

**“Nrithyam” (Dance) ,**  
**an integral part of Temple Worship**  
**With Reference to the Sanskrit Text**  
**“Agama Sastra”**

**By**

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The Agama Sastra are a collection of scriptures of several religious devotional schools.

Agama is essentially a tradition used mainly for 3 religious' cult, the Shaiva Cult (Worship of Lord Shiva), Vaishnava Cult (Worship of Lord Vishnu) and the Shakthi cult (Worship of Goddess Shakthi).

Agama texts describe cosmology, philosophical doctrines, ritual practices, four kinds of yoga, temple construction, deity worship and ways to attain enlightenment through Dharma (moral values), Artha (prosperity), Kama (psychological values) and Moksha (liberation, spiritual values).

Nrithyam (Dance) is mentioned as an integral part of temple worship in Agama Sastra.



**Agama Sastra is divided into four parts as follows:**

- 1. Jhana (Jhanapadha) - Includes the philosophical and spiritual knowledge.**

In Jhana pada, Nrithyam or Natyam is mentioned as a manifestation of spiritual knowledge using gestures and performed to make the audience understand the philosophy and spirituality involved in a particular religion. It is performed during Uthsava (periodic temple occasions). Number of devotees visit the temple during that time.

- 2. Yoga – Describes the mental and physical practices.**

Yoga pada – In this, Nrithyam or Natyam is mentioned as a one of a kind yoga practice, which leads to unification and higher

consciousness. The one who practice Nrithyam will overcome all desires and will be enlightened.

### **3. Kriya – Ways of worship and temple construction.**

Kriya Pada – In this, Nrithya Mandapam or Natya Mandapam is mentioned to be an integral part of the temple construction in certain regions and traditions. Here, Nrithya or Natyam is also mentioned as a service or offering (as upachara).

### **4. Charya – Rituals or Rules to perform a worship.**

Charya pada – In this, it is mentioned about when Nrithyam should be performed, where it should be performed, and how long it should be performed.

## **Significance of dance performance during Uthsava**

### **(Periodic Temple Occasions):**

- Nrithyam is performed as a part of Uthsava. This is where Nrithyam is used as a tool to convey philosophical, spiritual and moral values to the devotees or followers.
- Stories from mythology are enacted along with relevant music, which gives better understanding of the presiding deity in the temple.
- The concepts of Vedas and Upanishads are also enacted with proper musical rendering, which serves as an audio-visual presentation of the texts that can be understood by all classes of people.



*Description: Dancer Reaching out to the audience to get their attention in order to convey the moral and spiritual values in the performance effectively.*

*PC: Manu Narayanaswami*

*Dancer: Lakshmi Karthik*



*Description: Dancers enacting stories from mythology during a temple festival (Uthsava).*

*Denoting: Hindu Mythological character Lord Sri Rama (centre), with his wife Sita (left) & brother Lakshmana (right).*

PC: Subramanian S

Dancers: Meenakshi, Lakshmi, Gayatri.

### **Significance of dance as an (Upachara):**

- In Agama sastra, many ways of worships are explained. In one particular way of worship, god is treated as a king. The temple priest and the devotees offer many services for his pleasure. These services or luxuries offered to the Lord are called as Rajopachara (Raja means kings and Upachara means service/ luxury).
- There are varies kind of Rajopachara, like holding an umbrella, showing a mirror etc. In this, Dance and Music has an important role.
  - o Geetham - Music
  - o Vadhyam – Instrumental Music
  - o Nrithyam – Dance in praise of Lord, In front of the Deity.

The offering is narrated as follows:

“Geetham Shravyami”, (I offer to God, this music/song to his ears to please him)

“Vadhyam Goshayami”, (I offer playing of the instrument to Lord for his pleasure)

“Nrithyam Darshayami” (I offer this visual prestation of dance to the Lord)



To understand why “Nrithyam” has a huge role and its integral part of temple worship. One should be aware of the Origin of Dance, as described in the first chapter of Natya Sastra.

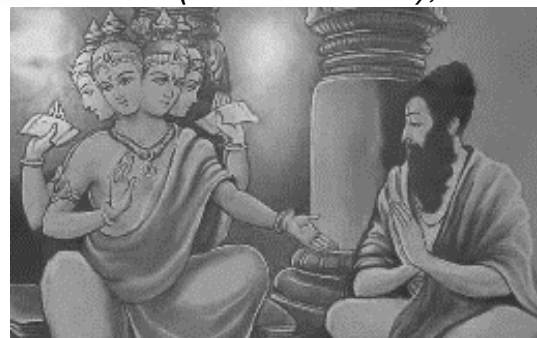
### Origin of Dance according to Natya Sastra:

During the end of Krita Yuga (Golden Age) and the beginning of the Tretha Yuga, (approximately 10,000 BCE) people on earth became addicted to excessive desire, greed, jealousy and anger. The Demi-Gods along with Indra (the kind of devas) approached Lord Brahma Deva (the God of Creation) to create a new Veda (principles) which removes all evil.



Lord Brahma Deva deeply meditated and created the fifth Veda called Natya Veda as a collective form of all four Vedas. He took the pattern of lyrics from the Rigveda, music from Samaveda, the language of gestures and emotions from the Yajurveda and the aesthetic experience or Rasa from Atharvaveda. Brahma also assured that

the one who practices this form will overcome all his worldly pleasure and will be enlightened. He will acquire *Dharma (moral values), Artha (prosperity), Kama (psychological values) and Moksha (liberation, spiritual values)*. Then Brahma Deva handed over the Natya Veda to Bharata Muni to practice and preach this to the world along with his 100 children.





*Bharata then felt it would not be possible to carry out this practice without the inclusion of women dancers. Brahma then created Apsaras or Celestial nymphs and presented them to Bharata.*

*The first 'Natya' presenting was then performed in front of Lord Shiva. After observation, Lord Shiva contributed to the text - the Karanas and Angaharas, and then passed it through Tandu (A sage). Hence, it's called as Tandava. Goddess Parvathi included mudras and gestures to express subtle emotions and that formed Lasya.*



*The Natya Veda of Brahma Deva is believed to have 36,000 verses and was difficult to understand for the people in earth. Bharatha Muni recreated the text according to the understanding of common people and named it as Natya Shastra. The Natya Shastra has 6000 verses with 36 chapters It covers various topics such as dance, music, theatre, painting, sculpting etc.*



*It was taught to Usha, the Sun Goddess. Usha passed it to the Gopikas living in Vrindavan. Thus, it came to earth and its practiced till date with great devotion and dedication. **From this it's very clear that, dance is created by the Gods themselves to overcome all worldly pleasure and it is a form of worship till today.***

