

Bharatanatyam

By
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NATYA-YOGA DARSHANA

A treatise on the impact of Spiritual Practices on Bharatanatya With Extensive Approach
to Abhinavabharati

Dedicated to :

Guru Vidwan K. Pattabhi Jois

Renowned Yoga Exponent

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Art critic and Impresario



By

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“Only enlightened sages who have comprehended the spiritual
essence of Vedas, and who have
mastered the materialization of those practices are fit to receive,
understand and practically realize this *natyaveda*”
(Natyashastra)

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Note:

This is a shortened (minor) version of Vasundhara Doraswamy's treatise on Bharatanatyam & Yoga – for a copy of the comprehensive version which provides deeper insights into the finer aspects including illustrations of postures – go to www.vasundharadoraswamy.com

PREFACE

It is in vogue to consider any of the Ancient Indian work as divine. Here a particle of doubt emerges as to the very definition of that divinity that is considered as an integral part of such works. In an inquisitive skeptic naturally questions arise, and such questions may be prompted in good sense, as to the veracity of such statements. Just bringing into the picture the element of God may not render the subject divine under such circumstances. Further, it is not sufficient just if any one assumes himself to be a devotee.

Is it true that the knowledge propounded or ingrained in those works were devolved from Brahma? If so, how come an Absolute like Brahma, without any attribute, can transfer that knowledge to human mortals? Are such assumptions not just a mark of belief or faith? Are they not just concocted stories? Questions as these are natural and are even welcome, so that they in a way prompt us to dive into the rationality of the philosophy embodied in those subjects.

As it is common with any other ancient Indian works, Bharatanatya too is enjoying that divine status, most of the time as a custom or faith out of respect. Though in ordinary circumstances such a faith may suffice in instilling divinity into the art form, it may not be quite convincing in case of an adept who desires to get into the depth or the rationality of such averments.

The aim of the present work is to introduce an adept to such depths Bharatha had intended to take the students of Bharatanatya.

More over, a student or performer usually limits his faculty of fathoming into the *bhaava*-s and the *rasa*-s to a conscious level in the process of conveying the essence of the theme on hand to the spectators. Further, it is also a common observation that the performances are turning out to be mere physical or technical- oriented presentations. Considering many presentations as having enriched by *saathvikaabhinaya* is in reality more a verbal delusion than a fact. They are more or less imitations or miming than convincing personifications of the characters under interpretation. The main reason is the failure on the part of the performer to involve into the essence or core of the characters, or to understand the very origin of those *bhaava*-s and their destined culmination with *shantharasa*.

For the above reason, most of the performances are rendered stereo typed, ultimately losing ground and charm. Unnecessary props and special

effects in sound and lightings are resorted to patch up deficiencies or to exaggerate the ideas.

A sort of ego or pride also creep in to spoil the serenity of the program, ultimately failing to make any deep impact on a serious spectator who expects a meditative ambience that would promote *shantharasa* in him. Instead, a distracting glamour or melodrama, not in consonance with the true ideologies of the art form makes its inroads. It means that the performance has failed to conform to the specified parameters of a success – *sidhhi*. It has now turned out to be a mere engaging entertainment than a soothing inexplicable subliminal (*aloukika*) experience – *aasvadanaroopa saakshasathkaarathmaka jnaana* - (Abhinavaguptha).

It is essential and even mandatory to have a thorough idea on the mechanism of transformation of the *bhaava*-s into respective *rasa*-s, in the light of the evolutionary process the mind of the spectator is supposed to pass through. In this process, a knowledge acquired by the performer in a systematic way as prescribed in the classical texts is indispensable. Further, the mental practices as enunciated in those texts warrant the performer to undergo training in spiritual matters, so that he would acquaint himself with such practices that would help him to unfurl the sentiments naturally from a state of tranquility or peace, and gradually lead the spectators to experience such states, carrying them through the other worldly sentiments.

The above awareness serves the four main goals one is ideally expected to fulfill in one's life – *dharma, artha, kaama and moksha*. This reminds of the performer's responsibility and commitments to the society.

A holistic approach is taken by the sage Bharatha to bring to light all the means to realize every element of the dance form. To have an in-depth knowledge of his work, a study on the commentary, Abhinavabharathi by Abhinavaguptha is indispensable. Abhinavaguptha has irrefutably established the spiritual foundation of Bharatha's work. He is the one who has written elaborate commentary on *shantharasa* to establish that as the origin and purpose of the entire art form.

He establishes *shama* as the primordial *bhaava* and as the origin of *shantharasa* in one level (on a deep subconscious plane). Later he establishes *shantharasa* as the basis of the entire *natya*, which incorporates forty-nine *bhaava*-s and eight *rasa*-s: this is more on a conscious plane. When observed from a deep conscious plane of the mind, the entire *naatya* is denominated as *mahaarasa* (great relish) encompassing all the other elements.

Therefore, it is important to view the art from two perspectives – one from the sensual plane working in our everyday life and another from a spiritual plane working at a deeper level as the core of the mechanism of the mental activities. Without such awareness and the associated techniques to acquire profound awareness, the practices of an artiste remains incomplete, thus perceptibly limiting his creativity and expressions.

Abhinavaguptha has principally quoted Pathanjali (he has quoted Pathanjali liberally even while instructing as to how it is possible to materialize *shama sthayibhaava* through *abhinaya*) while establishing *shama* as the *sthayibhaava*. *shama* (tranquility) is used as a synonym for *tatvajnaana*. It is an inexplicable state of awareness - a state of tranquility (called *rithambharaprajna* – a state filled with Truth) - the yogi transcends into while experiencing *purusha*.

Further, Abhinavaguptha elaborates on the mode of expressing *shama sthayibhaava*, in order to elicit *shantharasa* in the spectators. In this process, spiritual practices such as *yama-s*, *niyama-s*, *sanyasa* (renunciation), *nirveda* (detachment), *shaucha* (importance of maintaining purity) and many more are indicated as *vibhaava*, *anubhaava*, *vyabhicharibhaava* and so on. Ultimately and ideally, *shantharasa* should prevail over all the other *rasa-s*.

More over, controlling the *praana* and stabilizing it in different specified areas of the body is indispensable in realizing mental expressions – *saathvikaabhinaya*, the sole of *abhinaya*. The technique presupposes yogic practice of *pranayama*. In the absence of such intense involvements on the part of the artiste, the expressions are rendered just physical, and consequently, they fail to represent the core personalities of the characters under interpretation.

In this work, I have endeavored to explore the subject from a spiritual perspective, and strived to bring to the fore such aspects enunciated in both Natyashastra and Yoga, which help to strengthen the approach to Bharatanatya. It qualifies an adept both physically and spiritually to meet the requirement of the dance form, so that he evolves himself into an ideal dancer endowed with creativity. The approach models him to be an exemplary individual fit to bear social responsibilities too.

For the above reasons, in this work, I have mainly restricted myself to interpret the nexuses that bridge Bharatanatya and Yoga Darshana, by focusing on *shamasthayibhaava* and *shantharasa*, and those factors that are directly related with these spiritual principles and practices. Incidentally I have treated some of the physical aspects of Bharatanatya like *chari-s*, *gathi-s*, *bhramari-s* etc.

I have quoted Sanskrit verses from various texts to help the readers to refer to such points that would inspire them for further study to strengthen their approach to art form.

I with great humility request the readers to bear with any deficiency in my interpretation, and request them to complement my genuine study by their suggestions and studies. I believe we the artistes grow by such collective endeavors.

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When I was learning Yoga from World Famous Yoga Guru Vidwan. Sri.K.Pattabhi Jois, he suggested me to take up research in Yoga and Bharatanatya.

Guruji's idea kindled interest in me and I took up the Assignment as a challenge, With the support of Sri. Harish who stood with me right from the day one I met him.

As and when I used to complete the chapter on yoga, I used to show it to Guruji for review and he used to guide me with suitable corrections.

Regarding Bharatanatya, my husband Sri. H.S.Doraswamy, A Leading Critic and impresario guided me and after completing the thesis on Yoga and Bharatanatya, it was submitted to ICCI (R) under Tamil Nadu Government Act of 27, of 1975, Madras Affiliated to Intitut De Documentation Et D'Etudes Europeennes , Centre International de Recherches Universitaires U.K for Doctorate in the year 1987.

I have received my Doctorate in Dance and Yoga [Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Arts-phD Dance and Yoga National] in the presence of the Governor, Yoga and Bharatanatya Exponents, elites of Cultural City of India, Madras and renowned Art critics like Sri. Subbudu, Sri. K.S. Mahadevan, and Sri. T.S. Parthasarathy a Colourful function on 25th October 1988.

Dr. V. Nagaraj, Art Critic, The Hindu, after going through the manuscript on Yoga and Bharatanatya, suggested me to bring out a book on Yoga and Bharatanatya for wider circulation and readers for which I have promptly consented with a specific condition that he should take initiative of guiding me in bringing out the suggested book, Dr. V. Nagaraj immediately agreed

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Vasundhara Doraswamy

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF BHARATANATYA

Traditional History:

As is common to all the Indian Classical doctrines, the origin of the subject of Bharatanatya is traced to Brahma. This fact need not be considered lightly, as many modern scholars opined that the purpose or the intention of the past scholars was to tag an element of divinity to the subject.

There have been many Brahma-s, and this is an indication of non- eternity of Bhahma. Brahma is eternal only in comparison with the shot life span of the mortals. 14 *manvantaras* make up one day of Brahma, one *manvantara* is equal to 4,320,000 human years.

Brahma (rightly interpreted as the *karyabrahma* evolved from the Absolute) is a treasure house of vast knowledge and can be the greatest source of it.

At the end of the *krithayuga* (period when moral standards prevailed), and at the beginning of *trethayuga* (*yuga* is a measure of time to span the age of creation), which is approximately 25lakh years from now, when the moral standards started deteriorating, the *devata*-s under the leadership of Indra, pleaded with Brahma to save the world from dissipation and decadence.

Brahma entered into a yogic trance, recollected Bharatanatya, and devolved the knowledge to Bharathamuni entrusting him with the task of disseminating the scholarly art form to the mortals for the benefit of humankind. In furtherance of this, Bharatamuni spread this knowledge through his one hundred children conceived just by virtue of his sheer mental faculties (*manasapurta*-s)

To appreciate the nature of this entire yogic phenomenon which is instrumental in such mental devolutions of knolwdge, one may go through Pathanjali Yogasuthra-s, which speak of different levels of yogi-s, who exist in this creation for thousands of years, in proportion with the level of their *vairagya*. (Ref commentaries on the *sutra*-1/19 - *videha prakrithilayaanaam*).

A thorough study on scholarly interpretations on Pathanjali's work - *Vyasabhashya*, *Maniprabha*, *Raajamarthandavritthih*, *Nagojibhattavritthih* and so on, provide sufficient grounds for favorable unbiased inferences, and prompt us to take a fresh look at the traditional history with more understanding and wisdom. Further this has its own practical implications on a performance in fully realizing the essence of classical dance, even in the present day context.

Shiva is the originator of *thandava* (masculine or vigorous elements of dancing) which is an amalgamation of dancing elements like *angahara-s*, *rechaka-s* and *pindibandha-s*. Gods, goddesses, *deva-s*, saints, *gana-s*, *bhuta-s*, *yaksha-s*, *siddhara-s*, *amara-s*, *vidyadhara-s*, *uraga-s* and *pataga-s* witnessed Shiva's cosmic dance in Kailasa, and that dance comprised 108 *karana-s*, which thrived on meticulously integrated *angahara-s* (set of series of bewitching fluent movements) and *rechaka-s* (systematic movements of the limbs like neck, hand, waist and feet). In the context of drama, *thandava* or the masculine dance in an increasing intensity is performed on the stage in the *purvanga* part of a play and is called *vardhamana*.

Next, in order, to receive this knowledge from Shiva, were Hari, Brahma, Indra, Nandi, Tandu and other *deva-s*.

On the application of *thandava* and *laasya*, opinion of Raghavan.V. ('Bharatanatya' a paper presented at Sangeet Natak Academy dance seminar, 1958) is worth considering. Both were used in drama (*natya*), but only *laasya* appears to have been performed independently of the drama, danced by a *nati* or *nartaki*. Further, style that is more lyrical is of great interest to contemporary dancers and scholars, for 'it is in the wake of the classical *laasya* that the form known as Bharatanatya has developed. Even the individual items (*laasyanga-s*) of this type of solo performance are described in character and mood, and unmistakably resemble present-day poetic themes in *shabdam-s*, *padavarnam-s* and *padam-s*.

Bharatanatya in different epochs:

Whereas the above findings are based on the mythological aspects, which have to be interpreted through spiritual perspective than setting them aside as mere beliefs, modern findings also need substantial representation, for a better idea about the antiquity of Bharatanatya.

One of the few artifacts to have survived the pre-Aryan civilization of Mahejo-daro is the famous copper statue of a young dancing girl. And, an abundance of early literary references to the dance of humans and gods may be found in Vedic and post-Vedic literature, epic poetry and the *purana-s*.

4th Century BC: References to dancing may be found in Panini's work on grammar, where he has mentioned about Shilali and Krishashva, two Buddhists, supposed to have written

Natasutra-s (guidelines on dancing). Pathanjali's Mahabhashya (commentary on Panini's Ashtadhyayi) also mentions dance / theatrical troupes led by artistes named Granthika and Shobhanika.

Renowned teachers such as Thumburu, Kashyapa, Dattila, Ashmakuta lived during this period and were responsible for many works on Natya.

2nd Century BC: It is opined that Natyashastra took its birth during this period. It is a suggestive coincidence that Pathanjali who framed yogadarshana also lived around the same period. Still it cannot be hastily and lightly construed that Brahma's period starts from this period. The art of dancing which existed long before had come to be devolved from Brahma to Bharata around this period (consider the yogic phenomenon of connecting one's mind with those beings existing in the *prakrithilaya*, an ethereal plane, in this context).

Natyashastra served as the foundation of many art forms, which evolved into their different kinds in tune with varied customs, historical vicissitudes, geographical traditions and practices still, retaining the nuances of the main root. Bharatanatya of South India, Kuchipudi of Andhra, Kathak of North India, Kathakali and Mohiniattam of Kerala, Yakshagana of Karnataka, Manipuri of Manipur, Odissi of Orissa and the like are the results of such an evolution in the later period.

4th Century AD: the art gained immense popularity and enjoyed patronage during this period. At the same time, Devadasi system also was prevalent, and the Puri Jagannath temple had supported hundreds of Devadasi-s who contributed to the evolution of the art form.

5th-7th Century AD: Chalukya Dynasty was known for its patronage for Bharatanatya, Sculptures in Aihole, Badami, and Pattadakallu, wherein different *bhanga*-s and *karana*-s, have been represented belong to this period.

8th- 10th Century AD: Similarly, Chola Dynasty is the golden age of fine arts. Brihadishwara temple of Thanjavur, Nataraja temple of Chidambaram, Sarangapani temple of Kumbhakonam are a few which are the relics of the encouragement the art form enjoyed.

12th Century AD: Monumental carvings in the Halebidu and Belur temples reveal the story of the great Hoysala-s, and in this context Vishnuvardhana's queen Shantala's name is immortal in the history.

Fine Arts in Royal Courts of Mysore :

1578 : Raja Wodeyar (1578 - 1617 - Wodeyar Dynasty was originally founded by Yaduraya in 1399) took over independent governance of Mysore Samsthana after the fall of Vijayanagara Empire in Thalikote War- 1565. The culture and traditions hitherto followed were continued unaffected gradually gaining progressive prominence. An influx of artists, of various faculties, from the previous empire started enriching the new one.

1638: Existence of organized theatre -*nataka shale*- may be dated back to this era. Subject matters for the dramas were selected mostly from the epics, and some of them pertained to social themes as well. Sanskrit and few Kannada plays were in vogue - *mitra vinda govinda* was a Kannada play standing out as an example.

1673 -: Though no specific names of dancers are available, descriptions of the court by Honnamma, the court poetess during the reign of Chikkadeveraja Wodeyar (1673 – 1704), speak of beautiful courtesans performing at the court. Available literary references vouch for the presence of sound classical framework supporting those performances, and hence their significance as precursors to the present Mysore Style of Bharatanatya.

Folk art receiving encouragement from the people, and literature in furtherance of concretizing them have amply left their trail in such works as in Soundareshvarana Yakshagana written by Shanthavira Deshika a Lingayat poet and later in Padmavathiya Koravanji .

Geetha Gopala penned by the King after the style of Geetha Govinda of Jayadeva enriched the literature of his time.

References to Bharathacharya and the technique of dancing as prescribed in the treatises on the subject like Bharatha Sastra and so on indicate that classical dance was in a very flourishing condition during the period.

Regular schools were run to train the young artistes in dance and music. Folk dances like Kolata, Peacock dance, Parrot dance, and Swan dances were popular (History of the Wodeyars of Mysore – A. Sathyanarayana).

Wodeyars- Chikka Raja Wodeyar (1673- 1704) and his son Kanteerava Narasaraja Wodeyar (1704 – 1714) were known to have composed ten to fifteen Yakshagana-s in Kannada and Telugu.

After the death of Devan Purnayya (1732- 1812) court intrigues (it is interesting that Veena Venkatasubbayya – 1819- acting as the king's personal adviser (musahib) was also an accomplice in the intrigues against the king) brought down the efficiency in the administration, and the Wodeyar lost control over the administration. The British promptly took over the State and administered through their direct representatives (1831-1868). Mummadi spent his free time in pursuit of his interests in literature and fine arts including plays.

18th Century: This period has brought about an important turn in the form of Bharatanatyam, and the credit goes to the Tanjore Quartet- Chinnayya, Ponnayya, Shivanandam and Vadivelu whose thorough proficiency in both classical music and dance, had systematically blended both these inseparable, interdependent and interrelated components into an integral whole. This unique structuring is still the foundation of the present day style of presentation of Bharatanatyam. The quartet were responsible for great reformation and refinement brought into the classical dance form. Chinnayya joined the Royal Court paving way for the introduction of his style of Bharatanatyam in Mysore (this style was in addition to the Mysore style which was already in vogue).

1868: Inclusion of another art form- the theatre- took the cultural history of Mysore to perceptible heights. Inspired by Dashavathara plays (Yakshagana) at Dharmashtala, Mumtaz Ali brought the players to Mysore and they were paid regular salary after the troupe was converted into a regular drama company – Aramane Company – during the next Wodeyar's rule. Nandalike Vishwanathayya was the manager of the Yakshagana troupe and with his entry into the cultural world of Mysore, entered another school of music through his second son Bidaram Krishnappa, whose tutelage is still alive and flourishing.

“He met all its needs. If the modern Kannada Theatre was able to build on sound foundation in Mysore State the credit must go to Chamaraja Wodeyar”- 1868-1894 (Sindhuvalli Anantha Murthi –Theatre Movements in Karnataka –Gubbi Veeranna)”

The concept of theatre was not entirely new to Mysore (refer Kanteerava Narasaraja Wodeyar's period 1638-1659)

Aramane Company was constituted as of necessity to fill the lacuna in the field of Kannada theatre in Mysore, and it was when the people were longing to witness plays presented by Marathi and Parsy companies – around 1875. As a consequence, Shakuntala of Kalidasa got translated into Kannada by Basavappa Shastri and staged for the first time in 1881.

Subsequently Sri Chamarajendra Karnataka Nataka Sabha (1882-1917) took its birth. After the merger of another independent company, Rajadhani Nataka Mandali founded by Mandyam Rangacharya, the original company toured all over Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh with success. The plays were being staged at Hosa Chatra – the present Sanskrit Patashala.

Chamaraja Wodeyar's court treasured and encouraged musicians and dancers. Names of Thirumkudlu Sundaramma and Jetty Thayamma enriched the field of classical dance.

Music and artistry were inseparable ingredients in the lives of the Wodeyars, and Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar (1895-1940) was no exception.

Venkatalakshamma (1906-2003, a disciple of Jetty Thayamma), a dancer and also a musician (a disciple of Devendrappa), was appointed as court dancer in 1928. She later served as Assistant Professor in the College of Fine Arts, Mysore University, which recognizing her services, awarded a honorary Doctorate. She is a recipient of Padmabhushana in 1992.

Natyacharya Thiruchengod Subramanya Pillai was a well-known court dancer. Mugar Chinnamma (1900-1972) was another exponent of Mysore Style of Bharatanatya and was a disciple of both Venkatalakshamma and T. Subramanya Pillai.

Bharatanatya in the recent times (and scholars' findings) :

Udaya Shankar's great contribution to Indian dance with his international experience and perspective, couples with in vigorously independent style. He introduced into India ballets which, though basically Indian, were "nevertheless his own personal creation...influenced by European expressionist schools as well as the dances of the Far East. Shankar wanted to forge a dance, which would be relevant to modern conditions, in which contemporary problems could be expressed, and which would have meaning for his audience. To do this he employed all the resources at his disposal irrespective of their origins, and still created an art, which could not be mistaken for anything but Indian.

Another well-known Indian dance personality to come under the influence of internationalism was Rukmini Devi, founder of the Kalakshetra International Arts Center. Showing an early and stubborn sense of cultural independence she espoused Theosophy and married Dr. George Arundale, Her intellectually disciplined dedication to the art focused the public attention on the possibility that the dance might contain something of interest and value in the lives of respectable people (John Higgins)

Noted authority Harprasad Shastri has opined on the period of Bharatanatya that it was written in second century BC. Manmohan Ghosh, another research scholar has concluded, based on the style of language, the meter adopted and the geographical findings that it was between first and second century BC. Ramakrishna Kavi, an authority on Natyashastra has fixed it to be 500 years before Christ.

During the above period, of all the *shaddharshana-s*, *sankhya* and *yoga* philosophies were the most accepted and followed doctrines. Pathanjali, the preceptor of *yogadharshana*, also lived in this period. Though it is difficult to pin point whether Bharatha was influenced by *sankhya* or *yoga* or any other Darshana, yet it is clear that yoga as a means or technique has commanded a great deal of significance in the text.

When one goes through Abhinavabharathi, *bhashya* on *natyashastra* by Abhinavaguptha, it is self evident that he had imbibed and inculcated, in his approach to dancing, the principles and understandings of *sankhya* and *yogadharshana -s*, and he has also

established the spiritual goal of Natyashastra. Inclusion of *shantharasa* as the ninth one is very well justified by Abhinavaguptha, who even goes to the extent of considering it as the origin of all the other *rasa*-s.

Abhinavaguptha was a scholar in *tantrashastra*, *darshanashastra*, *kaavyashastra*, *natyashastra* and *sangeethashastra*. He has to his credit around forty-one texts. His period was 10 to 12th Century AD.

The present work is based on Abhinavaguptha's elaborate commentary on *natyashastra* and I have been influenced deeply by importance of the eight limbs of yoga in to process of understanding and practicing Bharatanatya.

CHAPTER 2

ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF YOGA DARSHANA

All the spiritual schools – be it Jaina, Bouddha, Vaisheshika, Naiyyayika, Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shaktha, Yoga - who agree with the concept of Liberation, have no difference of opinion as to the path of the *sadhaka* as comprising eight limbs.

They may have their different philosophies to establish the attainment of moksha, but all have unanimously accepted and followed the eight limbs -*Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana* and *Samadhi*. (Jivanmuktiviveka)

(sarvah api thairthikaha moksham angikurvan yogicharithe api arhatha- bouddha-vaisheshika- naiyyayika-shaiva-vaishnava-shaktha-sankhya- yogadhi moksha shastreshu prathipadya prameyasya naanaa vidhatve api, moksha sadhanasya yamaniyamaadi ashtaanga yogasya ekavidhatvat- Jivanmuktiviveka)

Though as a practical means to an end, yoga existed in Vedic times, yoga as a distinct philosophy, was established by the great sage Pathanjali around two thousand three hundred to two thousand five hundred years back.

Pathanjali was a sage (*rishi*), a grammarian, and a physician too. Even to this day, his works are considered as standard texts.

There are six main schools (*shaddharshana-s-* paths) on philosophy pertaining to spiritual matters.

1. *nyaya*
2. *vaisheshika*
3. *sankhya*
4. *yoga*
5. *purvamimamsa*
6. *uttaramimamsa* (Vedanta)

Among the above six, *nyaya* and *viasheshika* have many principles in common, *sankhya* and *yoga* have many common approaches, and *purvamimamsa* and *uttaramimamsa* go together in many aspects.

In fact, it is opined that it is impossible to fix the number of these *darshana-s*. The reason is that the individual in pursuit of liberation is at liberty to pursue his own path provided, it is established on logic, observation, understanding and experience. It has always been a sincere effort to describe the experience of Truth, in different ways, in spite of their awareness that such Truth is only to be experienced, and is something ineffable. The general goal is *moksha* and the only means is *vairagya*. All practices are subservient to the main goal and are ancillary to the approach.

Yet, the scholars have considered and recognized around 363 as the most important ones, and of them nine - *charvaka darshana*, *jaina darshana*, *boudha darshana*, *nyaya darshana*, *vaisheshika darshana*, *purvamimamsa*, *uttaramimamsa*, *sankhya darshana* and *yoga darshana* - are highly placed. In this list, *charvaka darshana* is an exception in the sense that it embodies a materialistic or a hedonistic view, not recognizing liberation, and therefore neither rebirth nor *atma*. For them the material body is everything and this birth is the ultimate.

Origin of Yoga as a means of Liberation:

The exact time or the period of the origin of Yoga as a path is difficult to arrive at. We have only to depend upon the material proofs to have a probable idea.

Many figurines of terracotta, faience etc have been found out in the Indus Valley.

Among these figures the most remarkable lies a three-faced deity wearing a horned headdress, seated cross-legged (Siddhasana and not Padmasana as mentioned in many texts) on an elevated place. Further this is not a representation of Shiva Cult or Linga (phallus) Worship as many opined. The hooded cobra over the head of the figure represents Kundalini, and this does not denote Naga Worship (snake worship).

Siddhasana is considered to be the best of all *asana*-s (ΙÉÉxÉÍÉqÉÇ ÍxÉ®xÉSØzÉÇ - *naasanam siddha sadrisham –Hatayoga Pradipika*). The figure beyond doubt proves that Yoga as a means of Liberation existed in the age of Indus Valley Civilization- 3000 BC. This period is still not very correct, as it has been proved that Mahabharata War took place at around 3100 BC. Hence, Indus Valley civilization has to be dated farther back.

Ramayana is much ancient to Mahabharata period. Vedic practices were much in vogue during Ramayana period and even before.

Vedas recognize Brahma to be its origin. To be 'connected' with Brahma the only means are Dhyana and Samadhi.

The entire finding logically establishes the antiquity of Yoga (as a means) as even the precursor of Vedas.

Evolution of Yoga as an independent doctrine:

Vedas are the vast treasury of all knowledge. Subject dealing with Brahma and liberation is (*brahmajijnaasaa*) a part of it, as any other rituals (*dharmajijnaasaa*- discussions on righteous ideal living) are. Rites or rituals as mentioned in the Vedas are sufficient to ward off all the worldly miseries, and they are intended to provide the individual all the mundane or heavenly pleasures. Nevertheless, they are not sufficient to eradicate *karmas* which lead to never ending rebirths.

On this, Eshwarakrishna in Sankhyakarika says

*(duhkhatraya abhighaathat jijnasaa that apaghatake hethou, drishte
sasapaartha cheth na ekaanta atyanthatho abhavaath –
Sankhyakarika)*

There being (in this world) an impediment caused by three kinds of pain (there arises) a desire for enquiry into the means of alleviating them. And if (it be urged that) the enquiry is superfluous on account of (existence of) obvious means, (we reply that it is) not so: because

these (latter) are neither absolute nor final. (Ganganath Jha) Further, Eshwarakrishna goes on to say as follows:

*(drishtavath anushravikaha sa hyavishuddhi kshaya athishaya
yukthaha, thath viparithaha shreyaan vyaktha avyaktha jna
vijñanasanaath - Sankhyakarika)*

Not all kinds of worships and subjects mentioned in Vedas support the pursuit of liberation. They are defective as they either increase the pleasures or decrease. The means are impure (as they carry *karma*-s). Therefore, it is wisely advised to know the true nature of the material existence, the root cause of this existence and the *purusha* (Brahma) in order to get liberated.

Of the above six schools, Sankhya and Yoga philosophies are closely related. Maharshi Kapila developed Sankhya Darshana and Maharshi Pathanjali propounded Yoga Darshana.

Mentions may be found in Mahabharata about the originators of Yogashastra as Sanatkumara and Jaigishavya. However, it is not certain whether they had followed the Yoga as a distinct philosophy or as a special practical means. From this aspect, Pathanjali may be logically established as the propounder of Yoga in its complete sense.

The origin of Natyashastra also took its birth around the same period. One may find many similarities in concepts in both the subjects. Abhinavaguptha in his Abhinavabharathi (commentary on Natyashastra) establishes a direct relationship between Natyashastra, Sankhya and Yoga though their prime purposes are partly different.

CHAPTER 3

PHILOSOPHY OF DANCING

It is interesting that the practice of Bharatanatya based its philosophy firmly on the spiritual plane. This is a fact that suggests the importance of spiritual knowledge and practices that have a significant bearing on the magnitude of understanding of the concept of dancing.

An artiste who is serious of realizing the essence of the art form, needs to give serious thoughts on imbibing these principles and inculcate them in order to finely incorporate the spiritual elements into the main theme of his performances. Thus, he will not only conserve the sublimity of the subject but will be able to preserve the same for the posterity – a honest effort at justifying the great sages' intentions of bequeathing that knowledge for the benefit of the human kind.

In the opening lines of his commentary, Abhinavabharathi (the only available authoritative commentary on Bharathamuni's Bharatanatya), Abhinavaguptha the commentator, while paying his obeisance (*mangalacharana*) to Lord Shiva, the presiding deity of Natya, mentions about the characteristic features of the Lord, as follows:

*vishwabeeja prahorartham, mooladharathaya sthitham /
dharthri shakthimayam vandhe dharanirupam eshvaram / -
Abhinavabharathi.*

I bow to that *Eshwara*, who is the primordial cause for the creation of this world, and who abides in the *muladharachakra* like the Earth, which supports that creation.

Findings have proved that Abhinavaguptha was proficient in *darshanashastra*, *tantrashastra*, *kaavyashastra*, *natyashastra* and *sangeethashastra*.

Any one studying and practicing *yoga* and the *tantra* will not fail to find the importance of *muladharachakra* in pursuit of knowledge. It is said that he in whom the kundalini is an exceptional orator and scholar (Shatchakranirupanam).

Nevertheless, in the present context the text is not advising a dancer to work on Kundalini in the same intensity with which a yogi pursues such practices. Here, the references are only to establish the importance of spiritual knowledge with reasonable implementation of the practices for effectively and successfully performing the art form. Following points are worth considering:

Firstly - Bharatanatya is not a spiritual subject as specific and exclusive as Yoga, which invariably aims at liberation from rebirths. Moksha is not the only aim of Bharatanatya.

Secondly, Bharatanatya is destined as a powerful media in carrying the spiritual theme to the common man through easily comprehensible artistry that embodies all the contemporary subjects. In this process, the performances are tailored in such a way that the ultimate goal makes a deep impact on the spectators inspiring them to follow the path of righteousness in the interest of the society. Simultaneously the performance should elevate him to higher intellectual and spiritual planes .

The performer has a great deal of social responsibility, and should work more as a role model. A prerequisite of an ideal performer is his indulgence in such practices which would finely shape his vision through noble ideas and spiritual awareness.

Bharatanatya makes the individual proficient in many subjects in furtherance of attaining *moksha*-one of the four principal goals of one's life (*Chaturvidhapurusharthaha*). These are expected to be achieved by every individual- irrespective of that individual being on the path of *samsara* or *vairagya*.

*(dharmyamarthyam yashasyam cha sopadeshyam sasangraham,
bhavishyathasya lokasya sarvakarmanudarshakam,
sarvashastrarthasampannam sarvashilpa pravarthakam,
natyakhyam panchamam vedam sethihasam karomyamaham -
Natyashastra)*

Meaning: Brahma says, that He created this Natya which teaches *dharma* (righteousness or moral codes: it implies or embodies all the other principal goals –Abhinavaguptha), *arthyam* (that which is pleasant to everyone- Abhinavaguptha), *yashas*. This Natya is fit for propagation and is rich in worldly knowledge, setting a model of one's duties. It has the essence of all

subjects and embodies all the art forms. History is another component of it. Therefore, on these tenable grounds, Natya is claimed as the Fifth Veda.

Discussing the classical definition of History bears relevance in establishing the *moksha* (liberation) aspect of Bharatanatya. *dharma artha kama mokshanam upadesha samanvitham, | Ithi vritta katha yuktham itihasa prachakshate.*

ithihasa is that scripture which highlights the past events with authenticity (*ithi*=in this way+ *ha*=truly+ *sa*=so). Here, in the context of Natyashastra, the word carries a broader meaning to encompass the spiritual aspects as well. *ithihasa* is that which embodies the four main goals of human existence- *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (success or livelihood), *kaama* (desires) and *moksha* (liberation), in relation to the events of the past.

Natyashastra embraces such events, which foster *chaturvidha purusha artha*, and therefore Bharatha calls it *panchama veda* (fifth Veda).

Now coming back to *muladharachakra*: In any individual in whom this Chakra is activated whether by virtue of his birth or by practice, scholarship and competence is naturally elevated to an exceptional degree.

*(vaachaam eesho narendraha sa bhavathi saravavidya vinodi, aarogyam
tasya nityam niravadhi cha mahanadachittantarathma, vakyaihi
kavuyaprabandhaihi sakalasuragurun sevathe Shuddha sheelaha.-
Shatchakranirupanam)*

He will be an unparalleled orator, appreciates every scholarly subject, enjoys good health, remains calm and blissful, he pleases all the great scholars by his speech and literary excellence.

When anything is done just to kindle or vitalize these impressions the individual instantly (*sahasa*) picks up the strains and progresses very fast with admirable understanding and creativity Spiritual practices can fathom into the deeper recesses of the mind and paves the way for the inherent predispositions to emerge with all their glory and intensity.

One can find references to the above statement in *sankhyayogadarshana* of Pathanjali :

'sati moole tadvipako jaati ayuhu bhogaha'- Sadhana Paada

When such past impressions are working in the background they govern one's nature of birth (human being, animal or plant), life span (longevity including health) and enjoyments or sufferings. (belongings, properties, pains or pleasures)

It is only when the mind cleared of distracting activities that the dormant faculties automatically start manifesting themselves with all their might. The hidden memories – *samskara-s*- become active at the *ahankara* (not to be construed as ego, which carries a negative meaning) level- a true subconscious state of mind wherein all the past memories or impressions - *samskara-s* are recorded.

This state of mind determines one's strong likes and dislikes. Certain practices help to explore the potentialities of the mind. Dhyana and Samadhi by any prescribed means are the only ways to achieve this end.

Observe the following verse as a testimony to the above phenomenon:

*(evamastvithi taanuktva devarajam visrija cha, sasmara
chatur vedani yogamaththaya tatvavith - Natyashastra)*

When the *devatha-s* requested to create something for the emancipation of the society and that which can be enjoyed by every class of that society, Brahma assured them and entered into Samadhi to recall all the four Veda-s.

As this art of Natya is pleasing, it is appealing to everyone irrespective of their intellectual status –

*(hridhyathayaa sarvajanaanaamapi naanaadhikaarathvena
abhilashaniyam itharthah) Abhinavabharathi)*

Further, highlighting the significance, the inner core, the basic contents of the art form, Bharatha says:

*(na tat jnanam na tat shilpam na saa Vidya na saa kala, naasau
yogo na tat karma naatyasmin yanna drishyate - Natyashastra.)*

jnanam: (jnaanamityupadeyam aatmajnaanaadi – Abhinavaguptha) : here knowledge includes athma jnana, an understanding of which is possible by practicing the principles enunciated in yogashastra. shilpam: (maala chitra pusthaadi yojanam -Abhinavaguptha) - flower arrangements, painting, clay modeling, woodwork and so on.

vidya: – (*danda neethyaadi* -Abhinavaguptha) – principles of governance.

kala:– (*kalaam geetha vaadyadika* -Abhinavaguptha) singing,
instrumental music.

yoga : (*yogo yojanam teshamiva jnaanadinam kalaantanaam*
svabhedairanyonyasaarabhedaih - Abhinavagupta).

In this context the word 'yoga' denotes a comprehensive and esthetic employment of all the above ingredients.

CHAPTER 4

BHAAVA FROM SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE AND YOGIC PRACTICES

Introduction:

The word '*bhaava*' connotes different meanings. It has to be comprehended as a conceptualized entity rather than by attributing to it any one meaning. The following meanings are extracted from the word Bhaava.

- 1) (*bhavanthithi bhaavaha*) – those mental predispositions which exist inherently in their potential states are called Bhaava-s. The word is here used as a noun.

They are recognized to exist in the lyrics, in the actor and in the spectator. These are the basic traits – *samskara*-s that govern all other manifestations, and they go on taking different forms or dimensions depending upon the circumstances to which any individual is exposed.

Interrelations and interdependencies between different *bhaava*-s, and different proportions in which they keep working in any given individual, collectively constitute the characteristic personality of that individual.

Personality thus is unique to any individual irrespective of that individual being a common person or a learned, an actor or a spectator.

The individual's attitudes, behaviors, and tendencies are governed by the memories ingrained (*samskara*-s) both in subconscious and conscious states. Those that penetrate into the subconscious levels (*samskaaranugatha*) in addition to the already ingrained impressions (deep-seated memories) are the ones that constitute the very core personality of the individual. This is called in the Indian spiritual parlance as *ahankara*.

Usually the word *ahankara* is erroneously translated as ego. The word 'ego' in English carries a meaning, which is non-spiritual, in the sense that it is not congenial for detachment (*vairagya* or renunciation). Whereas, when it is construed in the spiritual

plane, the word *ahankara* connotes a composite of the individual's traits, which is recognized to be a connecting link carrying the individual through different births.

The human mind retains everything that it experiences.

(anubhutha vishaya asampramoshaha smrithihi) - Pathanjali.

The impressions are in fact overlapped or superimposed by other impressions, and are not 'forgotten' as understood in the usual sense. They remain in the subconscious levels of the mind, in dormant state forever, unless they are erased or abandoned through profound meditation (*dhyana*) by the yogi.

(dhyanaheyaasthadvriththayah – Pathanjali) -

The afflictions must be removed through meditation. This ultimately results in (*chiththavritthi nirodhah*- Pathanjali) -total stillness of mind.

Memories, which appear to be forgotten or erased are the ones that are not potent enough to influence the mind strongly, or which could not stay in the mind for a considerable time for want of gravity of impact, or which may by virtue of being overlapped by other impressions stay in dormant states.

These dormant activities become active or manifest whenever congenial circumstances arise: (*vaasanaa rupena sthithaa api kleshah prabodhaka sahaayaka kaaryabhaave naabhivyajyathe*) -*Raajamarthandavritthih*, an authoritative commentary by Bhoja on Yogasutra-s

Bhoja once again reiterates thus:

*(praaptha sahakaara sanidhayah svamsvam kaaryam
abhiniivarthayanthi, yathaa sadhaiva yogaparipanthino
vyuththaana dhashaayaam).*

Relevance of *samskara*-s in Bharatanatya:

It is possible to trigger them into action by creating such artificial circumstances, which are very near to realities. This phenomenon is the very foundation, working as the modus operandi, of Natyashastra; and in this process both actor (dancer) and the spectators are inspired to significant extent in different stages of a performance.

Whereas, lyrics and the theme inspire the actor (dancer), and evolve in him the dormant traits (*bhaava-s*) an intense mood or sentiment mood that is created in him spontaneously emerges perceptibly through his thoroughly trained artistic expressions.

With this, the theme is now raised to impressive ecstasies, which in a way, hypnotize the spectator prompting him to identify himself with the artificially created near-realities.

A commonality in meanings thus established between the actor and the spectator triggers those impressions that are inherent in the spectator to manifest in the form of *rasa* or Relish.

- 2) (*bhaavayanthithi bhaavaha*) : That which can influence and modify (the feelings or the sentiments) is *bhaava*. The word *bhaava* is employed as a verb transitive.

As explained earlier, expressions of the actor influences or prompts into action the dormant traits primarily existing in the spectator.

3)

*(vibhaavena aahritho yo artho hi anubhaavaisthu gamyathe
vaaganga sathvaabhinayaihi sa bhaava ithi sanjnithaha -*

Natyashastra)

When any subject of the theme on hand (*artha*) triggered by the appropriate *vibhaava-s* (excitants/stimulating factors), is rendered aesthetically and meaningfully presentable by the suitable employment of relevant *anubhaava-s* and three types of *abhinaya-s* (1.verbal expressions, 2.physical movements, which includes gestures and signals fortified with 3.mental involvement), then that subject or the theme under consideration is called *baava*. Natyashastra has accepted this comprehensive definition.

A thorough understanding and assimilation of the essence or the import of this definition, and its practical significance is a sine qua non before any attempt at interpreting the theme on the stage. Only a well-versed actor is able to accomplish such a responsible deed. The pivot or the focus is invariably Bhaava or the basic mood or the essence of the subject matter.

Role of dhyana and dharana in Natya:

Of all the requirements, which can animate or trigger physiological reaction in a subject (spectator), mental involvement on the part of the actor (*sathvikabhaava* and *saathvikaabhinaya*) is given utmost importance. It is explicitly said that the essence of dancing primarily revolves round that deep absorption akin to a deep trance.

(*satve naatyam prathishtitham*)- *satva* is concentration (*sathvam chittaikaagryam*)

Abhinavaguptha . Concentration is technically called *dhaarana*-

(*deshabandhashcittasya dharana* - Pathanjali)

Making the point more clear, Nagojibhatta, another commentator on Pathanjali Yogasutras, says that *dhaarana* is achieving concentration.

(*chittasya bandha ekagrathvam dharanethyarthah* -
Nagojibhattavritthih)

It is gross meditation when compared with *dhyana*, which is more subtle and focussed:

(*tathra prathyayaikathanatha dhyaanam* - Pathanjali)

Dharana is transformed into Dhyana when the activities, which are confined within a permissible frame work, are made to fix on the object of meditation without any fluctuation: thought waves are identical.

The purpose of that concentration is to achieve oneness between the mind of person who is meditating and the object of meditation. This phenomenon of establishing uniformity between the self (*grihitri*), the sense faculty (*grahana*) and the object of meditation (*grahya*) is called *samapatti*.

In fact, practically, the actor needs to enter into a state of gross meditation (*dharana*) to achieve oneness between him and the character in its entirety. In a performance, the sentiments or emotions that are required to be depicted are not continuous and stable, but they keep on changing within a permissible and visualized framework. Hence, the actor while he is portraying a character on the stage, is not to be strictly considered to have entered entirely into a state of dhyana. He is ideally expected to shift between different states of dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Constancy in any of these states are expected only in case of yogis whose main objective is

detachment in furtherance of liberation, and in which state, waves of experience of exactly similar types are expected:

The actor is expected to personify the character as a whole, not any one of its characteristics. He has to shift from one feature to another yet remaining within the broad framework of the features of the personality of that character. Therefore, it is logical to consider this phenomenon mainly as *dharana* and not as *dhyaana*, which is expected at levels where the actor is depicting any one of mental states of the character under interpretation. *Dhyaana* is that activity which is unwavering in its strict sense, and a later step coming into picture after *dharana*.

Yet, the actor should practice *dhyaana* (meditation) in order to gain control over *dharana* (in relation to the character on hand, at any one given time) on the stage. This would create a state of mild Samadhi- a state of trance, in which the actor remains for a considerable time. It is only through intense involvement, as if amounting to a state of dissolution (*anuvyavsayathmaka* – identification of two things in such a manner that the one is completely absorbed into the other) with the characteristic features of the character, that the endeavors of the actor are accomplished.

As a collective result of such mental states on the part of the actor, the spectator is carried into deeper ineffable experience wherein he begins identifying himself with the character as if there appears no difference between him and the character. The entire process is summed up as having the substance of the expression:

(aasvaadanarupa saakshaatkaaratmaka jnaana)| The actual experience is termed as (anuvyavasaayarupa anukirthana) - Abhinavaguptha

When the actor identifies himself with the character as if there appears no difference (sakshaatkaaraatmaka) between him and the character, the theme under interpretation is instantly and automatically transformed into *bhaava*.

From the spectator's perspective:

The actor is like the object of meditation for the spectator. The spectator does not identify the actor as different from the character on hand, nor does the spectator visualize the actor as someone mimicking the character. The actor is the character personified in its entirety.

(*thena raama ithyeva prathithih , na thvayam raamo anyo ayamithi-*
Abinavabharathi)

A commonality in experience between the actor and spectator is then established which, in its turn, through *abhinaya*, evokes the desired *Rasa* (Relish) in the spectator. The entire phenomenon carries the audience beyond time and space.

Abhinavagupta further mentions, while describing the significance of *saathvika bhaava-s* (predispositions or inherent emotional or sentimental traits for the effective expressions of which intense mental involvement on the part of the actor is an indispensable prerequisite) thus,

(sathvam naama manaha prabhavam taccha

samahitha manasthvaaduchyathe manasa

samadhau sathvanishpatthihi bhavathi -

Abhinavabharathi) *sathva* is serene ineffable

consciousness or a cognition developed in the mind, and this is possible only in a well-composed refined mind (*samahithamanas*), reaching its pinnacle or consummation (*nishpaththi*) when it reaches a state of profound absorption (*samadhi*).

Samadhi is a state of mind full of undistorted awareness without any fluctuation in experience-

(samyagaadhiyathe ekaagrikriyathe yathra manaha sa samadhihi -

Bhojavrithi- a commentary on Pathanjali Yoga Sutras).

Only a mind devoid of distracting external activities can successfully achieve oneness (called *samapathi*- closeness) with the character under consideration and enter into a state very similar to *samadhi* - a prerequisite in personifying that character.

Expressions like bristling of hairs (*romancha*), crying (*ashru*), changes in the color of the face (*vaivarnya*- blushing, pallor) and so on (*sathvikabhaava-s*) are beyond realization without that profound involvement:

*(thasya cha yoasou svabhaavo romancha ashru vaivarnyaadhi
lakshano yathaa bhaavopagathah sa na shakyo anyamanasa
karthumithi -Abhinavbharathi)*

Conclusion:

These concepts of spiritual aspects enshrined in Natyashastra supported, elaborated and established by Abhinavaguptha, makes it mandatory that the dancer should imbibe and inculcate the principles of yoga in its true spiritual sense to achieve divine success (*daivisidhhi*).

Abundance of absorbing emotions, supported by intense involvement, spectators watching spell-bound, untainted by any distortion, and a packed auditorium signify a divine success.

In order to implement the above objectives the only recourse is to begin the whole practice systematically as stated in the scriptures on Yoga. This means a strict implementation of the eight limbs of yoga (A'shtāṅga - *ashtanga*).

While suggesting the implementation of these principles I have kept in mind the intensity of practice that is necessary for an artiste in pursuance of his art form. It means to say that the purpose here is not to expect total renunciation (on the part of an actor) as we expect in case of Yogis.

About the Author:

Dr. Vasundhara is a Danseuse par excellence, versatile choreographer of repute and a venerated guru of Bharatanatyam, hails from the princely city of Mysore and has turned very much a phenomenon in the Indian Classical dance scenario over the past five decades and more of her career. Her performances are a manifestation of the profound terpsichorean ingenuity marked by impromptu improvisations, esoteric foot-work and bewitching histrionic propensities. Her myriad choreographies encompassing a wide spectrum of spiritual and secular themes are striking paradigm of her inventive brilliance. Vasundhara is one of the pioneer disciples of renowned Shri Pattabhi Jois from Mysore in Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, and has earned a Phd for her research and thesis on the correlation between Yoga and Bharatanatyam.



Vasundhara is a recipient of the 'Shantala Award' - the highest Karnataka state award, she is the youngest recipient of the 'Karnataka Kala Tilak' the prestigious award from the Karnataka Sangeetha Nrithya Academy and has a post-graduate degree in Folklore and is a consummate exponent of the martial arts of 'Tang-ta' and 'Kalaripayattu' which vouches highlighting her multidisciplinary achievements. Vasundhara was awarded the prestigious 'Kala Vipanchi' in Chennai by Padma Vibushan Shri Balamurali Krishna and 'Shreshta Kala Pracharak' from Padma Bushan Saroja Vaidyanathan (Ganesh Natyala- New Delhi) and was recently awarded 'Chandana' award by Doordarshan India. She is the only recipient of Asthana Nritya Ratna from Shri Shri Vishwapiyateertha, Shri Krishna Mutt, Udupi. She has been honoured with State Rajyotsava Award [Karnataka], Natya Jyothi [Australia] and Millennium Award [USA]- just to name a few. She also holds a post-graduate degree in Folklore and has been involved in multiple solo choreographies like 'Panchali' noted for its singular adaptation of Yakshagana music [form of folk music] to Bharatanatyam and 'Ganga Lahari', another solo production depicting a detailed narration of the story of Ganga and many more. She has been the only choreographer in Bharatanatyam who has ventured into a dance production of 'Sama Veda' - the fountain head of Indian Classical music and Bharatanatyam. Vasundhara Doraswamy is an A-Graded Artist in Doordarshan. She is presently a member of ten members' expert committee for Bharatanatyam appointed by the Department Of Culture, Govt. of India.

Vasundhara is the one and only Bharatanatyam danseuse to have been invited from India to perform for 'WORLD PEACE' conference in Paris under aegis of UNESCO in the presence of 2500 representatives from 137 countries. International Accreditations & Relations: Bharatanatyam: Vasundhara travels around the world conducting workshops in Bharatanatyam and Yoga for anywhere between 3-4 months in a year. She performed at the festival for the 50th Independence celebrations in Sydney & Melbourne. Vasundhara has a branch in Melbourne, and tours Australia regularly on a yearly basis. She conducts summer camps for Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in the UK. She has travelled to Czech Republic, Poland, France, Germany, UK and Austria representing the ICCR [Indian Council for Cultural Relations]. Vasundhara's current tours are primarily based in the US, Singapore and Australia. Vasundhara is a visiting Guest Professor at Alabama University in the US where she spends 4 summer months every year. She was conferred the Honorary Citizen of Louisville and a Lifetime Achievement Award this summer by the Mayor of Louisville, USA. Yoga: Vasundhara has conducted numerous workshops all over the world and an official branch for Bharatanatyam & Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga at 'Art of Vinyasa' in Melbourne led by her daughter-in-law Meghala Bhat.

She has performed for numerous charity organisations regularly in the past and has worked successfully on productions for the blind and recently with the physically and mentally challenged kids.

Vasundhara Style:

Dr. Vasundhara gained her initial training in Pandanallur Style of Bharathanatyam. Over the years, with her experience and creativity has been able to give it a unique footprint of her own which is being recognized by the dance fraternity and the art connoisseurs in her performances and that of her students'. This transformation was never a drastic or intentional move but something that evolved into a beautiful piece of art over the years.

As a venerated Guru, Dr Vasundhara has been successful in generating disciples who have imbibed her every move, look (Drishti) & nuances needed etc in the way they perform. It is not an easy task for any teacher to leave such a footprint that the audience can see her/him in their student. Dr Vasundhara has been successful of doing this through a legacy of her 3 generations of students.

Dr Vasundhara's strong footing in Yoga as a practitioner and further as an exponent of martial arts was what inspired her to experiment with the boundaries of the classical dance of Bharatanatyam. Whereas incorporation of Yogic postures added to the gorgeousness of the dance form, regular practice of Yoga helped her in perfecting the geometry of the movements making the choreographies a visual treat. Martial arts provide inestimable vibrant energy to these movements. Use of singular hastas, alluring gaits, abhinaya which can communicate easily with the common man, modifications of the adavus, aharya, inimitable feather-touch footwork , all within the traditional framework ,have led to a unique footprint that is today identified and recognised by one and all as "Vasundhara Style". The primary objective of the style is use Angikabhinaya for aesthetic delineation. These innovations have been instrumental in taking Bharatanatyam to a wider audience.

Tradition is not static and it embraces preservation, innovation and transmission. In this connection, Winston Churchill's quote seems much relevant, "Without tradition, art is a flock of sheep without a shepherd and without innovation, it is a corpse".

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