The earliest mention of the Andhra is in the Aitareya Brahman as one of the tribes of South India. Andhra Desh was the original home of the Andhras in the earliest times as it is even today. After the fall of the Mauryan Empire, the Satavahanas extended their domain in the north west and south until Andhra embraced a great portion of the Indian Peninsula. Its early history is born out by Buddhist and Brahmanical literature, copper plates, inscriptions, coins, by ancient structures such as Stupas, Chaitya and Viharas and by manuscripts and the writings of foreign travellers. Megasthenes (300 B.C.) and Pliny (77 A.D.) referred to the Andhras as a powerful tribe who possessed numerous villages, thirty towns and an immense army. T.N. Ramachandran refers to Ptolemy's mentioning of a country under the name of Ariaka Sadanoni.e., Ariake of the Sadenvi and it is a Greek rendering of a Prakrit form of 'Satavahana'\(^1\). He mentions five ports and eighteen inland towns belonging to that country.

The Puranas refer to the Andhrabhritya dynasty of kings also called Satakarnis and Satavahanas who ruled from the middle of the 3rd century B.C. to the first quarter of the 3rd century A.D.

Andhra had cultural contacts with the Tamils of the far
south and with the Aryan kingdoms, south of the Ganges river from 500 B.C. In the 3rd Century BC Andhra was a vassal kingdom of the empire of Asoka; but after his death, Andhra became powerful and extended its empire to the whole of the Maratha country and even beyond.

The culture of Andhra from very early times was nourished by the Sanskrit literature of the Aryans covering religion, the epics, and the arts. Andhra's contribution to Sanskrit literature on the arts of music, dance, poetry and other subjects is substantial. Of the many branches of learning which flourished in Andhra from very early times, not the least noteworthy is that of Natyasastra embracing the twin arts of music and dance. Andhra is mentioned as one of the regions of the south India. A particular style of dance was being practiced and Bharata commends it as Kaisiki Vrtti, a delicate and graceful movement in the dance of this region. A particular raga by name of 'Andhri' was the contribution of this race of people to the music of India. The dance traditions in Andhra can be traced from various sources viz. the ancient temples, Buddhist-ruins excavated at Nagarjuna Konda, Amaravati, Chantasala, Jaggeyyapet and Bhattiprole.

The renowned Ajanta and Ellora Caves during the kingdom of the Satavahana rulers are justly famous. Of these the Amaravati Stupa relics are the most ancient (2nd Century B.C.) Besides the evidence of plastic art the continuity of the art of dance is found up to the Vijayanagara times. The Amaravati
sculptural relics reveal the great choreographic possibilities of the group and composite dances called Pindibandhas mentioned by Bharata and elaborated by Abhinavagupta, which we have already referred to earlier.

We have stated in the introduction that roughly speaking the history of dance could be divided into two periods: from the 2nd Century B.C. to the 9th Century AD and from the 10th Century AD to the 18th Century AD. We have also mentioned that in the second period there was a marked development of the regional styles. The latter half of this period coincides with the period of the growth of the various regional languages. (See page 3 in vol 1).

That there was flourishing a highly developed classical dance style in the Andhra Pradesh, in the first period is born out by the testimony of epigraphy sculpture and literature. The Ramappa temple possesses dance sculptures carved during the Kakatiya period. The pillars and doorways of the great temple of Palampet are carved with dancing figures.

The temple was the centre of the religious dance and it was performed by devadasis as a form of religious worship. These dancers were well versed in NS and their institution preserved the art of dance throughout several centuries. We gather from the various living natyacharyas and Gurus from Andhra Pradesh that the devadasis used to perform aradhana nrtya in front of the deity of the temple. In the Kakatiya
period temples were provided with a big polished stone slab called Balipith fixed on the ground just behind the God inside the temple. Another set of devadasis performed dances in the Natyamandapas before the presiding idol - the utsave vigraha - on festive occasions.

On the literary side we have both Sanskrit and Telugu works bearing witness to the extensive practice of dance in Andhra Pradesh. On the Sanskrit side the most important text is Nrttaratnavalil, a valuable treatise on classical dance written by Jayappa Nayak of the Royal Ayya Dynasty in the 13th Century. Jaya also describes the ritual dances of devadasis in the temples and the dramatic dance episodes staged by them in the Natya mandapas of the temple. Jaya was a disciple of a great Brahmin dance master, Gundamaty, and was well versed in theory and practice of the dance. At this time the dances of women belonged to Nattuvamela that was patronized by the ruling princes. Brahmin Gurus taught dancing to royal families and nobles. The art of Brahmin gurus was known as Brahman Mela.

Treatises on the composite art or dance and music are found to have been written in the 11th Century A.D. by a number of Andhra Kings and scholars. The important works among them are as follows which deal with the art of dance and music:

Saraswati Hrdayalenkar by Nanyadeva (1084 AD),
a Rashtrakuta King and a disciple of Abhinavagupta.
Abhilasitartha Chintamani ; or Manasollasam
by Chalukya Bhupati (1131 AD).

Sangita Chudamani by Pratapa Chakravarti a western Chalukya King (1134-1147 AD).

Nṛttaratnavali by Jaya Senapati the commander of the Elephant force under Kakati Ganapati Deva.

Vasanta Rajeevam ascribed to Kumar Giri Reddi of Kundavidu (1440 AD). This work is not extant.

Kumara Rajeevam - a commentary of Vasanta Rajeevam by Katyavema, a commander under Kumara Giri Reddi and his brother-in-law.

Sangita Chintamani by Peda Kemati Vema Reddy of Kundavidu (1450 AD).

Sangita Parijata by Ahobala (1600 AD).

Some Andhra Scholars and commentators who have contributed by writing commentaries on the treatises of dance and music also should be mentioned. Among them the earliest known commentator of Bharata's Natyaśastra is one Lollu Bhattu (800-840 AD). Singa Bhupala of the Reoharla dynasty (1300-1760 A.D.) wrote the commentary Rasarnava Sudhakara on Sangita Ratnakar.

Another famous commentator of Sarangdeva's Sangita Ratnakara is Kallinatha. During this period treatises like Swaramelsawalamidi and Ragavibodha pertaining only to music were also written.

In Telugu literature as it developed from the days of Nannaya in the 11th Century A.D., we have elaborate
descriptions of dancing. The 13th Century is often regarded as the golden age in the history of dance as described in literary works. The writers who dealt more or less elaborately with the subject of dance are Palkurki Somanath, Jayappa, Tikkana and Srinatha.

In Basava Purana and Panditaradhya Charitra of Palkurki Somanath there are many references to music, dance and drama. Palkurki Somanath's Panditaradhya Charitra is veritably a storehouse of information regarding the forms of dance prevalent then. We have in Parvata Prakarana not only a resume of the technical terms of dance but also a description of the dances as part of the Mahashivaratri festival at the Shrisailam shrine. Somanath describes dances going on in front of the shrine. He speaks of music and dance as follows: 'as soon as the dancers arrived inside; this is Purvaranga within the curtain, at the end of which the dancers issued out of the curtain (Javanika)'. He further mentions that with all these the assemblages of manifold types of dancers were dancing and enacting plays on different stories. He refers to dances in imitation of semi divine beings. The last mentioned is Pagativesa or Pahal vesa in which one or a pair come round each day in a different role and make-up and with short dialogues imitate different stock characters in life. The Pagati vesa tradition is a living tradition in Andhra and various Muchipudi exponents have mastered that art.
Tikanna gives in his Telugu Mahabharata a number of dance styles which are not mentioned in the Sanskrit original. These seem to have been current in the Telugu country of his day. He mentions Dandalasaka, Kundali, Prenkhana and Prerani. 

In Srinatha's works, Palnati Viracharitra there is a detailed description of music and dance forms. There is a reference to Sabhavandana and to the Vetrapani (the guru or Sutradhara) who carries a crooked stick. In Kuchipudi dance-dramas to this day Sutradhara hold Kutilaka a crooked stick. The dancer offers Pushpanjali. This tradition is alive and in Kuchipudi repertoire we witness Pushpanjali etc.

A more detailed account of various dance forms is found in Nrttaratnavali written by Jaya Senapati referred to earlier. The content of the book can be brought under two heads. One part describes the Marga or the classical form of dance as propounded by Bharata, Abhinavagupta and Kirtidharacharya. The other part describes the Desi or indigenous style. In this he follows Matanga's Brihaddesi. Each part contains four chapters and this shows that he attached as much importance to the Desi style as to the classical or Marga style. The fact that Rajasthan ruler Kumbhakarna made use of Jaya's Nrttaratnavali, in his book Sangitaraju indicates that Jaya's work achieved considerable reputation as a standard treatise on the subject within a short time after its composition.

The book consists of eight chapters:
Nrttaratnavali is a mine of information on everything pertaining to the art of dancing in Andhra of his day. The numerous reference to dancing which literary works of the period and the elaborate descriptions found in the work of Jaya and other writings show how great importance attached to this art was and how widely it was practiced. The art was a highly developed one and it took long years of training for one to become an expert in it. Kings, noblemen, temple authorities and ordinary house-holders patronised the art and kept it alive. It had an appeal to the higher classes as well as the masses.

Coming to the Reddi rulers of Kondavidu we find that King Kumaragiri of that dynasty (1386 - 1402 AD) wrote a valuable Natyasastra text called Vasantarajija after his own alias Vasantaraja; no manuscript of this work has so far come to light but citations from the Vasantarajija are made by other writers. We may also notice here some reference to dances in the Kasikhanda by Srinatha the poet laureate of the Reddi court. He speaks of a dancing girl of Benaras known as Karpurtilaka.
who danced in the court of Ratnasa. While describing the dance he speaks of Kundalinrta and the different views on dance promulgated by Kohala and other acaryas.

The most distinguished among the Recharla king was Simhabhupala, entitled Sarvajna, who gave us not only the Rasarnavasudhakara on rasa and dance but also Sangitasudhakara, a commentary on Sangitaratnakara which deals with dance in the last chapter.

This was also the period when the dance-drama called Yaksagana flourished.

This brings us very close to the second period in the history of dance. As we have noticed in the chapter on uparupakas, it is from 9th Century onwards that the form of dance-dramas began to develop side by side with the classical Sanskrit drama. The minor forms were getting codified also. On one side the arts of dance and music in Andhra Pradesh was receiving the royal patronage, the art of dance-drama was developing on its artistic lines from nearly 12th Century A.D. We have seen its growth from the time of Sattaka viz. Karpuramanjari.

Inscriptions of the 8th, 9th and the 10th Centuries reveal the existence in Andhra, Tamilnad and Karnataka of a variety of theatrical diversions composed of music dance and drama known as Brahman Mela. Though no conclusive proofs are available it is nevertheless certain that prototypes of the
Bhagavata Mela Nataka must have survived prior to the 11th century. Even earlier was another form of entertainment known as the Sivalilanatyaam: this seems to have been later on replaced by gradually introducing Vaisnavite themes into it and eventually giving it a different identity altogether. Sivalilanatyaams, describing the various activities of Lord Siva in poetic form were danced at temple festivals. Similarly Visnulilanatyaam, depicting the ten incarnations of Lord Visnu were also danced at Visnu temples.

Of the many theatrical diversions prevalent during this period, the Bhagavata Mela dance-dramas originated from earlier forms of Yaksaganaas. A traditional composite art-form of Telugu folk Yaksagana is a musical play in form sharing some characteristics of opera and ballet combined in one presentation.\(^{14}\) Born in Andhra and adopted and patronised afterwards in Tamilnadu and Karnataka it has an eventful history of more than six centuries. It offered on allround entertainment to the man in the street and the prince in the palace alike for generations and is still a living art-form of the people. More than 800 works were produced by 465 authors and 542 works are available, some in print and mostly in manuscript.\(^{15}\)

Yaksagana term is explained as the music of the Yaksas who according to our mythology are demi-gods but never were pre-eminent for their talent in music as the Gandharvas. The Yaksas associated with the Yakṣagana must have been mundane beings with a speciality of their own with world of music.
Palkuriki Somnatha in his Panditarama Charitra (13th cent. A.D.) mentions for the first time some kind of masquerades or dramatic events with the guises of Yaksa and Gandharvas. In fact the term Yaksagana appeared first in the Bheemeshwara Purana of Srinatha composed about 1430 A.D. It is stated that Gandharvas sang in the norms of the Yaksha's music, and it suggests to us that the Yaksagana is a distinct type of school of music. The performers of the Yaksagana must have originally belonged to the Jakkula community of the Telugu country. It is a dancing and theatrical caste. In Panditarama charitra a host of pastimes and amusements include the Gandharva, Yaksa and Vidyadhara disguise-plays. These came to be known as Yaksalu. Jakkulu is a corrupt form of Yaksalu. Kridabhirema of 15th century mentions the instances of the dance of the Yaksa damsels and the musical story narration by a Jakkula female; Chitrabharatamu of the 16th century refers to the dramatic dance and music of the Yaksa females. Tallapaka Annamacharyulu of 15th century is stated to have said in 'Sankirtana Yakshana' that the musical compositions in the Yaksagana were marked with various tala systems and the nine ragas. Such compositions might have been advanced by the Jakkula female artistes in their public performance, with dance and tune accompanied by song and gesture. Although no specimen of the 16th century vernacular drama has survived, the names of a few plays such as the Tayikondanataka and Gangavatara are preserved in the inscriptions and literature. They seem to be the earliest representatives of the modern Yaksagana. The Yaksagana is a dramatic composition
set to music and sung and acted upon the stage, accompanied by instrumental music such as vina, flute, mridanga, cymbal etc. The plays of the type were enacted by the actors and actresses belonging to the courtesan community, who formed into itinerant companies and wandered from place to place, staging plays usually connected with some puranic story. A group or band of players constituted itself into a mela and each mela contained in addition to the actors and actresses several others such as songstors and players of instrumental music. The plays were generally staged on important occasions such as festivals and Brahmotsavas of temples or during the performances of sacrifices. Some interesting details of the stage have been given by contemporary writers. The curtain is, as already noticed, frequently alluded to in literature; and the characters are said to emerge from behind it. It is said that rivers like Ganga and mountains like Kailasa, forests, wild beasts and birds were represented in such a realistic manner as to produce an impression on the audience that what they were witnessing were real objects and not artificial. If so, we would have to conclude that the stage paraphernalia were not simple: and the scenic arrangements must have given much trouble to the stage manager. We have instances of descending of Garuda and Swan on the Kudiyattam stage in a realistic manner, but these practices were long abandoned in view of the possible hazards. The actors put on the appropriate robes and costumes suitable to
the roles which they assumed. The ornaments were made of chips of wood so painted and gilded as to give them the semblance of gold and precious stones. This practice is observed by the present day Kuchipudi artistes.

We have an interesting account of the commencement of programme. It commenced with the songs of women accompanied by the play on all musical instruments. The Sutradhara or the stage manager then appeared on the stage and recited the nandi verse; next he announced the name of the play which was about to be enacted, and of the author who was responsible for its composition. As soon as he retired, the characters of the play came upon the stage, one after another. They danced and sang as they proceeded to act. At the close of the performance, they received presents from the audience whom they praised in eulogistic language.

Occasionally a mela or company might be invited to the palace of the raya or one of his grandees in order to entertain the members of the zenana. The raya might grace the occasion within the precincts of his palace. His relations, officers and other nobles would be invited to witness the play. Separate arrangements were made for the accommodation of the queen, princesses and other ladies of the zenana so that they might see the actors without being seen. The histrionic talents of these actors and actresses probably perished with them. The names of a few prominent members of the profession have come down to us through literature and inscriptions: Pendela Nagi, Buccigadu or
nattuva Nagayya are only names to us; but to their contemporaries they must have been the embodiment of the dramatic art which they seemed to have cherished fondly.¹⁹

We notice that the Yaksagana form has two indispensable elements viz. dance and music. Its evolution and gradual progression into the form of dance-drama can be best understood in this light. As time passed, the Yaksagana lost its affinity with the Yaksa disguises and the Jakkulu people. Some poets of the time, having been attracted to the musical metre of the Jakkula, took to the composition of Yaksa-ganas on the prevailing patterns. From the 16th century onwards the Karnataka school of music had its rapid evolution. During this period, the Jakkula metres were either changed or replaced by new modes of music. The popular farces and other forms of melodrama which were in vogue in the country since long, had their impact on the Yaksagana, but the Yaksagana in its turn with its multisided artistic stature and with its newly acquired vigour in dramatic character gradually eclipsed all other forms of popular plays. The stylised form of stage entertainment took definite shape though even today in Andhra we see among a variety of dramatic performances the simple and vulgar renderings of plays which make it evident that they have from the outset been intended for the laity. Such performances are called Vidhi natakams in Andhra and Terukuthu in Tamilnad. A tradition similar to these also survives in Jaffna and Batticaloa, the Tamil speaking regions of Ceylon,
where the art is known as Nattukuthu. We have another variety of Yakasagana folk, open-air theatre, Bayalata in Karanataka State. Thus we notice that several types of dance-dramas have preceded the Kuchipudi and Bhagavata Mela Nataka forms of today.

The Brahmin exponents of the art of Nattuvamela or Brahman Mela shaped the form of Yaksagana into a more stylized form confirming to the tanets of Bharata's NS. Being adept in the sastras and peripatetic preachers of the art they gave a new life to Yaksagana performances of the succeeding generations and were responsible for conceiving and evolving a new type of Yaksagana called Kalapam. It became a lyrical dance-drama in presentation and had an abiding impact of its own on the Yaksagana texts and performances.

From the above survey of the dance heritage and allied art forms from early times in Andhra we observe that the art of dance was perfected and the texts and manuals were written codifying the rules and principles of its exposition. The Margi classical and the Desi the folk dance styles co-existed and the recognition was given on sastric level to the Desi forms which developed during this period.

The dance-drama form which flourished during this period, a century before the golden era of Vijayanagar empire, is the tradition of Kuchipudi dance-drama. Known as Yaksaganas and conducted by the Brahmin Melas this form achieved its own individual classical character. There is no doubt that there must have been commerce between the classical solo exposition,
temple dances and its various exponents in a climate so healthy for the growth of the performing arts. The two streams of solo exposition and the dance-drama forms developed reaching its high watermark in the time of Vijayanagar empire, the Augustan period in the history of Andhra.

The earliest reference in history to a performance of this category seems to have been made in 1502 A.D. in the Machupalli Keifiyat. The local records were collected at the instance of Surveyor General Mackenzie who took much interest in South Indian history and institutions. According to the local record a troupe of dance actors seems to have obtained audience of Immadi Narasa Nayaka, the ruler of Vijayanagar, and entertained him and his court with a dance play that insinuated the sufferings of the people at the hands of Sammet Gurava Raju of Siddhavatam. In this way it is recorded these artistes succeeded in impressing the king and enlisting his support to liberate them from the mal-administration of the local chieftain in question.

The local record gives the following information which being of special significance is quoted here from Telugu into English translation:

'Vira-Narasimha and the Kuchipudi Mela (1502 A.D.) - Sambeta Guruva Raju lived for long and ruled the Siddhavatam area. In view of his age when he ruled, he was known as Grand-Father (Tata) Gurava Raju. In the reign of Gurava Raju, the people were subjected to severe torture and punishment. If the people did not pay money as demanded by the Government agents, the women folk of the
house-holds were tortured, after being dragged into the open with their breasts squeezed through artificial means. In those days, Brahmin Bhagavatars of Kucipudi village from the Vinukonda-Bellamkonda area came to this region for rendering performances. They came to know of the cruel rule of Sambeta Gurava Raju and immediately left for Vidyanagar where Vira Narasimha Rayulu was the King. The Kucipudi Brahmin Bhagavatars requested the King of Vidyanagar for permission to render performance (kelika) in his presence. As Rayulu was aware that the Kucipudi Bhagavatars were very famous and educated, he arranged that the women of the harem also were invited to see the performance. While rendering the performance the Bhagavatars put on the roles of Sambeta Gurava Raju, two peons and one woman. The performance was in the nature of Sambeta Gurava Raju torturing women cruelly squeezing their breasts through artificial means, for extracting money.

When Vira Narasimha Rayulu asked for the import of the performance, the Brahmins explained to him what Sambeta Gurava Raju was doing in Siddhavatam area for women, with a view to extorting money from the local people.

The next morning, Vira Narasimha Rayulu ordered his Ministers and Commanders to move to conquer Siddhavatam and bring the head of Sambeta Gurava Raju. The army of Rayulu was led by a Muslim by name "Ismail Khan" who was also known as the son of Rayulu. The army marched over Siddhavatam, and fought a war with the army of Sambeta Gurava Raju. The forces of Sambeta Gurava Raju were killed in the encounter and his head was taken away to
Vidyanagar for being shown to Vira Narasimha Rayulu. The women and children living in the harem of Sambeta Gurava Raju sacrificed their lives."

From this historical record, it is possible to determine the period during which the tradition of Kuchipudi dance-drama was flourishing. At least a hundred years before this incident there must have existed in Andhra this form and we can surmise that from the 15th century the dance-drama form of Kuchipudi was shaped by the Bhagavatars and the acharyas.

This art form came into existence at a time which also marks an important milestone in the spread of cult of Bhakti. It is an art with the sentiment of devotion permeating literally every aspect of them. It is an art which is a product of the Bhakti movement.

BHAKTI MOVEMENT:

It would be pertinent to refer to the historical development of the Bhakti movement as it resulted into various art expressions in the South. Both in the Andhra and Tamil country, as also in Karnataka and Kerala, its influence has been all embracing in the spheres of plastic and performing arts.

In the sphere of religion as generally in all matters of spiritual culture, South India began by being heavily indebted to the North; but in the course of centuries it more than amply repaid the debt and made signal contributions to the theory and practice of religion and to philosophic thought in its various
aspects. Its saints and seers evolved a new type of Bhakti, a fervid emotional surrender to God which found its supreme literary expression in Bhagavata purana, a bhakti very different from the calm, dignified devotion of the Bhagavatas of the early centuries before and after Christ in Northern India. It started in Tamilnad about the 6th century A.D. and then spread towards the North and the East. 22

It was from South India that two schools of Vedic exegesis - Mimasa that go by the name of Kumarilabhatla and Prabhakara arose. The founders of the three main systems of Vedanta - Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhava - also hailed from the Southern country. Yet another prominent philosophical system - the Saiva Siddhanta also found its exponents in Tamil country. Lastly, the Vedas were commented on more than once in this part of the country and the constant study of the ritual manuals of the different Vedic schools was kept up.

Till about the 5th cent A.D. harmony and tolerance characterised the relations between the different religious sects. But soon a great change came particularly in Tamil country and people began to entertain fears of the whole land going over to Jainism and Buddhism. At any rate, worshippers of Siva and Vishnu felt call to stem the rising tide of heresy. The growth on one hand of an intense emotional Bhakti to Siva or Vishnu and on the other of an outspoken hatred of Buddhists and Jains are the chief characteristics of the next epoch. Challenges to public debate competition in the performance of miracles, tests of the truth of doctrines
by means of ordeal became the order of the day. Parties of devotees under the leadership of one gifted saint or another traversed the country many times ever-singing, dancing and debating all their way. This great wave of religious enthusiasm attained its peak in the early seventh century and had not spent itself in the middle of the ninth.  

The Bhakti cult had its association with Visnu-Narayana and Purusottam in the North. The rise and spread of Bhagavat cult has been the subject of much learned discussion. The district of Mathura was the centre of the cult and Vasudeva was much revered there. We have lost the historical link between the early Bhakti movement of the North and the movement in the South. We may assume, however, that the Southern movement in some way was inspired by the Northern example. The movement had two wings—one Saiva and the other Vaishnava. They were contemporary and co-operative and had many close resemblances. They have both left a precious heritage of popular hymns of high literary quality marked at times by great philosophical insight and always reflecting the spiritual exaltation experienced by the hymnists as they stood worshipping in the shrines of their favourite deities. They have also left a considerable body of legendary history purporting to narrate the life histories of the Saints and gathered together in canonical collections by their followers of a later age, say about the 12th or 13th century A.D.

There came up a succession of great leaders among the worshippers
of Siva and Visnu the former known collectively as Nayamars (leaders) and the latter as Alvars (divers into the Divine). They evolved a new type of Bhakti and expressed it as emotional surrender to God.

Later tradition counted sixty-three Nayamars individual and collective as the most prominent leaders of this rival on the side of the Saivas. The individuals included a woman from Karikal and a pariah, Nandan from Adamur, besides a general of the Pallava forces, Siruttundar. But most prominent among them were the three great men whose hymns are collected together in Devaram.

The Vaisnava wing of the movement is represented by 12 Alvars for whom orthodox tradition gives an impossible chronology. The Alvars who were drawn from both sexes and from different classes of society were great devotees of Visnu. Andal was a woman, Kulasekhara was a king and some of the Alvars were even sudras. Their poetical utterances are collected in the great work Nal-Ayirs Divya Prabandham, which contains as many as 4000 hymns. The Prabandham came to be regarded in the South as the most sacred book and verses from it were sung along with Vedic mantras on all ceremonial religious occasions.

Among the Alvars who were devoted to Krsna and who sang of his dalliances with the Gopis and of the love of the latter for the former, Sathakopa (Namalvar), Andal and Tirumangaiy appear to be more prominent. They have introduced further a finesse.
into the legendary love-episode of Krsna and the Gopis by creating new situations and new characters. These Alvars have described the dalliance not only of the Gopis but also their own with Lord Krsna. They conceived themselves as Gopis deeply in love with the Lord and expressed themselves as such. An earnest longing for union, pangs of separation, enjoyment from union and similar other feelings find expression in their writings. Andal very often identified herself with a Gopi. Andal or Kodai (Sanskrit Goda) was the real or adopted daughter of Periyalvar. In her intense devotion to Visnu she dreamt of her marriage with the God and described her experience in her hymns. This mystical union was the only one she knew and in many ways the ardour of her devotion resembles that of Manikkavasagar and her hymns are replete with allusions to Krsna stories. In recent times Rukmini Devi has choreographed a dance-drama on the life of Andal. It also forms a part of padams and small balletic sequences in a solo Bharata Natyam recital. Almost contemporary to the last Alvars was the great Sankara who was born in 788 A.D. and died in 820 A.D. His personality was dynamic and scholarship unchallenged. His theory of Monoism created most stir alike in the religious life of the country and its philosophical thought. The Bhakti movement which had so far thrived without the basis of a systematic philosophy now found that its very foundations were being sapped by the fierce, uncompromising Advaitavada (monism) of Sankara which had for its support all the accepted
scriptures. Consequently it became necessary for the Bhakti cult to prove its propriety by reference to scriptures or else it ran the risk of being shown up. The challenge was taken up and a number of Acharyas arose one after another to establish the theistic religion on a secure philosophic basis.

Among the Acharyas were Nathamuni, Yamunacharya, Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhva, Chaitanya and Vallbha. Of these Acharyas Madhva followed Ramanuja and laid great stress on the Bhakti of Hari (Visnu) and Laksmi. But according to him reverence and the relation of the bhakta to the Brahman is that of a subject to his King. Born in a Brahmin family at Kalyanapura in the UDipi taluq in South Canara district, some forty miles west of Sringeri, he became a Sannyasi while he was still young and like Ramanuja had his early training in the system of Sankara. But before his training was over he broke away from that system and evolved his own based on the Bhagavata purana. In UDipi he built a temple of Krsna and spent his time preaching, converting defeating illusionists. He taught that the universe is ruled by God as two persons - Visnu and Laksmi and that the souls in the world are eternally distinct from him. The centre of his religion is Bhakti to Krsna as taught in Bhagavata, Radha having no place in it; but all other avatars are revered. Siva is worshipped and the five gods - Pancayatana are recognised.

Siddhendra Yogi who according to the legend is considered to be the founder of Kuchipudi dance-drama tradition had his
Vaisnavism continued to be the dominant force influencing the life of the people. Vallabhaeharya (1479-1531 A.D.) a Telugu Brahmin contemporary of Chaitanya was the founder of the school of pure monoism-suddhadvaita in philosophy and originator of the path of grace (Pustimarga) in Bhakti. He wrote several works in Sanskrit including a commentary on the Vedanta-sutras and propounded suddhadvaita which exalted Shakti above knowledge. He is said to have vanquished smarta scholars in public debate at the court of Krishnaddevaraya.

In the South various other expressions of Bhakti through Kirtanas, Bhajenas, Harikathas and Kalakshepama also left their indelible impressions on the lives of the people. During this period the influence of Tallapakam poets who flourished in the 15th and the 16th centuries is noteworthy for the spread of Bhajan-sampradaya. The Tallapakam musician poets were Nandavarika Brahmins, like Allasani Peddanamatya the poet laureate of Krishnaddevaraya of Vijayanagar and belonged to the Bharadvajagotra. Three works written by Annamacharya are preserved on copper plates. They are Srngaramanjari, Adhyatma sankirtanalu and Srngara sankirtanalu. We have referred to their usage in the abhinaya section of Kuchipudi solo dance-form.

The use of music as a Yogic sadhana is known from the times of sage Yajnavalkya, and the singing of god's names, praises and glory, Bhajan as part of devotional exercises is also well-known.

There was a line of advaitic sannyasins among whom this tradition of music and Bhajan as spiritual aid and devotional adoration of
god was prevalent. The illustrious example of Sadasiva Brahman, a great advaitic siddha and author of not only Sanskrit philosophical treatises but also of songs on the supreme Brahman, and the various forms of Godhead give us an insight into the hold that Bhakti movement had on the masses. Of equal greatness is Narayana Tirtha, less celebrated as a writer of Sanskrit treatises but occupying a far more important place in the history of Karnatak music and the Bhajan sampradaya. He and his disciple Siddhendra Yogi are associated with the tradition of the dance-drama. Of the two Narayan Tirtha and his disciple Siddhendra Yogi, the latter seems to have made the greater contribution to the art of the dance-drama.

SIDDHENDRA YOGI AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KUCHIPUDI DANCE-DRAMA:

It is not historically ascertained when Siddhendra was born and when did he live to propagate the art of Kuchipudi dance-drama. Legend has it that he was an orphan Brahmin boy not knowing his parentage. That he lived in nearby area of Srikakulam seems to be certain from his religious training and his returning to the Kuchipudi village and its environs. This is the region which has quite a historical past. Kuchipudi is a village in the Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh. It is a modest village where there is a large population of Brahmans. It is situated some 35 miles from Bezwada-Vijaywada and 15 miles from Masulipattanam. The village originally stood on the banks of river Krishna but the river changed its course a few centuries ago. The name
Knchipudi is derived from Kusheelava a term which stands for actors. The Sabdaratnakara mentions that kuseelaves are bands of actors moving from place to place. Even now in Andhra villages the word Kuchigallu is used for actors. It is possible that its former name might have been Kuchelapuram which later on was named as Knchipudi. In present times the name Knchipudi is associated with the dance-drama tradition and instead of Bhagavata Mela Kuchipudi Yaksagana the abbreviated name Kuchipudi dance-drama has come to stay.

Srikakulam which is at the distance of six miles from the present Kuchipudi village is of great historical importance. It was the capital of the early Satavahana empire during the 2nd century B.C. Nearby is Ghantashala which was once upon a time a great centre for Buddhist pilgrimage. Muvva, a small village two miles away from Kuchipudi is the birth place of Ksetrayya, the great Telugu composer of padams. As we have already seen earlier the dance heritage in Andhra dates back to Satavahana rule and the institution of Devadasis was prevalent in Andhra in the succeeding centuries. After the fall of the Kakatiya Empire this region was under the rule of the Kalinga rulers. Bhanudeva I was the ruler of Kalinga from 1263-1277 A.D. After the death of this Ganga ruler, Narahari Tirtha, the minister assumed charge as Regent to the minor prince. Narahari Tirtha was disciple of Ananda Tirtha, the great founder of the Madhva cult. During this period the influence of Jayadeva's Gitagovinda was all pervading.
Narahari Tirtha stayed at Srikakulam for eleven years and he brought along with him the great devotion for Lord Krsna. Along with him arrived dancers from Orissa to Srikakulam and the local artists must have studied the art from them also. The propagation of Krsna and the Bhakti cult naturally spread all over this region. During this period hundreds of songs were written in praise of Krsna and Radha which were adopted by the dancers and musicians. Narahari Tirtha is said to have a disciple in Gopalakrishna Saraswati who lived at Srikakulam and Mahabhagavatam, a text containing 128 slokas, songs is ascribed to him. The special feature of these songs seems to be their suitability for dance. Srikramajalakrida, another text used for dance-drama, is ascribed to him. It is also said that he wrote a treatise called Gopalakrsnavrtti. Besides Gopalakrsna Saraswati, Lillasuka, the composer of Srikrsnakarnamrta, was also a resident of Srikakulam. Under the influence of Narahari Tirtha he took to Vaisnavism and to the cult of Krsna Bhakti though originally he was a staunch Saivite. During this period the Devadasis were trained by the teachers who were Brahmins. Krsna theme was the breath of dance and it was towards the Bhakti of Krsna that all art expressions were directed.

Siddhendra lived in an atmosphere which was the centre of such an intense devotion for Lord Krsna. His charitable neighbours performed the thread ceremony for him. He used to wander from village to village living on charity. As was the custom
then he was married to a bride, who was as per the legend, hardly six months old. Fond of music and dance Siddhendra, popularly known as Siddhappa, used to witness dance-drama performances imbued with Bhakti.

Narahari Tirtha had established a math at Srikakulam. Siddhappa used to stay there after his night long watching of dance and dance-drama performances. The head of the math took kindly to him seeing his devotion to Lord Krsna, arranged to send him for Vedic studies at Udipi where his genius was nurtured and he received an intense training in religious studies. Siddhappa was gifted with fine voice and could sing various compositions. He began to compose slokas in Sanskrit. He was well-versed in NS and a fine Vedic scholar. When the training was over he returned to Srikakulam. An erudite scholar he immediately gained a following. He came to be known as Siddhendra. When his identity was revealed the elders directed him to join his wife with whom he was married during his childhood.

The story goes that when he was on his way to meet his wife and her parents who lived on the other side of the banks of the river Krishna, it was in spate. Siddhendra determined to join his wife decided to brave the floods. Midstream he was caught up in a storm. He realised his plight and prayed to Lord Krsna to save him and decided to spend rest of his life singing Krsna's songs dedicating himself to Lord as a sannyasi. He took what is known as athura sannyasa - renunciation of earthly attachments before
death. Reaching safely the other bank he visited his in-laws and declared his decision. When he was face to face with his wife he had vision of the divine pair Lord Krsna and his consort Satyabhama. He told his wife to forget the worldly love and their marriage bond and instead worship Lord Krsna. Siddhendra turned an ascetic and is considered to have established Bhama-cult, which was later known as Madhura-Bhakti. Satyabhama, the consort of Lord Krsna, loved him passionately. Her ambition was to keep him exclusively in her embrace. The devotee worships the Lord with such intense passion and wishes to merge with the Lord. This yearning for union with paramatma - the supersoul on part of the atma the soul underlined this intense devotion. And it has become the governing principle of Bhakti in general. It finds expression through literary compositions, songs, music and dance.

Siddhendra propagated the cult suggesting that every Bhakta - devotee should have this intense devotion for the Lord, as intense as that of Satyabhama. Krsna is the Bharta - the Lord and each devotee his consort - Satyabhama. Legend has it that Krsna appeared in a dream and told Siddhendra that he would attain liberation if he wrote the story of Parijatapaharana and wished to propagate it. He came to the Kuchelapuram, the present day Kuchipudi, and gathered a group of Brahmin boys who were talented and could enact it in form of a dance-drama. With their help he produced and presented the play written by him. In this manner he propitiated Lord Krsna. Siddhendra then took a vow from all the boys of Kuchelapuram who participated in his play.
that they would continue to enact the Parijatapaharana at least once every year. They in turn further assured him that they would continue to see that their sons and grand sons continued to act the same play in the same way at the same village of Kuchelapuram. Thus it is that to this day the tradition of the Parijatapaharana survives in the Kuchipudi village.

It is said that till Siddhendra came on the scene the Brahmins did not dance though they were the dance-gurus. It was customary then to outcaste and ostracise them if they took to dancing. Siddhendra received a special permission from the head of the Udipi math sanctioning the Brahmins to take part in the dance-dramas and perform it as a part of devotional expression. Since the theme was of Bhakti the Brahmins were called Bhagavatara as the stories enacted were based on the stories from Srimad Bhagavata.

It is also possible that the art of dance degenerated in the hands of the Devadasis and the court dancers and, therefore, Siddhendra Yogi in order to save it from lowliness and demoralised standard, thought it wise to ask the male dancers to dress as female and participate in the dance-drama. It is believed that Siddendra took a vow from the Brahmins that they would dedicate their entire lives to the propagation of this art, as a mark of which a bell is tied to the waist of every newborn child in that community. Siddhendra prescribed a strict discipline for them and saw to it that they were made adept in the art of music and dance besides mastering Vedas and the sastras, Natyasashtra and
Alankar sastras.

We have already referred to the Machupalli Kaifiyat (1502 AD) and noted that the art of dance-drama was popular. Another historical reference about the Kuchipudi dance drama enactment is found in the year 1678 AD. Evidence is available that a performance was given before the Nawab of Golkonda, Abdul Hasan Tahnisha (1672-1687 AD) when he had occasion to visit Masulipattanam. Along with his commander, Pingali Medanna, he had to pass through Kuchipudi village. The Nawab was so much pleased that he issued a copper-plate grant whereby he gave away the agraharam-village of Kuchipudi as a gift to the Brahmin families of this village, whose members had participated in the play. This award was made with a stipulation that the beneficiaries would continue to nurture the art and strive to ensure its perpetuation. Since then successive generations of the originally privileged Brahmin families of Kuchipudi have pursued the profession of dancing as a sacred duty and thereby kept the tradition alive to this day.

After the village was granted as inam to the Kuchipudi Bhagavatars, it appears that quarrels arose among them regarding their shares in the land. A partition deed was effected between their families and it was drafted in 1763 A.D. by one Mosalikanti Kanoji Pantulu and Kandragula Jogi Pantulu, agents of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Late Banda Kanaklingeswara Rao had a copy of the partition deed as among the following families: Vedantam, Vempatti, Hari, Bhagavtula, Pasumarti, Jyosula, Mahankali and
Yeleswarapu. These families are still living in the village today having property right over the land as inherited by them and devoting themselves to the art of Kuchipudi dance-drama and once in a life time the members of these families invariably perform the role of Satyabhama.

During our repeated visits to the Kuchipudi village and stay there we have gathered genealogies of these families who have been torch bearers of this art and are responsible for its continuance and preservation. We have collected the genealogies by interviewing the old members of these families which are given at the end of the chapter in the appendix.

Though Kuchipudi was the main centre of the art, parties of artistes giving similar performances also sprang up at other places near this village. Outstanding among such places were Srisilam, Kappatralla, Alempura, Benganapalli, Marampalli and Mandapeta. One of the families headed by Challa Bhagavatam Vasenbhotlu migrated from Kuchipudi to the village of Kotakonda in the Pattikonda taluq of the Kurnool district, nearly two hundred years ago having been invited by the Nawab. Shri Challa Bharat sastra Lakshmayya of Kotakonda nearly eighty years old passed away recently.

The rulers of Vijayanagar empire (1336-1565 AD) were great patrons of religion and the arts. They attracted to their capital Vijayanagar, scholars, poets, musicians and dancers. The Vijayanagar empire was founded in 1336 A.D. to guard South from the
invasions of Islam. This empire became rich and powerful and ruled over the Tamil kingdoms of the South for more than two centuries. The Andhra Nayakas appointed to rule at Tanjore extended patronage to musicians and dancers from Andhra at the royal court.

After the downfall of Vijayanagar in 1565 AD and the complete destruction of the magnificent city by the Muslims, poets, musicians, dance masters, court dancers and actors of Andhra sought patronage at the Tanjore court. The art of Kuchipudi dance-drama was also patronised by the Nayaka kings. Nayaka rulers at Tanjore were creating new centres of patronage for this and other similar arts. Thus, the art of the dance-drama of the Kuchipudi Bhagavatara went over from Kuchipudi to Tanjore and its environs and thereafter developed at each place according to the dictates of the circumstances. The Bhagavata Mela Nataka, therefore, may be considered as a continuation and an off-shoot of the Kuchipudi dance-drama tradition.

NOTES:
1 Ramachandran T.N. 'The artistic heritage of the Andhras' Special issue on Andhra Pradesh: The Illustrated Weekly of India, September 11, 1966.
2 Natyasastra.
3 Raghavan, V. Nrttaratanvali. See Introduction: Natyasastra in Andhra.
4 NS Ch IX.

5 See infra chapter on 'Theory and Technique.'

6 The Pillamarri inscription of Receruvula Nemi Reddi; the Panchal inscription; the Dharmasagar inscription; the temple endowments; the Jaya inscription of Chebrolu etc.

7 These sculptures were done in the reign of Ganapati under whom Jaya Senapati wrote Nṛttratnavali. It defines the classical and popular - Margi and Desi dance forms that existed at that time.


9 Krishnamurti A. Vaidhei: Social and economic conditions in East Deccan (A.D.1000-1250), page 179 (SECED).

10 Andhragranthmala, 30; see also Sarma M.S.: 'History of Reddi Kingdoms', pp 425 ff.

11 Krishnamurty A. Vaidhei SECED page 179.

12 Ibid p. 191.

13 Telugu culture 3rd volume of Telugu Encyclopaedia, Madras University, pp. 80-83; See Raghavan V.: Nṛttaratnavali Introduction.

14 Joga Rao S.V.: History of the Telugu Yaksagana; thesis submitted to Andhra University, 1961; see also Yaksagana article by the author in Teluguavana souvenir of World Telugu Conference, 1975.

15 Ibid.

16 Thurston E.: Castes and tribes of South India.
The state of the art of dance during the Vijayanagar empire can be better known through the writings of a foreign visitor Abdur Razack who visited the court of Devaraya II. His description of a magnificent display of dance that took place on a Dasera festival day is too well-known; Lakshminarayan, the dance teacher of the ladies court during the reign of Krishnadevaraya (1509-30 A.D.), wrote the Sangitāsuryodaya which had a chapter on dance. He quotes Kohala; the most noteworthy account of foreign traveller like Barbosa and Paes are well-documented Sanskrit plays were also written during this time. Jambavati is ascribed to Krishnadevaraya; see Venkatramanayya N.: SHOTDV page 441.


Ibid pp. 127-128.

Ibid pp.130; see also A history of South India from Prehistoric times to the fall of the empire of Vijayanagar (HSIV).

Dasgupta Surendranath: History of Philosophy, part III page 68.


Nilkent Sastri, K.N.: DORSI, ch.III.
28 Nilkant Sastri, K.N.: HISIFV and also SHOTDV pp.401.
29 Annamacharya: Adhyatma Sankirtanalu, Introduction.
31 Ibid see also 'Kuchipudi school of dancing' paper read by Vissa Appa Rao at the All India Dance Seminar 1958; also MARG Vol.X, No.4.
32 Marg, Vol.XIX, No.2, pp.34.