CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Situating the Study

India is known for her traditional culture, which includes her sublime artistic and religious belief systems. Being a home for several world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, and others, India is a deeply religious country. Hinduism\(^1\) is one of the oldest surviving religions in the world. Hinduism is the general term for all the forms of worship in which the Hindu religious consciousness has found expression. It has had a significant influence on the structure of Indian life. More significantly, Hinduism teaches Indian aesthetic and emotional culture for spiritual understanding and character development through fine arts like music, dance, drama, painting, and sculpture.

All established religions have their sacred places of worship. The main sacred place of worship of the Hindus is the temple or devālaya (or kōyil in Tamil), which means house of God. A temple is a building for religious exercises. It is a place of prostration before God, and a house of community worship. It is the central place of communication between gods and devotees. The temple served as a promoter of the arts, which ultimately showed the way to attain union between the material and the spiritual. The ultimate aim of life is mokṣa (release) and art is one of the recognized means of attaining this aim. Art was widely prevalent in Hindu temples. Temples played a significant role in the life of the Tamils and occupied a central place in their lives. They served as places of worship, divine experience, entertainment, aesthetic relish, social togetherness, as well as home for artistes in the fields of sculpture, painting, music, dance and philosophy.

According to Stella Kramrisch, a Hindu temple is one of the means to attain mokṣa. She explains:

Indian temple architecture, in the fullness of its development, establishes in spatial terms an intellectual and actual approach to the Supreme Principle of which the

\(^{1}\) Hinduism is also referred to as Vaiḍika Dharma, meaning “religion of the Vedas,” in the ancient Hindu scriptures. The original name of Hindu Dharma is Sanātana Dharma, or “universal religion.”
deity is symbolic. The statue is the manifestation (arcā-avatāra) of the deity through a concrete work of art (mūrti), and the building is its body and house. Images are given shape by sculpture and painting, whose inter-relationship expresses in line, proportion and colour the love (bhakti) to which gods and myths owe their existence as aspects of the Absolute.²

The Hindu temple is a monument with elaborate sculptures and wide circummutating passages, with other deities placed around the chief deity. The images were originally chiseled out of stone. Later bronze, wood, mortar and other materials came to be used to make religious images as mentioned in the Śilpa texts. The images became sacred when rituals were performed and prayers offered in the temples. Most of the sculptures depict dancing postures which enhance not only the beauty of the images but also their philosophical implications.

Art³ is the expression of a dominant idea in a beautiful form. The temple arts aim at the transcendental union of jivātma or individual soul with the Supreme Soul, Paramātman. In India, art and religion are intimately interrelated. The art of dance occupies a significant place in Indian culture. Dance in India is considered divine in origin. Indian dance includes tribal, folk and classical forms. The common root of all the classical dance forms can be traced to Bharata’s Nāṭyaśāstra, a comprehensive work on the science and technique of Indian drama, dance, and music. Among the classical dances that are prevalent in India, Bharatanatyam occupies an important position, and it is believed to have originated in Tamilnadu.

In the Sangam⁴ (Carīkam) Period Bharatanatyam was called kūttu, āṭ al and later satir and then dāsiāṭ ū am and, in the 20th century, it was termed Bharatanatyam. The mythological origin of Indian classical dance is traced in the Nāṭyaśāstra and Abhinayadarpaṇa. The historical origin of Bharatanatyam cannot be exactly traced, but one can explore where it flourished. Bharatanatyam is rooted in Tamilnadu and its origin can be traced back to the Sangam Period. The ancient Tamil texts Eṭ ū utokai, Pattupāṭ ū u, Kūttanūl, Pañcamarapu, Tolkāppiyam, and Cilappatikāram speak of this


³ The word “art” is derived from *arti*, the craft guilds of the Italian Renaissance, where art denoted beauty, craftsmanship, skill, mastery of form, inventiveness, and the associations that exist between form and ideas and between techniques and materials.

⁴ The Sangam Age and the Sangam literature represent the richest poetic expression of the Tamils and this age is called the heroic age or the golden age. The Sangam Age is said to have existed for an incredible duration of about 10,000 years.
dance form. From the above, one can infer that this art might have flourished 3000 to 4000 years ago throughout India, with Tamilnadu as its main centre.

The sculptures and paintings found in the temples portray certain dance postures that are found in Bharatanatyam. These images provide the fundamentals about Hindu iconography. Iconography is a way of studying symbolic meanings: religious/political iconography. The description of any subject by means of drawings or figures is iconography. It is the language of the form. It is the use of symbols by artistes to express certain universal ideas. It is a pictorial representation, a drawing or a plan or a figure. The term “iconography” was formerly used in a secular way and, in India, till the fifth century AD, icons were not used for religious purposes. There were no images/icons known in Tamil country which are of earlier date than the 7th century AD. Only after the seventh century AD, the term “icon” came to be used specifically for religious representations. The images are great works of art, and, when one is interested in studying the images in depth, iconographic study is indispensable. The focus of this study is Hindu iconography, giving special emphasis to the aesthetic nature of the images.

Several scholars have dealt in detail with the art of dancing and sculpture from various angles. With the help of those scholarly research works and several field visits, this

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5 The word “iconography” is synonymous with piratimaiviravanam (description of icons) in Tamil. This word is said to have come into use in 1628.


8 The word “icon” has its root in Greek eiko’n. The etymology of the word eiko’n is: e + y which form Greek root eik. Eiko’n means a likeness, image, portrait (whether picture or statue) an image in a mirror, a similitude, semblance, phantom, or simile. An icon is a religious picture, usually painted on a flat surface such as wood or ivory. Cf. K. C. A. Gnana Giri Nadar, Greek Words of Tamil Origin (Madurai: K. C. A. Gnana Giri Nadar, 1982), p. 35. Icons in Eastern Orthodox churches are the pictures of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or the saints. Before the Russian Revolution in 1917, icons were placed in churches and taken by armies into battle. The pictures could be reverenced highly, but only Christ’s image could be adored. Cf. Michael Kelly, “Icons,” Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, vol. 2 (Newyork: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 454. The word “icon” is synonymous with piratirūpam or piratimal in Tamil.


10 Sculptures are figures chiseled out of stone or rocks in caves and on mountains. They can be religious, or secular i.e., for beauty’s sake. Sculptures of gods and goddesses are found in the main sanctum sanctorum, subsidiary sanctums, on the front and side walls of the prāśāda (a three-storeyed palace or a complete solid mass on whose multi-buttressed walls the images are displayed), on the outside of the prāśāda, and on the
researcher has tried to study the relationship between Bharatanatyam and iconography, laying emphasis on the body postures, from rare texts like Saṅgītaratnakara, Bharatārṇava, Cīpa Čeṇḍūl, and Śilparatna. The body postures of the mūlavars (chief deities) in the garbhagṛha (sanctum sanctorum) and the other deities in the subsidiary sanctums have been studied relating them to Bharatanatyam and iconography. An attempt has been made here to further explore the bodily postures of the dancing and non-dancing divinities in the garbhagṛha and subsidiary sanctums and the impact of the mūlavars on the devotees. This thesis, entitled “The Significance of the Mūla Beras in the Hindu Temples of Tamilnadu with Special Reference to Bharatanatyam and Hindu Iconography,” is an attempt to study the intimate relationship between Indian classical dance, Bharatanatyam, and Indian traditional sculpture, Hindu iconography with Hindu temples as their common platform.

1.2  The Meaning of the Title

In India, there is an intimate relationship between dance and religion, sculpture and religion, dance and sculpture, and art and philosophy. They are interdependent. This fact is obvious in Tamilnadu. This thesis studies the relationship between āṅgikābhīnaya (the dance techniques of the body) and pratimā lakṣaṇa (the grammar of form and the order in form in Hindu iconography) and their correlation with Hindu temples and deities. Hence the thesis is entitled “The Significance of the Mūla Beras in the Hindu Temples of Tamilnadu with Special Reference to Bharatanatyam and Hindu Iconography.” The five focal aspects of the title are: “the Significance of the Mūla Beras,” the first; “in the Hindu Temples,” the second; “of Tamilnadu,” the third; “with Special Reference to Bharatanatyam,” the fourth; and “Hindu Iconography,” the fifth. They are explained hereunder.

1.2.1  The Significance of the Mūla Beras

The English word “image” derived from old French and Latin imago, has the basic connotation of likeness. The term “image” is defined as a representation, a similitude of any person or thing, an idea or a metaphor. The term “image” finds its close parallel in Sanskrit words like pratikṛti, pratimā,11 bimba, and so on. In Sanskrit, pratimā means

ghanadvāra (massive door). The images of the deities are also found on the outer walls of the temple, the outermost perimeter of the building, ceilings, pillars, gopuras (towers), and on the gateway.

11 The word pratimā is an ancient one found in the Vedic hymns, e.g., Rig Veda 10, 10, 130.
tulyata or equality, rūpa or form, pratibimba or reflection as in a mirror. The word bimba means imitation and it is very frequently used in the sense of the images of divinities. The Hindus have believed from very early times that pratimā is representation, a resemblance, or a form of the Supreme Being; standing in the place of God. Pratimā tends to bring the worshipper near the worshipped. The word “idol” is often used in a derogatory sense, signifying “false god”. Therefore, the word “image” is a near approximation to the sense of pratimā.

Once the images are made, they are removed from the workshop and installed in the shrine. The real presence of the deity is invited into these images for receiving worshipers’ obeisance. The Hindus invoke the Great Spirit to come and dwell in a particular statue that is meant to represent a particular god or goddess. They perform the ceremony of prāṇa pratiṣṭhā (the infusion of life or soul, or the incarnation of the prāṇic power in the material image) and the ceremony of adhiṣṭhāna (plinth) or adhivāsa, or the inhabitation. On the completion of an image, its eyes are opened by a special and elaborate ceremony nayanōnmīlanam. Such a ceremony clearly indicates that the image is to be regarded as the life movement of the deity.

The representation or the image is called by diverse names according to its form and material. The religious images that are created with various features and characteristics comparable to the human form are known as bera. An image which represents the amorphous nature of the Lord is called līṅga. An image made of metal is called bimba, and one that is carved by hand is known as pratimā. In general, all the icons are called paḍima. Ganapati Sthapati’s study of images is revealed in the following lines. The image, which is consecrated installed firmly within the garbhagṛha of the temple as the presiding deity and is considered as immoveable image is called dhruva bera or the mūla

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bera or the mūla vigraha or the sthāvara or the mūlavār. They are generally made out of stone, mud or wood and are fixed permanently in the central shrine. The tirumañjanam (holy adoration) with oil, milk, and ghee is not performed for the dhruva bera every day. Instead, the energies of the presiding deity are consecrated into another image called kautukam which is made out of metal and placed nearby. This ritual is called āvāhana. The energies that are transferred from the dhruva bera to the kautukam every morning are again anchored back into the main deity every night. This is known as utsavana. Thus, the two rituals āvāhana and utsavana are carried out to the dhruva bera every day.\(^\text{17}\)

Dhruva beras are of three kinds. They are: sthānaka (standing posture), āsana (sitting posture or a pedestal) and śayana (reclining posture). The vaiṣṇava images are found in all the above mentioned postures. The Śaivite images are found in sthānaka and āsana postures alone. In addition to the worship of the dhruva bera in a temple, there are other images worshipped in the temple. They are the dhruvārca (the chief deity where the various abulations and rituals are carried out directly to the image), the utsava bera (for festival occasions), snāpanabera (for special ablations), and bali bera (to which sacrifices for the subsidiary devas are offered).\(^\text{18}\) Images closely linked to the main image but are subjected to other forms of worship or are moveable are called karma bimba or jaṅgama.\(^\text{19}\) They are usually made out of metal. The karma bimba is linked to the mūla beras. According to Ganapati Sthapati, “If the mūla bera is fashioned standing then the karma bimba should also be in standing posture. If the mūla bera is fashioned seated, then the karma bimba should also be seated or standing. If the mūla bera is in reclining posture, the karma bimba may be standing or seated, but not reclining.”\(^\text{20}\)

1.2.2 The Hindu Temples

Hinduism is a way of life and is based on the practice of dharma,\(^\text{21}\) the code of life.\(^\text{22}\) The ultimate objective of religion is the realization of truth by getting united with the Supreme

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 28.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., pp. 28-29.

\(^{19}\) Jaṅgama images are of six types, namely karmārcā (pūja and abhiṣeka are accorded to a separate metal image if the primary deity is made out of wood), utsavārca (images taken on processions during festivals), baliarcā (images to which sacrifices are given), snāpanārca (special images which are given ritual baths), tīrthārca (the image for the sacred water) and śayanārca (image established in a reclining posture).

Being, Paramātman. There are three distinct aspects in Hindu religious belief: the temples, philosophy and the guru (teacher). In this study the devotee-deity union is centered on the temples. The Hindu temple is called devagṛha in Sanskrit and kōyil in Tamil, which means the house of god. The practice of preparing images of the deities mentioned in the Vedic mantras slowly disappeared by the end of the Vedic Period. The yāgaśālās (places where the sacrificial rites were performed) of the Vedic Period got metamorphosed into temples by the Epic Period owing to the influence of cultic practice. The early temples were built with perishable materials like timber and clay. Later came the cave temples and temples carved out of stone or built with bricks. Heavy stone structures with ornate architecture and sculpture belong to a still later period. The building of a temple has a set pattern with a basic philosophy of the temple, its meaning and significance.

Broadly speaking, there are three styles in temple architecture, namely the northern style or nāgara, the Southern style or drāviḍa and the vesara, a combination of both the styles.23 The present study is on the Hindu temples of Tamilnadu, and hence the Southern style or the Dravidian style is focused on. The Pallavas laid the foundations of the Dravidian school which flourished to its full extent during the rule of the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Vijayanagar kings and the Nayaks. The characteristic features of the drāviḍa styles had already been evolved in the Gupta period, which paved the way for a new epoch in the history of Indian architecture.24 The Dravidian architecture reached its glory during the reign of the Cholas (between AD 900 and AD 1200) who made it imposing in size and endowed it with right proportions.

The temple contains the sanctuary known as vimāna or towered sanctuary. Over the vimāna is the śikhara or the spire/tower. The topmost part of the śikhara, whose sloping

21 There are six recognized philosophical systems, which trace their origin more or less directly to the Upanishads. The systems are known as the Vēḍānta, founded by Vyāsa; the Mīmāmsa, founded by Kapila; the Yogā, founded by Patanjali; the Nyāya, founded by Gotama; and the Vaiśeṣhika founded by Kanada. The teachings of these philosophical systems form the basic tenets of Hindu religion. The two great groups are the Vaiṣṇavites (this sect declares Viṣṇu to be the one Supreme God and yet recognizes the acceptance of other divinities of the Hindu pantheon) and the Śivaites (the worshippers of Śiva who declare Śiva to be the one God and recognize other gods also). Both the sects strictly follow the ancient Hindu rules of conduct which came to be known as dharma.


23 Harshananda Swami, All about Hindu Temples (Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1981), p. 5.

walls lead towards a point, is the stūpi or the finial or the apex. The Hindu temple displays sculptures on the outer surface, the maṇḍapas (the various columned halls) and the prāsāda (a three-storeyed palace, a complete solid mass, on whose multi-buttressed walls the images are displayed), in which the innermost sanctuary or the garbhagṛha is located. The garbhagṛha or the womb cell is a small, dark, cubical chamber even in the largest temples. The divine symbol or the deity, invariably carved out of stone, is installed in the garbhagṛha. The door of this cell usually faces the east.25

In front of the doorway is the rectangular chamber which is called the antarāla or vestibule. The vestibule is the intermediate chamber between the garbhagṛha and the pillared hall called the maṇḍapa. Entrance to the maṇḍapa is by a porch called the ardha maṇḍapa (the hall leading to the inner sanctum sanctorum). In a fully formed temple there may be a transept on each side of the central hall known as the mahāmaṇḍapa. All the principal parts of this structure are crowned by pyramidal towers. The tallest is the tower on the sanctum and the shortest is the one on the porch. All round the sanctum is a passage meant for circumambulation by the devotees. The mukha maṇḍapa is the front hall in front of the shrine.26

The prāsāda is almost completely a solid mass on whose multi-buttressed walls the images are displayed. The finial/the culminating portion of a pinnacle is raised above the body of the prāsāda as it is on the crown of the temple known as āmalaka27 (dome). It is a ribbed flattened top surmounted by a kalaśa (ornamental pot found in finials and capitals), topped by a finial and a banner. It is also known as harmya28 (a beautiful palace) in South Indian temples. The main display of the figure sculptures is on the perpendicular and the horizontal walls, the front and side walls of the prāsāda, the outer of the prāsāda, the ghanadvāra or the niches (ghana – massive, dvāra – door), the surface of the temple, the

26 Ibid., p. 5.
27 Āmalaka is also called amalasila or amalasari: flat, fluted melon-shaped member usually at the summit of the śikhara or the spire.
28 Harmya has the following parts: mūlaprati sthāna (basement); bhitti-stambha-dvāratoraṭṭa (walls, pillars, doorways and arches); śālabhaṇḍikā (statues); kapāṭa (folding doors); pariṣṭha (door-bars); valabhī (roofs); viṭ arāha (cornices); nāga-danda (pegs); mattavārana (turrets); gavākṣa (ox-eye windows); sopāna (stairs); nandyāvarṭādi gṛha (pavilions).
walls of the temple, the outermost perimeter of the building, the *gopuras* or towers, the gateway, and the pillars. On the whole, a temple is a structure of figure sculptures.  

The perimeter of the temple generally has the shape of a cross with recessed angles or an outline that results from a rotation of a square. The static perfection of the small square of the dark *garbhagṛha* with its plain walls is translated into the body of the temple, the “body of god,” a likeness of the manifested universe and its primordial substance, *Prakṛti* (*Agnipurāṇa*, LXI. 25). It has its effect by giving the fullest exposition of its meaning and form to the devotee in the rite of circumambulation in which the devotee becomes the outermost perimeter and limit of the monument in the centre.  

T. A. Gopinath Rao points out the specificities of each temple by saying that each temple is filled with numerous images of gods, goddesses, *parivāra-devatas* (gods related in a family), *devas* (attendants to the gods), *sālagrāmās* (*cakra* – an ammonite shell), *bānaliṅgās* (egg-shaped pebbles), *yantras* (mystic and magical diagrams engraved upon metallic plates), *navagrahas* (the nine planetary divinities), certain divine animals and birds, certain holy rivers, tanks, trees and sepulchers of saints.  

There are numerous Hindu temples all over India. Among them some are of Viṣṇu, the great preserver of life; some are of Śiva, the ascetic god who destroys life when saturated with sin; some are of Murukāṉṭa, the lord of beauty; some are of Gaṇapati, the remover of all obstacles in life; and, some are of Pārvatī, the mother goddess of earth. There are a few temples for Brahmā, the creator. It is to be noted here that the temples in Tamilnadu have records of *Nāṭyaśāstra karaṇas* in the form of sculptures. The Brāhadīśvar temple at Tanjore, the Sārāṇgapāṇi temple at Kumbhakonam, the Naṭarāja temple at Cidambaram, and Śiva temples at Tiruvannāmalai and Vridhachalam show many dancing postures on their walls. The *karaṇas* are specific dance postures struck by Lord Naṭṭa arāja.

In a temple, the images worshipped are called *dhruvabera, kautukabera, utsavabera, snāpanabera* and *bali bera*. A temple where all the five above-mentioned images are worshipped is termed *uttama* (superior); a temple with only *dhruva bera, kautuka bera*, and

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30 Ibid., p. 300.
bali bera is termed *madhyama* (medium); and a temple with *dhruva* and *kautuka bera* alone is termed *adhama* (inferior).\(^{32}\) The focus of this study is on the *mūla bera* or *dhruva bera* (chief deity), that is, the *mūlavar* in the *garbhagṛha* and the other deities in the subsidiary sanctums. The bodily postures of the *mūla beras* in the *garbhagṛha* and the other deities in the subsidiary sanctums are studied in relation to Bharatanatyam and Hindu Iconography.

### 1.2.3 The Temples in Tamilnadu

This research concentrates on some of the temples of Tamilnadu. Tamilnadu or “the land of Tamil” is a state in the south–east of India, on the shores of the Bay of Bengal. Tamil is the main language of the state. This fertile land has thousands of lofty temples and hence Tamilnadu is also known as the “land of temples.” The Tamils have been great temple builders. It is noted that the ancient five ruling dynasties, such as the Pallavas (AD 325 – 897), Pandyas (AD 590 – 920, and AD 1190 – 1310), Cholas (AD 846 – 1173), Vijayanagar kings (AD 1335 – 1600) and the Nayaks of Madurai (AD 1600 – 1700) ruled Tamilnadu and they have made outstanding contributions to the growth of these monuments that are of great artistic value. It is no exaggeration to say that, during their reign, they were intimately associated with the process of the development of temples, and they built more than thirty thousand temples.

Every major town in Tamilnadu has at least one famous temple and a good number of villages and towns have two or more temples that are ancient and venerated. A large number of the existing temples are simple and unostentatious structures. What is most interesting to this study is that these monuments, which date from different periods of history, are covered with fine sculptures which form an inexhaustible mine of historical documents and artistic value. Therefore, this researcher focuses the study on the Hindu temples of Tamilnadu. A list of the famous temples built during the reign of the different dynasties is presented in chapter five.

### 1.2.4 Special Reference to Bharatanatyam

Bharatanatyam is said to be the dance of Bhārat, which is India. Some scholars define Bharatanatyam as the dance that comprises bhā (bhāva – expressions), rā (rāga – melody), tā (tāla – rhythm) and m (śruti – pitch). The term ‘Bharatanatyam’ is derived from the word “Bharata,” the author of the treatise Nāṭyaśāstra. The technique of Bharatanatyam is classified under three heads, namely nṛta, nṛtya and nāṭya. These three terms are explained in detail in chapter two. This dance form has aḍavus or basic steps. There are more than a hundred set patterns of body movements in it. After learning the aḍavus, the Bharatanatyam dancers master tīrmānas (finishing movements in multiples of three), jatis (mṛdaṅga rhythmic syllables), abhinaya (histrionic expressions) and then enter into the naṭ anamārgam or the repertoire that is very extensive.

In this study the nṛta elements of Bharatanatyam are given greater importance though, in a few places, the nāṭya aspect is also mentioned. To be precise, only the body postures, that is, the nṛta of the deities in the sanctums are concentrated on and the dramatic improvisation, that is, the nāṭya element, is highlighted in a few instances. The facial expressions of the images are also given importance, depending on the narration of the mythological legends involved in the installation of the icons.

1.2.5 Hindu Iconography

“Icon” means “likeness” or “image.” The term ‘icon’ is commonly associated with the devotional paintings or carvings of divine or religious figures. The study, description, cataloguing, or collective representation of images or portraits is generally termed iconography. The term ‘iconology’ is used to specify the descriptive study of icons and their symbolism. In short, iconography is a pictorial representation of a subject through a figure and iconology is the larger understanding of iconic representations. Historically, the members of the Eastern Orthodox Church used icons. At times, these figures have been a source of conflict between churches within Christendom, while, from the point of view of

35 Nāṭyaśāstra is the basic text for every theatrical art form of India for its theoretical and technical foundations. Cf. Saju George, “The Religio-Philosophical Foundations of Indian Classical Dance with Special Reference to the Saiva Tradition,” p. 4.
art history, iconography is applicable to the art of other religions as well.\textsuperscript{37} Since then, the field of “iconography” gained prominence as a subject applicable to all religions.

The study of iconography is almost entirely conditioned by a study of religion. This fact is particularly true of India, where image worship takes an important place in the popular religious worship of the country. Moreover, this thesis deals with the iconography of Hinduism as observed in the temples in Tamilnadu. The objects worshipped by Hindus in the temples are images of gods and goddesses, śālagraṁās, bāna-liṅgas, certain animals, birds, powers, and energies.

1.3 The Objectives of the Thesis

The present study aims at bringing out the significance of the deities in the sanctum sanctorum and the subsidiary sanctums of selected Hindu temples in Tamilnadu in relation to dance. Furthermore, it attempts to study the importance of the two fine arts, Bharatanatyam and Iconography, through the medium of the body postures of the deities in the sanctums. Hence, this thesis attempts:

a. To give a general idea of the fine arts of India and highlight the body techniques used in Bharatanatyam and Iconography from texts like Abhinayadarpaṇa and Cir pa Ceṇṭūl.
b. To discuss the relationship between the techniques of these two arts.
c. To explain the unique features of the chief deity in the sanctum sanctorum of the selected temples with reference to Bharatanatyam and Iconography.
d. To highlight the impact of the mūla bera on the devotees.

1.4 The Method

The subject matter of this research is a combination of Indian art, religion, mythology, philosophy, art history, dance, sculpture, iconography, temple architecture and temple history. Hence, it involved the field work of visiting all the temples in Tamilnadu selected for the study, discussing with the temple priests to learn about the speciality of each temple, and visiting the sthapatis to study about the deities and their form and structure. Textual study provided important data regarding the techniques involved in the execution of Bharatanatyam. The dhyāna ślokas (meditative verses) for the making of the deities in

the ṣilpa texts added to the clarity of the origin of these two arts. The information gathered from the field work is supported by textual references, personal reflection and interpretation. Three aspects are specifically researched from a religious perspective: (1) the significance of the mūla beras in the Hindu temples of Tamilnadu, (2) the techniques of Bharatanatyam and Iconography and their inter-relationship, and, (3) the body postures of the mūlavars with reference to Bharatanatyam and Iconography.

The transliteration followed in the thesis is the pattern recommended in the scheme of transliteration in page iii. This work contains technical terms in Tamil and Sanskrit, and English words that are used commonly. In the case of original Tamil words, the Tamil diacritic marks are followed, for example, koothu then kūttu is used. If the words are purely Sanskrit, the diacritic marks are followed, for example, mudrā, dhyāna. Words that are commonly used in English, such as the names of Indian classical dances such as Bharatanatyam, the names of the dynasties such as Pallavas, Cholas are not diacriticised. If words are taken from Tamil texts in the Tamil language but have their origin in Sanskrit, then only the Sanskrit form of the word is followed, for example, anjali is diacriticised as aṇjali and not añcali and Śiva is not diacriticised as Civa but retained as Śiva even if taken from Tamil texts. The original Tamil terms follow Tamil diacritics. For example, Ambāḷ is diacriticised as Ampāḷ and Muruga is diacriticised as Murukaṉ. The names of all the deities follow the Sanskrit pattern, except the deities who have their origin within the Tamil province. In such cases they are diacriticised with the Tamil script. Important names of the places are diacriticised in the body of the thesis and they are not diacriticised in the footnotes. For example, Kanchipuram is diacriticised as Kāñcīpuram.

The researcher, despite her sincere and strenuous efforts could not discover the English equivalents of some native terms used in the text of the thesis. Even the priests in the temples could not help the researcher in this regard because they themselves have invariably been using only the native terms for generations. The researcher has constrained to resort to anaphoric and cataphoric references in the text of the thesis because of variations in the importance attached to different deities in different temples. The fonts used in the thesis are Times New Roman and Times Ext Roman because of the usage of extensive diacritical marks.

1.5 The Sources
The sources for this study are books on dance, Bharatanatyam, sculpture, iconography, aesthetics, temples of Tamilnadu, and temple architecture. The selected temples themselves are also important sources of knowledge. To understand the basic concepts of dance, āṅgikābhīnaya and the classification of the heroes and the heroines, texts like the Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni (Sanskrit), Abhinayadarpaṇa of Nandikesvara (Sanskrit), the Bharatārṇava of Nandikesvara (Sanskrit), the Saṅgītaratnakara of Śāṅgadeva (Sanskrit), the Abhinava Navanīta of Chetlur Narayana Ayyangar and Tanjavur Panchapagesa Nattuvanar (English), and the Abhināya Sārasamputam of Chetlur Narayana Ayyangar (English) are referred to as original sources.

To study the basic aspects of iconography, the pratimā lakṣaṇa and the characters of the deities, texts like the Ciṟpa Ceṉṉūl (Tamil) and Indian Sculpture and Iconography: Forms and Measurements (English) by V. Ganapati Sthapati, the Elements of Hindu Iconography, vol. 1 & 2, part 1 & 2 of T. A. Gopinath Rao (English) and the Development of Hindu Iconography by Jithendra Nath Banerjee (English) serve as the primary sources. The primary sources also include the works that speak of the mūla beras, South Indian temple inscriptions, personal interviews with the pūjāris (temple priests) and the sthapatis (sculptors), photographs of the mūlavars and the outline maps of the temples. Many scholars have made unique contributions in related fields like sculpture and dance, religion and dance, religion and iconography, kings and temples, temples and arts, and philosophy and religion. These writings serve as secondary sources for this study.

1.6 The Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 serves as the introduction. It situates the study and gives the rationale behind undertaking it. It focuses on the role of the mūlavars in the Hindu temples in evoking divine feelings in the devotees. This chapter also explains the meaning of the title, the objectives, the method, the sources, the structure and the content of the thesis. Chapter 2 is titled “The Origin and Some Basic Concepts of Bharatanatyam.” It traces the mythological origin of dance from various texts and the historical proof of the existence of Bharatanatyam from five ancient Tamil texts, namely Pattupāṭu and Eṭṭutokai, Kūttanūl, Pańcamarapu, Tolkāppiyam and Cilappatikāram.

Chapter 3, titled “Hindu Iconography,” attempts to study the origin and the development of Hindu iconography and also some basic concepts in iconography. The
classification of images, the mode of casting images, the attributes used by the gods and goddesses, the characters of the gods and goddesses, and the pratimā lakṣaṇas are some of the topics dealt with in this chapter. Chapter 4 is titled “The Relationship between Bharatanatyam and Iconography.” The relationship between the āṅgikābhīnaṇa in Bharatanatyam and the pratimā lakṣaṇa in iconography are discussed with examples. Besides studying the technical interconnection between the two arts, their religious background with the temples as their common platform is also discussed. In other words, the commonality of the two arts on technical and spiritual grounds is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5, titled “The Significance of the Mūla Beras in the Hindu Temples,” traces the sthala purāṇa (the legend behind the place) of the temples selected and the significance of the mūla beras in those temples. References to the history and the architectural details of these temples are given in this chapter. A detailed study of the body postures of the mūla beras in the garbhagṛha and the other deities in the subsidiary sanctums of the temples with reference to the āṅgikābhīnaṇa and pratimā lakṣaṇa is integral to this chapter. This chapter serves as the heart of the thesis. There are two kinds of temples seen all over southern India: the temples dedicated to the higher gods of the Hindu pantheon, and those built in honour of the village deities. Considering all such categorizations, a study of the selected temples in Tamilnadu is also made in this chapter. The temples that are studied are:

1. Three temples from the pañca bhūta sthalas (the places of five cosmic elements) of Lord Śiva
2. Two other famous temples dedicated to Lord Śiva
3. Four significant temples of Lord Viṣṇu
4. Three noteworthy temples of the goddesses
5. Two temples from the ārupaṭai viṭṭu (the six abodes) of Lord Murukāṇa

Chapter 6 is the conclusion. This chapter presents some of the reflections that the researcher has made based on the insights gained from this study. The conclusion attempts to highlight the impact of the mūla beras on the devotees, and to show how the bodily postures of the mūla beras facilitate transcendental contact between the devotee and the personage to whom the prayers are directed. The supernatural feelings experienced by the
researcher while studying the bodily postures of the *mūla beras* are also spelt out in the conclusion. The significance of such an experience is expressed under the general heading ‘The Aesthetic Evocation’.

Art is the expression of beauty. The ultimate aim of beauty in art and religion is supreme bliss, that is, *ānanda* or aesthetic blissfulness in humans. The following three points are elaborated in this connection: (1) The Structural Implications – The perfect measurements employed in making the icons of the divine installed in the temple are based on the principles of the *dhyāna ślokās* found in the *śilpa śāstra*. The worshipper believes in the life-giving power of the consecrated images. (2) The Psycho-spiritual Responses – The *darśaṇa* of the perfect postures of the *mūla beras* awakens appropriate emotional responses and produce *ānanda* in the devotee. (3) The Religious Significance – The bodily postures of the *mūla beras* transport the devotee to certain metaphysical realms. This enables the devotee to understand the actual world in which he/she lives. The depth of the understanding of the metaphysical aspects involved in the *mūla bera* depends on the depth of the devotee’s knowledge.

The Appendix I presents the outlines (not to scale) of the temples studied. The Appendix II presents some photographs of the deities studied. The Appendix III comparatively tabulates terms in use in Bharatanatyam and iconography as per authoritative texts.