of Travancore an incentive to compose the forms of dance music like *Varnams*, *Padam*, *Swarjattis* and *Tilanas*. Swati Tirunal composed more than 30 *varnams* among which, “Sumasayaka” in Kapi presents innovations like *sangatis* or progressive variations in the *pallavi* and the form of a *ragamala* in the last *charana*. These *varnams* are popular in Bharatanatyam too. His *jatiswaram*, *Pancharagaswrajati*, beginning Sa Ni Sa Re Sa in Kalyani *raga* is still popular. Apart from Tamil and Telugu, he wrote also in Hindi, Marathi and Sanskrit.
The Dance Compositions of the Tanjore Quartet, edited by Bharatha Sangeetha Vidwan, Natya Kalanidhi Tanjore K P Kittappa and Veenai Vithakar, Tamil Nadu State Vidwan Kalaimamani, Tanjore K P Sivanandam, and originally published in 1961, brought to light many unknown compositions of the Quartet including Jathiswarams, Varnam.

Thyagaraja (1767-1847) the great composer-lyricist was a devotee of Lord Rama. He composed mainly in Telugu - kritis, namaavallis, kirtanas, geyanatakas, etc. - sometimes in Sanskrit. Compositions of Tyagaraja, especially his Nauka-charitra with 21 songs in 13 ragas, lend itself beautifully to an effective production as a dance-drama. He also composed in popular and rare ragas.

Jayadeva’s Gita Govinda of 12th cen. AD is not only a rich source for the miniature painters, but also equally perhaps more, important source of poetic subtlety for the dancers. The Stringer Rasa, both sensual and sensuous, depicted through the love of Radha and Krishna, are like eternal fountains, springing forth, with new colors in dance. Baajans of medieval Bhakti poets like Mirabai, Surdas, compositions of Tulsidas, Kabir and others form a staple part of most classical dance recitals today. Though profound in philosophy, they are full of simple life observations, more dramatic in content, and with visual imageries, giving ample emotional scope to the masters and reaching directly to the hearts of the spectators.

Up to the early 20th century, the songs to which dances were composed were exclusively those rich in sringara bhava - some in honor of kings and nobles,
patrons of both the arts and artists. While many of these were beautiful songs, the devadasis often interpreted them in a very earthly way. Coming to the concert stage, the flavor of compositions is more lyrical, sensual, and subtle in all areas as well as strong in expressing ideas which generate at times strong emotions. A lot of post-independence Indian poetry, describing the relevant issues like concern for Ecological balance, women's issues, political concerns as well as musical forms, yet not danced in the traditional Margam, such as Gazals, non-metered poetry are used for an added advantage.

**Dance References from Travelogues / Govt. Reports / Temple Records / Inscriptions And 20th century Dance Literature**

Scholars and explorers who traveled to ancient India and even as recent as the 19th century have left behind their travelogues that describe the dancers and the dances that they have seen, the occasions on which dances have been performed, the social customs associated with dance activity, the difference in professional and folk dances, and sometimes, the economic and political necessity for Courts to support dancers. Since dancing was chiefly associated with temples, texts or manuals describing temple rituals offer important information on why and when dance was performed in the temples, its significance as a part of the temple ritual, how temples supported dancers and so on. Government reports and gazettes are also important documentary evidences of the legal status of the dancers and the regulations that applied to them.
In 867 AD an Arab traveler, Abu Zeid Al Hasan mentioned dancing girls attached to temples. Another traveler, Al-Be°Funi also probably from an Arab country has referred to dancers performing in temples in his works. His interpretation of dancers in temples in north India, where he toured, is that "they were revenue-earners for the kings as they were a major attraction in the cities." A number of European travelers visited India from the 17th century onwards, writing travelogues describing what they saw and experienced. Amongst the first ones was Tavernier, who extensively toured south India, especially the Deccan region. He interpreted dancing girls as an indirect source of revenue for the rulers. Liquor was taxed in these kingdoms and dancing girls 'promoted' heavy consumption. He also observed that "there were 20,000 dancers in this region but he describes them as courtesans with no connection to temples".

Fray Sebastein Manrique also came here in this century and has recorded a Durga procession led by a vast troupe of dancing girls in his book, *Travels of Fray S. Manrique*. Abbe Jean Antoine Dubois, a French missionary who traveled and worked in India from 1792-1823, has written about the singing and dancing in temples at fixed times and how every important temple had at least 10-12 devadasis attached to it, in his travel book, *Hindu Manners. Customs and Ceremonies*. He has written about a festival at Tirupati with a procession of Lord Venkatesvara where the temple priests selected the most beautiful women from amongst those who had come to watch, to serve as new dancing girls in the temple. He has also described dancing at the Pongal
festival of Tamil Nadu. Three hundred years earlier, Marco Polo recorded during a visit to Malabar that the dances of the devadasis were believed to encourage sexual union between gods and goddesses, thus ensuring prosperity and good harvests. Another travel-writer, Dr. Francis Hamilton-Buchanan who wrote Journey from Madras through Mysore, Kanara and Malabar, in 3 volumes in 1807, has observed therein that the two important temples at Kanchipuram has about a hundred dancing girls attached to them. A missionary, Amy Wilson-Carmichael describes in her book, Things As They Are, (1904) how devadasis were carefully selected and how attractiveness was a prized characteristic. References to dance are found in James Todd’s Annals & Antiquities of Rajasthan where he explores the tradition of extensive Krishna-worship in the state and the association of dance with this worship, the ‘mystic dance’ the Rasmandel and comparing it to the Pythric dance, or the fire dance of the Egyptians.

Robert Sewell in his book, A Forgotten Empire (Vijaynagar) published in 1900 describes a city and a pagoda style temple therein with an image of Ganesha. He recounts how women dance before the image and that the daughters of these women belong to the temple. He describes the expensive lifestyle of these women. However, most importantly, he describes what appears to be a Dancing School in the king’s palace “There is a hall where the king sends his women to be taught to dance. There are images seated on the elephant, as well as those on the panels, are all dancing women having little drums... The designs of these panels show the positions at the end of
dances in such a way that on each panel there is a dancer in the proper position at the end of the dance; this is to teach the women so that if they forget the position in which they have to remain when the dance is done, they may look at one of the panels where is the end of that dance. By that they keep in mind what they have to do. At the end of this house on the left hand is a painted recess where the women cling on with their hand, in order better to stretch and loosen their bodies and legs; there they teach them to make the whole body supple, in order to make their dancing more graceful...in the middle of the wall is a golden image of a woman...with arms in the position which she occupies in the end of the dance. The author further describes what was perhaps popularly believed. It seemed that probably the whole of the Natyashastra was illustrated in sculpture and imagery, and it is such a misfortune that this wonderful structure has not survived. However in the Kalyana Mandapa of the famous Vitthalaswami temple at Hampi, there is a throne platform profusely decorated with a rich frieze at its base representing various types of musicians, dancers and drummers performing before an appreciative king, probably Krishna Deva Raya. This was perhaps the throne where the king witnessed performances which must have reached high standards of perfection in the kingdom of Vijayanagara.

In addition to the reports by travelers from foreign lands, these are numerous Government Reports and Gazettes that authentically note the happenings in various parts of the country. As recently as in early 1900s, there are local government reports that state that there were temple dancers in Assam,
Madras and the Jagannath temple in Orissa. But not in Bengal, Sind, United Provinces or Gujarat (Legislative Debates, 1922). By 1932, when it was becoming quite clear that dancing in temples would no longer be legally allowed, the Journal of the Madras Music Academy, 1932, states, “We all know that today, even in Pandarpur, daily worship is being done in the temple accompanied by natyam (dance) similarly in Srirangan, during the ten days preceding the Mukkotai Ekadasi day, worship is generally accompanied by natyam”

5. The reality of the dancer-in-the-temple continued in actual fact over many centuries almost all over India until it was banned by an act of law in the mid-20th century. Dancing in temples, and temple precincts has reappeared in recent years when professional classical dancers participated in dance festivals and other prestigious events held by temple trusts / official tourism and culture departments, but not as dedicated devadasis.

Temple inscriptions provide undisputed social records of prevalent practices. One of the most important inscriptions is the 12th century inscription at the Brhadesvara Temple in Tanjore records the event when the ruler, Rajendra Chola ordered four hundred dancers to be brought from nearby temples to be attached to the Tanjore Temple. The inscription names all the temples both Saivite and Vaishnavite, that had dancers attached to them6. An inscription dating to the reign of Kulottunga III (1205-18) establishes that there was a time-table for the presentation of dance and the dancers took turns: “the assignment of a fixed period in the day for every dancing girl to perform her services by turn in the temple”7. The word Nṛtta is found in the inscriptions

[ 97 ]
as early as the 9th century. The Manne Copper Plates (802 AD) mentions the word nritta while referring to “a subordinate of Rastrakuta Govinda III called Srivijaya who made a grant to those engaged in the service of dancing and singing in the Jaina Basadi at Manyapura, -vi‘asini-viracita-nritta-gita-vadyabali”.

Manuals on Temple Rituals are a rich source of documentation. P V Jagadisha Ayyar describes dance as a ritual in temples. One such description in a temple in Ramesvaram records a ritual with accuracy: “At 4.30 or 5 am (the puja begins) the dancing girl (muraikari) officiating for the day, with rudraksha beads in place of jewels, dressed up as a Brahmani and her hair uncombed … open up all the doors to the mahamandapa. Later the god is taken in procession preceded by musicians and attendant dancing girl … the dancing girl repeats a tevara ujal or verse in honour of Siva.” A number of these manuals also state the reasons for which dance was performed in the temple. Such manuals form part of the literature or written evidence available as documentation. None of the manuals associate temple dancing with prostitution. While most of the texts refer to dancing girls in temples as ganikas, they were also known as devaganikas, and there are instances where devaganikas and devadasis are the same.

With Indian classical dance gaining much respect and importance in the early 20th century, it also encouraged a few serious dance scholars to embark on critical analysis and writing on the subject mainly in English. There is some research in the history of the dance form, the life of the devadasis, and textual
analysis. People have tried to draw parallels between development of different aspects of Indian art such as temple art, paintings and performance arts as a method of understanding the hoary traditions of our cultural heritage. But all these are sporadic, yet dance research is much unexplored area. Esteemed scholars and historians like Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, Shri Mozan Khokar, Dr Mandakranta Bose, Dr Sunil Kothari, and Dr Kanak Rele have provided rich works of in-depth serious studies. Their published books, as well as articles in significant journals have been internationally acclaimed. Foreign scholars such as John Erdman, Anne Marie Gaston, Phillip Zarilli and others have contributed significantly to the area of dance research. Specific organizations given to the study and dissemination of the performance arts produce magazines and journals devoted to these arts. These include Shruti (Shruti Foundation, Chennai), NCPA Journal (National Centre for the Performing Arts, Mumbai), SNA Journal (Sangeet Natak Akademi), certain publications of Marg, the oldest cultural publication of India, Attendance (Dance Annual of India) and so on. With the proliferation of computers and the popularity of the Internet, there are several sites devoted to dance such as www.narthaki.com, www.kutcheri.com, etc. In recent years younger generations of dancers like Leela Samson, Lakshmi Viswanathan, and Jayalakshmi Eshwar have also written on dance in general. Yet there is very little in-depth writing on the development of dance after it came on the secular stage. The major gap here is the inability to get any concrete information on the development of classical dance styles. Compared with the long traditions and amount of dance and teaching of the performance genre, we have almost
no written word. But still the written word has provided concrete support in the area of dance documentation.

Notes:

1. The Devadasis of Tamil Nadu: A Study, R. Nagaswamy Sangeet Natak No 9: July-September, 1990


3. Travernier, translation by Ball 1925: I, :27-8


8. Hema Govindarajan “Dance Terminologies” pg. 27