

**THE SYNOPSIS OF
"THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF A TRADITIONAL ART FORM:
CASE STUDY OF BHARATANATYAM MARGAM"**

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HYPOTHESIS

With 15 years of intense training in Bharatanatyam, I am trying to develop myself as a good dance practitioner, teacher and researcher of the form. To teach, practice and research, I have to understand the basics of the form as well as the format of Bharatanatyam so as to develop it further. The format or repertoire of Bharatanatyam is called *Margam*. This format was created by the Tanjore Quartet in the mid 19th century, around 1867 A D. There were other contemporary prevalent forms also. How did the *Margam* come about and what will be its future in the fast changing times and the socio-cultural pattern is very imperative to know and understand not only for me but for all those connected and concerned with Bharatanatyam in any manner. This is true for now, for the past and for the future. With discussion and understanding of the scope and importance of this research work with my research guide, the topic was finalised. Through this hypothesis and research, I have tried to deep delve into the past, the present and the future trends and the directions of the Bharatanatyam *Margam*.

METHODOLOGY

Attending the 3 months Research Course Work organised by the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in

2012-13 and during my 2 years of dissertation work for the Master of Performing Arts/Dance during 2007-2009 I learnt and understood the importance of following scientific research methodologies for any research work. My subject being Dance falls in the category of Humanities and Social Science. We do not have the Statistical research data but it is more subjective and individualistic.

The research methodology that I followed is

1. Reading of the already published books, treatises, journals and articles to understand what is *Margam*.
2. At every point there was detailed, critical and intense discussion with my guide.
3. Before personal interviews and visits with the gurus/teachers, experts, critics and performers, a questioner was sent to them (to more than 100 experts) for their basic information and details of their work in Bharatanatyam *Margam*.

4. Going and working in the archives and libraries
 - A. Music Academy, Sruti, Narad Gana Sabha, Krishna Gana Sabha, Chennai
 - B. The National Centre of performing Arts - Bombay
 - C. Sangeet Natak Academy archives Delhi,
 - D. Bhartiya Vidhya Bhavan in Mumbai
 - E. Saraswati Mahal Library Thanjavur and many other.
 - F. Visiting the universities with Bharatanatyam departments such as Pune University, BHU, Kalakshetra etc.
5. The compilation of the data as per my requirement.

This is basic methodology that I have followed

INTRODUCTION

As I observe and understand from my guru/teachers, my family and friends and life around me that change is an inevitable aspect of human life or any life for that matter. How and why do things change? This I perceived and experienced throughout my training of Bharatanatyam. The dynamics of change involved affect the traditional art forms. It was one of the major concern that I had throughout my study of Bharatanatyam at The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in the Department of Dance.

To connect to my personal query and being the Bharatanatyam dancer I decided along with the discussion and help from my guru and guide that I must pursue my this query through the proper scientific approach. That is the beginning of my Ph.D. Basically I wish to be a creative performer and practicing artist. So it is very important for me personally to find, learn and understand how Bharatanatyam and its *Margam*, the repertoire has come about to its present state, what are the directions in which it is changing and what will be its future development. I selected and finalised the subject for myself and for the future generations of the dancers to understand. My thesis will be mainly in three major parts. First to establish the continuous and long existence of solo classical dance in India. The development of Bharatanatyam and its *Margam* as well as its items in detail. Lastly the additions and new developments in *Margam* Post-Independence and the future trends.

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CHAPTER 1:CHANGING DYNAMICS OF CLASSICAL DANCE IN INDIA.

Bharatanatyam is a solo dance style. The items of *Margam* are taught to all who learn this classical dance style,in 3 to 5 years after the basic technique of *Adavu-s* is mastered. In this chapter, the codification of solo classical dance is introduced with very brief description of eight classical dance styles of India, highlighting their solo or group status and the major changes that are observed in them through the history.

CHAPTER 2: THE CODIFICATION OF SOLO CLASSICAL DANCE WITH RESPECT TO SANSKRIT TREATIES, STARTING WITH NATYASHASTRA

For the Performers and Dancers the learning and understanding of performance is must. The *Natyashastra* of Bharatmuni's the first and the most important text for all practical purposes to all dancers. Bharata talks about "*EK AAHARYA LASYA*" in *Natyashastra*. It is performing, acting and dancing in one costume and oneset. The same trends follow in further texts also. This is part of the Margi tradition. There is no individual regional dance style described in *Natyashastra*. As we go further from *Natyashastra* about 800- 900 years, the SamgeetRatnakar brings for the first time the regional dance styles. The later texts support the same. Thus the second chapter deals with the beginning or codification of the solo dance style.

CHAPTER 3:THE SOLO CLASSICAL DANCE AND THE DANCER AS HIGHLIGHTEDIN SILAPADIKARAM, SANSKRIT KAVYA AND OTHER LITERATURE

As per the *Shashtras* solo dance and dancers are highlighted in the Sanskrit Kavya and other literature. *Silapadikaram* of Ilaango- Adigal as well as *Malavika Agnimitram*, *Shakuntalam*, and *Meghdootam* of Kalidasa and other Sanskrit Kavya literature writers, through their stories have described in detail the solo dance style, solodancer and the dance gurus. In *Shilpadikaram Arangetram Kandai* there is detailed descriptionof dance training.This Chapter highlights the importance of solo dance and dancer in the Sanskrit *Kavya* and other literature. Also some descriptions of solo dance and dance related activities, as described by the foreign travellers is discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4:THE SOLO CLASSICAL DANCER IN THE SCULPTURE

The temple sculptures of India have prominently kept the records of dance. They are the evidences of continuous existence of classical dance.This is done by showing on different levels and differentwaysthe positions of the solodancer, the group dancers, the

music accompaniment and so forth. I have taken a lot of sculptures of Gujarat. My idea is to show that dance also had an important role in the temple building in Gujarat.

CHAPTER 5: THE SOLO CLASSICAL DANCE IN PAINTING

The sculptures highlight the *Nritta* aspect of dance more whereas the paintings highlight the *Nritya* aspect. The story telling or the narrative part of the dance is *Nritya*. From cave paintings of Bimbetaka and Bagh, miniature paintings showing the Astha-Nayikas and the court dancer, the palm leaf manuscripts narrating the story of the Radha Krishna and Geeta Govind, Kalpasutra paintings of dancers and such other paintings are the historical evidences of the continuous unbroken existence of the solo dance style in India.

CHAPTER 6: COMING OF FILMS AND TELEVISION FURTHERED THE DOCUMENTATION OF SOLO CLASSICAL DANCE IN INDIA.

In the chapters 2 to 5 we saw the existence of solo classical dance as seen through literature, sculpture and paintings. Though they are a very valuable part of the history and development of dance in India, the technological development, beginning with films and other electronic media gave a total new perspective. This is a very wide subject by itself. So in this chapter I will be briefly showing, in continuum of last 3 chapters, how early films (1930 onwards) supported and utilised solo classical dance.

CHAPTER 7 :THE PRE-CURSOR TO MARGAM- PRABANDHA AND NIRUPANA

In this chapter I deal with how Solo dance style developed from the then existing *Prabandha* and later *Nirupana*. These were the existing *Geyanatya Rupakas* which had certain solo passages. During the time of Sahaji II and Safoji II, they were performed and presented by the Devadasis in the courts in the Tamil and Telugu speaking areas and patronised by the Maratha Kings. I have started with the *Prabandha* as a musical presentation with emphasis on poetical composition as referred in *Samgeet-Ratanakar*. The two special *Prabandha-s* written by Sahaji II for dance are described in detail. The list of 15 *Nirupana-s* as written by Safoji II, each with 18 items, with details of performance is very interesting study. Here is the real “*Eka Aharyalasya*” as defined in the *Natyashastra*. From these *Geya-Rupaks*, gradually evolved the solo dance style that is named as Dasiattam, Sadir and finally Bharatanatyam.

CHAPTER 8:THE BRIEF HISTORY OF BHARTANATYAM AND THE CREATION OF BHARATANATYAM MARGAM BY THE TANJORE QUARTET.

After the introduction of Solo Dance through Literature, Sculpture, Painting and Films, also *Prabandha* and *Nirupana* I come to the creation and development of the Bharatanatyam *Margam*. Bharatanatyam is one of the eight classical dance forms of India and perhaps the most prominent. In this chapter I will go through very briefly the relevant history of Bharatanatyam. Here I have addressed the questions such as what is a *Margam*? When, Why and How did the Tanjore Quartet that is Chinnaiya, Ponnaiyya, Vadivelu and, Shivanand created the *Margam*. A brief history of the Maratha Tanjore dynasty. How the dance was presented by the Devadasis in the temple as part of the temple rituals is described in detail.

CHAPTER 9 : THE NRITTA KRITIS OF MARGAM

With such a strong historical background, the *Margam* that is the repertoire of Bharatanatyam has become the most accepted teaching and presentational performance format. It gives full freedom and scope to the artistic expression as well as challenge to the physical, emotional and spiritual capacities of the artist and the Guru. The student has to undergo intense training for a number of years. After that one may perform. Normally, the *Margam* opens with an invocatory, introductory item more popularly known today as *Alaripu* (*Kautuvam*, *Pushpanjali*, *Today Mangalam*, *Mallari* and such) and it ends with *Tillana* and a small *Shloka*. In between it has *Jathiswaram*, *Shabdam*, *Varnam*, *Padam*, *Javali*, *Ashtapadi*, *Kirtanam* and *Tillana*, totally 9 *Kruti-s* or items. Some are pre dominantly *Nritta*, some *Nritya* and some have combination of both *Nritya* and *Nritta*. In this chapter I discuss the *Nritta Kritis* of *Margam* which are *Allaripu* and other invocatory items, *Jathishwaram* and *Tillana*.

CHAPTER 10 : THE NRITYA (ABHINAYA) KRITIS OF MARGAM

If *Nritta* is the non-narrative and abstract aspect in Indian classical dance, *Nritya* is narrative. It means storytelling, expressive, *Abhinaya* item. The *Nritya* aspect of a dance style is always challenging to the artist. The interpretation and depth brought out speaks a million. It needs the understanding and knowledge not only of the technique of dance but also the culture. In Bharatanatyam the *Nritya* or *Abhinaya Kritis* are *Padam*, *Javali*, *Ashtapadi*. There are varieties of *Padams*, many many *Javalis* and *Ashtapadis*. All these items are parts of the *Margam*.

CHAPTER 11: THE NRITTA -NRITYA KRITIS OF MARGAM

In this chapter I am discussing the *Margam* items which are the combination of Nritta and Nritya in Bharatanatyam. These are *Shabdam*, *Varnam* and *Kirtanam*. *Shabdam* is simple, where the *Abhinaya* is introduced for the first time. The *Varnam* is considered the most important item, the piece-de-resistance, which is normally more than 30 minutes duration. It is a test for both the performer and the audience. Earlier *Swarajathis* were also performed in place of *Varnam* but it is less prevalent today.

CHAPTER 12:THE DEVELOPMENT AND EXTENSION OF THE MARGAM IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY.

In the previous chapters, I have tried to establish the existence and continuity of a solo dance style in India with evidences from multiple mediums such as literature, painting, sculpture and films. After 17th century we are able to see the existence of individual dance styles in different parts of the country. The Chola, Pallava and Maratha dynasties supported and patronised the temple dance art of what is today known as Bharatanatyam. I have traced this historical, cultural and technical details as well.

From about 1860s, that is the creation and beginning of *Margam* of Bharatanatyam by the Tanjore Quartet, till about 1970s, the *Margam* was the only presentational format which was followed by the Gurus and performers. With coming of Bharatanatyam from temple to theatre, its travels beyond the Tamil speaking areas, the need to popularise, make it approachable, sheer challenge of change and foremost the creativity has propelled and pushed some bold souls to experiment. In this chapter I have tried to handle the experimental and extension work carried by different gurus in further developing of the *Margam*. I have looked and discussed in detail the *Margams* created using different languages other than Tamil Telugu and specific themes.

CHAPTER 13:THE CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTION OF MARGAM

The production of *Krishnay-tubhyam-Namah* by Dr Padma Subrahmaniam with herself as the solo dancer in her Bharathanrityam style ushered in a new era for the Bharatanatyam presentation and creative process. So far she has produced more than 15 such productions, with one story line and a solo dancer. Many characters are danced by one individual only. The duration of these dance, dance-theatre, dance-drama is about one to two hours. It includes both *Nritta* and *Nritya* and usually is performed in one main costume with minor changes. It makes use of the theatre technology at the

best. Since 1970 till date many dancers and choreographers have ventured in this area. Perhaps this is the development of a story line kind of *Margam* which may be dance drama and it may be like *Nirupana* which had one story line with different items in same the Raga and Tala.

The last chapter of my doctoral thesis is looking at the future development of *Margam* and its viability as the teaching and presentational format of Bharatanatyam for times to come. It is the intense study of last 6 years of this research work which includes extensive reading, personal and detailed interaction and interviews with the stakeholders (gurus, performers, students, critics, organisers... it is a long list) and personal experiences. It is very clear that *Margam* at present is a very strong teaching tool and must for all Bharatanatyam, serious dance practitioners. The *Margam* performance is an absolute must for *Arangetral*. It is a must and important for a performer to know and dance at least a few *Margams*. But for the professional performances due to various cultural, life-style social concerns and artistic needs the *Margam* has not remained on the top for Bharatanatyam performance scene today.