

## Gender Monopolies in Indian Classical Dance: A Sociological Analysis of Cause and Context

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In most pre-industrial *gemeinschaft* societies dance developed as a communal activity celebrating marriage, childbirth, harvest or a victory or sometimes as a mode of defying or alleviating pain and grief after death or warding off an affliction by evil spirits. Both males and females participated in different ways in this with allotted roles according to local custom. But as dance evolved into a more sophisticated art, with a clear distinction between the dancer and the audience, there also developed sharper differences between male and female roles and a gradual dominance of the female in dance which came to be considered a more feminine art. In Indian classical dance, however, the evolution of male and female roles in dance was far more complex than in any other civilization. In particular, the position of the male dancer has been a paradox for centuries in South India. Lord Siva was glorified as the king of dance from the 5th century onwards and his icon adorns the stage in present-day Bharatanatyam performances. But the majority of Bharatanatyam dancers are and have always been women. By contrast, in Kuchipudi and Kathakali (as well as Sattriya and Chhau) the dancers till recently were all men taking both the male and female roles. These paradoxes need some explanation. It cannot be argued that either the male or female anatomy is specially fitted for this or that dance role as both have their excellences and limitations. The reasons for gender-dance relations in India are neither anatomical nor purely religious but socio-historical. This article traces the ambivalences and paradoxes of these relations to several rival traditions and their complex interactions. Our thesis may be summed up as follows.

1. The interrelations of art and religion have played an important part in male-female participation in dance but in an extremely complex way. Unfortunately, these have been oversimplified, particularly in the case of India by the influence of Dr Ananda K. Coomaraswamy as well as lay Western observers. To understand the peculiarities in the evolution of the performing arts and male and female roles therein, we need a more critical dialectical analysis of the interactions of art, society, state and organized religion than is available in histories of Indian art.
2. The paradox of the male monopoly in the dance-drama traditions of Kuchipudi or Kathakali (with males taking female roles also), derives from a convoluted priest-versus-dancer rivalry and ritual-versus-art conflict, which were resolved by a special interpretation of the concept of dance as *yagna* or sacrifice.
3. The female monopoly of Bharatanatyam in South Indian society, where the Lord of dance is the male dancer Nataraja who defeated the female dancer Kali, seems to be an even greater paradox. But it can be accounted for by the stronger rival tradition of

Bhakti Śrūṅgāra or devotional eroticism which took shape about the same time as the Nataraja cult. It generated a strong chain reaction by which the Hindu temple became the permanent patron of the female dancer interpreting Śrūṅgāra or the erotic compositions on the deity.

4. These socio-historical forces worked often in the disguise of religious prescriptions. A less paradoxical and more functional allocation of male and female roles in dance is developing in India mainly because of the secularization of society and a more rational analytical view of art

Let us now elaborate these points.

# I

The complex art-religion relation has been oversimplified as one of harmony by lay observers and supported by the misleading proclamation of the identity of art and religion by the great savant Dr Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. The former are impressed by the association of music and dance with deities in sculpture and in the Puranas, portraying Siva as Nataraja, the dance king or Veenadhara, the musician, Krishna as Kaliyamardana dancing on the serpent Kaliya or Venugopala the flute player and Saraswati as a Veena player. They also notice that practically all the songs in concert or dance performances are about deities and their doings. Coomaraswamy however went much further than this to argue for the identity of art and religion through his own interpretation of Indian aesthetics and his contempt for Western secularization of art<sup>1</sup>. I have criticized his sweeping equation in considerable detail (in *The Sacred and the Secular in India's Performing Arts*) and argued that, far from being a natural eternal association, the relation between the two was never a simple one either in India or Europe but was dialectical, being governed by changing socio-historical patterns of confrontation, compromise and appropriation<sup>2</sup>. To sum it up briefly: there was a period down to the 6th century in all India when music and dance had strong secular orientations and more particularly in Tamil Nadu from the Sangam to the early post-Sangam age when poetic literature was totally secular without even prayer songs to preface the Sangam anthologies. Then a specific psycho-social revolution took place against an ascetic religion like Jainism and dry Brahmin ritualism through an emerging cult of devotion to a personalized god, i.e. Bhakti. The Bhakti poets naturally adopted the earlier dominant erotic romantic genre of poetry in Tamil called Aham, thus making their devotional poetry an emotional outpouring of love to an intimate personal god. At the same time, they took over the idea of the deity as a munificent king from another earlier poetic genre, Aarruppadai, glorifying a king free with his gifts to poets, musicians and dancers. Thus the Hindu temple deity as Raja became the permanent patron of the sensuous arts of dance and music. This relation was sustained by the ruling monarchs in return for legitimization by the temple priests, making the religion-art association a political convenience. We will elaborate this in detail later in Section III. Quite apart from this development, performing artists appropriated some sacralizing rites particularly in North India to avoid accusations and harassment by priests and kings as we argue in Section II. We may add that the religion-art relation was not one of harmony or identity but was

quite dialectical in Europe too. The Hellenic civilization developed the performing arts of music, dance and drama in a context where religious activity was social and celebratory and the temple was a communal institution—in compact city states. The same ideas were taken over by the Roman Empire too but perhaps vulgarized as part of decadent aristocratic entertainment. But early Christianity which grew as a counter to state authority was ascetic and tried to wipe out much of the Hellenic heritage in dance and music<sup>3</sup>. It was only after the Church itself became an imperium in the late medieval period that it adopted the role of a patron of sculpture, painting and architecture—and music, though dance itself was not encouraged. Some of the Church fathers like Pope Gregory considered all art including literature as competitors for attention against the Holy Writ. Later, the Catholic Church began to rely more heavily on art for its influence during the Counter-Reformation period particularly with the painting of Rubens, even as Protestants initiated a period of iconoclasm. The wave of secularization of art in Europe followed essentially after all this religious antagonism and the violent Thirty Years War. Coomaraswamy ignored all this history and the work of contemporary Marxist art historians and characterized secularization as a mistake<sup>4</sup>. We argue instead that the relation of religion to art, particularly the performing arts, was neither one of harmony nor of total antagonism but pretty complicated, depending on socio-economic and socio-historical conditions.

This is not to deny that the psychology of the individual artist at work may have much in common with that of the religious mystic, the yogi or the contemplative monk in his cloister in terms of mental concentration, identification and self-hypnosis. But it still remains an individual activity in isolation. Its impact on society is what makes it relevant and important. The consequences of artistic activity in a society are outside the ambit of individual psychology and depend on complex (mostly) non-religious socio-historical factors at that time. Our explanation of male or female monopolies is based primarily on such socio-historical factors, with only side glances at individual psychological religious inspiration. Thus we argue in Section II that the male monopoly of dance for a long time in Kuchipudi and Kathakali was based upon the socio-historical context of regarding dance and drama as *yagna* against a background of the antagonism of priests, lawgivers and statesmen towards performing artists. Similarly we maintain in Section III that despite worshipping the male god Nataraja as the Lord of dance, a combination of socio-historical influences namely Bhakti Śrūngara, Rajopachara and royal land grants bypassed Nataraja as a role model for male dancers and instead used him as the subject of the erotic yearnings of female dancers.

## II

Most scholars take seriously the glorification and divinization of the performing arts in texts on music and dance but rarely look at the contrary evidence from other sources. By analyzing such other sources one is inclined to believe that performing artists in particular were suspected and attacked from two sides. On the one hand, Dharmasastras like Manu's and various priestly texts attacked music and dance as *enemies* of self-control to

be avoided. On the other hand, authors on statecraft like Kautilya regarded dancers and travelling dance troupes as possible spies.

Thus Manu includes learning of music and dance among various things to be avoided by students of the Vedas who have to cultivate self-control and advises the King to banish dancers, singers etc. from his city<sup>5</sup>. Dance in particular was portrayed as the chief weapon of seduction of sages doing penance. Epics and Puranas contain several such stories, apart from the well known story of Menaka seducing sage Viswamitra<sup>6</sup>. The term used for an actor (or dancer) 'Sailusa' in the Sukla Yajurveda and Taittiriya Brahmana gradually acquired a pejorative meaning. Pantanjali's *Mahabhashya* also mentions that an actor's wife, herself playing various roles, when asked "whom do you belong to", always replies "to you, to you"<sup>7</sup>. Elsewhere it is stated that actors and dancers mate with anyone like vowels with consonants<sup>8</sup>. Buddhist Sanskrit texts also refer to the seductive power of actresses. The *Avadanasataka* describes how an actress from a South Indian dramatic troupe performing in Rajagriha was a great seducer of monks<sup>9</sup>. One can dig up several more instances showing how sacred literature and Dharmasastras regarded the performing arts as enemies of self-control<sup>10</sup>.

Statesmen and writers on statecraft considered actors and dancers as effective spies. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* refers to the practice of employing them for espionage among enemies and the undesirables and suspects of one's own kingdom and also mentions how dramatic performances provide suitable opportunities for murder and sabotage<sup>11</sup>. Such employment of actors and dancers for espionage cut both ways. They were also suspect as enemy agents at home and still more suspect when they travelled to another state as a troupe. All these are borne out by examples from the Puranas, Itihasas and Buddhist and Prakrit literature<sup>12</sup>. Thus, courtesan Vasavadatta was accused of treason and mutilated and courtesan Ambapali's loyalty to the city state of Vaisali was suspect because of her liaison with King Bimbisara. Another interesting example comes from *Harivamsa*, a supplement to the *Mahabharata*<sup>13</sup>. Pradyumna, son of Lord Krishna, was in love with Prabhavati, daughter of the powerful demon king Vajranabha, who was an enemy of the gods. Krishna and his tribe secure the aid of a gifted actor, Bhadra, and get into the demon king's city as a dramatic troupe, perform several dramas while Pradyumna carries on his love affair with Prabhavati. Finally the troupe kills the demon king, and carries his daughter away to celebrate her marriage with Pradyumna. The *Mahabharata* also includes an account of the siege of Krishna's capital by King Salva and how the actors and dancers were evicted from the city as security risks<sup>14</sup>.

All told, there is substantial evidence of suspicion, restriction, and some harassment of performing artists by priests and lawgivers on one side and state officials on the other, particularly in North India<sup>15</sup>. One may also infer that one common way in which performing artists safeguarded themselves from such harassment was to relate their profession to religion in several ways and claim divine origins for it.

Bharata's *Natyasastra* provides indirect indications of this in its first and last chapters, if we read between the lines<sup>16</sup>. In the first chapter, as soon as a drama is scheduled for performance there is harassment from the demons which is stopped by Indra using his Jarjara. But the demons come back and Brahma has to do some explaining and suggest the per-

formance of *yagna* rituals, which constitute the *Purvaranga* of the performance. Evidently the 'explanation' was not quite enough. In the last chapter on how drama came down from heaven to earth, Bharata explains how his sons adept in *Natyaśāstra* insulted the sages by caricaturing them in a dance drama—and how they were cursed to be born in a low caste on earth. The curse was reversed by their performing *natya* as *yagna* or sacrifice. They came back to heaven leaving their progeny to practise and teach *natya*. Another story in the *Jaiminiya Brahmana* describes a contest between the gods and Death. Prajapati teaches the gods to win through appropriating musical metres by ritualizing them<sup>17</sup>. The foregoing stories and a few similar ones point to the frequent antagonism between ritualist priests and performing artists, resolved tentatively by some rituals before the performance, called *Purvaranga*, and by regarding the performance itself as a *yagna* or sacrifice. Kalidasa's prayer verse (*Nandi*) to his drama *Malavikāgnimitram*, referring to it as a *kratu* or sacrifice for the eyes, confirms that this metaphor was well established.

But the *yagna* metaphor and its symbolism and rituals involved a price in later centuries<sup>18</sup>. It gradually led to the exclusion of women as 'unclean' from the *natya-yagna*. In ancient times vedic rituals involved and prescribed the participation of women. In the dominant *Natyaśāstra* period down to the 5th century both male and female dancers took part in dance-dramas<sup>19</sup>. But with successive foreign invasions, particularly after that of the Huns, exclusion of women from public participation took shape gradually as a measure of protection, and exclusion from some religious rituals was justified on the basis of (menstrual) uncleanness. It was in this later context of treating *natya* as *yagna* with austere attributes of ritual purity that the exclusive male dance-drama traditions of Kuchipudi and Bhagavata Melam were shaped by Agnihotris. Similarly, Kutiyattam and later Kathakali which started as offerings in a temple took over the idea of *yagna*. The former used women of the specific caste of Nambiar for female roles but with strict rules of purity within the temple Koothambalam. But Kathakali opted in favour of an all-male cast to preserve ritual purity<sup>20</sup>.

The *yagna* metaphor did not strike deep roots in Tamil Nadu though local variants of *Purvaranga* practices were followed—as attested by *Silappadikaram* and the detailed commentary on it by Adiyarku Nallar<sup>21</sup>. The dominant influence in Tamil Nadu was the sustained chain reaction emanating from the devotional eroticism or Bhakti Śrūngara shaped by the devotional poets from the 6th century onwards, eclipsing even the powerful Nataraja symbolism.

### III

The image, philosophy and symbolism of dancing Siva or Nataraja achieved their distinct shape mainly in Tamil Nadu, though dancing-Siva sculptures were known all over India at least from the 5th century onwards. But the symbolism did not much encourage male dancing because another powerful concatenation of ideas and practices, starting with the devotional or Bhakti cult, overshadowed it and set off a chain reaction which did not exhaust itself till the middle of the 20th century. We will discuss the two contending fac-

tors in that order. Contrary to popular opinion, Siva as dancer is not sacralized in the earlier Sanskrit sacred texts<sup>22</sup>. There is no mention of Siva as a dancer in the famous 'Rudram' of Yajurveda, which attributes many other roles to him including that of a thief. Nor does Svetasvatara Upanishad an important basis of Saivite theistic philosophy, mention Siva's dance. The concept of Siva as dancer in fact took clear shape in Tamil Nadu between 2nd and 5th centuries, in particular at the hands of Karaikal Ammaiyar in her famous *Mootha Tiruppadiyam*, though there is reference to Siva's dances in Tirumoolar's *Tirumantiram* and in *Silappadikaram* which probably belong to a later date. Karaikkal describes the wild dance of Siva in Tiruvalangadu in the burning ground surrounded by ghosts (*pey*) dancing with him. Wild dancing was already a part of Tamil social culture to cure illnesses supposedly caused by evil spirits or even to express the sheer joy of living. But Siva's wild dance is conceived here as the conquest of death, a theme common to several cultures—as portrayed in the phoenix of the ancient Middle East or in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or the song of the free soul at the end of *Taittiriyaopanishad*. Ultimately, the idea of this conquest led to the practice of celebrating it. Siva's Smasana Nrutya or Samhara Tandava led to his dance of ecstasy, the Ananda Tandava.

The original idea of dancing Siva was non-Aryan and non-scriptural but very soon found its way into Sanskrit scriptures as well as Brahminic rituals. Thus the three thousand (or 2999) Brahmins of Chidambaram chose that place to settle down for meditation and discussion probably about the 1st century B.C. with Siva as their Sabhanayaka or President<sup>23</sup>. At some stage before the 6th century, Siva was accepted as a joyful dancer with his icon installed in the temple essentially under local Tamil influence. When and how this took place in this period is still a matter for research. But the presence of a striking image of dancing Siva in the late 6th century is attested by the famous Tevaram of Saint Appar, '*Kunitha Puruvamum*'<sup>24</sup>:

Thy bent eyebrow, the blossoming smile on those red lips  
Thy matted locks, the milk-white ashes adorning thy coral-like body  
Thy golden foot lifted sweetly  
To see just that, one needs to be born a human being on this earth.

Appar's six *padigams* and two *tandakams* on Koli, i.e. Chidambaram, leave us in no doubt about an actual image of dancing Siva. In one *padigam* each verse is devoted to describing one limb separately, e.g. the foot, the hands, the dark neck, etc., ending with the exclamation: "What else is there to see after seeing [that]". The hymns of Gnana Sambandha also run along similar lines, describing Chidambaram as a city of rich people in rich houses. The Chidambaram Brahmins, i.e. Dikshitaras, saw no conflict in the addition of the worship of the Nataraja image to their traditional sacrificial fire rituals probably because Siva is equated with fire scripturally<sup>25</sup>. Gnanasambandha describes these Brahmins as learned fire worshippers in the *tevaram* '*Kartu angu eri ombi*' and portrays Siva in another *tevaram*, '*Aadinai Naru Neyyodu*'<sup>26</sup>, as dancing in Chidambaram indissolubly united with milk, curds, ghee and Brahmins. He also sings at length in another hymn



'*Tiruttala chati*' about how Nataraja defeated the female dancer Kali in a competition establishing male supremacy in dance. The worship of the joyfully dancing Siva was thus firmly entrenched in the South by the 6th century if not earlier. The South Indian glorification of Nataraja most probably influenced later commentaries on Bharata's *Natyasastra*. Abhinavagupta's commentary in the 10th century starts with the prayer 'Angikam' to dancing Siva alone while Bharata begins with a joint prayer to Brahma and Siva.

The dancing Siva icon and the related cult constituted perhaps the most powerful factor in shaping Hindu iconography and Saivite philosophy. The casting of the beautiful Nataraja icon by the *cire perdu* process in the Chola period led to enormous advances in the conception and casting of the most beautiful bronzes in the world portraying all the anatomical and spiritual graces of the human body. The dancing Siva with his flying locks of hair, carrying fire, drum and a deer, formed the basic symbolism of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy which Dr Ananda K. Coomaraswamy drew upon to explain the icon's beauty and spiritual meaning in his famous essay<sup>27</sup>. In more recent times, Western scientists have found in it the best symbolic representation of the birth of the universe. *But with all that, it had practically no influence as a role model for male dancers and generated no lasting tradition of male dancing.*

This forms the central paradox of the evolution of Bharatanatyam into a female monopoly in Tamil Nadu under the watchful eye of the victorious male king of dancers. It happened because a concatenation of three aesthetic and socio-political factors, namely Bhakti Śrūngara, the king-god symbolism, and royal support for temple arts took shape about the same time as the growth of the Nataraja cult and bypassed it altogether. Each one of these was powerful enough but in combination they were almost irresistible. In addition, they generated a chain reaction which virtually entrenched female monopoly for centuries. I have traced these in considerable detail elsewhere and will give just a brief account here in support of my thesis<sup>28</sup>.

The devotional cult or Bhakti took shape in Tamil Nadu from the fifth century onwards from several sources, such as dissatisfaction with the asceticism of Jainism and Brahmin ritualism and the spread of the Bhagavatha cult from the North, but it took an intense emotional garb due to a special poetic legacy in Tamil. The saint-singers of Tamil Nadu from the 6th century searched for ways of expressing a more intimate relation with their God than ascetic self control and found it in the Aham genre of poetry of the earlier Sangam age. This genre focussed on various aspects of the love relationship between a man and a woman. This was done according to three strict grammatical prescriptions. Each poem should be in the first person singular, the person relating his own feelings; the identity of the speaker and listener should never be revealed and the mood for the emotional expression should be created by a description of a suitable natural surrounding. These rules elaborated in *Tolkappiyam* were intended to transmit the experience directly from the poem to the listener and were followed faithfully in the large corpus of Aham poetry<sup>29</sup>. In addition to its power of communication, Aham was the dominant literary genre of Tamil and a genre which the Tamils were inordinately proud of. The Bhakti poets, particularly the Vaishnavite ones or Alvars, naturally took it as a model and cast

themselves in the transvestite role of the pining lovelorn beloveds of Lord Krishna while the Saivite poets expressed similar feelings for Siva. The emotional intensity and beauty of their hymns thus created Bhakti Śrūṅgara or devotional eroticism in poetry. The hymns were meant to be sung in select Panns, i.e., melodic modes, and to certain rhythm or *tala*, and they enriched thereby the evolving South Indian Pann system of classical music. Dance was already practised by female 'courtesans' in Tamil Nadu and there was the older tradition of the Panan as the singing husband and Virali, his dancing wife, in the Sangam period. Saint Appar also refers to a substantial number of dancers in his hymns on Tiruvarur<sup>30</sup>. These relationships of Pann music and dance with the hymns by themselves might have taken over Bhakti Śrūṅgara into dance as its main theme. But there were two other factors which hastened this marriage. One such factor took shape when Saivite Bhakti poets transmuted another older Tamil poetic genre or Aarruppadaï into Bhakti poetry. In that genre, a lucky minstrel or Panan who received presents from a generous king, or chieftain shows the way to his castle to another indigent minstrel. The Saivite Bhakti poets or Nayanars in particular took up this model first and sang of Siva as a munificent king with the temple as his palace and the Alvars also adopted this model. Following this, several deities acquired royal names such as Nataraja, Rangaraja, Govindaraja, Tyagaraja, Rajagopala and the like. Thus Aham-based Bhakti love poetry and the identification of the deity as King together legitimized the offering of music and dance in the temple as *rajopachara*, i.e. sensuous offerings to a munificent art-loving king-god. The simultaneous transmutation of Aham and Aarruppadaï genres into devotional poetry onto music and dance indirectly encouraged the shaping of the institution of dancing girls for the temple and the royal court as these two were equated metaphorically<sup>31</sup>.

Dancing girls were known in the early stages of the Bhakti movement as Appar refers to them in his song on Tiruvarur. The offering of music and dance to the deity as *rajopachara* was promoted by the existing population of dancing girls and received the sanctification of the Agamas which were taking shape from the 6th century onwards. A third factor, that of politico-economic support, came into play to strengthen the practice of *rajopachara*. New dynasties like Chola looked for legitimation by temple institutions and in return made generous land grants to support the temple and its artists. This practice was entrenched by Raja Raja Chola's glorification of dancing Siva or Adalvallaṇ as his personal deity, his commandeering of over four hundred dancing girls from various other temples and settling them in four streets round his Brihadeeswaram temple, and his general effort to replicate the Chidambaram format in his Thanjavur temple<sup>32</sup>. Inscriptions therein not only refer to the four hundred dancers and their specializing in Aariyam and Tamil songs separately but also to the titles conferred on those who interpreted Tevarams best such as 'Sambandha Talaikkoli'<sup>33</sup>. Thus did Bhakti Śrūṅgara generate the female monopoly of interpreting it in dance by the concatenation we have traced above.

There remains a nagging question. If Bhakti Śrūṅgara was essentially the creation of inspired mental transvestite males why did it not generate the tradition of male dancers interpreting it? The obvious answer is that it was not practical. It is one thing for an odd love-drunk male devotee fantasizing as a lovelorn woman in literature and quite another



to build an institution of male dancers interpreting erotic songs on that basis. In fact, when it was built into 'Araiya sevai', it became a marginal phenomenon. Moreover, Bhakti Śrūngara developed along with the deity-as-king concept and generated a twin genre of poetry expressing a woman's love for the king himself which I have named decadent royal romantic poetry<sup>34</sup>. Obviously, it would be incongruous if not obscene for a male dancer to interpret in dance the transvestite metaphor before royalty.

To sum up, the Nataraja cult has had very little effect as a model or inspiration for producing a tribe of male dancers because of the concatenation of Bhakti Śrūngara drawn from Aham poetry coupled with the deity-as-king metaphor, and the royal support of temples in return for legitimation, onto the emergence of the institution of temple dancing girls or Devadasis. That institution itself continued to strengthen the female-dancer syndrome over the centuries as it created its own endogamous caste system of Peria Melam and Chinna Melam, with their own codes of marriage and pecking order. The men became musicians essentially playing on instruments such as the Nagaswaram and Veena while others developed as dance teachers. As for the women, some were dedicated to the temple as dancers or in other temple services and a few others married within the caste. The same system developed in other parts of South India, e.g. in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The system might have started to decay by the exhaustion of artistic resources but it received a boost in the 17th century. The dance repertoire which was drawn mostly from Tamil Bhakti poetry was enriched by an inspired members of this caste, Muthu Thandavar, fathering the 'Padam' with separate musical limbs, i.e. Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanam to suit dancing, but on the same basis of Bhakti Śrūngara<sup>35</sup>. About the same time, Kshetragna in Andhra Pradesh inaugurated the same Padam genre. In both cases it was expected to be danced by a woman, as it was more sharply erotic than devotional poetry—portraying a woman in all her moods of jealousy, love, quarrelsomeness or tenderness or wantonness.

Later developments in musical composition, temple administration and princely patronage all strengthened the institution of the female dancer, with her dance based on Bhakti Śrūngara alternating with royal romantic poetry. Thus the creation of the most elaborate dance composition, the Varnam, in the 19th century strengthened it further to include several shades of the erotic with reinforcing digressions called *sancharis*<sup>36</sup>. Other socio-economic developments, such as the rise of a sizeable landowner class under the stable British Indian political system and their tendency to use their agricultural surplus in expensive weddings including dance performances further strengthened the institution of the female dancer<sup>37</sup>. In fact, almost all socio-historical, economic and artistic factors favoured the female dancer.

#### IV

It follows from our account that gender monopolies in Indian classical dance have depended less on internal aesthetics or religious prescriptions but more on a variety of competing and converging socio-historical factors—sometimes under the guise of religion

or reasons of state. The secularization of Indian society makes possible a socio-historical analysis like the one we have attempted to expose forgotten and hidden factors and to look at gender participation more functionally. When Rukmini Devi opted to produce dance-dramas after putting individual dancing on the backburner, she naturally looked for male dancers for male roles and took them from Kathakali practitioners—as few were available from among Bharatanatyam dancers. In course of time Bharatanatyam has gradually produced its own male dancers. Conversely Kuchipudi quickly accepted females as individual dancers or for roles in dance-dramas, and Kathakali has done it a little more slowly. The increasing popularity of dance-drama in the place of individual dance has played a major part in this rational outlook on male and female roles in classical Indian dance, just the way Bharatamuni portrayed it in his classic compendium □

## NOTES

1. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, New York, 1956. He follows Meister Eckhart's view of art as religiously inspired. In most of his other works, particularly *The Dance of Siva and Other Essays*, he takes the same view and is contemptuous of the Western idea of progress. One of his oft-repeated quips was that one important function of a museum is to downsize this idea of progress.
2. V. Subramaniam (ed.) *The Sacred and the Secular in India's Performing Arts*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981.
3. Alois Riegel, *SpatRomische Kunstindustrie* (It is a pity that this important work is still not available in English.) Riegel explains how the orthodox church of Byzantium considered the Hellenic heritage too sensuous and wiped out even less sensuous parts of it like the seven-note major and minor scales.
4. Coomaraswamy rarely analyzed Christian sectarian warfare as a possible reason for the secularization of art. He was apparently unaware of the work of the Austrian Marxists on art. He glorified Dionysius' book *The Heavenly Hierarchies* as the proper basis for art appreciation. Of course he had a very strong influence on some poets and critics, e.g. T.S. Elliot.
5. *Laws of Manu* trans. by G. Buhler IX, p. 381. Apart from advising the King to keep dancers out of the city, Manu advises the student to avoid several things including oil massage and bath. In recent times, Mahavidwan Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai stopped his student U.V. Swaminathier from learning music.
6. Wendy O'Flaherty, 'Death as a Dancer in Hindu Mythology', paper presented to the Lancaster Religious Studies Colloquia, lists several instances of the conflict of dance with scriptural austerity.
7. Quoted in V. Raghavan, 'Sanskrit Drama in Performances', in Rachel Van M. Baumer and James R. Brandon (ed.) *Performance in Sanskrit Drama*, University of Hawaii Press, 1981, p. 10.
8. Raghavan, *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p.11.
10. Wendy O'Flaherty, *Ibid.*

11. R. Shama Sastry, *Kautilya's Arthasastra*, Mysore, Chapters 7, 11 & 13.
12. Buddhist Nikayas include the stories of Ambapali and Vasavadatta. *Bruhatkatha* in Prakrit includes several stories of courtesans suspected of spying.
13. V. Raghavan, *Ibid.*, p. 14.
14. *Mahabharata*, Gita Press edition, Vana Parva, (*sargas*) Chapters 14-22.
15. Tamil Sangam literature includes practically no instance of the priest-versus-artist conflict. Even *Kural* in its *Porutpaal* has only a single chapter condemning courtesans. I have argued elsewhere (*Sruti*) that the concept of *Natyadharmi* was shaped in North India as a defence against accusations based on *Dharmasastras*.
16. Bharata's *Natyasastra* translated by Manomohan Ghosh, 2nd ed., Granthalaya, Calcutta, 1967, Chapters 1 & 36.
17. Hanns Gertel, *Jaiminiya Upanishad-Brahmana*, American Oriental Society, New Haven, 1894. It is a convoluted story. Prajapati created the Gods and Death. He then teaches them to escape Death by "getting into" the metres of scientific music.
18. There was usually a curtailing of women's freedom in India following foreign invasions. This is attested by history particularly after the Muslim invasions of India, when Hindu women in Muslim-occupied areas took up *purdah*, and other restrictive practices. Along with this, the term *yagna* started losing its specific elevated meaning quite early by being applied to every human act. The Buddhists also used the term *yagna* in a positive as well as negative way. The dilution of its meaning made it necessary for dancers to apply stricter standards to claim dance as *yagna*.
19. V. Raghavan, *Ibid.*, points out recorded instances of females taking male roles and vice versa.
20. Over the centuries, the temple *puja* came to be equated with *yagna* evolving its own rules of purity. As *Kutiyattam* was performed within temple precincts in the Koothambalam, it took over these rules. The women—the *Nangyar*—who took on female roles belonged to the Nambiar caste, related to the Chakyar caste, from which the male actors were drawn and apparently observed some strict rules of purity. When *Kathakali* took shape in the 17th century, it evolved as an all-male drama mainly to play it safe in regard to ritual purity.
21. The *Purvaranga* ceremony as described in *Silappadikaram* and *Adiyarku Nallar's* commentary was a mixture of the *Natyasastra's* *Purvaranga* and some Tamil traditional practices. Instead of Indra's *Dhwaja* or *Jarjara*, a *Talaikkol* representing *Jayantha*, son of Indra, was placed on the stage. This was a stick taken from the white umbrella of a defeated king and then decorated with gold and gemstones. This was taken in a very elaborate procession and placed on the stage.
22. While dancing-Siva carvings and icons are found in several parts of India even before well known ones of the 6th century, the inclusion of dancing Siva in sacred texts was much slower. Apart from references in the *Natyasastra*, Siva finds mention in *Amarakosa* (4th-5th century AD) as *Mahanata*, the great dancer. His *pradosha* dance is described as the source of *abhinaya* in Kohala's verse 'Sandhyayam' (4th-5th century AD). None of these is scriptural but indicate the association of Siva with dance with increasing frequency, leading to inclusion in scriptures later.

23. The Nataraja temple is still known formally as Sabhanayaka's temple. According to the researches of Mu. and Ra. Raghaviegar, part of a group of immigrant Brahmins from the North settled in Chidambaram, and a large group went to Kerala, i.e. Nambudiris. See also Paul Younger's 'Chola Kingship and the Citamparam Temple' in V. Subramaniam (ed.) *Political Theorizing in Asia*, Ajanta, Delhi, 1994.
24. *Tirunavukkarasar Tevaram*, Kumara-Guruparan Sangam edition, Sri Vaikuntam, 1970, p. 10.
25. In Sankaracharya's *Prasnottara Ratnamalika*, the question "Who is worthy of upasana by Brahmins" elicits the reply: "Sambhu who takes the form of Gayatri, fire and sun". Siva was equated with all the five elements in the Agamas but in particular with fire.
26. *Tirugnana Sambandar Tevaram*, Kumara Guruparan Sangam edition.
27. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Dance of Siva and Other Essays*.
28. V. Subramaniam, 'Origins of Bhakti in Tamilnadu', Chapter 1 in *Bhakti Studies* edited by G.M. Bailey and I. Kesarcodi-Watson, Sterling Publishers Private Ltd., Delhi, 1986. See also V. Subramaniam (ed.) *The Sacred and the Secular in India's Performing Arts*, Chapters I, II & III.
29. In fact, the rule about omitting the names of heroes or heroines was so strictly observed that a superb Aham poem called *Nedunavada* was classified as Puram, as it mentioned the name of the lover-hero Vemban by mistake in passing.
30. '*Tirunavukkarasar Tevaram*', the hymn on the Tiruvadirai festival, describes the dancing girls in the procession. Another hymn refers to the firm-breasted bejewelled Rambha like women who served the temple.
31. V. Subramaniam (ed.) *The Sacred and the Secular*, Chap. III. See also V. Subramaniam, *Cultural Integration in India*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979. Appendix II on 'Courtly Romantic Poetry in Tamil'.
32. Gnana Kulendran, *Palantamilar Adalil Isai*, Thanjavur Tamil University, 1990, pp. 42-50. The appendix lists the names of the 400 dancers settled by Raja Raja Chola around the temple.
33. Gnana Kulendran, *op cit.*, pp. 37-38.
34. V. Subramaniam, *Cultural Integration in India*, Appendix II on 'Courtly Romantic Poetry'.
35. V. Subramaniam, 'Muthuthandavar: A Landmark Composer', *Sruti*, Madras, 1992 Winter Bumper issue.
36. V. Subramaniam, 'Historical Dialectic Between Music and Dance in India', *Sangeet Natak*, New Delhi, October-December 1993.
37. V. Subramaniam, 'Colonialism and Performing Arts in India', paper read at the World Congress of Sociology, Delhi, 1986.