

The background of the entire page is a bright yellow color with a dense, fibrous texture, resembling recycled paper or a similar material. The fibers are thin, brown, and scattered throughout the yellow field.

Chapter - 2

Visual Art Forms

Chapter 2

Visual Art Forms

Words, symbols, films are the major methods of recording the action of dance. Drawing, painting, sculpture, photographs are the major methods of recording movement pause. It is said that dance is the moving sculpture. From wall paintings in the caves to the fanciful miniatures, paintings-pictures of one sort or the other have provided clues to the dance style, dance themes, dress code of that time, and sometimes actual movements. Without such visuals, it would be impossible to attempt to re-create any images of the gone era in our minds. Sometimes skillful depiction of a dancer in action seem to provide better records than photographs.

Classical Dance, as practiced in India, has a long history of the oral tradition. However it is important to note that along with this very significant oral tradition, there exists a parallel **unconscious** ‘documentation’ of dance that strongly authenticates the oral tradition. The teaching, instruction and performance practices of the classical dances in India have been carefully passed from one generation to the next through the oral tradition. Though based on Sanskrit texts like the *Natyashastra*, *Sangita Ratnakara* and *Abhinaya Darpanam*, the specific technicalities of the dance and the interpretation of the content continued to be in the hands of the professional families. They were the dancers, musicians and teachers who actually practiced the dance form. But when one looks beyond the texts, examining the other visual and literary art forms that were contemporary to the dance texts,

we have a wealth of an amazing amount of indirect documentation of the dance that corresponds to what is written in the texts. Scholars such as Dr Kapila Vatsyayan have already done monumental, pioneering work in researching the inter-relationships between the different artistic forms. They have conclusively established the significant links between the same. ***Vishnudharmottara Purana*** very clearly states the inter-dependence of the arts leading to one philosophical thought underlying all Indian art forms.

वज्र:-	देवतारूपनिर्माणं कथयस्व ममानघ । यस्मात्सन्निहिता निस्थं शास्त्रवत्साकृतिर्भवेत् ॥१॥
मार्कण्डेय:-	चित्रसूत्रं न जानाति यस्तु सम्यङ् नराधिप । प्रतिमालक्षणं वेत्तुं न शक्यं तेन कर्हिचित् ॥२॥
वज्र:-	चित्रसूत्रं समाचक्ष्व मृगुवंशविवर्धन । चित्रसूत्रविदेवाथ वेत्यर्चालक्षणं यतः ॥३॥
मार्कण्डेय:-	विना तु नृत्तशास्त्रेण चित्रसूत्रं सुदुर्विदम् । जगतानुऽनुक्रिया कार्या द्वयोरपि यतो नृप ॥४॥
वज्र:-	नृत्तशास्त्रं समाचक्ष्व चित्रसूत्रं वदिष्यसि । नृत्तशास्त्रविधानज्ञश्चित्रं वेत्ति यतो द्विज ॥५॥
मार्कण्डेय:-	आतोद्यं यो न जानाति तस्य नृत्तं सुदुर्विदम् । आतोद्येन विना नृत्तं विद्यते न कथञ्चन ॥६॥
वज्र:-	आतोद्यं ब्रूहि धर्मज्ञ नृत्तशास्त्रं वदिष्यसि । तस्मिन्सुविदिते वेत्ति नृत्तं भार्गवसत्तम ॥७॥
मार्कण्डेय:-	न गीतेन विना शक्यं ज्ञातुमातोद्यमच्युत । गीतशास्त्रावेधानज्ञः सर्वे वेत्ति यथाविधि ॥८॥
वज्र:-	गीतशास्त्रं समाचक्ष्व सर्वधर्ममृतां वर । गीतशास्त्रविदेवाथ सर्वज्ञः पुरुषोत्तमः ॥९॥
मार्कण्डेय:-	संस्कृतं ब्राकृतं चैव गीतं द्विविधमुच्यते । अपभ्रष्टं तृतीयं तु तदनन्तं नराधिप ॥१०॥ देशभाषाविशेषेण तस्यान्तो नेह विद्यते । गीतं पाठनशाज्ज्ञेयं स च पाठो द्विधा मतः ॥११॥ गद्यं पद्यं च धर्मज्ञ गद्यं संकथग्रा स्मृतम् । पद्यं छन्दोविशेषेण छन्दश्च बहुधा भवेत् ॥१२॥

We almost ‘unknowingly’ find dance in other artistic media such as sculpture, painting, iconography, archeology, architecture and literature. Though not consciously made or produced to depict dance traditions of that particular time or region they provide us with a continuous link of the *Natyashastra* tradition. These documents of dance offer new ways of looking at and understanding how dance was practiced in different periods of time and space. These various mediums can be interpreted as the ‘historical evidences’ - important links in the existence of Dance and its development in different parts of the country over the last many centuries. The practitioners of these media perhaps worked in their own disciplines with parallel ideology of Indian philosophy that brought them all together. The influence of Dance on other creative disciplines is expressed by this unconscious documentation at multiple levels and in direct and indirect references.

Even though we may not have any kind of ‘formal’ dance documentation, we have enough supportive evidence to prove conclusively that we had a continuous, unbroken tradition of classical dance. There is documentation available to guide us along this route. Where Bharatanatyam in particular is concerned, it must be pointed out that a number of books and articles have been written on the various aspects of Bharatanatyam (genealogy, general descriptions of items, *banis*, dancers and *nattuvanars*). But even now there is hardly any authoritative book on the complete dance technique of Bharatanatyam, detailing *margams* or performances, and the formal structure of this dance style.

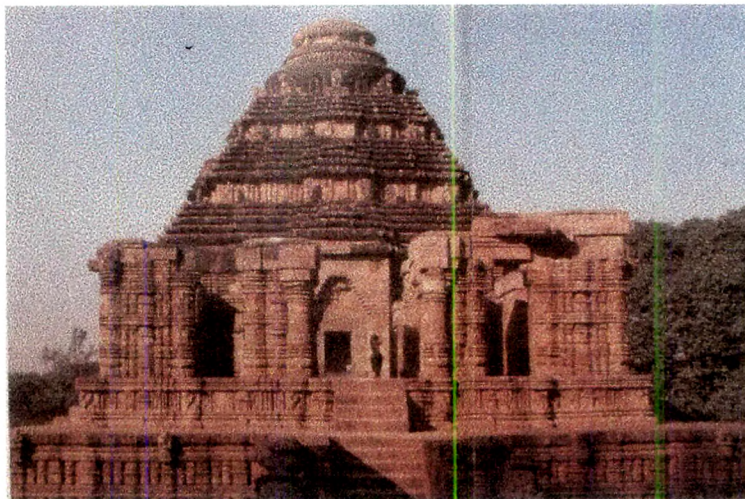
Though in the Indian tradition each art form had its own *Shastra* that identified its principles, the body or the human form was the common medium of expression and was dealt with accordingly. In this chapter are detailed the many unconscious references to Dance (not necessarily only Bharatanatyam) that can be identified in sculptures in temples and other public areas, paintings, murals, inscriptions, and closer to the 20th century, in photographs and cinema. An effort is made to understand their significance vis-à-vis the development of Dance, in general and Bharatanatyam in particular. Their role in the continuity of tradition is significant and they provide a vital link between the past and the present and may indicate which way dance will be going in the future.

Patronage to dance from royal courts began to diminish by the middle of the 19th century with the British establishing their supremacy over the country. This had its influence on royal support to the performing and visual arts. However as other art forms and supporting technologies emerged, dance images were captured in those media. From monumental sculptures and murals, the newly invented art of photography captured numerous images of dancers in performance. These were also not directed by any formal need for ‘documentation’. However these were certainly more realistic images expressing what actually existed. Whereas in the past, the temple sculptor could exercise his own creative vision in the portrayal of a dancing figure, the late 19th century and early 20th century photographs of *devadasis* were a true-to-life portrayal. They clearly showed the ‘ardhamandi’ postures, hand

gestures, the kind of clothes and jewellery they wore, the musicians who accompanied them and so on.

Towards the beginning of the 20th century, the moving pictures or the cinema offered an even more faithful 'documentation' with each movement shown in continuity as against the static, single image of the photograph. And by the close of this century, videography brought easy and cheap access to filming complete movement sequences as a method of learning and teaching, of documenting compositions and choreography created by dancers everywhere.

In India the classical dance, the temple and royal patronage are inseparable. The Indian temple itself was the single-most important repository of dance performance and showing a continuity in the performing tradition. Most royal courts were patrons of the large temple complexes in their kingdoms. The large temples had *natyamandapas* and *rangamandapas* on their campuses



Nata Mandap, Jaganmohan Temple, Konark

where dance performances were held. These performances were a part of the religious rituals. People came to pray at the temple and could also see the performances thus giving social sanction to the dance and to the performers. Such continuous exposure provided knowledge and appreciation of the arts to the common people. Also in India, temple was the center of all activities, be it cultural or political. Temple was the architectural delight, decorated with sculptures, paintings, with halls for music and dancing, and theatre. All arts came together to fulfill the aesthetic and devotional needs of the devotees. All came to the temples and thus it worked as the institution of popular artistic culture.

“With the temple, came the arts and God was worshipped in song and dance”¹. There were different kinds of temples on the basis of their shape such as Nagara, Dravida and Vesara. In the Nagara-temple style, the traditional Sompura community were the architects and builders and they followed the *Shilpa Shastra* and *Vishnudharmottara Purana*. In such temples the lowest part was decorative, with carved images of flowers and animals, the upper level portrayed human activity where dance found a major place. Pillars would often also have dancers and dance poses sculpted on them and dance panels went all around the temple. Here is a list of few temples from all parts of India having Natamandapa-s.

TEMPLE CHART

Sr. No.	Temple	Place	Century		
1.	Lingaraja	Bhubaneswar	1000 AD	Nat-Mandap	Eastern India Sculptures on the outer walls
2.	Jagannath	Puri	--	Nat-Mandir	Stylized and lifeless profuse Decoration
3.	Sun Temple	Konark	1238-64	Nat-Mandir	Sculptures of human & Animal forms, abstract Design and erotic themes
4.	Khajuraho	Bundel-Khand (M.P.)	950-1050		Central India Erotic sculptures
5.	Vimala Vasahi	Makrana (Rajasthan)			Western India
6.	Dilwara	Mount Abu			Tireless inventiveness and caprice sculptured decoration
7.	Sun Temple	Modhera	11 th Century		Dance scenes and dance poses
8.	Sun Temple	Martand			Kashmir Mural sculpture on the walls
9.	Mahabalipuram	Chennai	6 th Century		Southern India Sculptures on the interior walls of the Durga & Varsha mandapas
10.	Brihadesvara	Tanjore	1000		Two compartments of the Vimana are decorated with figure sculptures
11.	Meenakshi	Madurai	1150-1300		Figure-Sculptures larger than life-size
12.	Rameswaram	Near Adam's bridge	17 th Century		Carved pillars
13.	Nataraja	Chidambaram	17 th Century		Porch with fifty-six pillars which are delicately carved
14.	Badami	Badami			Wall panels of excellent quality sculptures

15.	Virupaksha	Pattadakal			Sculptured walls, brackets, pilasters, perforated windows carved with ornamental detail
16.	Chennakesava	Belur	1117		38 beautifully carved bracket-figures. Four central pillars of the hall adorned with bracket figures looks like bejeweled dancing damsel
17.	Hoysalesvara	Halebid	12 th Century		At the bottom of the indented walls are six horizontal bonds of relief sculptures elephants, lions, swans and stories from Ramayana & Mahabharata. Figure sculptures about half life-size
18.	Kesava	Somnathpur	13 th Century		Friezes of elephants, cavalry and stories from the Hindu epics. Panels with bejeweled gods & goddesses

In Tamil Nadu, all the temples were constructed according to specifications in Agama literature. They include various architectural aspects of temples including spaces for music, dance and *nagaswaram* recitals. “In fact, most of the music and dance rituals performed in temples have been clearly prescribed in these Agamas. The ***Kamikagama*** is the earliest religious treatise containing information about temple rituals and the music and dance connected to them”².

How do the Visual Arts provide a documentary evidence for Dance? Exploring the vast sculptures and paintings as seen in the temple complexes, caves, miniature tradition of India, one is able to bring out specific categories showing Dance in its most technical aspect to the Dance-like representation in the various Arts. These can be broadly surmised in four levels :

1. Dance - shown in its pure Technique
2. Dance - shown as a Performance Event
3. Dance - Dance-like Activity
4. Dance - Murtis, Icons, Figures

Dance Documentation in Sculpture

Most of the sculptural 'documentation' of dance is found in temples. One of the richest source in the entire country of sculptural representations of dance is believed to be in the Chidambaram, Kumbhakonam and Brhadessvara temples in Tamilnadu. The Devi Temple in Chidambaram has some especially marvelous examples of the depiction of dance in sculpture. It is not just by chance that both the *Natyashastra* and *Shilpashastra* use the *tala* as of measurement in space. Also, both disciplines require a correct and detailed knowledge of the human body, the bone structure, the joints and their flexibility, the muscular system and the limbs. Our vast architectural heritage dating back to several centuries that is still available to us harbours extensive sculptural treasures in terms of dance documentation. Sculptural imagery of dance is found in stone, wood, metal, terracotta in both classical and regional styles of depiction. Such sculptures have provided an unbroken link for dance and they existed and developed at multiple levels. It is also important to

remember that the tenets prescribed in the *Natyashastra* (2nd century) and *Vishnudharmottara Purana* (3rd century) go parallel. At Ellora and Mahabalipuram, entire stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* can be found sculpted within the caves and rock formations, the very same stories that are the basis of the *sahitya* for dance themes.

1. Dance - Technique Sculptures : The tall *gopurams* of the temple complexes at Kumbhakonam, Brhdeswara and Chidambaram in Tamilnadu are



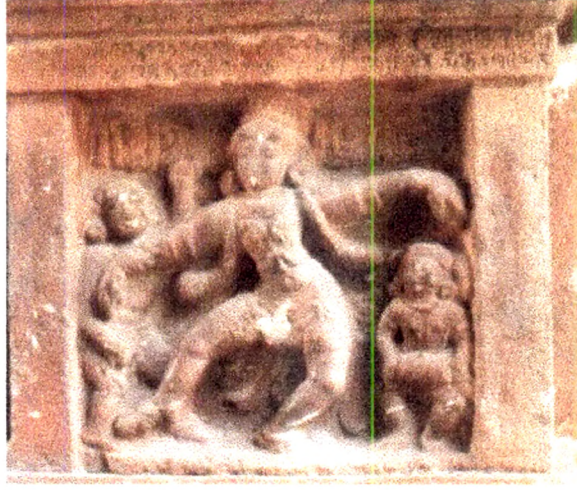
Karana Panel – Chindambaram

adorned with chronologically depicted *karana* sculptures. The 108 *karanas* are the basic units of dance movements as described in the *Natyashastra*. A *karana* comprises *chari*, *sthanaka*, and *nritta hasta*. The relevant *shloka* from *Natyashastra* is often found under the *karana* sculpture clearly identifying it. Dr. Padma Subrahmaniam did the detail study of the Karana-s relating the Karana sculptures to the NS sholaka-s. She created “Bharata Nrutyam” based on the research work.

Examples:

In Chapter 4 of the *Natyashastra*, the *karanas* are described in detail. Given below are some of the *Shlokas* describing specific *karanas*³. We are relating the Karana-s to their respective temple sculptures. This provides direct documentary links between the dance and sculpture.

Danda Recitam Karana (no. 41, *Shloka* 101, NS Chap 4):



Danda Rechitam Karana

विक्षिप्तं हस्तपादं तु समान्ताधत्र दण्डवत् ।
रेच्यते तद्धि करणं ज्ञेयं दण्डकरेचितम् ॥

The hand and leg are in *Viksipta* to the whole of their stretch like a stick, and then *Recita* (of the hand) is made.

Vrscika Kuttitam Karana (no. 42 *Shloka* 102, NS, Chap 4):

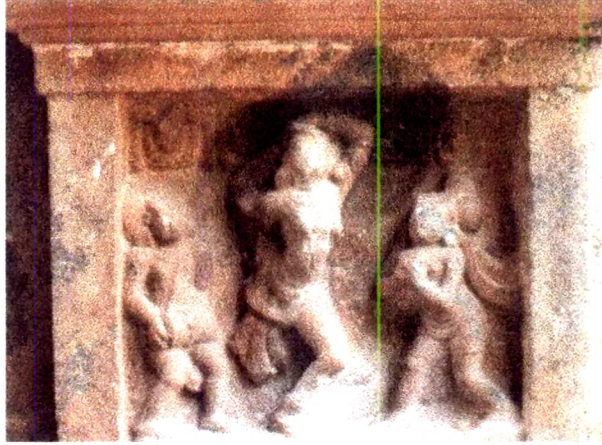


Vrscika Kuttitam Karana

वृश्चिकं चरणं कृत्वा ठावप्यथ निकुटितौ ।
विधातव्यौ करौ ततुज्ञेयं वृश्चिककुट्टितम् ॥

Put the leg in *Vrscika*, and the two hands in *Nikutta*.

Lalata Tilaka Karana (no.50 *Shloka* 110, NS, Chap. 4):

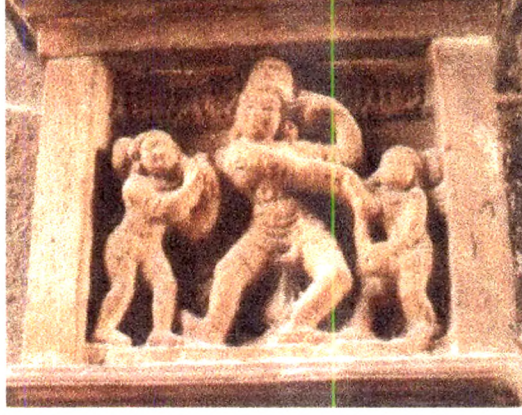


Lalata Tilaka Karana

वृश्चिकं चरणं कृत्वा पाडस्याङ्गुष्ठकेन तु ।
ललाहे तिलकं कुर्याल्ललाटतिळकं तु तत् ॥

Make *Vrscika* of the right leg, and form *Tilaka* on the forehead with the big toe.

Karihasta Karana (no.87 *Shloka* 147, NS, Chap.4):



Karihasta Karana

अेको वामो वक्षः स्थितो हस्तः प्रोद्धेष्टितलोडपर ।
अग्नित श्ररणश्चैव प्रयोज्यः करिहस्तके ॥

The left hand is placed on the chest. The right hand is in *Prodvestita Tala*.

The legs are in *Ancita*.

Vrsabhakridita Karana (no.104, *Shloka* 164, NS, Chap.4):

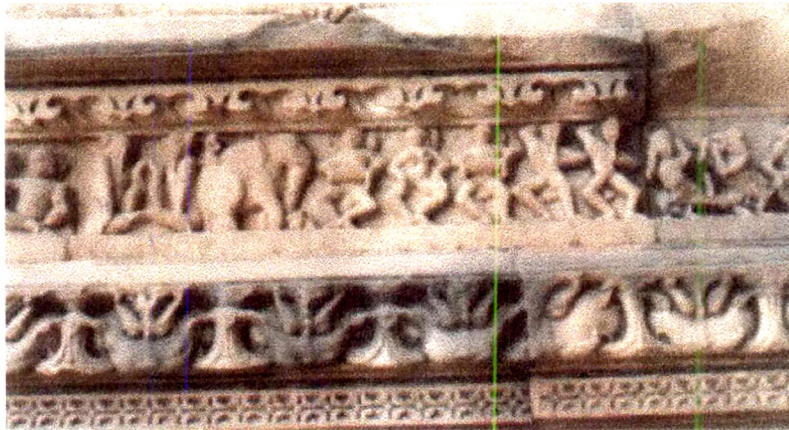


Vrsabhakridita Karana

प्रयुज्यालातकं पूर्व हस्तौ चापि हि रेचयेत् ।
कुञ्चितावग्नितौ चैव वृषभक्तीडिते सदा ॥

Make *Alata (cari)*. Let the two hands be in *Recita*, bent and inverted.

2. Dance Performance through Sculpture : There are sculptural panels showing dance in performance found throughout India in a number of temples.



Khajuraho – Dance Panel

They usually show one or two dancers accompanied by a group of musicians.

One is easily able to identify the dancing figure through costume, jewellery and



A Female Dancer - Chenna Kesava Temple

hair style and other details. The musician figures are seen holding musical instruments such as *mridangam*, *vina*, cymbals, lute, etc. At times there are additional figures shown clapping their hands probably giving *tala*.

Examples:



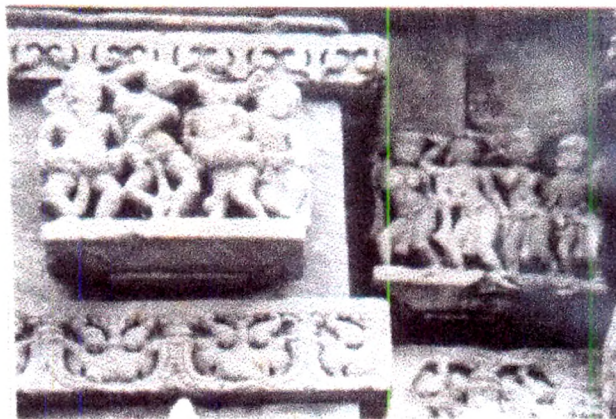
Rani-ni-Vav, Siddhapur

At the famous 12th century Rani-ni-Vav at Siddpur-Vadnagar, north Gujarat, celestial dancers are sculpted on pillars and *toranas*. One of the clearest images is a group of three figures where the middle figure has her back to us, her waist in *vivarta* (according to *SR*, sh. 311), *ardhakuncita* knees and the right foot in *kuncita* (*SR*, sh. 317). Her right hand is at her waist and the left is raised, apparently in *pataka* (*AD*, sh. 93). One of the figures is playing the horn while the other figure is in *aramandi* position, right foot in *kuncita* (*SR*, sh. 317) and placed near the left foot which is also in the same position.



Dance Panel, Ellora Cave 7

There is also a dance panel at Ellora Cave 7. In this panel, attention is focused on the dancing girl who is at the center of the panel. She is in *dvibhanga* pose, in *aramandi* but the left knee is in front of the right knee. It is possible that this was done to capture movement and this may not be a static pose. Both her hands are in *katakamukha hasta* (AD, sh. 124). She is flanked on both sides by seated female musician figures. While one is playing the flute and the other is playing the drum, and the rest are 'giving *tala*'.



Muni Bawa Temple, Than

At the 10th century Muni Bawa temple in Than, Saurashtra, there is a dance panel at two levels carved in stone. The panel in the front has four figures, musicians and dancers, probably all male, one of whom also has a beard. The first and third figures are playing the drum while the figure between them is in *aramandi* with *kuncita swastika* feet. His right hand is in *dola-hasta* (AD, sh. 181) in the front and his posture is *tribhangi*. The fourth figure is holding cymbals. The second panel has female dancers, all in *dvibhangi* positions, with both knees bent in the front. The right hand of all figures are in *dola-hasta* (AD, sh. 181) but the left is not clearly seen and could be assumed (from the posture) to be raised above the head. There are numerous such examples of dance activity in many temples in Gujarat, though it is a known fact that Gujarat does not boast of the existence of a classical dance style

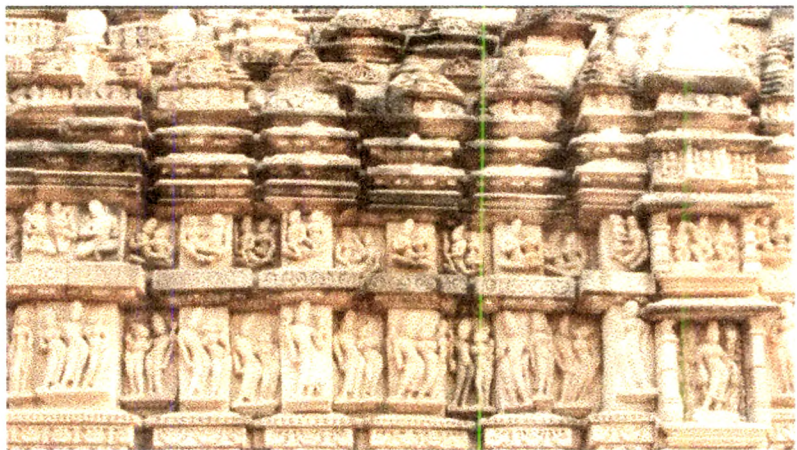


Parasurameswara Temple, Bhuvaneshwar

At Bhuvaneshwar's Parasurameswara Temple, there is a perforated window with sculptures of dancers with musicians. The window is divided into two and the upper portion has three male figures. One of them has his back to the viewer but his face is turned so that it can be partially seen. His left hand is raised and bent to touch the left shoulder with the hand in *kartari hasta* (AD, sh. 106). His right hand falls to his side, touching the right thigh. He is in the *aramandi* position with the left leg raised in *swastika* (AD, sh. 269) behind the right knee and with the left heel raised. The second figure is in *atibhanga* pose with the left leg in *triyaka kuncita* and the right leg also bent with the heel slightly raised. His right hand is held high apparently holding something and with the little finger raised. His left hand also appears to be holding something but it falls at his side. The third figure is also in *atibhanga* pose. The right hand is holding something in *musti* (AD, sh. 116-117) above the head and the left hand rests below the waist holding the sash. His legs are in *kuncita* (SR, sh. 317) and *swastika* (AD, sh. 269). The bottom half of the window has four figures. All of them seem to be musicians. One of them holds the cymbals with his legs slightly bent in *kuncita* (SR, sh. 317), the second figure is sitting in *garudasthana* (AD, sh. 280) with the left hand resting on the right knee. He also has cymbals in his hands. The third figure is in *abhanga* pose, playing the flute; and the fourth figure is shown playing the drum. It is possible that this is illustrative of a group classical dance by males.

3. **The 'Dance-like' Sculptures** : In the many decorative sculptures, the figures which look Dance-like appear to be in dance positions but they may

actually not be so. That is, these are not figures of dancers but the poses they are in look stylized enough to be called Dance-like. These figures are generally of *yakshas*, *yakshinis*, *gandharvas*, *vidyadharas*, *kinnaras* and so on.



Vidyadharas

They are most often found in niches, crevices, corners and cornices of temples. The dance scholar has a wealth of material in the form of these figurative sculptures. These figures also depict movement in sculpture in the same way as do obvious dancing figures.



Shesasayi - Vishnu, Rani-ni-Vav



Dancer in Shesasayi Pose

Examples:



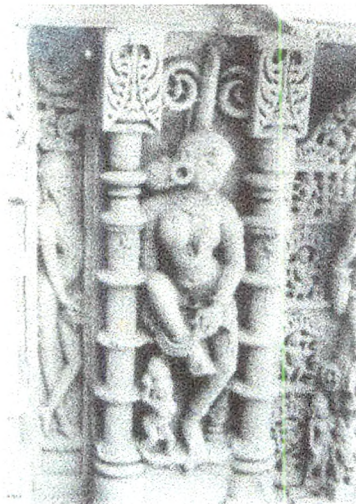
Yakshini at Sanchi Stupa

An example is the Yakshini holding the branch of the Asoka tree sculpted at the great Stupa of Sanchi. Yakshas are air-spirits and inhabit trees. In this particular sculpture, the Yakshini has one arm around the trunk of the tree while the other holds a flowering branch with the *musti-hasta* (AD, sh. 116-117). Her left foot is in *sampada* (AD, sh. 275) and the right is lifted up and wrapped around the tree. The figure is in *dvibhangi* pose. She is wearing a draped dhoti, secured at the hips with a four-strand pearl belt, a pearl necklace and a row of rings around her arms and ankles.



Darpanadharini, Rani-ni-Vav

A *Darpanadharini* image can be seen at the Rani ni Vav, Vadnagar, where the Devangana is in *sampada* (AD, sh. 275) position with a slight flexion of the hip. Her left knee is slightly bent. She is holding a mirror in her right hand and either putting on her ear-rings with her left hand or adjusting her hair. The head is in *paravrittam* (AD, sh. 61). She is covered with ornaments.



Devangana, Rani-ni-Vav

In the Rani-ni-Vav there is also a Devangana sculpture where she is tying on her anklet. Her right leg is in *aindra sthanaka* (AD, sh. 278). The knee is raised high. The left foot is slightly raised from the heel. Her head is in *paravrittam* (AD, sh. 61). She has many ornaments on her person.



Bracket Figure, Chenna Kesava Temple

In the Chenna-Kesava Temple, Belur, there are many stylized figures in what could be interpreted as dance postures. One such image shows a female figure in *dvibhangi* posture with her right leg crossing the left leg from the knees. The right foot is in *parsvaga* (SR, sh. 326), the right hand in *kapitha* (AD, sh. 121) and is holding something. Her eyes are in *avalokita drishti* (AD, sh. 78). In most of the sculpted figures here, one can easily identify clear *Caris*, *Sthanakas* and the *Karanas* as described in the *Natyashastra*.

4. **The ‘Nritta-Murti’ or Icon Sculptures** : There is an abundance of sculptures of gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon depicted in sculpture



Krishna Playing Flute, Tanjore

as dancing images. The famous Chola Bronzes are a case in point. These are generally not worshipped but they are strong examples of dance movements and poses that we find in the practice of Bharatanatyam today. Dance postures



Brihadeshwara Temple, Tanjore

appear to have been popular in the depiction of gods and goddesses in well-known religious legends too, for example the Kalia Mardana or the Govardhana-Dhari legends of Krishna.

Examples:



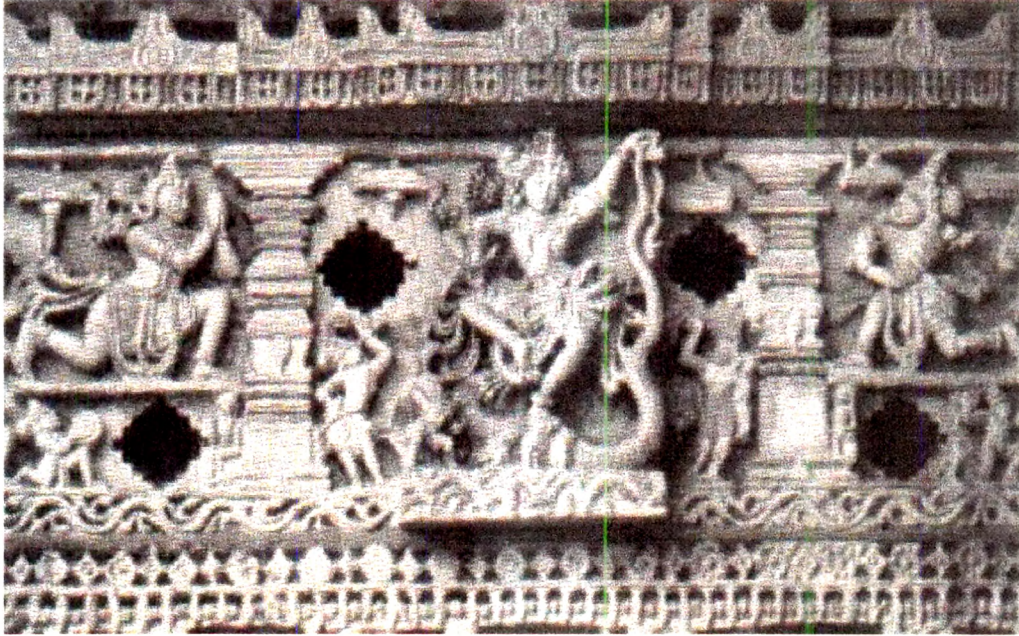
Dancing Shiva as Nataraja

The most famous icon in this category is the Dancing Shiva as Nataraja. A Chola bronze (12th –13th century AD), Melaperumballam, Tanjore, depicts



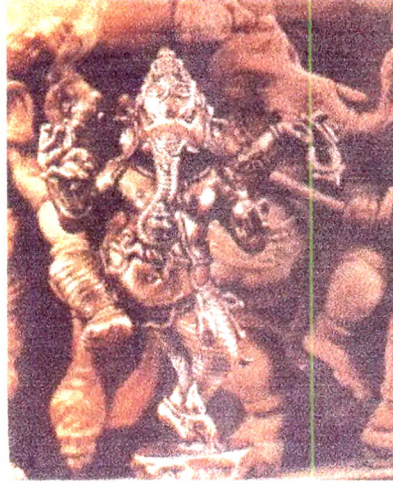
Nataraja, Melaperumballam, Tanjore

Shiva dancing enclosed in the circular *prabha*. Shiva's front two hands are in the *abhayavarada mudra* while the back right hand holds the *damru* and the back left hand holds *agni*. Shiva's flying *jata* are spread out almost to touch the *prabha*, indicating movement of the dance.



Kalia - Daman, Chenna Kesava Temple

The famous *Kalia-daman* episode (fig.) in Krishna's childhood stories seems to have been as popular with sculptors as with present-day dancers. At the Chenna-Kesava temple in Belur, there is a dance panel which portrays the triumphant Krishna dancing on the hood of the subdued Kaliya Naga. He is in the dance pose of *Tribhanga*, in *aindra sthana* (AD, sh. 278) where he stands on one leg bent at the knee and the other leg and knee raised. The right hand is in *Abhaya-mudra* and the left hand holds the tail of the Naga. Two small figures flank him, each holding yak-tail fans while the two larger figures are in *garuda-sthana* (AD, sh. 280) with the hands folded in *anjali-hasta* (AD, sh. 276).



Nritta Ganesha

The Nritta Ganesha is a very popular metal sculpture generally made in brass. The ‘*chaturbhuj*’ form of the 4-armed Ganesha is in *aindra sthana* (AD, sh. 278). Of the four arms the right front is in the *kapitha hasta* (AD, sh. 121) and the one behind is also in *kapitha* (AD, sh. 121) but holding a lotus. The left front hand is holding a *laddoo* and the back left hand is holding a *vajra*.



Dancing Saraswati, Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebid



An unusual icon is the Dancing Saraswati image from the Hoysaleswara Temple, Halebid. She is seen in the *aindra sthana* (AD, sh. 278). She has four hands, one of the right hands appears to be in *musti* (AD, sh. 116-117) and the other is in *abhaya mudra*. One of the left hands is in *ardhacandra* (AD, sh. 111). She is wearing numerous ornaments and a very elaborate headgear.

All the *Swarupas* of the Hindu gods and goddesses are also depicted, carved on the temple walls and the Indian classical dancer often depicts these forms through stories in dance, such as the Dashavatara of Vishnu, Shiva in his various Tandavas, and so on. As indicated in the **Natyashastra**, the sculptors have also used similar techniques to depict various movements, including that of flying. For example, the Vrscika Karana (shloka 107, karana 47) describes how in this *karana*, the hands are bent towards the elevations of the shoulders, the right leg is bent towards the back and kept at some distance from it. The Mayura Lalita Karana (shloka 104, karana 80) guides the dancer to make a *vriscika* of the leg, keep the hands in *recita* and turn the *trika* round and round. Traditional Indian sculpture also followed the same rule; and it is truly amazing to see how such figures still convey a tremendous sense of release from the ground and the feeling of being air-borne, even in the limited space they have in the corners and the niches. Later we see the 'flying' figures with wings added on the shoulders. This could be an indirect Western influence.

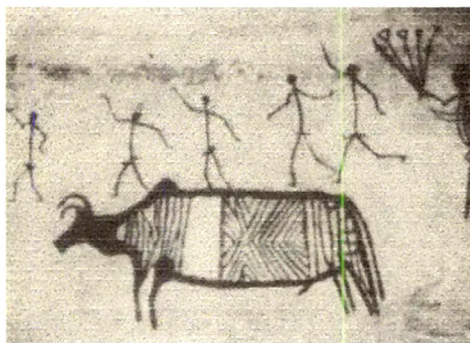
There is one example of a sculpture that is specifically made to depict a dancer in the tradition of the Court dancer, and where the dancer may have served as a model herself. It is in the Maharaja Fatesinh Museum of the Laxmi



Tanjore Dancing Girl, Maharaja Fatesinh Museum, Baroda

Vilas Palace, Baroda, and is made by Fellini, a visiting European sculptor at the Baroda Court in the early part of the 20th century. It depicts a female court dancer (who were brought to Baroda from Tanjore) and is believed to be an exact representation.

Dance Documentation in Painting



Hunting Dance, Bhimbetka Caves, Deccan

There has been an old and time-revered link between dance and painting in India. The pre-historic Bhim Betka Caves in Madhya Pradesh have some of the earliest painted images of dance.

Images of dancers and their dance are available to dance practitioners through paintings created in India since pre-historic times. Figures that appear to be like dancers and images of dancing figures are found on walls, on scrolls,



Dancer Brihadeswara Temple



Mahakali Pata-Chitra

pata-chitras, illustrated manuscripts like the Kalpasutra texts (Dasava-no-



Sakara Enjoying Devine Pleaure, Kalpasutra



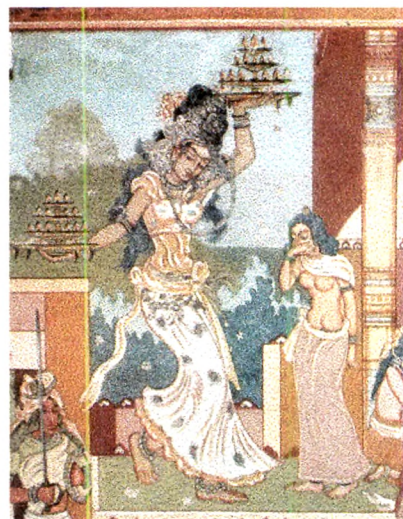
Manuscript Copy of the Gita Govinda, Bengal

pado), Gita Govinda texts, miniatures, etc. Such paintings were and are still made on walls, ceilings, in caves, on cloth, paper, palm leaves, and ivory. And so on. In terms of the depiction of dance, the paintings being two-dimensional were better equipped to depict narrative elements. The subtleties of abhinaya with its minute details was easier to bring out through the brush of the painter rather than the hammer and chisel of the sculptor. These paintings were used to illustrate religious texts. Nomadic folk singers and story-tellers used the scroll paintings (pata paintings) while singing their stories or legends. Through the paintings, for example those found in the Ajanta Caves or the Moghul miniatures, we are able to identify prevalent social, cultural and artistic styles providing much information on the contemporary styles of those eras.

Painting on walls known as murals was a technique that survived centuries of battering by invaders, natural disasters and was often protected by natural overgrowths as was the case with the Ajanta Caves. Murals could be executed as tempera and fresco.



Natirpuja - Nandlala Bose



Natirpuja – Kirti Mandir, Baroda

Wall paintings are found in pre-historic caves (Bhim Betka), rock-cut caves (Ajanta-Ellora) made by Buddhist monks, inner surfaces of temples, palaces and houses of noblemen (Rajasthan).

The miniature format of painting on paper in medieval times. They developed as narrative stories complete in themselves as well as illustrations to hand-written texts/books. Miniatures became a popular form of art work and several styles developed – Moghul, Deccani, Pahari, Mewadi, Kishangarh and so on. Dance and music performances, dancers, musicians, Raga-Ragini are common subjects for many miniatures. They reveal a formal sophistication in the presentation of the dance, especially when the setting is the royal court. Both the Shilpa Shastra and the Chitra Shastra follow the dictate of their own individual discipline. As all the art forms interpret and depict life one finds a commonality running through them. The three-dimensional sculptures and the two-dimensional paintings are able to bring out the strength and beauty of the forms as specific to their own medium. The paintings are also a great source of information and historical sustenance to dance. From the pre-historic to present times, through the paintings one is able to get a continuous account of dance, its technique, its presentation and thematic content. Different painting styles prevalent at different points of time in history and regions have nourished the art of dance.

1. Dance - Technique Paintings : Paintings were often been used to illustrate the dance texts which described the dance technique. These included dance postures and at times even movements, painted as illustrations to the manuscripts. They gave a clear picture of the technique.

Examples:



Ardhacandra Hasta



Pataka Hasta



Kangula Hasta



Mushti Hasta



Arala Hasta

The Jain Kalpasutra manuscript from Devasha-no-pado, Ahmedabad, has 419 illustrations related to Indian music and dance. These illustrations are painted in the margins. As far as dance various *drashthis*, *hastas* and *caris*, etc. are

drawn in great detail. These Kalpasutra Manuscripts have detailed illustrations of the *hastas*, for example, the *ardhacandra hasta* (AD, sh. 111) is depicted where a female figure is shown in the *dvibhangi* pose, in *aramandi* with her right hand in *dola hasta* (AD, sh. 181) and left in *ardhacandra hasta* (AD, sh.111). For the *pataka hasta* (AD, sh. 93) the figure is in *aramandi* with the feet slightly raised at the heels, the right hand in *dola* (AD, sh. 181) and the left in *pataka* (AD, sh. 93). The *kangula hasta* (AD, sh. 144) is shown by a figure in *dvibhangi* pose, in *aramandi* with the right foot flat and the left one slightly raised. The right hand is in *dola hasta* (AD, sh. 181) and the left in *kangula hasta* (AD, sh. 144). The *mushti hasta* (AD, sh. 116-117) is also shown thus with the right hand performing the *hasta*. For the *arala hasta* (AD, sh. 114), the figure is in *tribhangi* pose, in *aramandi*, her right hand in *dola* (AD, sh. 181) and left in *arala* (AD, sh.114).



Casagaticari 1



Casagaticari 2



Casagaticari 3



Casagaticari 4

The same manuscript also has extensive paintings of *caris*. An example of a *bhumi cari*, *Casagati* (*shloka* 925/926) is described thus : The right foot is put

forward by a span, then drawn back by two spans, then simultaneously with jumping movements both the feet approach each other a little and/or separate and approach each other. This is accepted to be Casagati, and is used to depict ‘frightened’ movements, etc. For an *akashi cari*, Mrgapluta (*sh.* 984/989) the



Mrgapluta 1



Mrgapluta 2



Mrgapluta 3

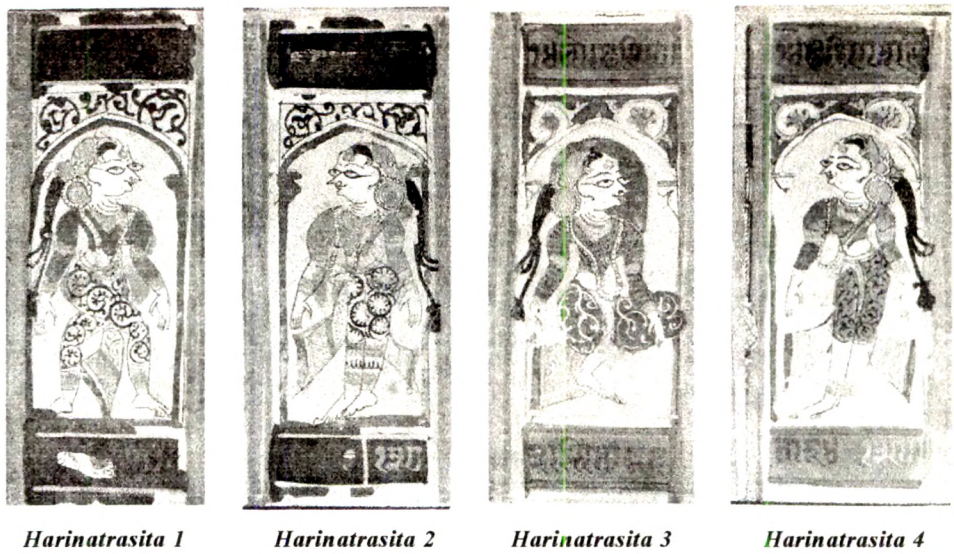


Mrgapluta 4

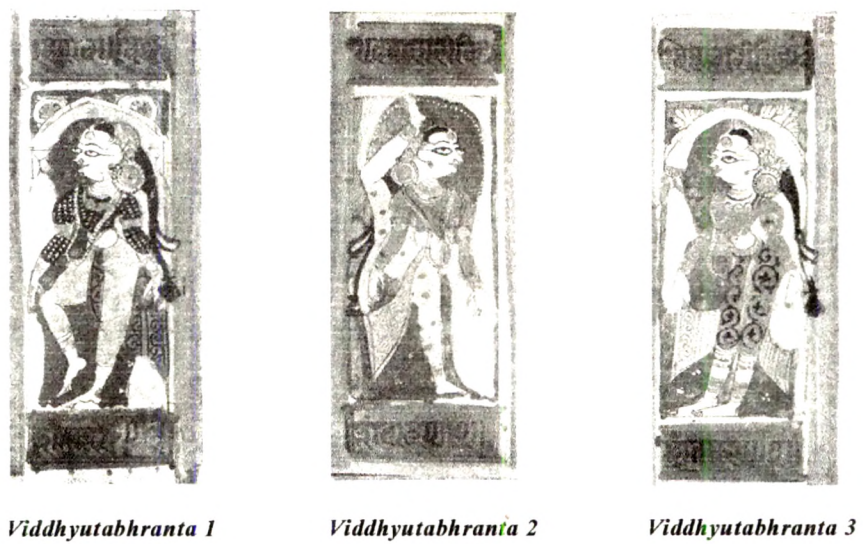


Mrgapluta 5

dancer throws up one *kuncita* (SR, sh. 317) foot, jumps up and lays the foot at the back of the shank of the other foot in *ancita* (SR, sh. 316). An example of a *bhumi desi cari*, Harinatrāsita (sh. 984) describes the dancer crossing the



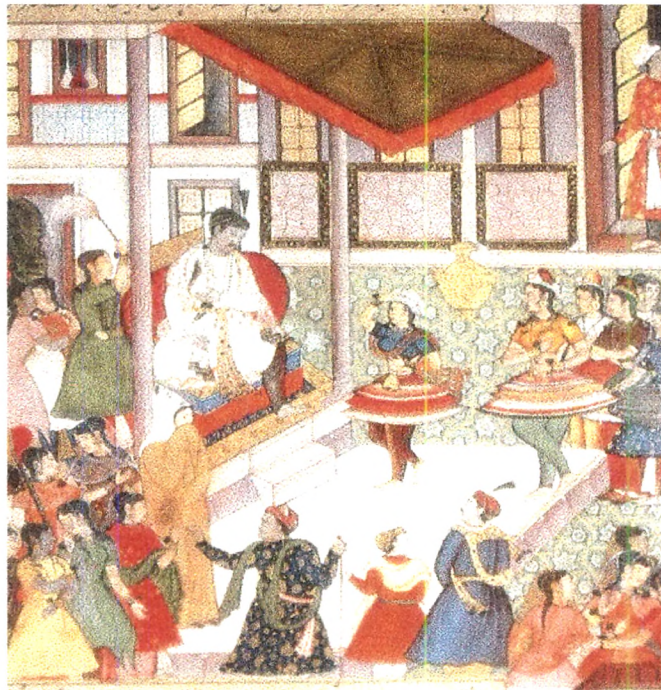
kuncita (SR, sh. 317) feet in *svastika* (AD, sh. 269) with the foreparts of the soles bent, and the dancer jumping up and down. An *ākāshi desi cari* Viddhyutabhṛanta (sh. 1001-2) describes the dancer throwing up the feet in front



in a quick movement, moving it around above the forehead quickly and then placing it on the ground.

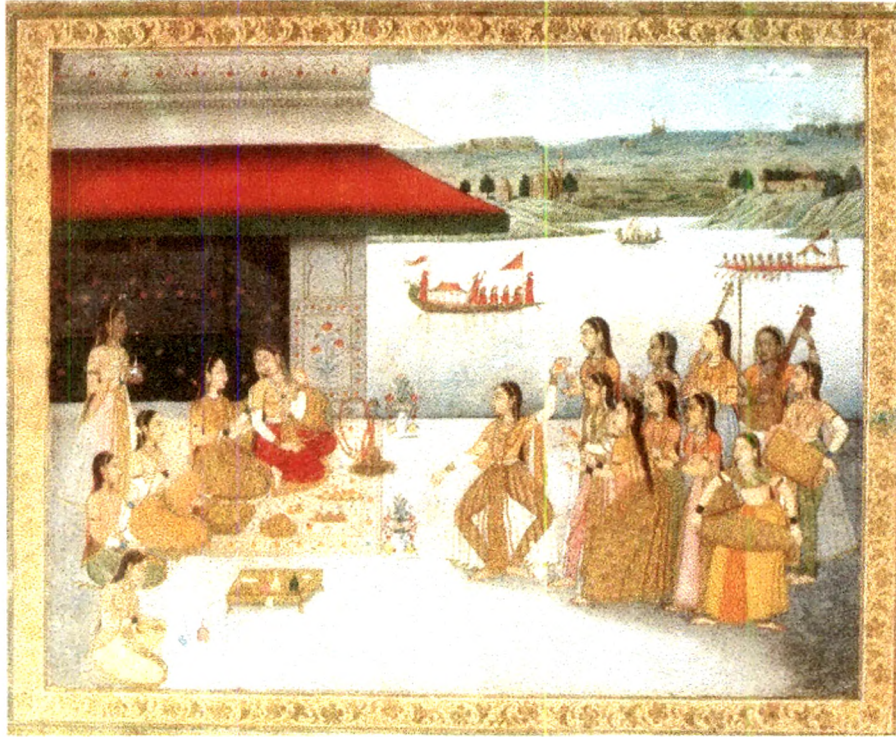
2. Paintings showing Dance Performances : There are a number of paintings that show an actual performance. They amply illustrate the significance of a performance, the royal patronage and offer a sharper picture of *aharya* traditions than sculptures.

Examples:



Mughal Miniature, Mandu

In the Mughal miniature one can see dancers of Baz Bahadur saluting the Emperor Akbar at Malwa. Musicians, singers and other female dancers are shown in three groups at the corners. The costumes of the two dancers including their headgear and that of the drummer are extremely interesting. The tutu-like short skirts and the hat-style headgear create an impression of Western dancers. Both dancers have feet in *swastika* (AD, sh. 269) one at the back and one in the front. A female musician is playing a two-sided drum.



Dancer on the Terrace, Oudh-Lucknow

A lot of dancing and music was performed by women for royal women who were in *purdah* and had their own entertainment. A painting of such a performance features a dancer in the *aramandi* position with the right hand in *dola* and the left hand raised and near the head in *arala hasta* (AD, sh. 114). Behind the dancer is an all-women orchestra, one playing the *mridamgam*, another a *dhol*-like drum, one has a *tanpura* and another an *ektara*, others clapping and singing. *tanpura*, etc. The performance is being watched by an important royal lady, possibly the Begum, who is seated in a regal attitude and smoking a *hookah*. An interesting part of the painting is the leg positions of *aramandi* absolutely correspond to what we see in Bharatanatyam today, but the costumes – blouse, *pajama* covered with a transparent skirt and *dupatta* points to a Kathak or Rajasthani style.



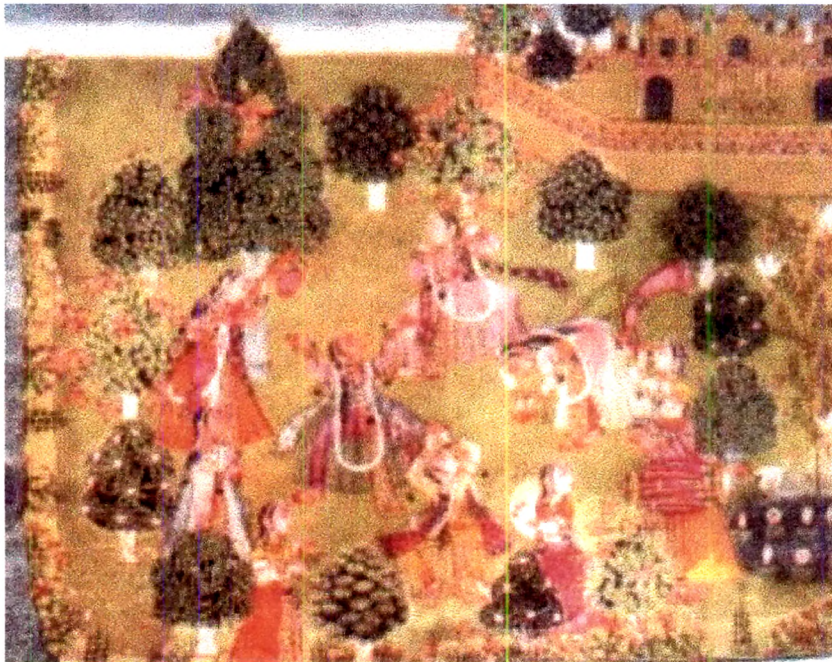
Raja Raj Singh of Chamba Watching a Dance Performance

In a Kangra (Chamba Kalam) miniature titled, *Raja Raj Singh of Chamba watching a Dance Performance*, the dancer is performing what seems to be Kathak. The right hand is in the position of doing *salam* and the left at the back with a typical *arala hasta* (AD, sh. 114), and her gaze is appropriately lowered as in *avalokita drashti* (AD, sh. 78). The dancer is dressed in flowing robes, her head covered with a *dupatta*. She has decorated her hands with *alata* and is wearing ear-rings, necklaces and bangles. The musicians are all at the back with *tabla*, cymbals and an old lady with a *tanpura*. The musicians are in very ordinary local clothes. There is a half moon in the sky indicating that the performance is being presented at twilight.



Ram Singh II Watching a Dance

In a Kota miniature, *Ram Singh II watching a Dance*, the prince is on the palace terrace watching a dance performance with his courtiers. The dancer has probably just finished a pirouette as in Kathak, looking at the way her gathered skirt is flared. Her feet are in *sampada* (AD, sh. 274) and her hands are raised. She is accompanied by three musicians who stand behind her. One of them is playing the *tabla*.



Hanuman in Golden Lanka, Pahari

In this Pahari (Bilaspur) miniature (1670), *Hanuman in Golden Lanka*, four dancers and six musicians, all female, are seen in a circle. Two dancers are in *chauka (ayata)* (AD, sh. 263). One of them has her arms touching the shoulders and the head turned to her right, while the other has her hands opened out above her head in *dola*, (AD, sh. 181) her body tilted to the right and her head in *ukshipta* (AD, sh. 63) to the left. The third dancer is bent

from the waist parallel to the ground in *sampada* (AD, sh. 274) with *pushpaputa hasta* (AD, sh. 182) as if offering or putting something on the ground. The fourth dancer is sitting in *aramandi* with right leg in *kuncita* (SR, sh. 317), the body turned to the right with head in *ukshipta* (AD, sh. 63) to the left, has both hands joined in *pushpaputa* (AD, sh.182) above the head. The musicians are playing different instruments such as *vina*, cymbals, *dundubhi*, *mridanga/pakhavaj*, *dafli*, *kartala*. The scene seems to depict the performance of a classical dance. By wearing a pajama with a transparent tunic above it that falls till the knees, one is able to surmise that the dress was designed for extended movements. All the positions of *hastas*, *padas* as well as their expressions and the accompanying orchestra, lead one to believe that this was a stylized performance.



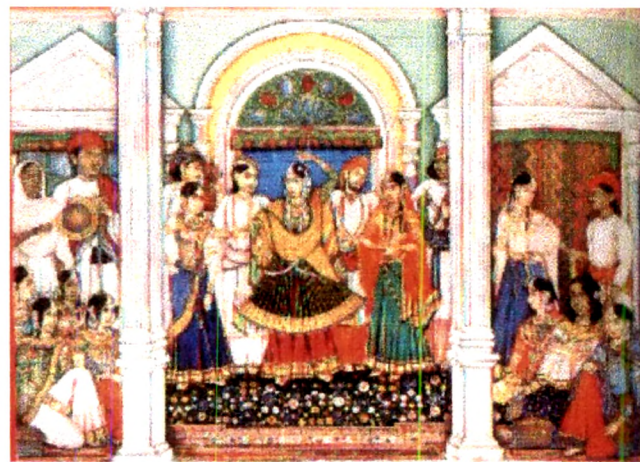
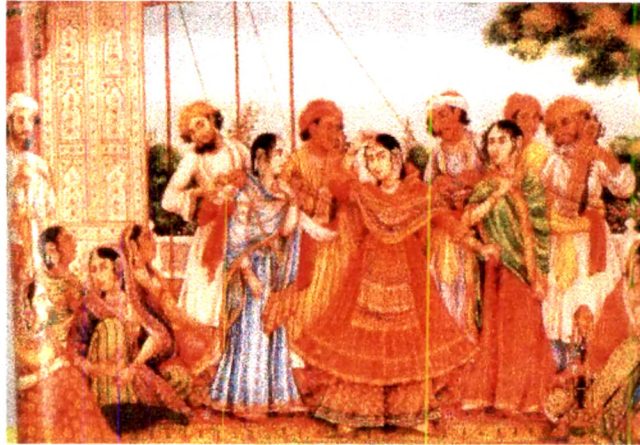
Akbar's Circumcision in Kabul, Akbarnama

The *Akbarnama* (1602) has a dance scene celebrating the occasion of Akbar's circumcision in Kabul. It shows three female dancers in the center and their costumes look like what Kathak dancers wear. The center figure looks as if she has just finished the pirouettes from the flow of her garments while the other two are standing with hands in typical Kathak style. The King and the Queen along with the courtiers are watching the dance and the musicians are sitting on the dais.



Dancers and Musicians, Laghu Samgrahani Sutra

The *Laghu Samgrahani Sutra* (1583) has a dance panel with three male musicians and two female dancers. The first figure is holding a string instrument, the second one has cymbals, the third one is a dancer in *aindra sthanaka* (AD, sh. 278) with *arala hasta* (AD, sh. 114) for both hands. The fourth figure is in *dvibhanga* pose with knees in *aramandi*. Her hands are in *pataka* (AD, sh. 93). The last figure is playing a two-sided drum. The male figures are wearing *angarkha*-like upper garments, coloured *pajamas*, a waistband and a *sesh*. The skull-cap type headgear suggests a specific community. The two dancers are wearing printed *pajamas* with blouses and long transparent *dupattas*. The edges of all the upper garments and the *dupattas* have strange designs as if to make a lotus-like pattern.



Nautch Girls Performing in a European Household

British travelers who roamed the Indian princely kingdoms and the countryside in the 19th century, also made paintings/prints of landscapes, local people, animals and birds, plant-life, fairs and festivals, and local customs that they actually saw or experienced. One such example is the paintings of ‘Nautch Girls’ in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. The figure depicts a performance within a *haveli* (A Nautch Girl performing in a European household, 1820) while the other figure is outside of a tent or *shamiana* outside a bungalow (Col. James Skinner’s house, Delhi, 1830). “Col. James

Skinner was well-known for his lavish entertainment of English visitors and his glamorous *nautch* parties. He often presented his guests with pictures of *nautch* girls along with their musicians.”⁵ The dancers are in a Kathak-style dance pose, accompanied by numerous musicians. They are wearing clothes and jewellery that were popular amongst Muslim noblewomen of the mid-19th century north India. One sees a drastic change in the costumes as seen in the miniature paintings. Now they wear a frock-like upper garment with wide pajamas and a *dupatta*. It is also important to note the rather limited availability of dancing space.

3. Paintings of Dance Stories : Nataraja, the God of Dance and Natwara, the Lord of Dance, Shiva and Krishna, and many other gods and goddesses are popularly known for their dancing expertise. All the Tandavas of Shiva, many of his other forms such as Bhairava, Raudra; Krishna, from the infant to boy to adult; Vishnu in all his manifestations, Durga, Kali, Saraswati, are beautifully painted by Indian artists through the centuries.

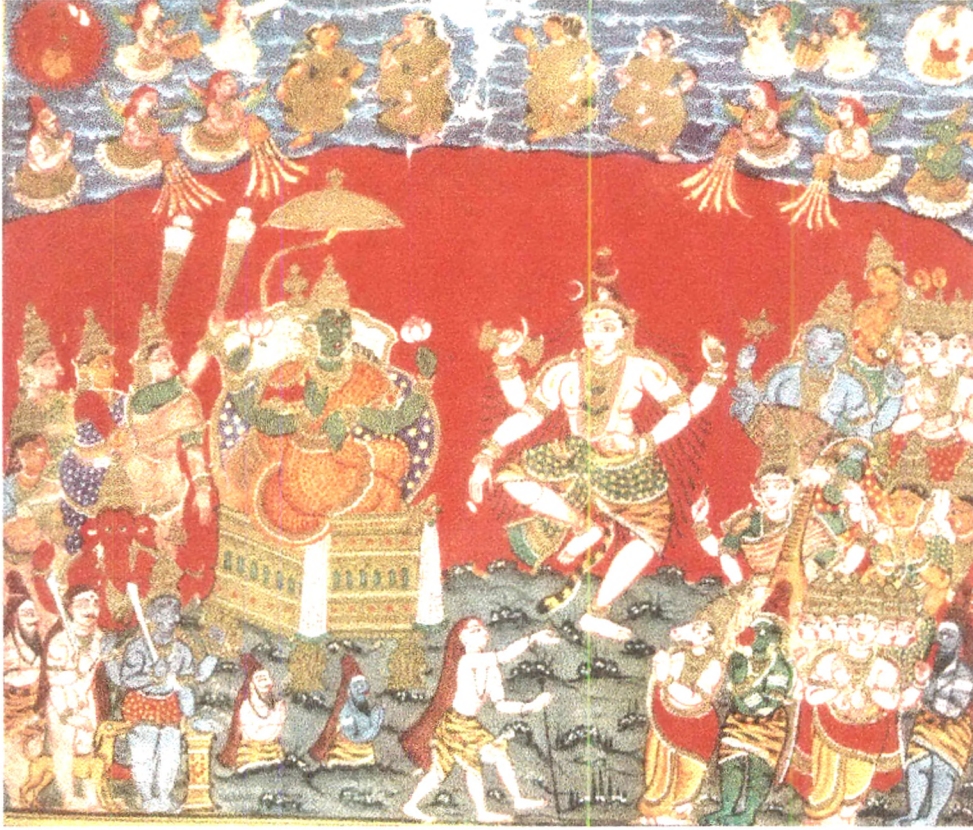
Examples:

Illustrations of Gita Govinda, the 12th century poem of Jayadeva are amply found in various styles of painting. The story of the love of Radha-Krishna in all its colours captivated the imagination of painters. The Gita-Govinda theme in Kangra style (19th century) represents this style at its best. The example shows the scene of Krishna surrounded by *gopis*. The sound of soft flute is magic to the deer-eyed maidens. It also charms the entire universe, animate and inanimate. The depth of feelings is beautifully and delicately brought out by the painter.



Krishna Dancing with Gopis, Mewadi Miniature

Miniatures also feature scenes from popular religious myths and legends. In the Mewadi miniature is featured a scene of young Krishna dancing with *gopis*. Krishna is in *aramandi*, his heels slightly raised and playing the flute. One *gopi* is playing the ‘*tala*’ by clapping her hands and the other is playing the *dafli*. There are more musicians seated at the back and some amongst them are playing the *pakhavaj*, *dhol*, *nagara*, *bheri*, *shehnai*, *nisan*, etc. Krishna is wearing a peculiar dress, a kind of knee-length skirt over slim *pajamas*, with two pleated fans opening out. The cummerband at the waist is also two-coloured, one dark and the other light. The women musicians are in traditional Rajasthani *chania-choli-chunari*.



Sandhya Tandava, Mysore School

A Mysore School painting from the 18th century shows Nataraja dancing the Sandhya Tandava with Devi enthroned and witness of Shiva's dance. There are numerous accompanying celestial musicians. The painting is minutely illustrative in detail with Saraswati playing the lute, Lakshmi singing, Indra playing the flute, Vishnu sounding the drum and Brahma playing the cymbals. Bhringi dances in ecstasy and all other celestials, like the sun, moon, the Dikpalas and others watch the dance. From above Narada, Tumburu and others give musical accompaniment to the dance of the celestial nymphs, like Rambha and Urvasi.



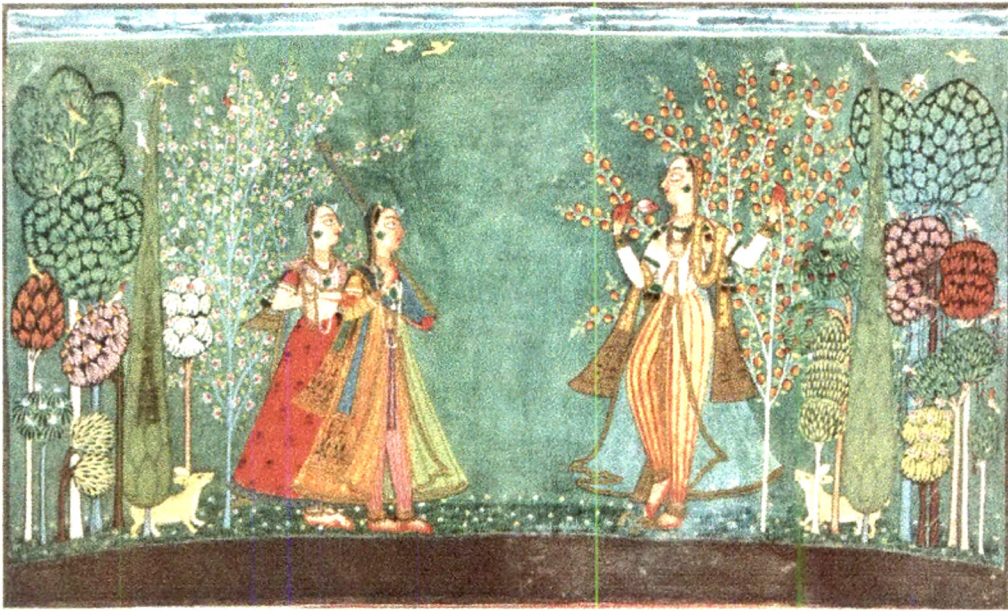
Dancing Ganesha - Nepali Pata Painting

In a Nepali Pata Painting (Lakshmi Narayana Pata 1781 AD) there is a Dancing Ganesha drawn in an exquisitely rhythmic manner. His left foot is in *kuncita* (SR Sh. 317) and completely raised facing the right bent knee and the right leg is also in *kuncita* (SR, Sh. 317) but balanced on the toes. While his four hands hold the standard symbols.

4. Paintings of Dance like figures: There are several instances of paintings which have ‘dance-like’ figures - that is, where the figure is not identified as a dancer nor is he/she in the act of a dance performance. But maybe such painted figures brought out a mood or an emotion with a body position that created an image of dance.

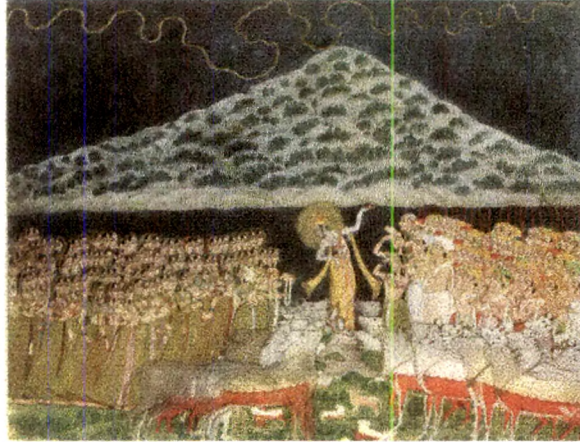
Examples:

In miniature paintings one of the favourite and most exploited themes was of the picturization of Raga-Ragini. The characteristics of the Raga or Ragini and the kind of emotion that it generated and its effect on the environment, etc. have been a great source of inspiration to all miniature painting schools.



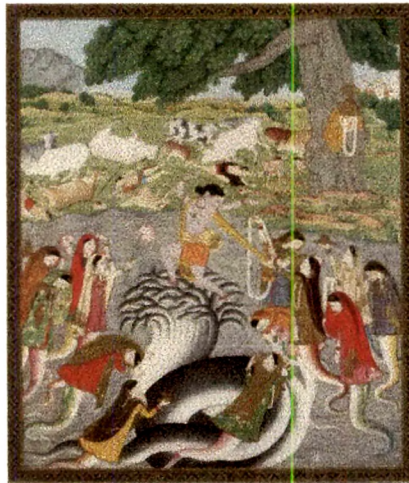
Ragini Dhanashri, Basholi Ragamala

In this richly imaginative painting of Ragini Dhanashri (about 1720, Basholi Ragamala Painting, N C Mehta Collection), a lady is shown holding the branch of a tree and carrying a lotus bud as she yearns for her absent lover. It is Spring and the exuberant mood of Nature is in contrast with the suffering woman. One of her companions plays music but this does not lighten her mood. The kuncita (SR shloka 317) position of the feet, pajama-tunic costume all create a moving picture.



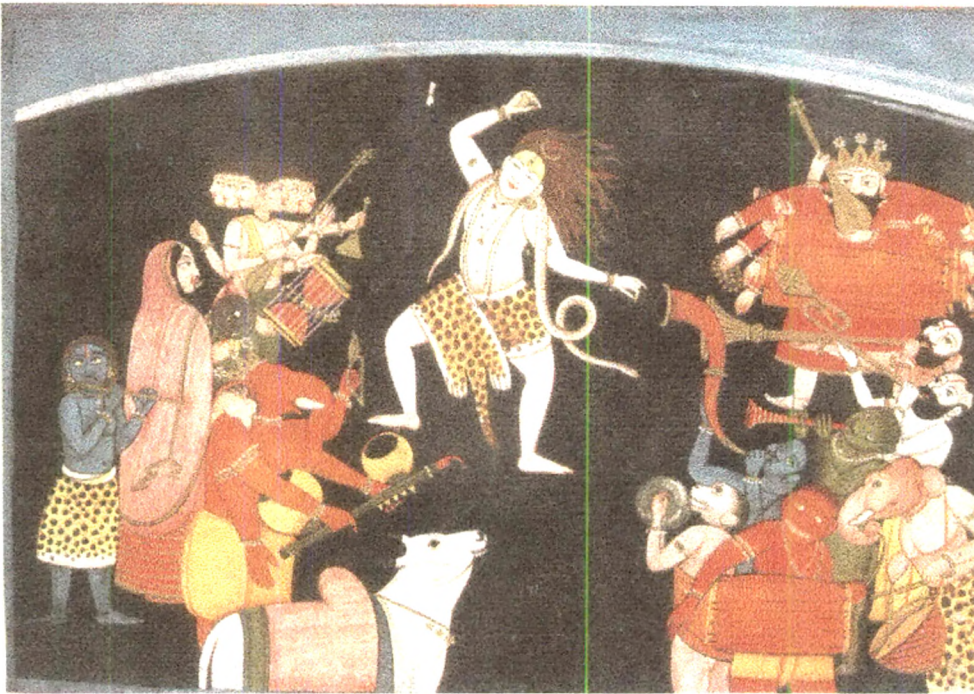
Govardhandhari

This beautiful Kishangarh miniature shows Krishna holding Mount Govardhana (about 1755, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benaras). The 'Govardhandhari' image of Krishna and the story is danced by all classical dancers and dance styles in India. Krishna lifted the Govardhana mountain with his little finger, sheltering the residents and cattle of Vraja under it. One should notice the carefully balanced composition of the girls, cowherds and cows as well as how sinuous lightening decorates the sky.



Kalia Daman

A beautiful illustration to the Bhagwata Purana shows the Kalia Daman in vivid detail. The pain of Kalia's distressed wives is poignantly portrayed. Krishna is shown dancing on the great serpent's innumerable hoods and due to the wild dance of Krishna, these numerous hoods were rendered powerless and his whole body shattered.



Nataraja, Chamba School

This is a beautiful painting of the Chamba School of miniatures, of the late medieval time. It is an extremely interesting painting of Lord Shiva where even the serpent draped around his neck wriggles in dance, the leopard hide moves in the rhythm of the dance and the *jata* sways almost like snakes. Ganesha plays the lute, Skanda sounds the drum, and Uma plays the circular metal drums. The Ganas are playing various drums and blow instruments.

Though painting, sculpture and the plastic arts have often provided a strong base and at times lead the written word of the text authenticating the performing traditions, it is still very difficult to come to any kind of conclusion from them regarding the prevalent contemporary practices of dance and dance styles at any point of time in history.

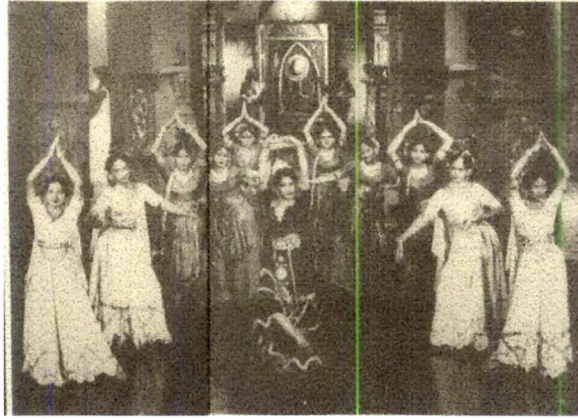
Documentation of Dance in Films/Video (documentary and fiction) and Photography

In his book, *The Dance in America*, Walter Terry writes, “The ephemeral nature of dance makes every method of recording its fleeting wonders a precious instrument. Words, symbols, films : these are the major methods of recording the action of dance. Drawings, sculpture, photographs : these are the major methods of recording movement pause, be it a quiet pose or the peak of a leap...Exactness in recording dance can be supplied by two methods : motion pictures for the recording of actual performance, and notation (a dance script) for recording choreography. Films are to dance what phonograph records are to music...”⁵.

In the first quarter of the 20th century, the ‘movies’ began to be made in India. The early Indian silent films developed out of the strong stage tradition of ‘musicals’ that were already popular amongst both urban and rural audiences. These ‘musicals’ traced their roots to the *uparupak* tradition full of songs and dancing. The early movies continued the trend and were full of dance-music sequences.

With dancing going away from the temples, there was a new interest emerging for dance in the early 1900s. This not only brought concert dance in the theatres but also manifested itself in cinema. Though silent films had some dancing, with the coming of the talkies, dance became special. There were varieties of short films made some of which dealt with dance exclusively. Some traditional dancers and nattuvanars turned to the newly established and growing film industry in Madras (Chennai) and later in Bombay (Mumbai) for better opportunities in earning a living through dance. They provided dance and dance direction. The film “Sairandhri” made in 1933, carried genuine Bharatanatyam. Raginidevi and Gopinath performed a duet in bharatanatyam for a telugu film. Many dancers, specially from professional dance communities, made their way to cinema and more meaningful dancing was introduced. Early commercial Indian cinema, almost till the mid-1960s, often featured dances that were truly in the Bharatanatyam and Kathak traditions, by trained dancers. At times specific dance items were shown such as Alarippu, Tillana, Thumri, Tatkar and so on. The movements, accompanying music as well as the costumes were also as authentic to the tradition as possible.

Gowri Ammal was the last devadasi-dancer at the Mylapore Kapaleeswarar Temple. Dancers Lakshmi Viswanathan and her elder sister trained with her for two years. In the film, *Thyaga Bhumi*, the elder sister played the role of a character called Saroja who danced ‘*Krishna Nee Vegamai Verai*’, the Tamil version of the famous ‘*Krishna Nee Begane Baro*’ as taught to her by Gauri Ammal, composed by Papanasam Sivan and sung by the dancer’s mother⁶. So here one has the actual documentation of a dance piece the way it was interpreted by one of the senior-most exponents of the dance style.



Film: Vikram - Urvashi

Some of the well-known films in which classical dances can be seen are *Raj Nartaki*, *Mughal-e-Azam*, *Chandralekha*, *Navrang*, *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baaje*, *Guide*, *Pakeezah*, *Prince*, *Nache Mayuri*, *Jal Bin Machli Nritya Bin Bijli*, *Teesri Kasam*, *Kinara*, *Sargam*, *Umrao Jaan*, *Devdas*. Here the main heroine often played the role of an accomplished dancer or a person who expresses herself through dance.



Sadhna Bose in Film Alibaba

If the film itself did not have a dancer-based story, there were also scripts that accommodated songs and sequences with classical dance. An example is the Killing of Dushashana episode from Kathakali in Shyam Benegal's *Kalyug* to portray the state of mind of the character in the film watching the performance. There have also been films made by dancers, such as Uday Shanker's classic, *Kalpana* and documentary films on dancers made by directors of Satyajit Ray's stature such as *Bala* on Balasaraswati.

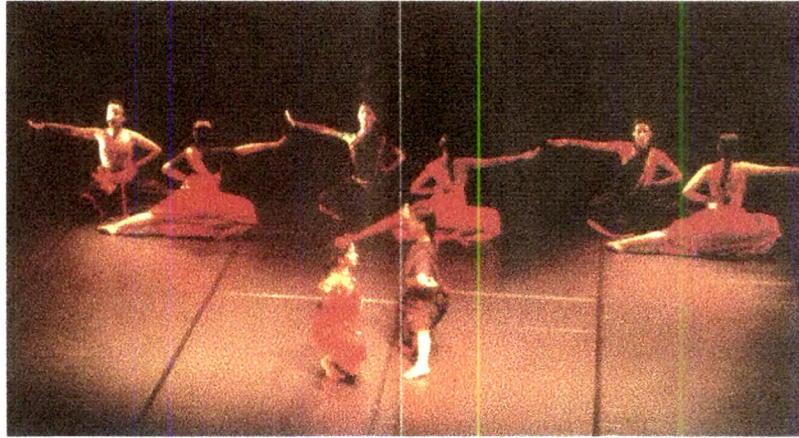
The Indian film industry also includes regional cinema. This cinema often uses local folk dance forms as part of its song-and-dance routine or if it has a dancer-based story. For example, Gujarati films may use the *garba*, Marathi films may use the *lavni*, Punjabi films the *bhangra* and *giddha*, Bhojpuri films the *nautanki*, Bengali films *rabindra sangeet*, and so on. Many regional films in the South Indian languages - Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu - often use the classical dances themselves.

The development and coming of Television and Video technology and its inter-play with the arts have created newer and wider possibilities in all the areas of artistic creativity, be it choreography, presentation or preservation. It has played an important role for the record and revival of dance. The dance performances are recorded, and dances are specially designed for the camera. In the serials and narratives one finds ample use of all kinds of dance. The video recordings of travelers, amateurs at times, are amazingly sensitive and provide detailed dance activity hitherto unseen. They have become professional tools for capturing the "never to be repeated" dance and virtual evidences of existing dance activity.



Late Smt. Anjaliben Merh

Photographs offer indisputable evidence of the existing realities of dance with the artistic interpretation of the photographer. There are numerous photographs available of devadasis, nautch girls in the late 19th and early 20th centuries taken by the foreign travelers. During their stay, they seem to have captured interesting images of life in India. They clearly indicate the style, audience, body dynamics, dress and jewellery, the accompanying musicians, and even dance postures. Some of the pictures clearly show the limitations in the scope of movements due dress style, space limitations and so on. The most sensitive pictures of the great dances are imaginatively captured by photographers, which immortalize both the dance and the dancer. Today we have world renowned photographers, capturing the essence of dance, movement in their art works.



Yantra, Dance-Diagrams, Chandralekha

Going through this mine of documental evidences, one realizes the strong interrelation of the arts, as well as their being indirectly supportive to the continuity of the various arts forms in different historical and political periods of time. An in-depth study of the sculptures, paintings on one side and dance on the other, has shown clearly that they are closely related to each other in their subject matter. The monuments serve as the visual illustrations of the verbal descriptions of the texts, thus providing unbroken documentary chain. In fact it will be almost impossible to understand one without the other.

Notes:

1. Understanding Bharata Natyam, Mrinalini Sarabhai, pg 17
2. Bharatanatyam, the Tamil Heritage, Lakshmi Viswanathan, pg 81
3. Natyashastra, GOS series no. 36 pgs 114-118
4. Different Strokes : Paintings in the British Raj, Pran Neville, Swagat magazine, June 2002, pg.109-110.
5. The Dance in America, Walter Terry, pg 227-8
6. Bharatanatyam, the Tamil Heritage, Lakshmi Viswanathan, pg 95