Abstract
This paper is abstracted from my larger research where I study the aesthetics of bharatanatyam through the axis of spectacularization of the bharatanatyam body at different points of its history. I focus on the period between the end of 1950s and 1970s, which sets off the rupture between popular aesthetics in film and classical aesthetic in the mainstream bharatanatyam world. This period led to the complete transition of transmission techniques to a tertiary model of learning from its primary habitus in hereditary practitioner households spearheaded as early as 1936 by Rukmini Arundale through her institution of mass learning and transmission, Kalakshetra. Several dance schools mushroomed among the bharatanatyam middle and upper class, largely populated by upper-caste, Brahmin female students of hereditary nattuvanar teachers following the lead set by Arundale’s tertiary model of transmission. This period was punctuated by a loss of dancing bodies. Each of these drivers shape the aesthetic orientation of the field. The pedagogical methods within bharatanatyam classrooms and the performances engendered by those methods and dance techniques, respond to these macro drivers and steer the aesthetic orientation of the field.

Introduction
Bharatanatyam dance in the popular narrative has claimed to be a dance aesthetics by tracing itself to temple sculptures and Sanskrit texts dating as far back as two million years (Subrahmanyam 10). Many scholars have challenged this “mytho-poetic” historical narrative (Soneji and Peterson; Soneji, Bharatanatyam: A Reader and Unfinished Histories; Harp, “Rewriting”; Meduri, Nation; Srinivasan). Taking this discourse as a departure point, my research traces the aesthetic history of the bharatanatyam body between the early to mid-twentieth century and current times (Mahadevan). The journey of bharatanatyam aesthetics even in this short period is a history of rupture, loss, reimagining, and calibration.

Apart from the somatic methods used to discipline the physical dancing body, the hegemonic players or forces—upper-caste educated elites, and the prevailing patriarchy—from the early twentieth century have used the body of the female dancer to further tenets of nationalism, and upper-caste Hindu womanhood (Anagol; Anandhi; Ramaswamy; Silva; Sinha; Sreenivasas; Sunder Rajan; Chatterjee). Now during the social media, the Hindu woman continues to be a spectacle, albeit through the additional qualities of being independent, expressive, and bold as a means of transitioning the bharatanatyam dancer to the global stage. This, thus, while the hegemonic discourse in the early-twentieth-century muted female sexuality, film-makers, teachers, and the audience have foregrounded it, though by masking it in more appealing discourses of spirituality and national pride. This disciplined, gendered, and sexualized body continues to sustain a spectacle and steers the direction of aesthetics in the bharatanatyam field.

I have divided the aesthetic history of bharatanatyam into three different waves each shaped by distinct socio-political-economic forces. Each of these drivers shape the aesthetic orientation of bharatanatyam, positioning it as a spectacle for popular consumption in that period and thereby place certain demands on the body and mind of the bharatanatyam dancer. The pedagogical methods within bharatanatyam classrooms and the performances engendered by those methods and dance techniques, respond to these macro drivers and steer the aesthetic orientation of the field.

The major driver for the first wave, from the 1930s to the 1950s, was the shift in knowledge transmission from its primary habitus in hereditary practitioner households to the emerging middle class. Knowledge transfer in hereditary practitioner households was through immersive and lived-knowledge transmission. However, the students of these hereditary practitioners from the emerging middle class extracted portable modules of knowledge for the purpose of mass transmission. This diluted, modular, and fragmented understanding of the bharatanatyam tradition is what has been transmitted since the mid-twentieth century in dance classrooms around the world (Krishnan, 161–202). These nattuvanars were the conduit through which the dance moved away from the bodies of Isai Vellalars to women outside the community (Srinivasan). The movies created an opportunity for nattuvanars to establish themselves and prove their expertise to a larger public in this newly emerging bharatanatyam field.

By the end of the 1950s several of these nattuvanars exited the movie industry and set up dance schools outside among the rising upper- and middle-class society. This was a significant period of shift in pedagogical methods from a primary method of learning and knowledge transmission to a primary one. This paper will focus on this period of bharatanatyam’s aesthetic history and discuss the censoring of bodies, practices, and repertoires that took place at this time. Several practices, bodies, and repertoires were added to the corpus as the dominant narrative directors were not interested in the composition of the dances, aesthetics, and public reception of bharatanatyam.

Aspects of the dance and added others to make the dance palatable for the emerging middle class and acceptable “respectable” young women. Globalization brought with it a certain adventure, where dancers started to gradually move away from the confines of their primary schools of learning and were exposed to more ways of dancing, through both collaborative and competitive means. The transnational flow of visual culture opened up new methods of cultural production and dissemination that impacted mainstream bharatanatyam practice. The political economy of dance—venues, funders, and artists—concentrates on maximizing the frequency and reach of market engagements in the field by using technologies of dissemination and elitist access to information guiding aesthetic decisions in the bharatanatyam marketplace.

For the purpose of this paper, I will be focusing on the end of the first wave from the late fifties to the beginning of the second wave from the early sixties to the seventies. While globalization has already reared its head by the mid-sixties, I will not be delving in detail on its impact on bharatanatyam aesthetics in this paper.

This paper narrates the story of this rupture and loss by analyzing:

a. The divide between popular and classical aesthetics created in the early twentieth century when bharatanatyam moved from the popular aesthetic of the movies into the classical aesthetic of bharatanatyam mainstream as we know it today.

b. The shifts in knowledge transmission from its primary habitus in hereditary practitioner households to the emerging middle class. Knowledge transfer in hereditary practitioner households was through immersive and lived-knowledge transmission. However, the students of these hereditary practitioners from the emerging middle class extracted portable modules of knowledge for the purpose of mass transmission. This diluted, modular, and fragmented understanding of the bharatanatyam tradition is what has been transmitted since the mid-twentieth century in dance classrooms around the world (Krishnan, 161–202). These nattuvanars were the conduit through which the dance moved away from the bodies of Isai Vellalars to women outside the community (Srinivasan). The movies created an opportunity for nattuvanars to establish themselves and prove their expertise to a larger public in this newly emerging bharatanatyam field.

2 This paper is an abstracted version of my longer research and study. For a more detailed understanding of the three waves and their impact on bharatanatyam aesthetics see Mahadevan, Bharatanatyam Body.

3 Much has been written about the complicated sociopolitical history of bharatanatyam between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that led to the phenomenon of female hereditary practitioners of the art form commonly referred to as devadasi. For a detailed account of this history with primary and secondary sources refer Srej (Bharatanatyam: Pedagogy, spectacle, structures of feeling).

Bharatanatyam dance, since its reconstruction in the early twentieth century, has been a predominant Hindu dance form throughout the dance form, they largely adopt practices, names, languages, and other markers to pass as Hindu in the bharatanatyam mainstream.
Popular and Classical Aesthetic

In the early twentieth century, bharatanatyam was establishing itself as an "urban, devotional and Sanskritized" cultural practice. The language of classicalism was first applied to bharatanatyam only during the process of its reinvention at the hands of the English-educated Brahmin elites in Madras in the 1930s (Krishnan 7). Thus, the classical arts were constructed in opposition to the popular arts such as cinema. The ways nattuvanar-choreographers responded to the music presented to them in the films reflect the essence of the regional and vernacular cultural origins of bharatanatyam. However, with the rise of Indian nationalism, when the country was marching towards independence, upper-caste, educated elites reconstructed several indigenous artistic traditions into what we consider "classical" today. Indigenous practices in multiple parts of India were repatriated and transformed for nationalist purposes (Soneji and Peterson; Bhakle; Meduri; Harp; Soneji; Bharatanatyam and Unfinished Gestures; Subramaniam; Weidman). Upper-caste/class, educated elites reformulated these indigenous art forms to serve as a source of national pride—cultural nationalism—through methods deemed scientific and aligned with ideals of caste/class. These methods included standardizing pedagogy, institutionalizing transmission, theorizing without Sanskrit texts or shastras, and undermining practice by relegating it as whimsical.

Shastras, standardizing pedagogy, institutionalizing transmission, through methods deemed scientific and aligned with ideals of caste/class, educated elites reformulated these indigenous art forms to serve as a source of national pride—cultural nationalism—through methods deemed scientific and aligned with ideals of caste/class. These methods included standardizing pedagogy, institutionalizing transmission, theorizing without Sanskrit texts or shastras, and undermining practice by relegating it as whimsical. This period from the late 1950s into the second wave at the beginning of 1960s marked the move from popular to classical aesthetics paralleling the move of nattuvanars from the movie industry into forming what is known today as the bharatanatyam mainstream. What was dance in the midst of the other aspects of life? How was it more proficient and transmitted? What are the series of events that prompted nattuvanar-choreographers to exit movies? The next section of this paper will address these questions.

In his book Celluloid Classicism, Hari Krishnan elaborates, through detailed ethnographic research, the status of dance in the movies. His study is a discourse on colonialism, nationalism, orientalism, and rising patriarchy, and how these have affected the conception and presentation of dance in Tamil cinema and how in turn cinema dance influenced public sentiment. Putcha discusses a similar, concurrent process in Telugu movies in which a "constellation of social forces such as anti-colonialism, nationalism, and migration have at once amplified and ventriloquized" the female dancer’s voice (Putcha 3). I will be drawing from Krishnan’s detailed research along with my own to draw attention to ways in which movement aesthetics, body holds, and sartorial choices impacted the aesthetics of bharatanatyam as it moved from the realm of the popular in the movies to the classical in the mainstream bharatanatyam world.

Specifically with respect to bharatanatyam, female hereditary practitioners danced in the courts, in the temples, in ritual and non-ritual contexts, in the homes of people, at community festivals. However when the dance moved predominantly to a concert hall, a new "classical" repertoire and therefore pedagogy was formalized. A syncretic dance form that could be "less formal" at times was realigned selectively into the bharatanatyam that we know today.

Following her emphatic condemnation of bharatanatyam as it appears in the movies Rukmini Arundale, founder of Kalakshetra (1936), was one of the prime shapers of this "classical" imaginary. Amanda Weidman refers to an article written by Rukmini Arundale in Creative Spirit, published by the Theosophical Society in the early 1940s. Arundale calls attention to this shift in aesthetics of dance as an awakening from the physical level of the "acrobatic" to a higher level where the slightest of movements conveys higher expressions and meaning: "A tiny finger lifted with meaning," she concluded, "is far more thrilling than all the turns and gyrations and tricks of the circus performer" (Weidman 203).

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Specifi...
In the Tamil film Dr. Savithri (1955), performers Sayee and Subbulakshmi present a dance in a proscenium setting that seems like a typical bharatanatyam performance. Even though K. V. Raja, the choreographer, tried to copy the postures of Muthuswamy Pillai who worked under Muthukumarani Pillai and Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai who in turn taught Rukmini Devi, one observes that our current standards of postures are exalted in the minds of the audience, and lifted elbows is not emphasized. The song praises the male protagonist, possibly a male deity or a local god. However, if we look at the “costumed” bodies, they are not holding their bodies tall, as students are taught today, but rather there is a softness in the leg, and the knees seem to move fluidly. When they use their hands to gesture, they do so without being classified to form angular lines as dancers are taught in classrooms today.

Video clips of female hereditary dancer Balasaraswati (1918–1984) also show that her style of dancing did not have the erect spine of Kalakshetra dancers, although it is a little more angular than both Kamala Lakshman’s and Sayee and Subbulakshmi’s dance in the movies at that time. This difference could be because most of Kamala, Sayee, and Subbulakshmi performances are part of movies whereas Balasaraswati’s dance is in a proscenium setting. We may see more fluidity in film dancers because they perform inside the cinema medium, but also because during this period—the end of the 1950s to the beginning of the 1960s—many of the body positions performed by cinema dancers that required suppleness were relegated as not “classical” enough by the bharatanatyam mainstream.

Kamala was much younger than Balasaraswati, and when Kamala was a child artist in the movies and was developing her career as a solo dancer outside of cinema under the guidance of her nattuvanar teacher Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai, Bala was already in her thirties. Bala’s dance did not have the body bends and athleticism of Kamala’s, but she still possessed a suppleness in the way she held her body that seemed more typical of dance during the 1940s and early 1950s. I am contrasting a supple body posture to the erect postures that was later introduced as the norm largely by Kalakshetra and has come to stay. Beryl de Zoete (1897–1962), is a critic and ethnologist of Dutch descent, who traveled independently in South Asia and wrote three ethnographies. She visited India in the 1950s and in a chapter dedicated to Balasaraswati

Kamala Lakshman was known for her acrobatic moves (Chori Chori, 1956)

the basic body posture might still be very representative of the bharatanatyam aesthetics of those times. I also draw attention to the body hold and posture: She does not have an erect spine, and her body bends without rigorous attention to the core. These were characteristics of bharatanatyam at that time. Her contemporaries also possessed a more supple way of holding the body, which might have enabled them to do her body pose and “acrobatic moves” (as Rukmini Arundale called them), but was not favored by the classical formidabile idiom outside of the movies.

In her book The Other Mind: A Study of Dance in South India, De Zoete writes about a dance concert by Kamala, in order to set her apart from Balasaraswati. She reports that although the audience could not see it, Kamala’s movements were described by Muthuswamy Pillai as a “snake-charming dance” of Kanyakumari Pillai. Despite her teacher’s approval, the audience loudly applauded Kamala’s musicality of the dance, while De Zoete comments on Kamala’s snake dance as “disgust and morbid pollution for caste Hindus”. The “acrobatic” dancing disliked by Indian elites was also considered a “ritual pollution for caste Hindus” (Singleton 6). It was exoticized, and to that extent was a spectacle in which the ‘world’ and the ‘other’ could be distinguished.

Kamala was accompanied by her teacher, the nattuvanar practitioner Ramaiah Pillai, in this concert. The implication was that these moves were introduced in the main body of the dance under his approval and guidance. These moves that were sometimes relegated and eschewed as not “classical” enough were part of the choreographic choices by hereditary nattuvanars like Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai. In the same chapter De Zoete applauds Balasaraswati for her simplicity and purity of style. While Kamala stayed away from the erotic javalis and the gestures associated with them, she retained some of the acrobatic moves that were choreographed for her by Vazhuvoor Ramiah Pillai. Balasaraswati, on the other hand, was from the hereditary practitioner community, and while she stayed away from the “acrobatic feats” of Kamala, she argued for sensuality in the dance, as according to her, all of dance was spiritual including its erotic elements. But the “classically minded” had to leave out both the erotic javalis of Bala and the acrobatic moves of Kamala, leaving space for a newly forming aesthetic of the then bharatanatyam mainstream.

There is a clear parallel between the history of bharatanatyam aesthetics from the early twentieth century, which veered toward spectacularization, and the history of yoga of that time. The reflexivity that Arundale brought to her pedagogical methods at Kalakshetra caused a radical rupture in the aesthetics of the dance form. What we consume as bharatanatyam today traces its origin not to a distant past, or to the past represented by the hereditary performers of Thanjavur, but to this legacy of corruption revealed by Rukmini Arundale at Kalakshetra in the 1930s.

6 See note by dance-researcher, Swarnimala Ganesh as she emphasizes this aspect of “finding the hat” in her recent post on Instagram. Here she terms asdf as the older version of what we practice as bharatanatyam today. It needs a longer discussion to validate and nuance this argument of Ganesh but for our immediate purpose I draw attention to these two videos to elaborate on the difference between Kamala Lakshman’s body hold and what is assimilated as bharatanatyam aesthetics today. Available on Instagram at https://www.instagram.com/reel/CU7rlJDBIja/?igshid=MWZjMTM2ODFkZg== (October 11, 2021); https://www.instagram.com/post/CTULCDhXsSfGpI5ZTBMWvOFc5Yz2IzcLkJh2/ (October 12, 2021).

7 See De Zoete (p. 165) for a colonial account of acrobatic dance written in 1870. Also see Soneji (“Performing Pasts” 5), where a primary source article by R. Reghunath Chary from 1885 explains that young girls need great “applity of constitution” to dance bharatanatyam. See also, Paddarsharma (The Whole World 25) for Balasaraswati’s account of dancers performing brave acrobatic feats while dancing Vishwani Ala Taran varnam in three tempos.
As a traditional practitioner, Bala positioned herself contrary to Rukmini Devi, an upper-caste, Brahmin dancer. She challenged Rukmini’s effort to “cleanse” the repertoire, arguing that everything that is part of the dance is an offering to God and that there was no need to cleanse it, if the dancer approached spiritually. However, they were both responsive to the rhetoric of anticolonial nationalism, rooted in Hindu spirituality, finding form in the arts. This spirituality was positioned in opposition to the Western materialism. The knee drops, the ecstatic back bends, the rati mudras and many other embodied practices, such as biting the lower lip to show erotic longing, a movement of the shoulder to show displeasure called tol thali (Samson 79) or pushing one’s shoulder were ejected from the aesthetic vocabulary of the “classical” idiom of dance. These moves represented a physicality, sexuality, and materiality that was undesirable in the spiritual framing of the classical idiom.

The dominant feature of the Kalakshetra aesthetic lies in its overpowering physicality. While Rukmini Arundale criticized a certain kind of physicality, she embraced another. She opposed any element of spectacle that she saw as preventing the dance from reaching the spiritual realm, its true purpose. Ironically, the means she used to achieve this purity was derived from a more globalized, Western aesthetic of lines and angles, creating yet another visual spectacle.

Primary to Tertiary Methods of Knowledge Transmission

The beginning of 1960s through the 70s saw the mushrooming of several dance schools set up by hereditary practitioners and sometimes senior students of hereditary practitioners. This was a significant period that clearly marked a shift in pedagogical methods from a primary to a tertiary, or a more modular method of learning and knowledge transmission. While this move to tertiary learning was initially marked by the inception of Kalakshetra in 1936 and from there proceeded steadily but sporadically, the 1960s marked the beginning of a more pervasive shift into a tertiary method of knowledge transmission across the bharatanatyam dance field.

Rukmini Arundale, the founder and visionary behind Kalakshetra, faced initial resistance from the traditionalists who had by this time started to build careers outside the Kalakshetra. Dance for you is only a pastime. It will not be a profession, like it is for those I teach. Their life is community. Dance for you is only a pastime. She married Dr. George Arundale (1878–1945), an Englishman and a prominent member of the Theosophical Society. At a very young age, she accompanied Arundale on several world tours where she was exposed to different cultures (Samson 53–74). Her reflexive attitude toward bharatanatyam imposed a critical distance between her and the dance form, a distance that arose out of the tertiary position compared to the devadasi dancers. Her primary habitus grounded in being a Brahmin upper-caste woman, the idea of world religion as furthered by the Theosophical Society, the notion of identity as a drag for the Arundale’s Kalakshetra and all subsequent methods of bharatanatyam transmission. This tertiary method of knowledge transmission had a cumulative and irreversible effect on the bharatanatyam body, its idiom, aesthetic orientation, structures of transmission, and its reception in public consciousness.

Wacquant (2010) argues that knowledge gained through this method (tertiary) is grounded in a primary habitus, in this case, nation, gender, caste, class, etc., and is mediated through a scholastic habitus or a system of learning that becomes “both a motivating resource and a built-in hindrance to gaining mastery of a corporeal craft, insofar as it inclines the apprentice to a reflexive attitude” (7). I observe that this hindrance that Wacquant mentions is a crucial factor in Rukmini Arundale’s assimilation of the art in her body, given how it is loaded with a level of reflexivity that changed or altered several facets of the original form.

However, Rukmini Arundale goes a step further. Not only did she assimilate the dance form in her body with a reflexive attitude, but explicitly organized a pedagogical model to transmit that knowledge through a tertiary habitus to a larger pool of students. When she established Kalakshetra School of Arts in 1936, she institutionalized this dance form and prepared it for transmission to a wider audience. Ironically, even though Rukmini Arundale learned the dance from the hereditary community — thus directly in touch with those from its primary habitus — her distance from its objective structure was much greater due to the level of reflexive intervention, that she brought to her learning. Over time, this method of learning has become the only method of learning bharatanatyam, the only method of transmission that was thus exposed to the classical orientation through this tertiary method, the sole method of assimilation for over a couple of generations before them.

Rukmini Arundale’s primary habitus was shaped by her position as an educated Brahmin woman—in other words, she carried the most of the discourse of nation. She married Dr. George Arundale (1878–1945), an Englishman and a prominent member of the Theosophical Society. At a very young age, she accompanied Arundale on world tours where she was exposed to different cultures (Samson 53–74). Her reflexive attitude toward bharatanatyam imposed a critical distance between her and the dance form, a distance that arose out of the tertiary position compared to the devadasi dancers. Her primary habitus grounded in being a Brahmin upper-caste woman, the idea of world religion as furthered by the Theosophical Society, the notion of identity as a drag for the Arundale’s spouse, shaped the way she assimilated bharatanatyam in her body and her singular manner of teaching at Kalakshetra. While the movies between the 1940s and 50s sustained the idea of spectacle both in content and form, Kalakshetra was the parallel movement, launched in 1936, that created a spectacle by furthering the vision of world religion as a drag for the art form itself. Rukmini Arundale was creating the “classical” aesthetic as opposed to the popular aesthetic of the movies.

Second Wave: Nattuvanars Exit Movies and a Tertiary Practice Begins

I have plotted the second wave of bharatanatyam as spanning four decades, starting at the beginning of the 1960s and ending with the new millennium. The decade of the 1950s was the most commercially and artistically generative for both the movie industry and the artists associated with it. The decade also marked an increased exchange of artists, choreographers, and artistic ideas between North and South India, engendering a wider range of movement styles, vocabularies, and sartorial choices to South Indian cinema. Therefore, I observe that by the end of the 1950s changes to popular aesthetics through North-South collaborations started to make bharathanatyam in movies unrecognizable even to the nattuvanar teachers, who had by this time started to build careers outside the movies and whose teaching practice was influenced by the classical aesthetic.

Dances in movies like Vanjikottai Valiban (1958), choreographed by the Bombay-based choreographer Hiralal, and starring leading upper-caste dancer-actresses like Padmini and Vyjayanthimala, were a commercial
The mimetic movement stream translated directly into an increase in content and a higher spiritual ends invoked by the classical vocabulary was drawn from largely brahmanical religious practices. This was crucial for retaining the classical status and creating a safe space for young girls from upper-caste, upper-class families to learn the dance form (Coorlawala). The precariousness between classical and popular increased in the 1960s with Tamil movies like Parthiban Kanavu (1960) starring upper-caste dancer Vyjayanthimala, Konjum Salangal (1961) starring upper-caste dancer Kamala Lakshman, Thilana Mohanirai (1968) starring upper-caste though not Brahmin, dancer-actress Padmini,11 Amrapali (1966) starring South Indian Vyjayanthimala. These movies glamourized the female dancer, through tight-fitting dresses and movements that objectified them, versus desexualizing or mobilizing them for nationalistic ends, as in the first wave.

The heterosexual female body was at the center of the visual spectacle both in the movies and outside in the growing field of bharatanatyam. However, outside the cinema in the bharatanatyam field, the dancer's sexuality was masked in her status as an upper-caste, educated, English-speaking woman who practiced this art for higher spiritual ends. Thus dancer-actresses from non-upper-caste and hereditary families, like E. V. Saroja Dutt, were starred to financial security.13 Thus, Vazhuvoor Ramaih Pillai, who were commissioned as choreographers for many movies in the 1950s, followed suit and phased themselves out of the popular aesthetic to align with the classical aesthetic that had taken root in the mainstream bharatanatyam field.

Establishment of Hereditary Lineages by Nattuvanars

Until the 1950s, senior nattuvanars like Pandanallur Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai (1869–1954), T.P. Kuppalai (1887–1981), and Kattumaran Koil Muthukumar Pillai supported younger nattuvanars like Vazhuvoor Ramaih Pillai, Kittappa Pillai, Muthuswamy Pillai, who were commissioned as choreographers for many movies in the 1950s, followed suit and phased themselves out of the popular aesthetic to align with the classical aesthetic that had taken root in the mainstream bharatanatyam field. But upper-caste dancers like Vyjayanthimala, Kamala Lakshman, and Padmini who were stars in the popular realm, also became stars in the classical.

The higher spiritual ends invoked by the classical stream translated directly into an increase in content drawn from Sanskritic sources. The mimetic movement of dance at that time in the movies.

10 Outside the movie industry, the new classical aesthetic continued to further the ideology of Hindu nationalism, gaining recognition and validation from the nation, both from its institutions and its powerful elites. A key moment in the recognition of the classical stream was the establishment of Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1950, a public entity that was set up to be the custodian of culture for India. Sangeet Natak Akademi pronounced bharatanatyam dance a “classical” dance of India, thus formalizing, and articulating something that was more a pervasive sentiment until then (Chakravorty).

11 Padmini was not a brahmin Brahmin but belonged to the upper-caste Nair community.

12 See Krishnan, Calcutta, p. 183 for an interview given for the Tamil film magazine Citra in 1954, Ramaih Pillai enquires about his angel about the state of dance at that time in the movies.

13 R. Sarasa, born in April 1924, is one of the very few women dancers from a hereditary family of dancers. While she was inspired by Kamala lakshman and wanted to dance herself, Vasuvra Ramaih Pillai discouraged her from becoming a dancer and advised her to take teaching dance as a career choice instead. He pointed to her that dancers who took up bharatanatyam were glamorous and looked like “queens” and that Sarasa with her plain looks would never stand a chance among them. Also, he argued that since the career from a struggling hathiworthy practitioner family was then very demanding and it would help them financially. Sarasa became one of the very few women who became a teacher from the Isai Vellalar community at this time. https://youtu.be/5ucF5rPdPEE

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In both first and second waves, teaching dance to young upper-caste, upper-class, educated women generated income, and so the elder nattuvanars in the family guided the junior nattuvanars to this professional route to financial security.12 Thus, Vazhuvoor Ramaih Pillai began training upper-caste, typically brahmin, dancers outside cinema and established his own following. Many other hereditary nattuvanars like K. N. Dandayudapani Pillai and Muthuswamy Pillai, who were commissioned as choreographers for many movies in the 1950s, followed suit and phased themselves out of the popular aesthetic to align with the classical aesthetic that had taken root in the mainstream bharatanatyam field.

During the 1950s and 1960s, it was common for female upper-caste, upper-class families to learn the dance for higher spiritual ends.12 He began training upper-caste, typically brahmin, dancers outside cinema and established his own following. Many other hereditary nattuvanars like K. N. Dandayudapani Pillai and Muthuswamy Pillai, who were commissioned as choreographers for many movies in the 1950s, followed suit and phased themselves out of the popular aesthetic to align with the classical aesthetic that had taken root in the mainstream bharatanatyam field.

Rukmini Arundale started her initial training with Malyapore Gowri Ammal (1892–1971) then with Pandanallur Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai at Kalakshetra, she later brought other members of her family, including Muthukumar Pillai, Chokkalinga Pillai, and K. N. Dandayudapani Pillai to aid him. Rukmini Arundale learned from the collective expertise and creativity of all these teachers who were sharing knowledge among themselves. Leading dancer-dancer Vyjayanthimala was a student of Kittappa Pillai, Malyapore Gowri Ammal, and later, K. N. Dandayudapani Pillai (Raman A tribute). Similarly, though much later, Chithra Vishweshwaran (1950– ) who was also associated with the Vazhuvoor style of dance, started her dance training at the age of ten from T. Rajalakshmi (1917–2003), a devadasi from Tiruvidaimarudur who had settled in Calcutta where Chithra lived at that time. Chithra moved to Madras from Calcutta in the 1950s to开始 train with Vazhuvoor Ramaih Pillai (Vivaswanar Namivindhiran), similarly Sudharani Raghupathy started training with U. S. Krishna Iyer Pillai (1918–2005) in the late 1940s, but then continued her training with Malyapore Gowri Ammal and Kittappa Pillai in the late 1950s (Chowdurie). The dance aesthetics imbided in all these dancer bodies was an assemblage of techniques and performance styles. The aesthetics they inhabited thus resulted from the exposure to these different teachers, a product of their different pedagogical methods at specific stages in their lives.

Many of the dancers eventually settled down with a single teacher around the 1960s. Though she trained with Muthukumar Pillai in her initial years, Kamala went on to have a long performance career under Vazhuvoor Ramaih Pillai and trace her style of dancing to him. Sudharani in her later years, began working with Raghupathy, as Their vaddus had no tradition as passed on to her by nattuvanar, Kittappa Pillai. Kamala’s sister Radha traces her style to Vazhuvoor Ramaih Pillai and did not learn from any other nattuvanars. Though having studied for just a few years with Vazhuvoor Ramaih Pillai, Chithra Vishweshwaran is still associated with his style of dancing, Alamel Valli (1956) is a disciple of Subbaraya Pillai (1914–2008) and did not learn from other nattuvanars. All the dancers mentioned above—Chithra Vishweshwaran, Sudha Rani Raghupathy, Kamala Lakshman, Radha, Rukmini Arundale—are well-to-do, English-speaking Brahmins who trained under a hereditary female nattuvanar. There were scores of female dancers from upper-caste, upper-class families who studied with these hereditary nattuvanars between the 1940s and 1970s, and who then went on to establish their own dance schools or performance careers in the 1970s. They were the first generation of tertiary students who learned the dance from their teacher, not in an immersive setting, but more often as an after-school activity, at prescribed times in specific modules.

Radha told me that her sister Kamala sequenced the steps and created a categorization of adavus in the 1970s in order to establish a modular teaching curriculum for her own students. She did not remember Vazhuvoor Ramaih Pillai following systematic procedure to create a dance curriculum in her school. She added that Kalakshetra’s teaching methodology was an important influence for Kamala in devising a systematic module for the Vazhuvoor style of teaching dance in her own school (Ramanathan, Personal interview).
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Muthukumaran Pillai (30 Aug 2009) and https://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/on-a-classical-path/article4787717.ece by Savita Gautam for the Times

The movement was conveyed through a generated vocabulary of seated movements, gestures, or words that were usually developed over the

While a few students translated the intention of the teachers. The

The vocabulary of words and gestures through which the

14 While a few nattuvanar-like Multiukumaran Pillai, Muthuwami Pillai, and Karajayarasaumudan Pillai were known to demonstrate movement, most of the

The students of the second generation of tertiary teachers

The categorization of the adavus to facilitate modular teaching must have been done by

Rukmini Arundale is said to have given her first public performance within six months of training with her teacher Pandanallur Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai. I doubt if there is a system of adavu classification that

Rukmini Arundale had to master before moving to the next

The knowledge transfer took place between a non-performing teacher and their teacher. However, the hereditary lineage of

Rukmini Arundale started her dance career with Vazhuvoor Ramaiah Pillai's aesthetics, but, it is critical that certain steps that to her keen eye seemed to be a slight aberration from the movement vocabulary typical of her teaching. She was referring to Kalakshetra, which was on the other side of the Adyar Bridge, and also Sudhanruthan Raghupathy, senior disciple of Kittappa Pillai, resides and teaches in Mylapore.16 Teachers were respectful of the skills and aesthetics of other dancers while fiercely guarding their own aesthetics.17 This created the opportunity for different aesthetic streams to co-exist and thrive during the second wave, fostering a healthy aesthetic diversity.

The second wave started with a rupture with the popular aesthetic and a classicization of bharatanatyam outside the movies. Many practices, movements born from the nattuvanar tradition that were associated with the Vazhuvoor tradition. This was a strategic move to give their dance a sense of authenticity (Meduri, Temple stage, 141). In sum, upper-caste Bharatnatyam dancers needed validation, authenticity, and continuity of tradition.

There were also a number of dance schools that claimed their hereditary lineage to a particular nattuvanar. While their aesthetic lineage can be traced to performing gurus, their hereditary lineage is traced to performing nattuvanar teachers. The students of Radha, a direct disciple of Vazhuvoor Ramaih, perform their theeramnattu adavu keeping the knee of the extended leg bent, rather than keeping that leg straight. However, the students of K. J. Sarasaraam started with the same theeramnattu, but after a few years, Radha, the founder and director of Sarasaraam, also lay claim to the Vazhuvoor tradition. Her students perform the same theeramnattu adavu by keeping the working leg straight rather than bending the knees as done by Radha and Kamala. Radha's students, moreover, have a very distinctive head shake attributed to Kamala's style of dancing, and which is hardly seen in any other dance school that claims the Vazhuvoor tradition (Ramanathan, Personal interview; Lakshman, Personal interview).

The first generation of upper-caste dancers

On the one hand, the first generation of upper-caste dancers

On the other hand, the upper-caste teachers

Thus, the beginning of the second wave started

15 In contrast, K. J. Sarasara and S. K. Rajaraman Pillai were still non-performing teachers from the hereditary community who started schools around the same time as these upper-caste dancers. Their students still maintained an aesthetic diversity, as neither of these teachers demonstrated movement. They also maintained a one-on-one teaching model, especially for those students who were securing opportunities to perform. However, in the case of K. J. Sarasara a certain uniformity due to large class sizes, especially in the later years as junior students watched the senior students perform both and demonstrate marks in class settings (Sunndaram, Personal interview; Ranganjan, Personal interview).

16 It is also noteworthy that as the city of Madras developed, certain districts such as South Madras were largely Brahmin occupied. Kristin Rudolph (2007) traces the movement to the upper-caste Brahmin in Madras and maps caste culture in Madras in which Adyar, Mylapore, and T. Nagar that have the highest number of sathyas where brahmins congregated to cultivate their appreciation of "high art" (pp. 58-60).

17 Lakshman, senior student of K. J. Sarasara, shared with me that the students of S. K. Rajaraman Pillai started with the same theeramnattu, but after a few years, Radha, the founder and director of Sarasaraam, also lay claim to the Vazhuvoor tradition. Her students perform the same theeramnattu adavu by keeping the working leg straight rather than bending the knees as done by Radha and Kamala. Radha’s students, moreover, have a very distinctive head shake attributed to Kamala’s style of dancing, and which is hardly seen in any other dance school that claims the Vazhuvoor tradition (Ramanathan, Personal interview; Lakshman, Personal interview).

Aesthetic Lineage Fostered Aesthetic Diversity

During the second wave, most teachers seem to be

From the 1970s through the early 1990s, these first-

One of his senior disciples, now a teacher in

From the 1970s through the early 1990s, these first-

One of the first nattuvanars who

1936. Dance schools that started much later in the 1960s.15

14 The teacher and student typically developed

nattuvanar teachers to their understanding of the styles passed on to them by their teachers. On the other hand, the upper-caste teachers

One of the first nattuvanars who

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Hereditary lineage (Gaston 140-144) was invoked by the upper-caste dancers to bring a sense of authenticity to their newly emergent classical stream. But, it is critical that certain steps that to her keen eye seemed to be a slight aberration from the movement vocabulary typical of her teaching. She was referring to Kalakshetra, which was on the other side of the Adyar Bridge, and also Sudhanruthan Raghupathy, senior disciple of Kuttappa Pillai, resides and teaches in Mylapore.16 Teachers were respectful of the skills and aesthetics of other dancers while fiercely guarding their own aesthetics.17 This created the opportunity for different aesthetic streams to co-exist and thrive during the second wave, fostering a healthy aesthetic diversity.

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Aesthetic Lineage Fostered Aesthetic Diversity

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SOUTH ASIAN DANCE INTERSECTIONS
methods of knowledge transfer. This brought the loss of implicit, familial knowledge transfer. The hereditary dance practice was the antithesis of the tertiary method of instruction and presentation. Many believe that the art of hereditary practitioner and solo performer Balasaraswati (1918–1984) died with her (Pattabhiraman and Ramachandran, 1984). Though she trained a few dancers, it might have seemed largely futile to invest in a time-based, modular teaching method given that she had six generations of hereditary dancers preceding her and another six generations preceding her teacher, Kandappa Pillai. Her training in the primary Isai Vellalar habitus sets her apart from all other well-known dancers who performed between the 1950s and 1970s. Dance was an immersive learning experience for her. She was as good a musician and vocalist as she was a dancer. Her in-depth knowledge of music and hereditary culture, and her tacit understanding of dance and its lived history infused her engagement with the dance. It would have been impossible to pass along all this through a tertiary model. At the performative level, this translated into the interruption of the seamless nexus between music and dance. The multiple aspects—historical, familial, and situational—of interpreting a line of poetry, and the embodied movements that were an extension of sociocultural lifestyle, all of which had been funneled through the art of improvisation. This practice of improvisation, which cannot be taught but rather is seasoned into a hereditary dancer over years of immersion, was lost to the stripped down, modular way of transmitting the art in the tertiary manner. Improvisation lost the race to pre-choreographed, time-bound, rehearsed routines.

The futility of teaching a grand tradition that the hereditary practitioner inherits might have been felt by Balasaraswati, Kandappa Pillai, and many other nattuvanars who were sometimes accused, especially by upper-caste, Brahmin dance students, of “hoarding” their art.18 Some amount of distrust also stems from the actions of dancers like Rukmini Arundale, who systematically took their art and did away with the community. Rukmini Arundale remarked, “It is a well-known fact that they (hereditary performers) are a small clan of people who have never believed it possible for anybody else to conduct a dance performance… Now there are so many girls from good families who are excellent dancers. The second part is to train nattuvanars from good families. I am happy that on Vaijayadasami day I was able to prove that we could do without them” (Harp 207).

While on one hand, the second wave promoted the notion of higher spiritual ends over monetary returns, on the other hand, it simultaneously opened up spaces for professionalizing and monetizing bharatanatyam through the method of mass transmission, which increased class sizes and therefore revenues. The modular way of assimilation by stripping the art from its original methods resulted in the field fragmenting into modular experts: nattuvangam, abhinaya, choreography, music, and rhythm composition, branching out as subfields within bharatanatyam. This fragmentation into subfields often resulted in a very reductive assimilation of the art by performing dancers who then transmitted this skeletal form to the next generation. One thing that prevailed in the second wave was aesthetic diversity due to the multiple aesthetic lineages that co-existed at this time. However, we see at the end of the second wave, due to increase in competition and collaborations there is a growing homogenization of aesthetics. In the third wave, this homogenization of aesthetics is further catalyzed by social media and other neoliberal manifestations that urges the bharatanatyam dancer to compete with the Western aesthetics in order to keep the heterosexual spectacle thriving in the body of the bharatanatyam dancer.

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