



SCHOLARS OF INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE:

A STUDY ON LITERATURE REVIEW AND FEW OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF DR.KAPILAVATSYAYAN, DR.V.RAGHAVAN AND DR.MANDAKRANTA BOSE

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ABSTRACT

“The aesthetics of Indian art forms, dance in particular, evolves from a world view which regards the cosmic process as a dance of microcosm and the macrocosm, a rhythmic interplay of eternity and flux in an unending movement of innovation, evolution and devolution”.

- Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan

The Indian culture is an amalgamation of several cultures; fine-arts, handicrafts, traditions, beliefs, language, economics and social organisation which spans across the Indian sub-continent and has been influenced by a history that is several millennia old. The history of dance is no longer a matter of conjecture; it is a fact and reality which pervades all parts of India and extends from the earliest levels of civilisation to the present day (Vatsyayan, K,

2015). *The Literature of dance in India is vast, with a wealth of Sanskrit treatises. A number of scholars in the recent times have discussed about the aspects of dance, music and drama as per the Sanskrit treatises. This paper throws light on the works of Dr.KapilaVatsyayan, who presents a view of classical Indian dancing that is as analytical as it is informative, Dr.V.Raghavan, whose works are a perennial source of reference in Music, Dance and Drama, Dr.Mandakranta Bose, who has done a systematic and exhaustive study of all the available Sanskrit treatises with a view to tracing the evolution of classical Indian dance concepts. This paper focuses on the literature review on dance and the contribution of some of the eminent scholars such as Dr.KapilaVatsyayan, Dr.V.Raghavan and Dr.Mandakranta Bose.*

Keywords: Classical Dance, Literature Review, Scholars.

Introduction:

In India all forms of art have a sacred origin, and the inner experience of the soul finds its highest expression in Music and Dance. The Hindu attitude toward art as an expression of the Inner beauty or Divinity in human beings brought it into close connection with religion (Devi, R, 1990). The most comprehensive view of the evolution of dancing in India is one that is derived from Sanskrit textual sources. In the beginning of the tradition of discourse on dancing, of which the earliest extant example is the *Natya Sastra* of Bharata Muni, dancing was regarded as a technique for adding the beauty of abstract form to dramatic performances. An ancillary to drama rather than an independent art, it carried no meaning and elicited no emotional response. Gradually, however, its autonomy was recognized as also its communicative power and it began to be discussed fully in treatises rather than in works on drama or poetics – a clear sign of its growing importance in India's cultural life (Bose, M, 1989).

Classical Dances of India:

The Classical Dances of India are widely practiced and regarded as art-forms descended unchanged from the earliest ages of Hindu culture. In ancient India, dance was presumed to be of such aesthetic richness that it was thought to be a direct gift of the Gods to men (Bose, M, 1995). KapilaVatsyayan says that Indian dance was the most chiselled expression of a larger and more complex background of Indian world-view and its distinctive speculative thought. *Natya Shastra* is the earliest treatise on Theatre, Dance and Music written by Sage

Bharatha. The ritual and the speculative thought was the ready source material for Bharatha to both formulate a theory of aesthetics and develop an infrastructure for a form called theatre (*natya*), which communicates through several media. In enunciating his theory and in evolving a grammar of artistic expression he undoubtedly accepted the organic world-view in the speculative thought and in the ritual (Vatsyayan, (K), 1995).

Literature Review:

A literature review is a survey of books, scholarly articles, and other sources relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, which provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of these works in relation to the research problem being investigated. Literature review is designed to provide an overview of sources one explores while researching a particular topic and to demonstrate to readers how research fits within a larger field of study. It demonstrates that the researcher knows the field and would allow one to map the field and position his/her research within the context, and allows establishing the theoretical framework and methodological focus.

The Literature of dance in India is vast, with a wealth of Sanskrit treatises. A number of scholars in the recent times have discussed about the aspects of dance, music and drama as per the Sanskrit treatises. Literature review provides researchers the knowledge of data available in the particular field of study and enables them to zero in on the topic that they wish to research by avoiding repetition.

Primary Sources of Literature for Indian Classical Dance:

The earliest source of our knowledge of Indian dancing is the *Natya Sastra* of Bharata, whose influence on all later writers proved to be very deep, extensive and everlasting. That, in all Sanskrit works on dance we find substantially the same material as in the *Natya Sastra*, both as to the principles and the techniques of dancing (Bose, M, 2001).

Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikeswara occupies a unique position in the literature of classical Indian Dancing. This text was meant as a practical guide to be used by dancers to learn the technique of dancing. The glances, the neck movements, the hand gestures or *mudras* and other expressive movements found in *Abhinaya Darpana* form the dancer's technical stock, upon which dancer draws when creating a whole dance. The close connection of present day

dance technique with *Abhinaya Darpana* is evident in the repertoire of *hastas*, that is, the movements of hands (Bose, M, 2001).

Among the many treatises, the *Sangitaratnakara*, Sarangadeva's monumental treatise has an exhaustive chapter on dance. This chapter is of vital importance for understanding the traditions of the dance as they were followed and as they developed in different parts of India (Vatsyayan, K, 2015).

Dasaroopakam of Dhananjaya, *Sringaraprakasa* of Bhoja, *Abhinava Bharathi* of Abhinavagupta, *Natyaloohanam* of Trilochanaditya, *NrittaRatnavali* of Jayaprasenapathi, *NatyaDarpanam* of Rama Chandra and Guna Chandra are some of the Treatises on Dance and Drama which were written in Sanskrit manuscript in the form of anusthup format. These treatises have been translated by our great Scholars.

Scholars of Indian Classical Dance:

A Scholar is a learned or well-educated person, especially one who excels in a particular field or subject. A lot of Scholars have contributed towards Dance Literature which goes a long way in helping the future generations to know about Indian Classical dance. Some of the well-known Scholars are Dr.KapilaVatsyayan, Dr. V Raghavan and Dr.Mandakranta Bose whose works must be referred by the scholars, artistes and the connoisseurs of art.

Dr.Kapila Vatsyayan:



Image source: <http://niyogibooksindia.com/portfolio-items/kapila-vatsyayan/>

Dr.KapilaVatsyayan is a leading scholar of Indian Classical Dance, artist and art historian. Her work moves from a deep understanding of the primary textual sources of the East and West, principally Sanskrit and English, and a direct experience of the arts as a performer.

In her early years, Dr.KapilaVatsyayan trained in various forms of Indian classical dance. Later on, she complemented her knowledge in Classical Dance with the knowledge of Modern Dance, Movement Analysis, Dance Notation and Choreology, under Dr. Juana de Laban and Hanya Holm in the West. Dr.KapilaVatsyayan pursued the academic disciplines of Literature, Art Education and Indology, and this contributed to help her bring to the field of dance scholarship, a new insight (Coorlawala U A, 2000). She has successfully endeavoured to examine and to formulate the relationship of the dance to the other arts. Dr.Kapila Vatsyayan is an honorary Professor of a large number of Universities in India and abroad.

‘The most extensive study so far of the non-specialist literature of dancing is that of KapilaVatsyayan who has examined the Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanisads, Epics, Puranas, grammatical literature, lexicons, Grhyasutra, Dharmasutra, the ArthaSastra, the Kamasutra, Buddhist and Jaina texts and Kavya literature’ (Bose, M, 1989).

Through her study,practice, and performance of Kathak, Manipuri, and modern dance techniques, and in her writings, KapilaVatsyayan addressed the concerns of her time with discovery and revalidation of the nation’s present identity – by demonstrating continuities in present performance praxis with an indigenous past. Her vision has informed perceptions of Indian dance outside India and Indian cultural policies. Indeed, Vatsyayan's writing is seminal not just because it is comprehensive, insightful, and trans-cultural, her research is poised at a moment of severance and regeneration, and her writing marks a radical shift from inherited dance knowledge and oral traditions to institutional knowledge (Coorlawala U A, 2000).

Some of her works are ‘*Classical Indian Dance in Literature and Arts*’, ‘*Dance in Indian painting*’, ‘*The Theoretical Basis of Asian Aesthetic Traditions*’, ‘*Traditional Indian Theatre: Multiple Streams*’, ‘*The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts*’, ‘*Concepts of Space: Ancient and Modern*’, ‘*Bharata and the Natyasastra*’, *Gita Govinda* and ‘*Concepts of Time: Ancient and Modern*’.

In the fourth chapter – *The Natyasastra* of the book ‘*The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts*’, KapilaVatsyayan gives a brief description of *Natyasastra* written by Sage Bharata. She mentions that Bharata explores all movement from the position *sama*, whether it is the smaller movements of the face or the movements on a larger scale of the head, torso, hips and legs (Vatsyayan, K, 1997).

She has contributed, in a significant way, to the strengthening of the bridge of communication between practising dancers and theoreticians, between the artistes of one region of India and another, and between Indian artistes and their contemporaries in other countries. No eastern, western studies are complete without mentioning her works.

Dr. V. Raghavan:



Image source: <http://www.drvraghavancentre.com/drvraghavan-life-career.html>

Among the galaxy of great scholars of Sanskrit in Modern India, perhaps one name shines brighter, that of Dr. V. Raghavan, a scholar and aesthete par excellence (Mansingh, S, 2004). Venkataraman Raghavan was a scholar and Musicologist and has authored several books on music and aesthetics in Sanskrit. He has edited and translated Bhoja's *Sringaraprakasha*, a treatise consisting of 36 chapters dealing with both poetics and dramaturgy. He has authored more than 120 books and 1,200 articles.

His lifelong association with the great dancer T.Balasaraswathi must have been filled his mind with such nuances of Rasa as were seen her abhinaya. This Rasa Anubhava (experience of aesthetic delight) is what he always held close to his heart. Therefore, his words were imbued with Rasa which often could cut through complex ideas, making them sound, simple and intelligible even to a lay leader. His total dedication to preservation and propagation of dance, not only Bharathanatyam but all the known styles of his time, through sharing his understanding and appreciation of this great performing art resulted in several articles, essays, lectures and books (Mansingh, S, 2004).

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Dr KapilaVatsyayan said that there was a gap between those looking at primary material and those looking into critical and scholarly issues, and in order to address that gap, Dr.Raghavan's example must be emulated. Dr.Raghavan was aware, and in complete command, of primary texts, and he also made them accessible by writing articles and commentaries. "Dr.Raghavan is the foundation of what we call Indian cultural tradition..." she said. Dr.Vatsyayan said no work of Indian aesthetics was complete without its quoting Dr.Raghavan. But, along with his work on aesthetics in the Sanskrit tradition, he looked into other theories from various parts of the world and linked them. "His work represented a continuum of traditions rather than a contest of traditions" (The Hindu, 2008).

Some of his works are '*Sanskrit Drama: Its Aesthetics and Production*', '*The Indian Heritage, An Anthology on Aspects of Indian Culture*', '*Splendours of Indian Dance*', '*Sringaramanjari*', '*Rabindranath Tagore and Sanskrit Literature*' and '*Abhinavagupta and his works*', etc. He has also written many compositions for dance.

The book '*Splendours of Indian Dance*', which is a collection of writings by Dr. V Raghavan offers an exposition of some of our dance traditions, their forms, content, composition and practice. In the 7th chapter of this book, the author describes about The *Veethi Bhagavatam* of Andhra. Dr. V Raghavan says that when Kuchipudi Bhagavata attained its high water- mark, it gave birth to a derivative solo performance called the *Veethi Bhagavata* or *Gollakalapa*. The masters of Kuchipudi themselves thought of this new form and evolved it through women-artistes of courtesan families (*Kalvantula*) who were proficient in the solo dance-art of Nautch. The *Veethi Bhagavatam* had to face the same fate as other traditional forms of dance and dance-drama, in the present age (Raghavan, V, 2004). Dr.Raghavan has rightly observed that the nuances of traditional art forms of Kuchipudi must be revived and preserved for posterity.

The incomparably rich legacy of his original interpretations of Sanskrit texts and elucidations on a variety of subjects concerning dance, music, fine arts, Puranas, aesthetics, philosophy, etc. is a source of knowledge and inspiration to scholars, students and researchers alike (Mansingh, S, 2004).

Dr.Mandakranta Bose:



Image source: <https://cisar.iar.ubc.ca/person/mandakranta-bose/>

Dr.Mandakranta Bose is Emeritus Professor and Director of the Centre for India and South Asia Research at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. Her research over the past fifty years covers four main areas; Sanskrit treatises on performing arts, the Ramayana, Hindu dharmaśāstras and religious culture, and gender representation in the arts and literatures of India.

“Dr.Mandakranta Bose’s Canvas is wide, almost wider than that of late Dr. V. Raghavan who was the first to bring to light the wealth of material in Sanskrit relating to dance, music and theatre...The work needs to be read very carefully by all serious students of and researchers on dance”. – Dr.KapilaVatsyayan (Bose, M, 2007).

Her research covers the Classical performing arts of India, Sanskrit literature, and the representation of women in the arts and literatures of India. Some of her publications are ‘*Movement and Mimesis*’, ‘*The Dance Vocabulary of Classical India*’, ‘*Faces of the Feminine in Classical, Medieval and Modern India*’, ‘*Speaking of Dance: The Indian Critique*’, ‘*Women in Hindu Tradition*’ and ‘*Ramayana Revisited*’ to name few.

In the book ‘*Speaking of Dance: The Indian Critique*’, the author explains the key concepts surfacing from the *Natya Śāstra* of Bharata Muni and some of the other land mark treatises, like *Abhinaya Darpana*, *Sangitaratnakara*, and *Nartana Nirṇaya* and also tries to explain how these time-honoured writings have contributed to the evolution of classical dancing in India.

Conclusion:

Dance in India has both mythological and cultural history. It is one of the earliest fine arts performed in the Temples as offering by the devotees. It has evolved into an unmatched art and has built up a long tradition. The history of Indian Dance is very vast from the earliest treatises written by great saints in Sanskrit Literature. Although the majority of these works on dance in India have been available for a long time, systematic research on them is a comparatively recent development. A study of the different scholars on dance, thus show how Indian Dance has evolved through a process of accretion and assimilation. Literature review plays an important role in the research process which every researcher has to undertake during the course of research and failure to do so, would result in writings which may be termed as gibberish and would also be termed as a blunder if one were to proceed to research without having a knowledge of the already done research in the same or similar field of study. In this context, the works of eminent scholars such as Dr.Kapila Vatsyayan, Dr. V. Raghavan, Dr.Mandakranta Bose should be read with a lot of interest by all the present day researchers and artists of dance.

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