



# **DEVELOPMENT OF DANCE DURING THE VIJAYANAGAR EMPIRE AND CHOLA DYNASTY: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO LEPAKSHI TEMPLE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Vijayanagar Empire and Chola Dynasty significantly contributed to the evolution of dance as a vital cultural element in South India. This article explores the development of dance during these periods, emphasizing their contributions to Bharatanatyam and its propagation. The architectural differences between Chola temples and the Lepakshi temple in the Vijayanagar Empire are analysed to illustrate their influence on dance traditions.

Special attention is given to the Lepakshi temple's murals and sculptures as vital records of dance history. The synthesis of architectural innovation and classical dance forms underscores the rich heritage these empires have left behind.

## **KEYWORDS**

Vijayanagar Empire, Chola Dynasty, Bharatanatyam, Lepakshi Temple, Dance Evolution, Temple Architecture

## **INTRODUCTION**

Dance in India has always been more than an art form, it serves as a spiritual expression and a cultural emblem. The Chola Dynasty (9th-13th centuries CE) and the Vijayanagar Empire (14th-17th centuries CE) were pivotal in institutionalizing and propagating dance traditions. Bharatanatyam, deeply rooted in temple rituals, flourished under royal patronage during these periods. The architectural marvels of these times, particularly temples, became repositories of dance traditions, showcasing sculptures, murals, and inscriptions that reflect the symbiosis between dance and architecture.

This study delves into the development of dance during these two significant periods, comparing architectural styles and their impact on Bharatanatyam. The Lepakshi temple in Andhra Pradesh, an epitome of Vijayanagar architecture, serves as a case study to highlight how dance influenced and was influenced by temple art.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Dance During the Vijayanagar Empire**

The Vijayanagar Empire heralded a cultural renaissance, blending multiple regional traditions. The Lepakshi temple exemplifies this synthesis, with its remarkable murals and sculptures that celebrate dance and music.

#### 1. Architectural Integration:

The Lepakshi temple's design incorporates dance halls (Natya mandapas), with intricately carved pillars depicting dancers and musicians. The hanging pillar in the temple, an architectural marvel, symbolizes the ingenuity of Vijayanagar artisans. These Natya mandapas served as spaces for the performance of Bharatanatyam and other classical dances, integrating dance deeply into the spiritual life of the temple.

#### 2. Murals as Historical Records:

The murals in Lepakshi temple illustrate vibrant scenes of dancers in traditional attire, accompanied by musicians. These visual narratives provide a window into the costumes, ornaments, and dance styles of the Vijayanagar period. The detailed depictions highlight the fluidity and elegance of movements, offering insights into the repertoire of classical dance during this era.

#### 3. Transition and Innovation:

While the Chola period focused on devotion through dance, the Vijayanagar era embraced a broader cultural perspective, integrating secular themes alongside spiritual narratives. The Lepakshi murals and sculptures depict not only divine dances but also court performances, showing a holistic representation of the art form. This evolution enriched Bharatanatyam's repertoire and broadened its thematic scope.

### **Dance During the Chola Dynasty**

The Chola Dynasty is renowned for its unparalleled contributions to temple architecture and Bharatanatyam. Temples such as the Brihadeeswara Temple in Thanjavur stand as monuments of devotion and artistic excellence.

#### 1. Patronage and Codification:

The Chola kings were ardent patrons of the arts. Bharatanatyam, which was then performed by temple dancers or devadasis, was codified during this period. The dance form's spiritual essence was rooted in expressing bhakti (devotion) through intricate movements, gestures (mudras), and expressions (abhinaya). The devadasis were trained rigorously to perform these dances as offerings to the deities.

#### 2. Temple Sculptures and Dance:

Chola temples feature numerous sculptures of celestial dancers in dynamic poses, providing insight into the dance forms of the era. The depiction of Karanas (dance units) as described in the Natya Shastra emphasizes the technical precision and grace of Bharatanatyam. These sculptures serve as instructional guides for dancers and preserve the nuances of dance movements.

#### 3. Role of Inscriptions:

Temple inscriptions during the Chola period document the patronage extended to devadasis and the performances conducted during festivals. These records highlight the intricate link between dance and temple rituals, showcasing the socio-cultural importance of the art form. The Brihadeeswara Temple, for instance, has inscriptions detailing the roles and contributions of temple dancers.

## Architectural Differences

The architectural styles of the Chola and Vijayanagar periods reflect their unique approaches to integrating dance into temple art.

### Vijayanagar Temples specific to Lepakshi.

Known for elaborate Natya mandapas, vivid murals, and a fusion of architectural techniques. Dance here was celebrated as a holistic cultural expression, evident in the integration of secular and divine themes. The emphasis on spacious dance halls highlights the Vijayanagar focus on performance as a communal activity.

### Chola Temples:

Massive structures with vimanas (towering spires) and symmetrical layouts. Dance was depicted predominantly in sculptures and inscriptions, focusing on devotion. The intricate carvings of celestial dancers reflect the technical and spiritual depth of Bharatanatyam during this period.

### Bharatanatyam's Evolution

Bharatanatyam, as nurtured during these periods, evolved into a structured classical dance form. The Chola contribution lies in its codification and ritualistic performance, while the Vijayanagar legacy enhanced its aesthetic and thematic diversity. Together, they laid the foundation for Bharatanatyam as both a spiritual offering and a performance art.

## CONCLUSION

The Vijayanagar Empire and Chola Dynasty were instrumental in shaping the trajectory of dance in South India. The Chola's devotion-driven approach established Bharatanatyam as a spiritual art, while the Vijayanagar period expanded its horizons, embracing cultural plurality. The Lepakshi temple stands as a testament to the Vijayanagar legacy, merging art, architecture, and dance into a cohesive narrative. Understanding these contributions is crucial for preserving and propagating the cultural heritage of Bharatanatyam.

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