The performance of the Rāsa-dances is a living tradition of Gujarātī. In myths, the graceful stylised form of Siva's dance the Lasya was taught to the women of saurastra through Parvati and Usā. There was an anxiety and urge to explore the existing dance forms of Gujarātī, which would be preserving some traits of the ones popular classical dance. The Rāsa in its multiple variations and prevalence was chosen with such an idea. Many a poets and writers, folklorist, social workers and cultural anthropologists have mentioned the circular dance but the movements patterns have hardly been explored. In the present work, the attempt has been made to describe the dance movements of Rāsa-varieties as performed by different ethnic groups, with the background of their social and cultural traits.

The Rāsa, the circular dance is so common and integral to the cultural life of Gujarātī, that most of us are unable to notice its inherent qualities. Though performed differently, it reveals a definite form and structure in the dance movements, musical form and rhythmic structure. With the background provided by the Sanskrit, Apabhramśa, Jaina and...
Gujarāti literary works, the origin and development of the circular Rāsa-dance in the religious as well as ritualistic context is traced. The representation of the circular dance in the plastic arts show the mutual links of these arts and their corresponding influence on each other. Through the costumes and stances of the figures, represented in different mediums of stone, paper, textiles etc., of a particular period and community, the form emerges more clearly.

With this background, the dances were keenly observed, photographed and recorded. Though with limited resources, the attempt was made to cover the maximum possible regions of Gujarāta and different communities to study the dance movements in the context of social background. As each community and individual show a variation in the style of movement, it is beyond the scope of the present study to comprehend all. The attempt has been towards noting the common traits of a particular community and the region. It would be folly to take the word of this work as final, as the living traditions change from day to day and from place to place. The dance is a matter of actual experience and participation. My being exposed to this form, from early childhood in school, in the community and social gatherings as actual performer and now a composer, helped in learning the basic movements of different groups. The musical patterns of the song and rhythm are part of my being. The structural analysis became more relevant.
The knowledge and practice of classical dance helped tremendously in understanding the basis of physical movements, the rhythm. An attempt has been made to correspond these 'popular' or folk movements in the classical terms of sthāna, mandala, cāri, so as to get an actual idea of the position and placement of different parts of the body. As Āngīta-Ratnākara of Śrīraṅgadeva, of the same Nātyasāstra tradition, has lot of indigenous or Desī movements explained, it has been taken as the basis.

The scope of the research is much wider and one hopes to continue further the work. The dance could be studied in comparison to the same form being performed in different regions of India. The surviving traditions of Uparūpaka forms of Rāsa, are the Rāsalīlā of Manipur and Braj, having extensive use of the circular dance. It would be interesting and enlightening to study the movement patterns in context to the Rāsa dances of Gujarātā.

I have taken the Rāsa-dance, not as popularly known Dāndiā Rāsa, but in a wider context of it being a circular dance form. The form is existing with coming of men, through various periods of history and evolution, in different civilizations and in diverse conditions. In India, the form was named, given a name in the context of Kṛṣṇa legend, though it existed as part of the fertility rites and rituals. The Rāsa, has circular form in Gujarātā, would
comprise Garbā, Garbī and Rāsdā—all with similar form, as far as dance is concerned, of a CIRCLE. This widened the scope of the study much extensively. All these forms exist today comprehensively, on the stage and in the streets, in the fairs and festivals, as disco-Rāsa and Garbā in modern Gujarāta. The spontaneous and unsophisticated folk art as become a theatre activity. The seemingly simple group activity, operates on many levels and signify complexities which can be traced back to many dimensions.