Like music, Indian dancing has changed little with the passage of centuries. Dance, according to the rules of the Nāṭyaśāstra was closely connected with acting Nāṭya. In fact, both are forms of the same word. The latter being a *prakritism*, and aspects of a single art, *apohinaya*. The Drama employed, chiefly, words and gestures, and the dance, chiefly, music and gesture.

The Indian dance is not merely a thing of legs and arms alone, but of the whole body. Every movement of the little finger or the eye brow is significant and must be fully controlled. The poses and gestures are classified in detail. With so many possible combinations, the dancer can tell a whole story, easily comprehensible to the observer who knows the convention.

The most striking feature of the Indian dance, undoubtedly, is the hand gesture, *mudrā*. By a beautiful and complicated code, the hand alone is capable of portraying not only a wide range of emotions, but gods, animals, men, natural scenery, actions and so on. Ancient India was rich in folk dances, which were performed at festivals. There seems to have been no social taboo on the art in ancient times. Women were very fond of
dance and music. Court dancers were patronised by paramount kings.

Our sculptors had also taken the advantage of this exercise, full of glamour. They realised that they could depict a woman in mere glamorous and beautiful poses. They painted her in beautiful colours and posed in the famous Ajanta fresco. They made beautiful sculptures of her at famous caves of Aurangabad, etc. Thus we find very beautiful examples of dancing scenes in the Ancient Indian art.

From the very beginning, man is aware of woman's glamorous pose. Even in the earliest civilization of the Indus Valley, we find the sculpture of an aboriginal naked dancing girl in bronze Pl XXIV. This figure is 6 ft. 4 in. below the surface. It is 4 ft. high. This is the most amazing of the discoveries at Mohenjodaro. This figure immediately reminds one of the devadasis who are the dancers institutionally attached to certain Hindu temples. The statue is notable because of its treatment of the slim back and the long legs. She has very slender body full of dynamism of life. Art has presented her in a very beautiful pose. She has put her right hand on the hip. In the left she wears bracelets upto the shoulder which rests upon the left leg just above the knee. On the right hand there are only a few bracelets, probably
because this arm is used more in dancing. The legs are put slightly forward with the feet beating rhythm of the music. Thus her pose is quite natural.

The arrangement of the hair is very curious. It is worn in short crimped curls on the top of the head and exceptionally long and thick locks starting from the left side. It is brought round behind the head and over the right shoulder. The eyes are half-closed and she has full lips. The necklace has three pendants suspended from it. Though the body is not very proportionate, yet it is a fine piece of work.

Besides the dancing girl in bronze two more dancing figures have been found from the upper levels at the excavation at Mohenjodaro. Here also, we see that the feet are a little ahead of the body which remind us of the pose of dance. Perhaps, this posture was part of a ritual dance. One figure, which, perhaps is the depiction of a dwarf, is bandy-legged and a drum is hanging around his neck. They are in a much more crude form than the bronze image.

Thus we see that the dance is often intimately connected with religious practices.

A headless dancing figure has been found from Harappa. It is 10 cm. in height. It is quite a dull
A standing female figurine has been found from Bulandi Bāgh. It belongs to the Maurya period. It is a complete figure and well modelled from the front as well as from the back. But the face is pressed from the moulds and it appears to have been modelled with hands. The figurine wears an elaborate array of heavy apparel with fluttering hoops in the front and at the sides. Over the head appears the rich head-dress of almost manifold elements. Legs are in rigid posture. The left hand is broken. Even then the position of the hand indicates an attitude of dance.

A female dancer has been found from Pataliputra, belonging to the Maurya period. She has elaborate head-dress and extended skirt. Her right hand is extended forward as if she is making some dance pose. This terracotta shows the highest advancement in the art of dancing.

Another terracotta of the Maurya period also shows a group of female dancers wearing skirts. Their costume and poses suggest that they are the dancing girls. The artist has beautifully shown the swinging motion of their body by uplifting the edges of the skirts but he has failed to make beautiful legs. They are unartistic and
stumpy. The head-dress is also very elaborate. It is quite complicated and consists of a number of dices. They wear ear studs, necklaces and girdles.

A female figurine of the Sunga period is found from Kosam. She wears elaborate ornaments. The treatment of the coiffure is elaborate with jewelled bands and turban-like roll on the left side of the head. The ears have heavy pendants and the neck is adorned with a close fitting collar and a beaded chain of several strings. In the arms there are a few pairs of bracelets and a girdle of several strings passes round the waist. The upper part of the body is bare, except ornaments from the waist downwards hangs an extremely thin drapery which reveals the delicate contours of the thighs and the legs. Her face is also very sensitively modelled. The hands seem to be joined in the front just below the breasts. The left leg is bent and from the attitude, the figurine seems to represent a graceful female dancer.

A relief of female dancer of the Sunga period has been found from Kausambī. She is adorned with heavy jewellery, coiffure and rich clothes. Her drapery is very delicately treated so that every part of her body could be visible. She is very well modelled, having full breasts and smile on the face. Her body shows vigour and mobility.
We find so many sculptural figures of *aparāśas* engaged in dancing and music at the Bharhut stūpa belonging to the Sunga period. Here, we see a group of celestial musicians and dancers on a panel of sculptured pillar. Four females with a little girl are in dancing postures and eight females are seated in a semicircle at the left. They are playing on instruments — the latter four play a type of harp with seven strings, one beats time with cymbals, and perhaps others are singing. Their names are inscribed on the railing below as Mīsrakeśī, Subhadra, Sudarśana and Alambuṣā. These heavenly damsels are known as *aparāśas*. The scene appears to be 'śūdikasamaddam turaṁ devānāṁ'.

Perhaps it was a spring festival in which these *aparāśas* used to play instrumental music with feeling of joy in the assembly of gods. In the Vedic texts, too, we find the reference to *aparāśas* who used to dance in Indra Sabha. On the left upper corner there is a tree. Cunningham recognized it as the Bodhi tree and the scene represented the temptation of Śakya Munī, but it does not seem to be so.

Not only in Bharhut but on Śāñči stūpa also we see a dancer on the right of group below the southern gate who carries her large figure in three quarter view. Her face is in a profile. Her arms are extended up to
the end of the space into which the dancer is moving. By her right, she appears with raised hand, however also to turn and left that space into the second plane of the relief. This relief is important for two factors: the three-dimensional extensiveness of the figure which is modelled and foreshortened in relief and translation and reduction of this three-dimensional movement and its extension into surface. In the second relief plane, there is a seated female musician facing the dancer. Her right shoulder is drawn forward like a shield for her chest.

Eastern Gateway — Right Pillar front face — Here is a palace scene where a Raja is seated on a Murhā in the palace hall holding the Veīra in his right hand and a gourd in the left one. Behind him are two attendants holding Chatra and Chaurī. On his right is seated some important royal person attended by two Chaurī and Chatra bearers. On the king's left are two girls, who are dancing to the sound of two Sarangīs or lutes and two drums.

At Mathura, there are numerous railing pillars. On these we find the representation of several nude female figures. There is a young female depicted in a dynamic pose of dancing. Her left foot stands firm to the back and the right is put forward. She has raised
her left hand above the head while with the other she grasps the sash flowing down from the waist. The artist has shown the ecstatic mood of the young dancer. Perched on her girdle is a parrot which is actually conceived as nibbling at the knot of the ornament to untie it. This beautiful sculpture of the Mathura art is now in the Lucknow Museum.

Another piece of the Mathura finds is a girl, whose attitude is easy and natural. The pose of the figure is remarkable, for the un-constrained freedom of both limbs and body. Probably, it is the temporary rest of a dancer. Both her hands are joined behind the head. It is one of the master pieces of the Mathura sculpture art. She wears an additional flat belt or girdle. At first sight, she seems to be entirely naked with the exception of jewellery. Probably the artist wanted to display every part of her body.

Another figure of the same type from Mathura also represents a dancing girl. She is standing in such a pose as though she is trying to expose herself. She is wearing a long necklace of pearls and a broad flat belt passing round the side of the upper part of the bead girdle.

A mithuna couple in dancing pose has been found at Nāgārjunkohgū. Besides this a group of female dancers
in a dancing scene is also found from the same place.

Several dancing figures have been found from the excavation at Sarnath. One dancing figure is pressing her breast with the left hand with its palm turned outwards and the right hand hanging against the knee. Her height is 9½". To her right is a flower stalk.

At Dhamak Stūpa area, the miniature of a dancing figure has been found. Its height is 3¾". But unfortunately, it is quite defaced.

The fragment of a sculpture was found at an area north of the main shrine.

There is a dancing female above and a tail and other traces of the body of a lion below. Its height is 13".

The Aurangabad dancing panel is the most beautiful so far found. It is actually the miracle of the Buddhist caves. We find this panel on the left wall of cave No. VII, which is a Vihara. In the main shrine, is a seated Buddha in Dharma Chakra mudrā. On the left wall of the shrine is an exquisitely carved panel representing a girl dancing in accompaniment of the music played by six other girls, three on each side all deeply self-absorbed in the rhythm. She is a lovely young dancer with a beautiful oval face, finely carved lips, arched
eye brows and a delicate nose. She is wearing an elaborate crown. She has heavy lips and moon-like full breast. Her hands are very slender and artistic and her delicate body is dancing with gay abandon. Her right foot is lifted and the left one is slightly bent. This is the finest expression of the art of dancing in India. Her slender waist is slightly bent at the middle. The dancer is in the full bloom of her youth, dancing in complete self absorption and absolute surrender to the tune of the music offered by a group of six youthful maidens playing on drums, flutes and cymbals, three on each side. The entire composition is conceived and executed in terms of an offering, as it were to the Master seated in the sanctum. The dancing figure itself poised in a moment of time in two delightfully sensuous curves flowing from top to bottom and balanced on two sides by two pairs of delicate angles, is the pivot of the entire composition. The six figures, three on each side, are somewhat separated at forward angles by two deep shadows, one on each side, affording enough space for the dancer for movements. Yet, integrated with her are the two groups of musicians arranged in two slightly angular but pronouncedly circular curves that bind all the figures into one compositional whole. The display of light and shade keeps time and tune with those
of the dance and music. The compositional unit is, therefore, not merely visual and aesthetic, but also conceptual and psychological, which imparts to the panel a deep human appeal, an appeal that is at once secular and spiritual. This would be equally evident in the soft but disciplined treatment of the plastic mass, nowhere so evident than in the treatment of the facial and abdominal muscles of the waist and the finger movements of the hand, and of the right leg with the tilted foot resting on its toes. The total conception and execution of the attitude of the central figure are intended here not to represent a particular movement in the flux of time, but to give significant and eternal form to a state of being. The humanisation of an experience basically spiritual could hardly ever be made visually more perceptible.

Two bronze carvings of dancing girls were found in the jumbled collection of old brass utensils at the shop of a dealer in old brassware at Bombay by Dr. Maghe. From some patches it seems that originally, it must have been heavily gold-gilt all over. The stand-pīṭha or āsana and the two supports at the back were not found with the image. Later on they were prepared by some local artist. The image has a flat face and high cheek bones, characteristic of a Mongolian or a Tibetan face. She is wearing a crown of eight chakras, each surmounted
with a skull. There are three eyes and the lips are little parted. The right hand is raised up and bent and holds a chopper and the left hand holds an artistic bowl probably containing congealed blood. She is wearing three necklaces, one of them touching the navel and a garland of fifty skulls. There is a scarf, gracefully curved, throughout passing behind the head over the shoulders in the front and behind the thighs. On the right its ends form a loop and turns upwards. The hair is combed down in eleven strands and curled up at the ends. The image is in a dancing pose. The toes of the left foot are resting on the padmāsana and those of the right are raised up and touch the calf of the left leg. She is wearing a heavily elaborate mekhālā. There are large circular ear-rings in her ear. She is also wearing armlets and bangles. But the most important thing is the head of a lion on the top of the head of the female figure. Because of this, Dr. Vogel identified them as Dākinī Śīrāhavaktrā. Later on Dr. Bhattacharyya identified them as Vaṭrā Varāhī. Her height is 12 in. and width is 6.5".

There is a beautiful dancing panel in cave No. I at Ajanta. In the left corridor of the cave is depicted the story of the king, Mahājanka who is going to renounce the world. Queen mother Sivali arranges a dance in order to get away her son from the path of Renunciation. Here
the dancer is dancing with full gusto. Her graceful movements reveal the great beauty of her form. She is trying her best to attract Prince Mahājanak. She is dancing very passionately. She is accompanied by female musicians. The pose of the dancer is very characteristic.

In this fresco, we see two tableaux with the usual strings round their bowls in as perfect a form as they are in India even to-day. Cave No. I is dated to the 5th Century A.D.

In cave No. X is a painted scene where a Raja goes with his attendants to a Bodhi tree for worship. The next panel shows the Bodhi tree with a group of women two of whom are dancing and the others playing on musical instruments or clapping. Their upper bodies show the movement indicating that they are dancing gracefully. The main musical instrument resembles a trumpet with a broad end. The women are sitting on stools of beautiful wicker. This scene belongs to the 2nd century B.C. It is in quite a damaged panel.

This scene is painted on the left wall of the front aisle. This fresco is quite damaged and the colour and drawing are fainted. On the extreme left of the painting is a dark green gateway. Beyond which we see a portico where a male figure with ugly feature is sitting. Below him is a female dwarf. Close to them is a young beautiful maid, holding a chaurī.
Beyond this portico is a royal chamber where a Nāga king and his queen are seated on a throne and a musical performance with dance is going on. Behind the queen is a female dancer of pink complexion, whose features show strain. The eyes are bulging and eye-brows raised. The position of her hands is very dramatic. Close to this dancer is a female figure of greyish complexion carrying a pair of small sticks in her right hand and a tray of flowers in the left one. The principal dancer is in the middle, near the feet of the queen. She has raised one hand and one foot and poised herself in a most charming manner. She is dressed in a jacket of blue colour and is wearing bangles and coiffure which are painted with great care.

Above the dancer is a musician with a reddish complexion holding a pair of cymbals in her hands. To the right of the musician holding cymbals, and between the pillars are seen three more figures, the most prominent of them being that shown sitting. She is wearing a long robe of blue striped silk, figures of oxen and ducks appearing in the texture of the blue stripes, the floral design of the cloth of the bodice of the woman, who is standing at the right hand of the latter figure, is also interesting. The third woman with a pale complexion, who is watching the dancer has twisted her finger in a curious way.
Behind the main musician and at some distance is a male figure watching the dance from behind the pillar. The panel seems to be continued farther to the right but the fresco, being damaged, only a few figures can be made out.

In the north-eastern wall of Paharpur, there is a dancing female figure. She is standing cross-legged and in a pleasant triple flexion. Her left hand is upraised while the right one is held before the face. This fine gesture shows the beautiful movement of her body. An almost similar panel in the same wall depicts, again, a female figure with hands shown as if beating cymbals to keep time in tune with the dance. The hair is coiled up and forming a mass behind the head.

We find another dancer in the south-eastern wall PI XXV. She is standing with forcefully bent knees and her right arm with palm outwards swinging across the body, the left shoulder and arm raised, the fore-arm (Palm inwards) loosely pending from the bent upper arm and the head violently bent towards the right. It seems to be a momentary pause. The hair is coiled up against the left shoulder. It is quite a violent pose.

There is another female figure standing cross-legged in tribhanga pose. Both her hands are up raised above the head and hold some rectangular object.
A series of female figures have been found in Nathu, near Sanghao in the Yusufzai district. These figures, which are very gracefully and pleasingly executed, stand, with one leg crossed over the other so that one hip protrudes under trees whose branches they grasp with one hand. One arm is always poised somewhat coquettishly on the protruding hip. All of them are wearing lower cloth round the legs. Three of the four examples wear a sort of jacket. One of which is open down the front and three have scarfs, over the shoulders while three other wear beaded girdles round the loins with a clasp suspending a leaf-shaped ornaments. The hair is waved over the brow and plaited into terminated knobs. All of them are wearing ear-rings, necklaces, bangles and anklets. All these women wear Persian trousers and long jackets with sleeves. In their hair are fresh lotus flowers. They may represent dancing girls employed for side decorations on reliefs of larger groups, or on portions of facades.

We find a beautiful example of Post-Gupta classicism. This figure of a female dancer has been found from Madhya Pradesh. The exquisite movement of the body of the dancer shows the craftsmanship of the artist. She has sensuous charm on her face. It is really a well modelled figure of a Gāndharva dancer.
Apsarās — We find in literature the names of Apsarās who are heavenly dancers and employed in dance and music in the court of Indra.

At Ajanta, we find these mythical characters painted beautifully on walls. They are descending from the clouds to pay their homage to the Buddha. The figure of Indra is drawn with great skill. His fair complexion, fine features and bejewelled crown at once show him as the Lord of heaven. Among the musicians only five are intact row. Two of them are flying on the same plane with Indra, one of them being of a fair complexion and the other ruddy. Both have exquisite feature and womanly grace. These two apsarās are playing cymbals. On a lower plane, another apsarā is playing on a flute. Her hair style is very impressive and pleasing. At a still lower level three is another apsarā who is also playing on some instrument. She is also carrying a small basket on her back. The ornamental ribbons tied round her neck are flying backward in order to indicate movement. Her curly hair has been dressed backward in plain style and tied together in a knot. Behind Indra is another musician with a dwarfish figure and irregular features. Probably, it is a comic figure. To indicate movement the artist has painted the necklace the strings the pearls and the ear-rings inclined on one side instead of hanging downward.
In the verandah of cave seventeen on the right wall are some more apsarás shown in the act of adoration and bringing offerings to the Buddha. Amongst them is one of the most beautiful apsarás. It is, perhaps, master pieces of the art of Ajanta. Her head gear is resembling a turban or an elaborate scarf beautifully decorated with flowers and jewels. She is wearing lovely pearl necklace, the strings of which are inclined on one side to indicate movement. The ribbons on the back of the figure are also floating to indicate movement. The apsarás is looking side ways. The features have been drawn elegantly.

Thus, we see that the artists of ancient India have painted or sculptured woman in a variety of most graceful poses, standing, kneeling, sitting, lying and dancing. Although, they have shown much imagination in sketching her, yet they have always treated her with respect and there is no erotic tendency as we notice in the classic art of Europe.

The inspired artists used woman as their principal decorative asset. They caught every curve of her body, every glance of her eye and every gesture of her hands with consummate artistry. "Woman is treated not as an individual but as a principle. She is there not a female merely but the incarnation of all the beauty of the world".