In the Arms of the Lord of Dance

It was 40 degrees above zero scorching Indian heat. We, spectators were bathing in sweat and sipping icy Pepsi. But the dancer after finishing two-hour performance full of quick and impetuous jumps came up to us fresh as a lotus flower. For all that she was thickly made up in a theatrical way and robed in magnificent garments, and the oil lamps were burning on the stage where she danced.

-Aren’t you hot? - I asked the temple dancer quite forgetting to make a compliment to her art in amazement. However I little understood in a cascade of strange bent poses in which she stood motionless like a statue, in swift finger work taking shapes of complex figures and in the unusual playing of eyes.

-The thoughts about the heat would distract my mind from my thoughts of Shiva, - a devadasi, a maidservant of deity answered mysteriously. - But now it is clear to me that I had danced badly. If I danced the way my guru does you wouldn’t have been hot too.

Only later I knew the gift of a true devadasi is like that of yogis who are able to melt snow and ice in Himalayas a few meters around them with the heat of their bodies. The matter here is in the perfect work with psycho energy. But I think that a classic dance even exceeds yoga. The yogi’s aim is in self-transformation. The aim of an Indian ritual dancer is by becoming a vessel of divine energy also to lead viewers to the unity with the higher forces of the Universe. It is not by mere accident that the final and at the same time the culmination moment of dance is moksha, the deliverance from hardships of existence and blending with the divine source. A dancer acts like a great extrasensory person, a healer of body and soul illnesses. The amazing fact that
Quite a lot of people who watch temple dance not only feel a special feeling of pacification but also get rid of aches especially of psychosomatic nature is explained by the mighty emanation that is coming from a dancer. Something similar happens when a shaman performs his dance. Shamans are believed to be obsessed by ghosts. But Lord Shiva Nataraja, the Lord of Dance enters the body of an Indian dancer.

Almost everyone might have seen a figurine of four-handed Shiva in this position. In his one hand he holds a drum, the image of the initial sound, rhythm, vibration out of which the Cosmos sprung out. In his second hand he holds the fire that destroys all that becomes obsolete. The gestures of two other hands show that he will protect and save those who worship him. Dancing Shiva treads under his feet a demon that embodies stagnation and passivity not letting him to take possession of human souls. The god’s dance is the symbol of the cosmic movement and renovation. When he stops there will be the end of all days.

Shiva is not only the Lord; he is also a Yogishvara, a divine yogi. The two incarnations of one god reflect the fundamental unity of two forms of meditation: one being static yogi, the other is dynamic and is embodied in temple dance. A dancer’s deepest concentration on the meaning of gestures and poses rapidly changing each other during the performance leads to the complete estrangement from body. It starts to move as if by its own will without a slightest strain.

Both in yoga and dance a body is trained with the aim to completely forget about it in the end, - explains an outstanding Indian dancer Padma Subramanyam. - It is a means thanks to which the prevalence of the corporal element in our consciousness is defeated. A dancer’s ego liberates itself from all the earthly by blending with the cosmic dance in which the universe moves. The result of such dance is like that what yogi and priests are aiming at by making sacrifices. Rest in the middle of movement is the characteristic feature of basic figures in Indian dance and are called karanas. A dancer’s body keeps firmly fixed positions in the swiftest jumps. This requires an extremely developed feeling of balance, ability for concentration and breath control - pranayama that makes yoga and dance related. The combination of statics and dynamics reveals the principles of Hindu world vision: the male principle is the passive and contemplating consciousness; the female principle is the active and world creating energy. It happens that a dancer stays in one
position for a long time, only her fingers and hands dance showing the amazing flexibility and speed. The narration goes with the help of a language of gestures called hastas and mudras.

For instance, little fingers of both hands fastened together signify intimacy, friendship, while joined index fingers on the contrary signify enmity. Two palms put one over the other with thumbs moved asides is the mudra "matsya", i.e. "a fish" one of Lord Vishnu's reincarnations. If you see thumbs start moving that means the fish has started to move.

The ancient Indian dance treatises tell about 28 positions for one hand and 24 positions for two hands. Hastas and mudras are mostly polysemanctic; their meaning is determined by the context. Thus a position called pataka (all fingers are fastened together, the palm is open) can symbolize night, light, a river, a horse, heat, opening or closing of a door, a street, equality, oath, an ideal ruler, ocean waves, dream, praising. The execution of hastas and mudras has a considerable psycho-physical effect connected with the size of hand projection upon cerebral cortex. This effect is well known to teachers and speech therapists that use finger games to develop speech and quickness of wit in children. Doctors see in hastas and mudras a stimulation of acupuncture points on fingers, as a result a head becomes clearer and lighter. The Hindus believe that hastas and mudras make Ajna-chakra, the third eye more active.

Another basic legs position is ardhamandali or semi-sitting position with knees widely moved apart. This is a position of rest that relieves the nerve system. It can be imagined as a combination of two triangles formed by a line mentally drawn between knees. Here again you can see the symbol of male and female principles: the triangle with its top down is the female principle, the triangle with its top up is the male principle. In ardhamandali these two principles are balanced that gives psychological and bioenergetics harmony.

The combination of triangles also remains in other legs positions, for instance on tiptoes position, when a dancer sits on toes with knees moved apart, and then out of this position she puts them on the floor in turns or simultaneously.
The same principle of harmonization of male and female, of solar and lunar energy lies at the basis of work with energy canals in hatha yoga. The word hatha consists of a combination of two syllables: ha that signifies the Sun and tha that signifies the Moon.

Generally, the possibilities of a spirit and body perfection found in Indian classic dance are hardly inferior to those inherent with yoga. Dance has its advantages in comparison with it. Quite a lot of people tried to practice asanas but gave up the idea because of its tediousness. Just as many women could not make themselves do physical exercises until aerobics and shaping appeared.

Padma Subramanyam disagrees that Indian classic dance requires a special inborn body flexibility or exhausting daily trainings. According to her words "the level of perfection in nritta (dance as it is without its subject component) directly depends on extent of a dancer’s perception of his/her own spiritual essence and this has nothing to do with physique or even mastery". One fine day the moment comes when dance itself in a mysterious way starts to lead a person who sincerely desires to master it. Dance as if becomes an invisible guru-instructor who gives body hints and helps it to stand in certain positions.

Anna Tkachova
Indian Classical Dance

Today there are a great number of various dancing traditions in India among which the following are marked out:

1. Classical dances
2. Semi-classical dances
3. Folk dances
4. Pop dances

The classical dance forms which trace back their roots deep into the Past, into the times of ritual temple divine services undoubtedly arouse the greatest interest.

Altogether 7 of such forms are marked out:

1. Kuchipudi [1]
2. Bharatanatyam [2]


7. Mohiniattam [7]

The three aspects - the Nritta, the Nritya and the Natya lay at the heart of each of these forms.

The Nritta is a rhythmic sequence that ends in either singing or in lyrics reciting.

The Nritya is a sum of rhythmic patterns each following a certain pantomimic interpretation (or abhinaya)

The Natya is a complete dance drama with a story-line and various characters.

Each dance form is a unique combination of these three aspects, each one possesses its own peculiarity, but Kuchipudi fully deserves its reputation of being the most beautiful and the most complex one among the above mentioned dance forms.

What is Kuchipudi? This is a unique charm that you get from subtle blending of unsurpassed technique with The Art of Drama that gets its inspiration in scriptures and mythology. Energetic jumps and turns, brave and sense full play of eyes, the vortex of uncommonly quick and skilled motions followed by a cascade of statuesque poses, that what Kuchipudi is!

A Kuchipudi dancer is required to possess not only perfect calisthenics but also perfect plasticity and developed sense of rhythm, be competent in mudras (hand-gestures with sacral meaning) and possess a thorough mastery of abhinaya (the art of pantomime). A combination of all these qualities in the presence of enormous inner energy and ability to instantly transform oneself into different characters allows the audience to perceive the dance art of Kuchipudi as light, igniting and bewitching act. Performing dances on the edges of a brass plate, executing complicated rhythmic patterns with dexterity, while sometimes also balancing a pot of water on the head is considered to be the highest level of mastery.
The Kuchipudi dance form developed in what is now known as the state of Andhra Pradesh in southern India. Kuchipudi derives its name from the village Kuchelapuram on the bank of the river Krishna. According to a legend, sultan Mohamed Kuli Kutab-Shahs’ elder nephew Abdul Tana-Shah was sent to the village Kuchipudi to supply it with water. A well was dug out by the order of Tana-Shah. The joy of the village dwellers knew no limits and in order to express their gratitude they organized a grand performance where they demonstrated their art of dancing. Being a great connoisseur of art, Abdul Tana-Shah was so impressed by the dance drama that he granted the village of Kuchipudi to the artists with the promise that they would continue the tradition of performing. From that day onwards this dance form became known as Kuchipudi.

But Kuchipudi provides to have been popular long before Tana-Shah.

Over 3000 years ago Bharata Muni the author of Natyashstra (a holy writ dedicated to the Art of Drama) explained some aspects of dance referring to this particular dance form. Sculptural compositions undoubtedly belonging to the same tradition were found in ancient temples and Buddhist monasteries such as Nagarjunakonda, Amaravathi and Ghantsala.

Since the moment of its origin and up to the present day Kuchipudi has undergone multiple changes.

By its origin Kuchipudi was a dance drama where each character was given one and strictly assigned part, but now Kuchipudi is basically a solo dance form. Within one performance and often within one item on the programme a dancer transforms into several absolutely different characters.
In ancient times Kuchipudi could be performed only in temples, but nowadays performances can be set on stage as well as in the open air.

And, finally, the most important thing. Earlier Kuchipudi could be performed exclusively by men and women were not permitted to perform this dance form because their beauty was believed to draw attention of spectators from the divine meaning of the drama. Moreover, men used to play all female parts and not only put on women’s dress but also had to make themselves up as women. Changes touched Kuchipudi in 1950s when indeed a revolutionary event took place: women were at last permitted to dance!

In this Kuchipudi owes a debt to the Great Guru Vempati Chinna Satyama who besides all other things holds the merit in spreading this style beyond India frontiers.

And we, a studio of classical Indian dance "Ananda Tandava" being followers of the Great Master Vempati Chinna Satyama, are happy to continue the glorious Kuchipudi tradition in Russia.
The Kuchipudi style has a rather extensive and well developed theoretical foundation. Each aspect of Abhinaya, or the expressive means available to people, is given a detailed description in such competent treatise as Natyashastra written by the great Bharatamuni. The Kuchipudi style follows Natyashastra more than any other dance form in India.

There are four kinds of abhinaya (means of expression):

1. Angika Abhinaya - the expression through various parts of body.
2. Vachika Abhinaya - the expression through voice, speech and song.
3. Sattvika Abhinaya - the expression through bhavas, i.e. feelings and emotions.
4. Aharya Abhinaya - the expression through costumes, make-up and ornaments.

Every person’s life becomes apparent by means of three aspects:

1. Manas - mind
2. Vak - speech
3. Karna - action

These three aspects altogether are called karanas. In dance they are realized as sattvika, vachika and angika abhinayas respectively.
Sattvika Abhinaya dominates mainly in Nataka (drama), Angika abhinaya is expressed in Nritta (pure dance, technique) and they are both equally strong in Nritya (solo dance).

There are three groups in Angika abhinaya:

1. Angas:
   - shiras (head)
   - hastas (gestures)
   - vaksha (chest)
   - parshva (side)
   - kati (hips)
   - padas (feet)

2. Pratyangas:
   - skadhae (shoulders)
   - bahu (hands)
   - prshtam (back)
   - udaram (belly)
   - uru (the external part of a hip)
   - jangha (the upper part of a leg)

3. Upangas:
   - drshti (eyes)
   - bhru (brows)
   - putta (eyelids)
   - kapola (cheeks)
   - nasaka (nose)
   - hanu (jaw)
   - adhara (the lower lip)
   - dasana (teeth)
   - jihva (tongue)
   - vadana (face)
   - gulbha (ankle)
   - angulya (fingers)

The movements of Pratyangas and Upangas always depend on Angas.

Hastas (hand gestures) are the part of Angika Abhinaya and include the ways of expression through the physical body (head, eyes, nose, hands etc.). In spite of the fact that the expression through gestures constitutes the minor part of Angika Abhinaya, their role is very important. Their meaning is not only decorative but they are also indicative of the specificity of communication and action in relation to
things.

With all that one should distinguish the notions of hastas and mudras. Although both of them are hand gestures we will call them hastas while speaking of a technical aspect of the dance and mudras if it is a necessary to distinguish a certain gesture in the dance that has a certain meaning.

There are three kinds of hastas:

1. Asamyuta Hastas - gestures of one hand carrying a certain semantic load.

2. Samyuta Hastas - gestures of two hands also having certain meaning.

3. Nritta Hastas - decorative gestures without a certain meaning and which are the pure dance (technique).

Among the texts on the theory of dance two most competent sources are distinguished: Natyashastra and Abhinaya Darpana. There are some differences between them in either the number of hastas or in the number of their meanings.

Thus Natyashastra mentions the following number of hastas: Asamyuta Hastas - 24, Samyuta Hastas - 13 and Nritta Hastas - 27. Abhinaya Darpana mentions 28, 23 and 13 respectively.

According to Natyashastra, Nritta Hastas are of independent origin while in Abhinaya Darpana they originate from Asamyuta and Samyuta Hastas.

This is how some differences in using hastas are explained for example between Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam, these styles are simply based on different sources.

The same holds true for viniyogas i.e. the meaning of hastas. Thus for example in Natyashastra
they mention circa 35 different meanings for Pataka hasta while in Abhinaya Darpana there are more than 40 of them.

Besides, the meanings of hastas are divided into three groups:

1. Natural - the hastas expressing simple movements: to go, to stop, to eat, to sleep etc.

2. Interpretive - the gestures imitating the most characteristic features of an object: to take water from a well, to ride a chariot, animal actions etc.

3. Symbolical - the gestures destined to portray such notions as beauty, power, opinion, male or female sex etc.

One can express almost everything in dance with the help of hastas, but their usage must not be isolated from the body movements and the meaning must necessarily be supported by expressions of face and eyes.
The origin of Indian classical dance

Once Gods called a council and were surprised to find out that they had nothing to do. There was absolutely nothing to occupy their minds with or draw their attention to. They realized that they must put an end to such situation and after taking council with each other they decided to retell stories with the help of gestures and motions. So the art of dance and drama came into being.

All this happened approximately in the era which is called the Golden Age or Krita Yuga in Indian mythology. No one heard anything about the art of neither dance nor drama then. The Golden Age lasted for hundreds of thousands of years and then according to cosmic laws Krita Yuga was replaced by Treta Yuga and everything in the world underwent great changes. Ideals, morals, ethics were distorted. People were unsatisfied and bored.

And then Indra, after calling the council of Gods suggested that they made a request to Brahma to create such an art that would be pleasant for both eyes and ears like the most beautiful things in the world, the art for the highest castes and at the same time available even to the lowest castes which were forbidden to study Vedas.

The Lord Brahma heeded their request and went into the state of meditation. In his mind he called for the four sacred Vedas, the embodiment of "the eternal truths" in Hinduism, and took the very essence from each of the four.
He took music from the Samaveda,
And words from the Rigveda,
And the law of gestures from the Yajurveda,
And the element of sentimentality (rasa) from the Atharvaveda.

He united all these components into a harmonious form and added a little of his divine talent. He created a brand new art, the art of drama or Natyaveda.

Now it was necessary to put all this into practice. To do that Brahma called for assistance to his loyal helper sage Bharata. Bharata had 100 sons and with their help he started the work. But soon he realized that his work would be too monotonous if he used only men in his project. Brahma solved the problem immediately by embracing his fingers to materialize 23 apsaras (nymphs) whom he gave to Bharata to successfully make the art of Natya come true.

Initially Bharata could use only 3 Vritis (ways of expression):

-Bharati -speech

-Arabhati-expression of manhood

-Sattwati-expression of emotions

These proved to be not enough and then Brahma, upon Bharata’s request, created the 4th way:

-Kaisiki -gracefulness

Sage Narada and gandharwas (celestial musicians) provided musical accompaniment, and the divine ensemble called Natya Brindam was formed.

Time flew fast and everyone waited for the performance impatiently. It was decided that “Indra Dwajamaha” (or festival of Indra’s banner) would be the suitable event. When all preparations were over and the great day came, the art
of Natya was introduced to the audience of Devas (gods) and Danavas (demons).

It happened so that the theme of the first drama called "Asuraparajyam" was the conflict between Gods and Demons, where Gods were victorious. Seeing this, the Demons became furious and started to weave magic spells to stop the performance and paralyze the dancers.

But Brahma stopped them and explained that it was just entertainment aimed at showing the idea of superiority of one creature over another in war or peace. A group of people only pretended to be those whom they wanted to portray and reproduced events from the past. However, the aim of the performance is not only entertainment but also the enlightenment.

Brahma said: "Do know that what I have created reflects life of three worlds - worlds of gods, demons and men and is destined equally for the High and the Low. The art of Natya will show you the value of the Good and vices of the Evil, it has absorbed the essence of all arts of all the three worlds and is going to be the never ending source of rest and enlightenment from which each one will get what he/she is looking for".

So the first performance of Natya took place.

Then Brahma offered to show the art of Natya to the great Shiva.

Shiva gladly agreed. It was decided that two dramas "Amrita Manthana" (The Churning of the Ocean) and "Tripura Daha" (The Burning of Three Palaces) would be staged in the Himalayas. Shiva surrounded by bhuts and gans enjoyed the wonderful performance. He congratulated Brahma and noted that while he was watching the drama he unintentionally remembered of his cosmic dance Nritta (or its other name - Tandava). Shiva said that it would be a great idea to unite Tandava and Natya into a single whole.

Brahma supported this idea enthusiastically and asked Shiva to train Bharata in dance technique. Shiva in his turn ordered his disciple Tanda to
train Bharata. So the dance united with the art of Natya and became its integral part. The written source Natyashastra written by sage Bharata became the climax.

They say that while Tanda was training Bharata in Tandava, Shiva’s spouse the goddess Parvati offered her own dance style - Lasya. Later she trained the demon Banu’s daughter Ushu in this style, who in her turn passed this knowledge down to the women of Saurashtra (western India).

So two main lines in Indian dance, Tandava and Lasya, spread all around the world.

In spite of the fact that the art of Natya was created by Brahma as a source of entertainment and enlightenment it is important to remember that it is also a sacrament. That’s why Brahma gave instructions to all dancers that before performance they are sure to do Puja (or Puravangaram Vriti - rituals of worshipping the Deity before performance; there are 19 of them, 9 are performed behind the scenes, the other 10 are performed on stage after curtain rise).

It is believed that if Puravangaram Vriti is ignored or performed incorrectly by performers or their teachers, such people will be in woe. Their performance will be Nicha Natyam (vulgar) and those who watch such a performance will be reincarnated as animals in next lives.

Whereas performing Puja according to all rules and with proper respect will let even mortal dancers get grace and place in heaven from Gods.

Thus the art of dance is the incarnation of the highest form of deity. That’s why classical dance in India has been considered to be worthy of Gods’ view for so many centuries.
Main deities and the cosmogonical theory

Hinduism is one of the most extraordinary religions of the world where polytheism reaches the unbelievable degree. The innumerous number of gods and goddesses decorate niches of the pantheon.

There are three supreme deities: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

They constitute the concept of Trimurti i.e. the triple image which unites Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Almighty and Shiva the Destroyer.

Besides the three Supreme Deities the Hindus also worship a great number of other gods, the most known of them are the following:

Indra: the god of war, the king of demigods, the ruler of Amaravati, one of the lower skies. He is considered to guard the Eastern part of the world.

Varuna: the all-seeing god of the Vedas who descended from his celestial palace to become the god of waters. At the same time he is the keeper of the Western part of the Universe.

Yama: the guardian of the Southern part of the world, the god of death who reigns in the Purgatory where sinners suffer until the next birth.

Kubera: the god of precious metals, stones, minerals and wealth in general, the lord of the Northern part of the world. His residence is the wonderful town of Alaka not far from the mountain Kaylasa.

Innumerous armies of dwarves (guhyakas) and mountain spirits (yakshas) are subordinate to him.

Ganesha (Ganapati): the god with the elephant head, Shiva and Parvati’s second
Ganapati: the son, the leader of ganas (demigods, Shiva's servants). He is The Obstacles Remover and the patron of all who goes in for different studies. He is the most favorite deity among the Hindus and is frequently portrayed dancing. His attributes are one broken tusk and a fat abdomen; he solemnly sits upon a rat.

Hanuman: the monkey god, son of Vayu (the god of wind), friend and true servant of Rama. In his honor monkeys are considered sacred.

Kama: the Indian god of love. Just like his European colleague he is portrayed as a handsome youth armed with a bow and arrows with a slight difference that his bow is made of sugarcane and flowers are his arrows. He has apsaras (nymphs) in his service.

Besides, all gods and demigods had wives who as a rule wore the names similar to the male names only with female endings, for instance Indrani.

Similar to the three Supreme Deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva's wives are the Supreme among the great number of female deities of the Indian pantheon and are highly revered by the Hindus.

Sarasvati: Lord Brahma's wife, the patroness of art, music and literature. She is portrayed as a young beautiful white-skinned woman with a vina (an Indian lute) and a book in her hand; she is escorted by a swan. According to a legend it was Sarasvati who invented Sanskrit.

Lakshmi: the goddess of luck and prosperity, Lord Vishnu's wife. According to a legend she appeared from the waters of the churned Causal Ocean. She is usually portrayed as a wonderful woman in her prime who sits or stands on a lotus, often with a lotus in her hand. They believe that as Vishnu's wife she becomes a wife of his every incarnation. Thus she is worshipped as Goddess Sita, Rama's spouse (see below); Rukmini, the first Krishna's queen, and Radha, Lord Krishna's eternal sweetheart.
Parvati: Lord Shiva’s wife in her benevolent aspect. In her awesome aspect she is worshipped as Durga or Kali. In her hostile aspect Parvati is portrayed as a terrible multi-handed witch armed with various weapons, with her fangs bared, with a bloody tongue and a necklace of skulls around her neck.

**VISHNU**

Vishnu is usually portrayed as a four-handed man with dark blue skin and a crown on his head who holds symbolical attributes in his hands: a shell, a disc sudarshana, a rod and a lotus. There is a sacred precious stone kaustubha on his neck. He rides Garuda, a gigantic eagle with a semi-human face. The Hindus worship Vishnu as “an all-embracing deity” meaning that all other gods are either his emanations or reflect his separate aspects.

According to a Hindu cosmogonical myth Vishnu is the eternal ruler on the planets of “the spiritual sky” – Vaikunthah (here he is called Narayana). A spiritual cloud sometimes darkens the edge of the spiritual sky brahmajiyoti. The darkened part is called mahat-tattva.

Then Lord Narayana assumes the shape of Maha-Vishnu and lies on the waters of the Causal Ocean. At the same time he stays in a meditation sleep yoganidra. The moment he exhales the innumerable numbers of universes come out of the pores of his body. They float on the surface of the Causal Ocean like bubbles in foam. All these universes only exist during a single Visnu’s exhalation.

The same Maha-Vishnu enters each of these universes as Garbhodakashayi-Visnu and in Garbha Ocean he lies upon serpent Shesha who is also one of the Narayana’s aspects.

Out of Garbhodakashayi-Visnu’s omphalos a stem of lotus grows up and on this lotus Brahma, the Lord of the specific Universe, is born. Out of his mind and body Brahma creates various forms of living creatures which give the Individual Souls (atme) the opportunity to become apparent
in the material world. He also creates the Sun, the Moon and all the planets of
"the material sky" and all the demigods who rule these planets i.e. in fact he creates his
own Universe.

The life time of a universe equals Brahma's life period and makes up 100 "Brahma years" that
exactly equals Maha-Vishnu's length of exhalation. When Maha-Vishnu inhales, all the myriads of universes each one with its own Brahma, return into the non-developed state and wait for the new Maha-Vishnu's exhalation.

In Hinduism the main cosmological cycle is kalpa, "a day of Brahma" that consists of 14 manvantaras or secondary cycles with duration of 306 720 thousand years each with big intervals between them. 360 of such days and nights make up "a year of Brahma". Every "cosmic day" Brahma creates the Universe and every "cosmic night" he absorbs it; and while he sleeps the whole universe stays in his body as a pure potency. Every manvantara contains 71 mahayugas and each mahayuga in its turn is divided into four yugas (eras): Krita (other name Satya), Treta, Dvapara and Kali. Their duration equals respectively:

Satya Yuga - 1 728 thousand human years
Treta Yuga - 1 296 thousand years
Dvapara Yuga - 864 thousand years
Kali Yuga - 432 thousand years

Every Yuga is the further decline of religiousness, morals, power, growth and duration of human life
and his happiness in comparison with the previous Yugas. It is believed we live in the era of Kali Yuga that began 5000 years ago.

Thus if one counts up the whole life time of a single Universe it will equal 311 040 000 million of human years.

While the whole multitude of universes stays revealed, the Initial Vishnu watches how the things go in each of them and from time to time he incarnates in this or that form entirely or partially to introduce the proper order. According to the most spread classification there has been 10 Vishnu's avatars (incarnations) on the Earth.

1. Fish (matsya). When the Earth was under the waters of the Flood, Vishnu assumed the aspect of a fish which was the first to warn Manu (the forefather of the mankind, Brahma’s son) of the coming danger. Then it took Manu, his family and seven sages (rishis) out of the Flood on a ship tied to a horn on its head.

2. Turtle(kurma). Many divine treasures were lost during the flood including ambrosia (amrita) that helped gods to preserve their eternal youth. Vishnu assumed the aspect of a gigantic turtle and went to the bottom of the cosmic ocean. The gods placed mountain Mandara on its back and wrapped the divine serpent Vasuka around the mountain. Then they pulled the serpent and thus untwisted the mountain shaking the ocean up the way an ordinary Indian milkman churns butter. Amrita and many other treasures including goddess Lakshmi came to the surface of the foamed ocean.

3. Wild boar(varaha). Demon Hiranyaksha again immersed the Earth into the depths of the cosmic ocean. Vishnu assumed the image of a gigantic wild boar, killed the demon and put the Earth back in its place by raising it on its fang.

4. Lion Man(narasimha). Another demon Hiranyakashipu received the magic ability to become invulnerable as a gift from Brahma. Neither animal nor man, nor god could kill him neither by day nor by night. Using his safety he started to pursue gods and men and even his pious son Prahlada. Then Prahlada turned to Vishnu for help. At sunset i.e. neither by day nor by night the god suddenly
appeared out of a column in the demon’s palace and killed the demon in the image of half-man and half-lion.

5. Dwarf (vamana). Demon Bali seized power over the world and after performing a number of ascetic feats he acquired the supernatural might and even started to threaten gods. Vishnu appeared before him in the image of a dwarf and asked to give him as a present as much land as he could measure in three steps. When the present was promised the god turned into a giant and made two steps which covered the earth, the sky and the space between them. But he generously abstained from the third step leaving the underworld in the demon’s domain.

6. Parashurama ("Rama with an axe"). Vishnu assumed a human image as a Brahman Jamadagni’s son. When wicked tsar Kartavirya robbed his father, Parashurama killed him. Kartavirya’s sons in their turn killed Jamadagni, after that angry Parashurama 21 times exterminated all the men from the kshatriy(warriors) estate.

7. Rama, the prince of Ayodhy, a hero of the epic drama "Ramayana". Vishnu assumed his image to save the world from the oppressions of demon Ravana. Rama is usually portrayed as a man with dark skin often armed with a bow and arrows. He is followed by his loving spouse Sita, the embodiment of feminine loyalty, his three devoted brothers: Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna, and by Hanuman, the king of monkeys, his loyal friend and companion-in-arms. Rama is revered as the embodiment of an ideal husband, commander and a monarch.

8. Krishna, the most significant of Vishnu’s incarnations. The stories from the
life of this deity are most often referred to in dance. The most favorite scenes are his child’s roguery as for instance stealing butter from Yashoda (his foster mother) or his love affairs with gopis (shepherdesses) among whom the beauty Radha was the most beloved.

The more detailed description of Krishna’s life can be found in the most famous epic work Mahabharata.

In short his story is the following. Krishna was born in Mathur in the tribe of yadavas. His father was Vasudeva, his mother - Devaki, the cousin sister of king Kansa who reigned at that time. There was a prophecy that Kansa would perish from the hand of Devaki’s eighth son, that’s why he intended to destroy all her children. But Krishna and his elder brother Balarama escaped the massacre. They were adopted and brought up by a shepherd Nanda and his wife Yashoda from Vrindavana. On knowing that the brothers escaped the death prepared for them, Kansa made multiple attempts to destroy the children. But as the incarnation of the God, Krishna worked a great number of wonders and performed feats: he would kill demons sent by Kansa, would cover the dwellers of Vrindavana from the storm by raising the mountain Govardhana on his little finger over their heads etc. When he was free from performing feats he grazed cows, played the flute for gopis and gave himself to his child’s roguery.

When he grew up and bid farewell to his idyllic shepherd life he headed for Mathura to fight the malevolent cousin of his mother. He killed Kansa and
became the ruler of the kingdom of Mathura; but being pressed by the ruler Magadhi, Kansa's father-in-law from the one side, and from the other side by the nameless king of yavanas from the north-west, he left the kingdom and established a new capital in Dvarak in Saurashtra. There he married Rukmini and made her his main wife among his 16,108 wives who gave birth to his 180,000 sons. In the main "Mahabharata" story throughout the whole history of the fight among royal clans he appears as a devoted friend and councilor of the five Pandavas brothers and before the battle at Kurukshetra which is the culmination of "Mahabharata" while addressing to one of his brothers Arjuna, he pronounced his great sermon stated in "Bhagavadgita".

9. Buddha, the latest Vishnu's incarnation in the past. According to "Gitagovinda" written by the great poet Jayadeva, Vishnu assumed the image of Buddha out of compassion to animals in order to put an end to the bloody offerings.

10. Kalki - the future incarnation. The Hindus believe that in the end of our morbid era Vishnu will appear as a man riding on a white horse with a blazing sword in his hand. He will condemn sinners, reward the virtuous ones and revive Satya Yuga ("the golden age").

SHIVA

In the Hindus' view all classical arts are inseparably linked with the divinity. They believe that Shiva is the source of dance - Nataraja. He dances and destroys the Universe when the due time comes. But Shiva is also a great ascetic. He sits immersed in meditation on the mountain Kaylasa in the Himalayas. There is a legend that Parvati had to follow Shiva's example and became a hermit so that Shiva took notice of her and married her.

In his Nataraja aspect Shiva is usually portrayed four-handed. In his upper left hand he holds Damara, a small drum which he uses while dancing Tandava. Vibrations of vital force come from Damara that puts the first step towards the Evolution of the Universe. Besides, the birth of the initial sound "OM" is
identified with this drum. The other left hand lowered in the direction of the toes of a raised leg embodies liberation and deliverance.

The upper right hand holds a plate with fire or a trident, the symbol of purification and destruction, and the lower right hand with stretched fingers and omkara on the palm symbolizes protection.

The right foot that treads on a dwarf breaks the chains which embrace a soul and lead it into the world of ignorance and illusion. The raised left leg is the symbol of liberation from Samsara (chain of reincarnations).

There is an image of Shiva with loose and flying hair decorated with stars. This is the example of Rhythm in space. Two eyes of Shiva are the Sun and the Moon, and “the third eye” is the symbol of his supreme wisdom and insight. The three eyes altogether embody the Past, the Present and the Future.

Shiva is sometimes portrayed as Ardhanarishvara with one part of the figure being the male aspect the other is the female aspect. This is the symbol of the god’s unity with his shakti (inner energy).

The river Ganga streaming out of his head confirms his immortality. And, finally, Shiva’s dance over the prostrate dwarf symbolizes the complete victory over the evil in the whole world.

Generally speaking Shiva’s dance is known as Tandava and takes one of the main places in Indian mythology. They believe that Shiva performed 108 kinds of Tandava though only 64 of them have a detailed description in literature.

The seven basic types of Tandava are called respectively: Kalika, Gauri, Sandhya, Samhara, Tripura, Urdhava and Ananda.

Shiva performed the most famous Ananda Tandava in the place Tillai (modern Chitambaram, 150 miles far from Madras).
The story is the following. Shiva learned that several thousands of heretics settled down in the forest not far from Tillai. Having decided to finish with them he headed there followed by Vishnu who assumed the image of a beautiful woman as a blind. But rishis (sages) sensed the danger and immediately prepared for defense. They lit sacrificial bonfires and started to read magic spells that resulted in the appearance of a tiger, a serpent and a dwarf.

Shiva neutralized the tiger and the serpent by putting them on as ornaments and started to dance on the dwarf. The heretics realized the uselessness of their efforts and when Shiva opened his third eye they prostrated themselves as one before him. Among those who saw dancing Shiva was Adi Shesha, a thousand-headed serpent upon which Vishnu lies. He was so enchanted by what he saw that he appealed to Shiva with a prayer to give him the opportunity of admiring the dance once more. Shiva told him to stay in Tillai until his next arrival. Transforming himself into half-man, half-serpent Adi Shesha stayed in Tillai for many thousands of years and was known there as Patanjali.

The second Shiva’s visit to Tillai happened under the following circumstances.

At that time there were two sacred places in Tillai: one was a place of worshipping Shiva, the other belonged to Kali. When Shiva decided to head for Tillai to make his devoted people happy, Kali opposed to it and refused to let him pass. Shiva got into difficulties. In order to solve this problem he offered Kali to hold a dance contest, according to the rules the defeated would have to abandon the sacred place and the town forever.

In the presence of many disciples and demigods Shiva performed a lot of dances but Kali was very accurate in imitating and was not inferior to Shiva in this respect. The confrontation lasted for a long time. Shiva felt more and more irritating. In his persistence to win he resorted to cunning: he raised his right leg up to the head level and started to dance in this position. Perhaps Kali would be able to give her rival the adequate response but the feminine intuition gave her a hint that she was to yield. Leaving the place of contest Kali abandoned the town for good and settled down in its outskirts. This Shiva’s dance is known as Urdhava.

Two divine dances in Tillai became a very important event for his worshippers. As a result of their belief and in honor of Shiva as the Supreme Dancer they erected a wonderful Nataraja statue in a temple in Chitambaram.
The structure of human "subtle body"

According to Indian philosophical tradition alongside with the branchy nervous system responsible for the perceiving of the physical world, in human body there also exists the so-called "subtle system" that regulates emotional, psychological and spiritual existence of people.

This energy system (or "subtle body") consists of three channels called nadis and seven basic energy centers - chakras. Each chakra is responsible for realization of certain spiritual qualities which remain non-manifested in most people.

In India the aim of human life is believed to be in achieving Self-realization what means the awakening of Kundalini energy that stays asleep during many reincarnations. While awoken, Kundalini rises up along the central energy channel (spinal column being its physical realization) and fills all the seven centers (chakras) with pure energy that makes it possible for all the human spiritual qualities to manifest themselves spontaneously.

Regular meditations allow strengthening of the "subtle body" without any mental efforts. As a result a person becomes calm, satisfied, and at the same time active and creative. With all this, in the process of meditation an individual gets the opportunity to exactly diagnose the condition of his/her "subtle system" by means of vibrations (sensations) which manifest themselves on palms of hands.

The matter is that the projections of all the seven chakras are found on palms. The right palm is responsible for diagnosing the right aspect of each chakra, and the left palm is responsible for the left aspect respectively. Cool vibrations (breeze) on any of the projections indicate that a chakra is all right; warm or hot
vibrations, pricking, numbness, feeling of heaviness and burning pain indicate that a person’s credo, his/her philosophy of life or his/her deeds lead to problems in subtle body and eventually develop into psychological and physical problems.

**Chakras**

**0. Sacrum**

A three cornered bone at the base of the spinal column is the residence of Kundalini. Sacrum means "sacred" in Latin.

**1. Muladhara**

Located at the base of the spinal column on its exterior side.

**Element - Earth.**

It has four thin petals.

Qualities: innocence, purity, chastity, wisdom, spontaneous knowledge of Truth (as with a child). It is connected with genitals and organs of secretion.

Problems in this center are caused by moral unscrupulousness, too excessive or perverted sexual life, unnecessary asceticism, adultery, aggressiveness, and negative actions against children.

**Diagnosis - sensations at the base of palms.**

**2. Swadhisthana**

Located at the appendix level (a palm’s width lower than umbilicus).
It has 6 energy petals.

Element - Fire.

Qualities: abilities for creative work and for acquiring knowledge, knowledge of Truth. It controls functions of kidneys, lower part of liver, pancreas, spleen and bowels.

Problems in this center are caused by intense future planning, a habit to live on the future, excessive learning and work, magic, witchcraft and occult practices.

Diagnosis - sensations on thumbs.

3. Nabi

Nabi-chakra (other name Manipura) regulates the level of prosperity, success in business, relations with partner in marriage, ability to fulfill Dharma (inner moral and spiritual duty).

It has 10 energy petals.

Element - Water.

Qualities: the enlightened Nabi grants a person a feeling of satisfaction, endows with generosity and hospitality, shifts attention from material consumption upon spiritual life, gives support in spiritual ascension. Physically this chakra is connected with stomach, upper part of liver, bowels.

Problems in this center are caused by stinginess, passion for material consumption, moral unscrupulousness, adultery, disrespect to partner in marriage, stealing, illegal money income, alcohol and medicinal chemistry.

Diagnosis - sensations in middle fingers.
Nabi is surrounded by the Void which is figuratively called "the ocean of illusions". In this area the central channel suffers a break and Kundalini energy cannot rise higher than Swadhistana if the Void is not filled with vibrations of a true spiritual leader whom a person accepted as his/her mentor.

Bhawasagara is the other name for the Void. This aspect is connected with the progress of personality, through it we are influenced by stars, planets and forces of gravitation.

Problems in this center are caused by cruel and egoistic behavior, moral unscrupulousness, non-observance of Dharma, following pseudo-teachers and pseudo-doctrines, and also by all the factors that strike Nabi-chakra.

Diagnosis - sensations on palms except for their centers.

4. Anahata

Located at the heart level.

Element - Fire.

Physically it regulates heart, lungs and bronchi functions.

Qualities: in normal condition it endows a person with fearlessness, a feeling of confidence and security, good immunity, ability to love without affection, favorable relations with parents.

It has 12 energy petals-valencies.

Problems in this center are caused by unhealthy emotional affections, fear, smoking, disrespect for parents, spiritually deprived life, cruelty, egoism, moral
unscrupulousness, excessive physical work.

Diagnosis - sensations on little fingers.

5. Vishuddha

Located at the jugular cavity level at the neck base.

It has 16 energy petals.

Element - Air (sky, ether).

Physically it is responsible for throat, neck, face, teeth, ears, tongue, nose, eyes and abilities to speak and sing.

Qualities: good Vishuddha grants a person pleasant mimicry, splendid speech, ear for music and voice, ability to be a loose witness to everything that happens around and the ability to easily adapt in any team.

Problems in this center are caused by foul and abusive language, rudeness, dominance over others via speech (shouts, rough instructions etc.), talkativeness, rumours, disdain of those who surround you, smoking, flirtation and impure thoughts towards opposite sex, feeling of guilt.

Diagnosis - sensations in forefingers.

6. Ajna

Located on the level of the middle of forehead in the place where optic nerves intersect.
Element - Light.

It has 2 energy petals.

Physically connected with frontal, temporal and end lobes of the brain.

Qualities: grants a person the ability for higher forms of thinking and sensation of Self (self as Pure Spirit), estimates the opportunity of visual perception.

Problems in this center are caused by unforgiveness, yearning for vengeance, impure eyes and thoughts, construction of bulky mental conceptions, intensive thinking, egoism, illusions about one’s personal might, conditionality and strict following the rules.

Diagnosis - sensation in third fingers.

7. Sahasrara

Sahasrara-chakra (“Thousand petal lotus”) is located in the upper part of the head in the area of sinciput. It is connected with limbic nerve plexus.

It has 1000 energy petals-valencies. Fully combines all the principles of all the other subtle centers.

When Kundalini reaches Sahasrara-chakra and goes through it a person feels the state of unity with the Deity and acquires the initial Truth by merging with it into a single whole.

Problems in this center are caused by doubts in God’s existence, atheism, activity against God.
Diagnosis - sensations in the palm centers.

Channels

The so called "autonomous nerve system" is said to be functioning in human organism. According to Indian philosophical tradition it consists of three channels.

The left channel is called Ida Nadi.

It is connected with the right and hind side of the brain. The left channel nourishes the left sympathetic nerve system; it is responsible for a person's emotional life and his/her past. One may say that this channel stores the past. Everything that is the present today will become the past tomorrow. The Unconscious draws information and images out of this channel. Besides, the unconscious mind of every person is connected to the centuries-old collective unconscious mind. All events that have taken place since the world was created stay dormant in the collective unconscious that accumulates and keeps everything that happened during the process of evolution.

The right channel is called Pingala Nadi.

It is connected with the left and front side of the brain and intersects with Ida Nadi on the Ajna-chakra level. This channel nourishes the right sympathetic nerve system. On the right side there is a conscious mind that creates our future. Everything that a person thinks of the future is recorded on the right side which has access to the collective overconscious. The collective overconscious stores aggressive species of animals and plants and also all information that is placed there by excessively ambitious and extremely future-oriented individuals.

The central channel is called Sushumna Nadi.

Kundalini goes through it in order to further go through the fontanel area (Brahmarandhra) and unite with the All-Penetrating Cosmic Energy (or World Mind). Sushumna Nadi is the channel of the present. A person whose Kundalini has risen up this channel can perceive the reality objectively while staying in a state of a loose witness and being in permanent contact with God.
Ornamentations in Indian classical dance

Make-up and ornamentations relate to Aharya Abhinaya as Rangabhusa aspect. Although Aharya is of minor importance in comparison with the aspects of Angika, Sattvika and Vachika Abhinayas, it acts as an additional means for intensifying the visual performance of the aesthetical aspect. At the same time the use of make-up and ornamentations as well as the use of stage scenery and flowers varies depending on vritti (type) and dharmi (form of a performance). For instance, Natyashastra, a treatise on the art of drama, ascribes certain ornamentations for men and women.

Women Siddhi must perform in yellow saris and ornamentations made of pearls and emeralds. Actors playing Apsars (celestial dancers) use ornamentations as ornamental patterns made of jewels and arrange their hair in a high coiffure.

Dancers portraying Gandharvas (celestial musicians) decorate themselves with rubies and perform in bright red costumes. In their hands they must hold Vina (the Goddess’ Sarasvati’s string musical instrument).

Vidyadharis must appear before the audience in white costumes decorated with
pearls. Dark garments and blue stones serve as the decoration for dancers playing demonesses. The costumes made of green silk and ornamentations made of pearls are typical for portraying goddesses. The costumes of milk carriers must be of blue color and their hair must be plaid.

Color gamut is used to tell one personages from the others. So the Kshatriys (warriors) perform in reddish and rust-colored shades, the Vayshyas (merchants) and the Shudras (servants) perform in darker shades.

The impeccable white is destined for the Brahmans.

The symbolism of color, costumes, make-up and ornamentations is the additional external means for dancers to resort to in order to portray this or that image, a hero or a heroine or a character.

Ornamentations play a special role. Dancers of classic styles Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, and Mohiniattam wear the so-called temple ornamentations made of gold and jewels. Nowadays jewels are replaced with artificial stones. The traditionality of a temple set of ornamentation remains up to now. Every element of ornamentation has its name and symbolism.

Chandra-prabha (the Moon) and Surya-prabha (the Sun) which are fixed on the left (the Moon) and the right (the Sun) sides of the hair parting with the purpose of endowing a dancer with their beauty and shining.

Talay-saaman or Chutti emphasize the line of forehead and hair parting.

**Talay-saaman with Surya and Chandra**
Maatal (pendants) are fixed to the ear lobes and hair in order to cover cochleae. They protect a dancer’s hearing from the loud sound of drums.

A long necklace is called differently depending on style and tradition: Maanga-malay, Muthu-malay, Tanmani and Kantha-haaram in the Kuchipudi tradition. Its purpose is to balance a dancer’s breathing.

Tanmani (long necklace)
Addikai (short necklace)

A belt around the waist supports the spinal column and also has different names: Oddiyanam, Kamar-patta, Vaddanamu in Kuchipudi.

Kamar-patta

Bracelets Valayal protect wrists and add elegance and grace to them.

Valayal
Chalang or a ring in a nose also plays a special role. A full set consists of three kinds: a small nail or a clip for the right nostril, a ring decorated with jewels for the left nostril (in Kuchipudi it is called Mukkera) and a pendant that is fixed on the lower part of the nasal septum.

In the Kuchipudi tradition a certain dance episode from the drama Bhama
Kalapam is dedicated to this type of ornamentation. The central personage of the drama, Satyabhama, treated her collection of ornamentations with the great awe because she had a separate set for each day of the week. The most precious among them was a ring Mukkera. Once after the quarrel her beloved Lord Krishna left Satyabhama. She turned to her friend Madhavi for help in returning Krishna’s love. Satyabhama offered to give all her ornamentations but did not desire to part with Mukkera. Madhavi kept on insisting that Satyabhama gave her the ring. Her intention was not to take possession of the ring but to make her friend part with her most precious treasure. Here Satyabhama’s ornamentation is compared with ego. By giving the ring she as if gets rid of the ego’s heavy bonds. It is easy to give what belongs to you but the giving will be full only when you step over your ego. The drama finishes in Satyabhama’s giving the ring to Madhavi and Krishna returns to her after getting the proof of her complete devotion to him. The ring’s purpose is to protect innocence.

Other ornamentations:

**Jimmiki (earrings) or Kundalu in Kuchipudi.**

**Bells - Gunghru, Gajjelu or Kinkini. They help to beat the rhythm and protect ankles.**
Flowers of jasmine (white) and orange Kanakambaram.

Raakodi - an ornamentation for the false hair decorated with a broche and a braid.

Kunjalam - an ornamentation entwined with a plait with pompons or tassels on edges.