CHAPTER – VI

CONCLUSION
Conclusion

The present research attempted to focus on and analyse the status of dance during the Vijayanagara period, based on the vast literature, inscriptive sources, sculpture and the dance treatises of the period, specifically relating to the Telugu language and the Telugu speaking country of Andhra. This is due to the fact that not much work has been done till date from this perspective. The thesis thus tried to study dance not in isolation, but in a holistic perspective by taking into consideration the literary and visual evidences, thus trying to establish a relation between dance, literature and sculpture.

Based on the previous chapters and discussions, we can conclude that dance was definitely an important art form and made its presence in all activities of the society. To understand this aspect more clearly, the research attempted to study the scenario based on the available source material.

It is interesting to observe that the literary works, especially the prabandhas mention dance as an important part of their subject. The description of dance mentioned in the prabandhas was also collated with the other writings of the period, especially the chronicles written by the foreign visitors and interestingly both support one another.

The prabandhas majorly mention the dancers their physical attributes and beauty, their lifestyles, their expertise in dance and music, and their prominence in the society. They used dance terminology as well as description of dances in different contexts, suggesting the popularity of marga tradition mainly performed in the courts, temple processions and in festive gatherings.

According to these, the dancers are described to look like the celestials from the heaven. In some contexts, they were described to be even outnumbering the beauty and talent of the celestial dancers like Rambha. Abdur Razzak mentions their beauty using phrases like “cheeks like the moon, and faces blooming as the spring”. These indicate they were indeed beautiful and charming. However, not just the beauty, but their talent was praised too as he mentions in the same line as “when these girls began to move their feet with such grace that wisdom lost its sense and the soul was intoxicated with delight”.
Intense training was given to these dancers not only in the practical performance, but they were also trained to master the dance treatise written by authors like Bharata, Dattila, Kohala Matanga\(^2\) etc. Thus, the training of dancers was extensive and full fledged. Not only these dancers, but dance as an activity was also considered as one of the important aspects of the general education. The royalty were especially taught this art form as a part of their general education. Many chronicles authenticate this fact and experts were appointed to train especially the royal ladies of the palace. This proves the fact that dance was not just a past time, but one of the important facets of the holistic education of the times.

The dancers were one of the important classes of the society and their presence was considered auspicious especially in festive gatherings and other important occasions. The ganikas were the ones who had the privilege of welcoming the guests\(^3\). They were the ones who were privileged to perform all the important rituals right on different social occasions right from birth to death\(^4\). In the court, they were seated only next to royalty. Especially during the Mahanavami festival, their presence was compulsory\(^5\). Thus, we can observe that dancers played an important role in the social rituals and were respected in the society.

Regarding the devadasis who were attached to the temples, they were the ones who performed the shodashopacharas to the god which were considered to be highly auspicious. The sculptures in the various temples like the Chinta Venkataramana temple where these upacharas by the devadasis are carved, substantiate the fact that the devadasis were held in high esteem. There were also certain special privileges given to the devadasis such as inauguration of temple festivals, first preference to start the rituals in the temple and along with the king enter the inner sanctum of the lord.

Besides the temple, the dancers were also seen employed in the court and also employed to perform certain duties in the social administration. They played a key role assisting the king during war campaigns, and sometimes also using their tact and intelligence played the role of spies gathering information thus helping the king to subdue the enemy\(^6\).

In the same way, the devadasis not only served the lord through the prescribed duties, but were conscious of the fact that they were socially responsible. Several inscriptions that we have gone through makes evident this large heartedness of the devadasis, where huge amounts were generously donated for the construction of mantapas, water tanks and other
aspects which benefit the entire society. This generousness on their part earned the devadasis a special position in the temple and the respect in the society.

The lifestyle of the devadasis as well as the courtesans was supposed to be quite luxurious. They were having the privileged freedom and were the only who could chew the beetel leaf.

The courtesans and the devadasis were generally appointed by the king and there are instances where some girls were also dedicated by others in the society to the temple. However, whether one chooses to be in the court or temple is entirely dependent on the will and decision of the dancer herself. Some courtesans after serving the king may opt to go into the service of the temple, but never any instances of a devadasi, a dancer in the temple coming to the court mentioned. This indicates that the ultimate decision that a dancer aimed to achieve is to become a devadasi and lead her life in the service of the lord.

Besides these courtesans and the devadasis, there were also dancers who were specifically called as vesyas. They might have the ones who majorly served as the ones that cater to the amorous pleasures of the men in general in the Vijayanagara society. Given this fact, certain writings also indicate the degeneration of the system and cautioning one to be away from dancers and dance itself.

Coming to the tradition of dance itself, one can observe that there was a clear cut demarcation of marga and desi. The marga which can be termed as the classical was the basis for the dances that were performed in the temples and the courts. The desi, i.e. the regional form, was popularly performed by the common folk. Hence, the sculptures belonging to these genres, find their place in the temples. The former mainly in the inner sanctum sanctorum and the ranga mantapas and the latter i.e. folk in the outer prakaras. Again, the former was more ritualistic if it was temple and the latter was performed in the processions, other social celebrations and gatherings.

The writing of dance treatises like Sangeeta Suryodayam, Sangeeta Darpanam, and Sangeeta Muktavali show that dance was considered as an important art form that needed to be textualised. Probably the authors of these treatises have enough impetus and thus wrote the lakshanas of the same. The texts also, especially Sangeeta Suryodayam gave equal
importance to marga and desi techniques, though unfortunately it does not talk about any specific forms of dance. We can also observe the enumeration of the technique of dance, in the various sculptures found in the temples.

Talking about the marga technique, the sculptures use the hand gestures like the samdamsa, pataka, dola and anjali and the karanas like gajakriditha, urdhwajanu and vrishika karanas. With regard to the desi technique, utlputya karanas like skadabhantam, bhrantapadancitam, ucita bhramari etc., were most commonly used. An analysis of the desi technique also mentioned in the Sangeeta Suryodayam gives us an idea that the majority of movements employed in desi are acrobatic in nature. Lot of stretches of the legs, usages of bhramaris (rounds), utplavanas (jumps) could be seen to be employed and performed. For instance, wherein the dancers falls on the ground on the kuncita feet (sarikam- cari) taking a round. Placing the feet in kuncita position and taking a jump (harinatrasikam cari) denotes the acrobatic nature of the movements. Besides these vibrant and virile movements, certain delicate and graceful were also mentioned by Lakshmi Narayana which indicate both the tandava and the laasya type of dancing. Examples of movements like parshniparshvagatam, parshinrecitam, parshnividdham, vishlista cari, parshni recita cari, Madalasa sthanakam for graceful movements. In addition, the vigour of such movements demands through expertise, skill and practice from the part of the dancer and it is only obvious that the training system of the dancers was catering to this.

Though Sangeeta Suryodayam does not mention any desi form of dance in particular, it mentions movements done with sticks (dandapramanancita karana) which denotes the existence of desi forms. The movement closely resembles the dance form of Kolatam mentioned in Nritta Ratnavali, an earlier treatise of dance. The foreign chronicles also mention certain dances performed with sticks. Nicolo Conti observes, “Some sing, dancing in a circle after our manner; while others sing forming a line in a single file, one after the other, and exchanging little painted rods, of which each person carries two, with those whom they meet on turning”. This description matches with the sculptural panels of Kolatam seen in several temples. This indicates that Kolatam might be one of the popular dance forms of the times.

Last but not the least, Sangeeta Suryodayam though followed Nritta Ratnavali in general, shows certain variations and also brings in certain additions which indicate the
movements of dance were evolving and the movements were identified crystallizing in the forms.

In the context of dance, the mention of terms like *sutradhari, purvarangam, kelika, brhukumsa* is specifically seen used. This denotes the presence of traditional theatre in those days. There is a mention of the *sutradhari* introducing the play to the audience in *Prabhavati Pradyumnam*. The same *prabandha* also mentions the usage of a curtain in the presentation along with description of the dancers wearing jewellery made of lacquer. This gives a strong foot hold that a tradition close to *bhagavata mela* tradition was then present.7

This character of *sutradhara* is seen in Kuchipudi, and the other *bhagavata melas* traditions even today. Also, the enactment of *purvaranga* ritual is an indication that this ritual was followed by all the dance performers of the times, either in solo or during group presentations. *Kelika* is another group presentation presented before Saluva Narasimha Raya, which again denotes the *natyamela* tradition being in vogue during those days. All the above terms strongly indicate the presence of certain traditions close to the *natyamela* traditions of today.

In addition, Krishnadevaraya mentions the term *brhukumsa* while defining it as male impersonation done by female. This was mentioned enacted in the *kaisiki natakam* wherein the roles were of *dasari* and the *rakshasa* were enacted by the *devadasis* of the times. In the present day context, this enactment of *brhukumsa* is found in the the *nattuvamela* tradition and also Kuchipudi dance drama. However, the term *bhrumkumsa* came to be understood in the later period as female impersonation by men. This might be a development that took place when the role of men became more dominant in dance thus, the role reversal of female impersonation became more popular. Also, some sculptures show all women groups *i.e.*, even the orchestra being of women had parallel practise seen until the last century especially in the coastal districts of Andhra.

Besides these, the musical support was seen as a major aspect for dance. The musicians included *nattuvanars*, probably also the guru and trainer, the *mridangists*, the cymbal player and the *tambura* player. It is not very clear whether they were any accompanists playing other instruments accompanying the dance
Regarding the costuming and the hair do-s, a wide variety of costumes and hair do-s depending upon the classes of dancers was present. Right from heavily draped dresses to simple patterns, the temples depict all the variety of costumes worn by the dancers of the times. Especially the *natya mantapas* and the *ranga mantapas* depict dance sculptures of dancers draped with heavy dresses and adorning heavy jewellery. This leads to two inferences. One, that they probably were the representations of the *devadasis* attached to the temple and two, they were wealthy and more confined to the inner sanctum of the temple and danced in front of the deity. The dancers wearing simpler costumes and plain jewellery are seen carved in the outer precincts of the temple indicating that the dancers were confined to dancing in the processional activities of the temple.

To sum up we may say dance that dance was a very predominant art from during the Vijayanagara period, and was in fact a way of life in the Vijayanagara society. In its technique, it was highly evolved with specialised training system, and commanded respect from all quarters. The dancers conducted themselves with grace and elan and honoured for their generosity and expertise in the art form. They played a key role in several aspects of Vijayanagara kingdom. The dancers of Vijayanagara seem to have extended the purpose of dance given by Bharata in *Natya Sastra*, "Dukhaartaanaam Sramartaanaam, Sokaartaanam, Tapasvenaam, Visraanti Jananam Kale, Natya me ta dhabhavishyati" beyond mere entertainment and putting it to the purposeful use of the development of the society.
References

1 Amukta malyada and Manu Charitra.

2 Kalahasti Mahatyaam mentions the extensive training given to Manikyavalli’s daughters in the course of becoming dancers.

3 In Parijatapaharanam, Nandi Timanna mentions that the nayaka was welcomed by the ganikas into the Indra sabha. This denotes the importance of dancers. In Amuktya Malyada, Krishnadevaraya mentions that lord Ranganatha was welcomed into the city of Srivilliputtur by the dancers. Not only that, he was dressed up as the groom by the dancers itself. In Ramabhyudayam, the poet mentions that the dancers performed the important rituals during the birth of lord Rama.

4 Amuktya Malyada mentions that Lord Ranganatha was dressed up as the groom by the dancers during his marriage with Godadevi In Ramabhyudayam, the poet mentions that the dancers performed the important rituals during the birth of lord Rama.

5 Domingo Paes mentions the same wherein the presence of dancers was a must during the Mahanavami festival which was the most important festival of the times. He mentions “For these feasts are summoned all the dancing-women of the kingdom, in order that they should be present; and also the captains and kings and great lords with all their retinues”.

6 This is mentioned by Abdur Razzak about a dancing girl who assisted the king in killing the enemy Thus, not only were they known for their art, but also for their intelligence and tactics through which they helped the king in war campaigns.

7 An inscription from the time of King Virupakasha in the Srirangam temple in the chandana mantapa is also seen mentioning the term sutradhara It mentions the drama Narayanavilasa in which the sutradhara introduces King Virupaksha as the author of the play. (www.souythindianinsccriptions).