

**NAVAVIDHA BHAKTHI IN THE BHAGAVATHA PURANA-**  
**A COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH THE BHARATHANATYAM MARGAM**

**PROJECT CODE- BH6BP02B18**

**PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE  
OF BACHELOR OF ARTS IN BHARTHANATYAM OF MAHATMA GANDHI UNIVERSITY**

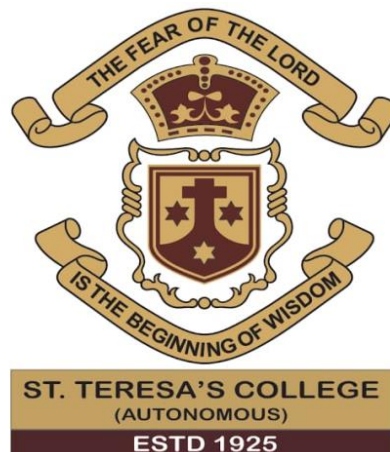
**DONE BY**

**SREENIDHI.C.R**

**REG NO: SB22BHA014**

**GUIDED BY**

**MS.ARUNIMA J.R**



**MARCH-2025**

**DEPARTMENT OF BHARATHANATYAM**

**ST. TERESA'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), ERNAKULAM, PIN-682011**

**AFFILIATED TO MG UNIVERSITY, KOTTAYAM**

DEPARTMENT OF BHARATHANATYAM  
ST TERESA'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS) PIN-682011

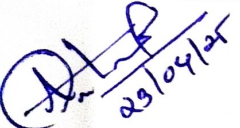
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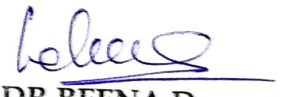
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MISS.ARUNIMA.J.R

Assistant Professor

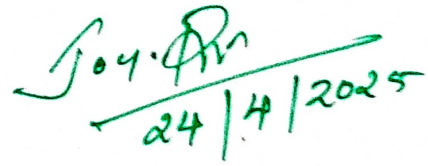
Department of Bharathanatyam

Project Guide & Coordinator)

  
DR.BEENA.D

Head of the Department

External Examiner

  
24/4/2025  
JOY. R  
Lecturer in Dance  
S.S.T. Govt. College of Music  
Thiruvananthapuram-14

## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the Almighty for the abundant blessings and guidance bestowed upon me throughout my life, and for enabling me to become the person I am today.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Beena D, Head of the Department, St. Teresa's College, for her invaluable support, encouragement and for providing the resources necessary for the successful completion of this project.

I extend my sincere gratitude to Ms. Arunima J. R. for her guidance, constructive feedback and insightful suggestions during the planning and execution of this project.

I am also grateful to Sri. Chandrakumar P. L. (Assistant Professor), Sri. C. K. Suresh Kumar (Assistant Professor), Smt. Ria. V. R. (Assistant Professor), Ms. Pooja Balamurali (Assistant Professor), Smt. Drishya P. P. (Assistant Professor, Department of Bharatanatyam) for their continuous support and valuable assistance.

Many thanks for the encouragement and support extended by my classmates, friends and family, which greatly contributed to the completion of this work.

**SREENIDHI.C.R**

# **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this project report title

**NAVAVIDHA BHAKTHI IN THE BHAGAVATHA PURANA-**

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submitted to the Department of Bharatanatyam, St Teresa's College (Autonomous)  
Ernakulam, Affiliated to MG University, Kottayam is a record of original work done by  
me under the guidance of Miss. ARUNIMA. J. R.

The information and the data given in the report is authentic to the best of my  
knowledge.

This project report is not submitted to any other university or institution for the award  
of any Degree, Diploma or Fellowship.

**24<sup>th</sup> April, 2025.**

**ERNAKULAM**

**SREENIDHI. C. R**

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## **1.INTRODUCTION**

In the Indian spiritual and artistic tradition, dance has never been seen as merely a physical act—it is a sacred offering, a form of worship, and a means of connecting the self with the divine. Bharatanatyam, one of the oldest and most structured classical dance forms of India, is a perfect embodiment of this sacred vision. Rooted in the temples of Tamil Nadu and originally performed by devadasis, Bharatanatyam evolved from being a ritualistic temple dance into a sophisticated and codified art form that is now performed on stages globally. Yet, its essence remains deeply devotional, centered on themes of surrender, longing, and love for the divine. Despite modern reinterpretations and the diversification of themes, many dancers return to devotional content as the source of their deepest inspiration. Bhakti literature offers timeless themes—longing, love, surrender, struggle, realization. Its adaptability allows dancers to continually discover new depths in familiar texts. Even audiences unfamiliar with the Sanskrit or Tamil verses can intuitively understand the emotions being conveyed. This emotional universality is what makes Bhakti literature so suited to a performance form like Bharatanatyam.

Parallel to this artistic expression is the profound spiritual philosophy found in the Srimad Bhagavata Purana, one of the most revered texts in the Bhakti movement. In this Purana, Navavidha Bhakti—or the Nine Modes of Devotion—are described as various pathways through which a devotee may express their love and surrender to the Divine. These include Shravanam (listening), Kirtanam (singing), Smaranam (remembering), Padasevanam (serving the feet), Archanam (worship), Vandanam (bowing), Dasyam (servitude), Sakhyam (friendship) and Atmanivedanam (complete self-surrender). Each of these forms speaks to a unique emotional and spiritual approach to the divine relationship.

The richness of these nine forms lies in their inclusivity. Anyone—irrespective of age, gender, caste, or background—can take refuge in one or more of these devotional paths. Each form of bhakti is a deeply personal experience, yet collectively they represent a journey of spiritual evolution. The traditional Margam structure of a Bharatanatyam recital closely mirrors this devotional journey. Margam, which literally means “the path,” is a beautifully crafted progression of dance items that guides the dancer—and the rasikas from the external world of rhythm and form into the inner world of emotion and transcendence.

The Margam typically begins with Alarippu, an Invocatory piece that awakens the body and mind, followed by Jatiswaram, a celebration of melody and rhythm. With Shabdham, expression and narrative are introduced. The central and most elaborate piece, Varnam, combines technical brilliance with deep emotional content. The recital then flows into Padams and Javalis, which allow for subtle abhinaya and exploration of intimate moods of devotion, before concluding with Thillana and Mangalam joyful pieces of celebration and gratitude. Each of these items resonates with a specific form of bhakti, revealing how dance becomes a dynamic medium of spiritual experience.

Alarippu, with its meditative quality and internal listening, reflects Shravanam, the act of listening with awareness. Jatiswaram, filled with melodic movement, echoes Kirtanam, the joyous singing of divine names. Shabdham, which tells stories of gods and saints, aligns with Smaranam, remembering and recounting divine glories. The emotional intensity and surrender portrayed in Varnam are reminiscent of Atmanivedanam, the complete offering of self to the divine. The devotion shown in Padams and Javalis can reflect Sakhyam (divine friendship), Dasyam (servitude), and even Vandanam (reverence), depending on the character portrayed. Tillana, with its energy can be seen as a form of Archanam—a celebratory worship through movement. Finally, Mangalam becomes the dancer's final Vandanam, an act of humble gratitude and closure.

Bharatanatyam, thus, does not merely illustrate stories or display physical agility—it becomes a spiritual journey. Every adavus, every expression, every rhythm is a step toward inner transformation. Just as Navavidha Bhakti offers different emotional approaches to reach the divine, so does each piece in the Margam guide the dancer and the audience closer to the experience of the sacred. The synergy between the aesthetic structure of the Margam and the philosophical depth of Navavidha Bhakti shows how deeply intertwined dance and devotion truly are.

The dancer, in this sacred dialogue, becomes more than a performer. She is a Sadhaka interpreter, a transmitter of divine truths. Her discipline is not only in perfecting form, but in aligning inner emotion with outer expression. In doing so, she transforms the stage into a temple, the audience into devotees, and the dance into darshan. Through her, the poetic voice of Bhakti literature gains a body, breath, and heartbeat.

This alignment between Margam and the ninefold path of Bhakti reveals the inherent spiritual foundation upon which Bharatanatyam rests. The art form becomes more than entertainment—it becomes an offering, a personal sadhana (discipline), and a method of connecting the individual soul (jivatma) to the supreme soul (paramatma). Whether one dances as a devotee of Krishna, Shiva, or the Goddess, the deeper intention remains the same: to dissolve the ego and become one with the Divine through the language of the body, music and soul.

## **2.BHARATHANATYAM MARGAM**

The Bharatanatyam Margam refers to the traditional and structured sequence of items performed in a Bharatanatyam recital. This well-defined format was codified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Tanjore Quartet—Chinnaiah, Ponniah, Sivanandam, and Vadivelu—who were court musicians and dance masters under the patronage of King Serfoji II of Tanjore. Drawing from the Natya Shastra and temple dance traditions, they created the Margam as a spiritual and artistic journey that would guide both the dancer and the audience toward a higher aesthetic and devotional experience. The word “Margam” in Sanskrit means “path” or “way,” symbolizing the dancer’s path to the divine.

The Margam begins with ALARIPPU, a pure dance piece that prepares the dancer physically and mentally; it is followed by JATISWARAM, which showcases rhythm and melody through intricate footwork. SHABDHAM introduces abhinaya (expressive dance), and VARNAM, the central and most elaborate item, combines both nritta and abhinaya, often expressing deep devotion to a deity. The recital then proceeds with PADHAMS and JAVALIS, which emphasize emotional expression and storytelling and concludes with THILLANA, a vibrant and rhythmic finale, and a SHLOKA or MANGALAM, a benedictory piece.

The purpose of the Margam is not only to display the technical prowess of the dancer but also to communicate spiritual themes and human emotions in a progressive manner. Each piece builds upon the previous one, gradually deepening the emotional and spiritual intensity. The significance of the Bharatanatyam Margam lies in its holistic approach—it blends body, mind, and spirit, leading the performer and the rasika (audience) on a transformative journey. It remains a timeless format that upholds the traditional essence of Bharatanatyam while allowing room for personal expression and spiritual connection.

## **2.1.ALARIPPU– The Invocation**

Alarippu, means “blossoming,” marks the beginning of a Bharatanatyam recital and symbolizes the dancer’s spiritual awakening and preparation. It is a purely Nritya (pure dance) piece performed to rhythmic syllables (sollukattu). The dance starts with subtle movements of the eyes, head, and neck, gradually extending to the arms and legs, much like a flower blooming. It serves as a warm-up, helping the dancer synchronize with the rhythm and establish a connection between mind and body. Traditionally set in three (Misra Chapu), four (Chatusra), five (Khanda), or seven (Tisra) beat cycles, Alarippu concludes with dynamic footwork, setting the stage for the rest of the performance.

## **2.2.JATHISWARAM –The Rhythmic Dance**

Jathiswaram is a vibrant Nritya composition that showcases the dancer’s technical process through intricate footwork, rhythmic patterns, and graceful movements. Unlike Alarippu, Jathiswaram incorporates musical swaras (notes), usually set in a specific raga and tala, yet it remains devoid of any abhinaya (expressions). The structure consists of jathi (rhythmic syllables) with swaras. The dancer demonstrates agility, stamina, and command over rhythm, preparing the audience for the expressive elements that follow in the recital. Jathiswaram is often a bridge between the introductory Alarippu and the more expressive pieces ahead.

## **2.3.SHABDHAM – The Expressive Prelude**

Shabdham follows the meaning of “word” or “sound,” is the first piece in the recital that introduces Nritya (expressive dance). It is set to lyrics, typically devotional or based on Bhakti (devotion). This composition allows the dancer to begin portraying emotions (Bhavas) while still incorporating rhythmic movements. The theme usually revolves around praising a deity, a king, or an abstract expression of divine love. The transition from Jathiswaram to Shabdham marks a significant shift from technical precision to narrative storytelling, drawing the audience into the emotive world of Bharatanatyam.

## **2.4.VARNAM– The Pinnacle of the Recital**

Varnam is the longest and most elaborate piece in the Margam, combining Nriitta, Nritya, and Natya. It is the heart of the performance, allowing the dancer to explore a wide range of emotions and depict stories from mythology. The lyrics are often centered around themes of devotion, longing, and divine love, particularly towards deities such as Lord Krishna, Shiva, or Muruga. Varnam begins in a Thrikala Jathi and gradually builds up to a climax with intricate footwork and abhinaya. The sanchari bhavas (elaborations on the theme) give the dancer freedom to express complex narratives, making this piece the ultimate test of their artistry, stamina, and emotive depth.

## **2.5.PADHAM– The Devotional or Romantic Expressive Piece**

Padams are slow, expressive pieces that allow the dancer to go deep into abhinaya (facial expressions and storytelling). Unlike the fast-paced Varnam, Padams focuses entirely on the emotional aspect, depicting the moods of the nayika (heroine) in love, separation, devotion, or surrender to the divine. These compositions are rich in Sringara Rasa (romantic sentiment) and often take inspiration from Bhakti poetry. The dancer internalizes the lyrics, expressing subtle yet powerful emotions through glances, hand gestures (mudras), and body language, captivating the audience with their storytelling skills.

## **2.6.KEERTHANAM– The Devotional Offering**

Keerthanam is an expressive composition that focuses on Bhakti Rasa (devotional sentiment). It is similar to Padam but often performed with more devotional energy. The dancer expresses devotion through abhinaya while also incorporating pure dance segments. Keerthanams are usually set in Carnatic music compositions and praise deities such as Lord Vishnu, Krishna, or Shiva, creating a deeply spiritual ambiance.

## **2.7.ASHTAPADHI– The Poetic Expression of Love and Devotion**

Ashtapadis are verses from the Gita Govinda, composed by the poet-saint Jayadeva. These pieces beautifully depict the divine love between Radha and Krishna, with deep expressions of Sringara Rasa (romantic sentiment) and devotion. The dancer uses subtle abhinaya and intricate storytelling to bring out the poetic beauty of the verses. The emotional depth of Ashtapadis makes them an integral part of Bharatanatyam performances.

## **2.8.JAVALI– The Playful and Romantic Piece**

Javalis are more playful pieces that often depict themes of mischief, teasing, or unfulfilled love. While similar to Padams in their emphasis on abhinaya, Javalis are more expressive and dynamic. They often involve a nayika playfully conversing with or chiding her nayaka (hero, often a deity or king). The lyrics are filled with humor, wit, and emotion, allowing the dancer to showcase a contrasting side of expressional storytelling. Javalis are performed at a slightly faster tempo than Padams, adding variety to the recital.

## **2.9.THILLANA– The Rhythmic Piece**

Thillana is the concluding dance piece in a Bharatanatyam recital, characterized by pure Nritta with energetic footwork, brisk movements, and vibrant expressions. It is set to rhythmic syllables (like Dheem Ta Na) and is highly technical, displaying the dancer's agility and precision. The choreography consists of jumps, intricate patterns, and dynamic poses, often incorporating sculptural postures inspired by temple carvings. Towards the end, a brief sahitya (lyrical segment) may express gratitude or devotion to a deity.

## **2.10.MANGALAM– The Benediction**

Mangalam is the final, solemn piece that marks the conclusion of the performance. It is a short, devotional composition expressing gratitude towards God, the Guru, the musicians and the audience. The dancer offers namaskaram (salutations), seeking blessings and invoking auspiciousness.

### **3.VEDA VYASA AND THE SRIMAD BHAGAVATHA PURANA**

#### **3.1.VEDA VYASA–The Sage and His Contributions**

Veda Vyasa,also known as Krishna Dvaipayana,is one of the most revered sages in Hindu tradition and is regarded as a literary and spiritual luminary.He is believed to be an incarnation of Lord Vishnu,who took birth to preserve and disseminate the Vedic knowledge in a structured form.His name “Vyasa” means “compiler” or “arranger,” as he played a crucial role in organizing and systematizing the vast corpus of Hindu scriptures.

One of his most significant contributions is the classification of the Vedas into four distinct parts—Rig Veda,Yajur Veda,Sama Veda and Atharva Veda—to make them more accessible to humanity.Before Vyasa’s time,the Vedas existed as a single,vast body of knowledge,passed down orally through generations.By dividing them into four sections and assigning them to different disciples, Vyasa ensured their preservation and structured transmission.Vyasa is also credited with composing the epic Mahabharata,which is the longest epic poem in the world,consisting of over 100,000 verses.The Mahabharata is not just a historical narrative but also a philosophical and ethical guide,with the Bhagavad Gita as one of its most revered sections.In addition,Vyasa is believed to be the author of the Brahma Sutras,a foundational text for the Vedanta philosophy.

Apart from these,he is traditionally regarded as the composer of the eighteen Mahapuranas,including the Srimad Bhagavata Purana,which is one of the most significant texts in Hinduism.

##### **3.1.1.The Incident Behind the Composition of Srimad Bhagavata Purana**

According to traditional accounts,after composing the Mahabharata and categorizing the Vedas,Vyasa felt a sense of dissatisfaction and spiritual emptiness.He sought guidance from Narada Muni,the celestial sage,who revealed to him that his unrest stemmed from not emphasizing the path of pure devotion (bhakti) in his earlier works.Narada advised Vyasa to compose a work centered on the glory and pastimes of Lord Vishnu, particularly his incarnation as Krishna, which would provide the ultimate spiritual guidance for humanity.

Vyasa meditated deeply on the Divine and,through the inspiration of Lord Vishnu,composed the Srimad Bhagavata Purana.It is said that Vyasa’s spiritual realization and divine insight allowed him to narrate



profound philosophical truths,wisdom,and the essence of bhakti in an unparalleled poetic form. This Purana emphasizes the concept of surrender to God through love and devotion,making it timelessly relevant.

### **3.2.SRIMAD BHAGAVATHA PURANA-The Supreme Devotional Scripture**

The Srimad Bhagavata Purana,often referred to simply as the Bhagavatam,is considered one of the most profound and sacred texts of Hindu spiritual literature.It consists of twelve cantos and over eighteen thousand verses,covering a vast range of topics,including cosmology, mythology, philosophy,and Bhakti (devotion).It is composed in Sanskrit and is written in a highly poetic and lyrical style.

The Bhagavata Purana is unique among the Puranas due to its exclusive focus on Bhakti (devotion to God),particularly towards Lord Vishnu and his incarnations, especially Krishna.It is said that Vyasa, after composing the Mahabharata,still felt a sense of dissatisfaction.Following the guidance of the sage Narada,he composed the Bhagavata Purana,which emphasizes pure,selfless devotion as the ultimate path to liberation (moksha).

The central theme of the Bhagavata Purana is the glorification of Lord Krishna, portraying him as the Supreme Personality of Godhead (Parabrahman). Some of the most famous sections of the Purana include:

Incarnations of Lord Vishnu,The Story of Prahlada and Hiranyakashipu,The dramatic appearance of Lord Narasimha,The Birth and Childhood of Krishna,The Teachings of Kapila,The Discourse of Uddhava and Krishna.

### **3.2.1 Philosophical and Spiritual Significance**

The Bhagavatam stands out among Hindu scriptures due to its deep spiritual and philosophical essence. It promotes the idea that Bhakti (devotion) is the highest path to self-realization, even above karma (action) and jnana (knowledge). The Bhagavata Purana teaches that true devotion is unconditional and selfless, transcending ritualistic worship and intellectual pursuits.

### **3.2.2. Cultural and Religious Impact**

The Bhagavata Purana has had a profound impact on Indian culture, performing arts, and religious traditions. It has inspired countless saints, poets, and philosophers across the centuries, including Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Madhvacharya, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and Vallabhacharya, who have written extensive commentaries on it.

It is also deeply associated with Bhagavata Saptaha, a seven-day recitation and discourse that is widely practiced in temples and spiritual gatherings. The text has influenced Indian classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi and Odissi which often depict stories from the Bhagavatam in their repertoire.

## **4.PRAHLADHA AND HIRANYAKASHIPU**

### **4.1.PRAHLADHA**

Prahladha is one of the most revered devotees in Hindu mythology, celebrated for his unwavering devotion to Lord Vishnu even in the face of extreme adversity. His character is a shining example of pure bhakti (devotion), unshaken by fear, pain, or external circumstances. Born into the family of asuras, Prahladha stood out as a beacon of righteousness and spiritual wisdom from a very young age. His deep love for Lord Vishnu was not influenced by his surroundings but was an innate realization, nurtured even while he was in his mother Kayadhu's womb, having listened to the teachings of Sage Narada. Despite being raised in a palace that rejected divinity, and under the rule of a father who saw God as his enemy, Prahladha constantly meditated upon, praised, and remembered the Lord. His knowledge of dharma, his calm nature, and his ability to see God in all beings revealed his spiritual maturity beyond his years. His story sets the stage for a powerful narrative that contrasts divine faith with worldly arrogance, and becomes the foundation for one of the most dramatic and spiritually significant confrontations in the Puranas—the encounter between Prahladha and his father, the mighty but egoistic demon king, Hiranyakashipu.

### **4.2.HIRANYAKASHIPU**

Hiranyakashipu is a powerful and complex figure in Hindu mythology, often portrayed as the embodiment of ego, pride, and the misuse of power. He was an asura (demon) king and the brother of Hiranyaksha, who was slain by Lord Vishnu in his Varaha avatar. Filled with rage and a desire for revenge against Vishnu for his brother's death, Hiranyakashipu undertook severe penance to please Lord Brahma and obtain a boon that made him nearly invincible. He asked that he should not be killed by any man or beast, neither during the day nor at night, neither inside nor outside, not on earth or in the sky, and not by any weapon. Empowered by this boon, Hiranyakashipu grew arrogant and declared himself to be the supreme ruler of the universe, demanding that everyone worship him instead of the gods. He ruled with terror and suppressed all forms of dharma, especially targeting the worship of Lord Vishnu. His tyranny extended even to his own family, particularly his son Prahladha, who was a devout devotee of Vishnu. Enraged by Prahladha's unwavering devotion, Hiranyakashipu subjected him to brutal punishments, hoping to break his faith. However, the more he tried to destroy his son's belief, the more Prahladha's devotion intensified.

Hiranyakashipu's story is not just a tale of cruelty and pride but also serves as a powerful reminder of the consequences of unchecked ego and the limits of material power. His eventual destruction by Lord Narasimha, a form that transcended the conditions of Brahma's boon, illustrates the eternal truth that no force—no matter how mighty—can stand against divine will and righteousness.

## **5.CONVERSATION BETWEEN PRAHLADHA AND HIRANYAKASHIPU**

Hiranyakashipu,the mighty demon king,sent his young son Prahladha to a school run by his trusted demon teachers,Sanda and Amaraka,with the goal of instilling in him hatred towards Lord Vishnu as he killed his brother Hiranyaksha.He also wanted Prahladha to be taught the ways of politics,diplomacy and demonic values.However,even in that environment,Prahladha remained steadfast in his devotion to Vishnu and began to share spiritual teachings with his classmates.When the teachers reported this to Hiranyakashipu,he summoned Prahladha and questioned him angrily about the source of his strength and wisdom.This led to a significant and deeply philosophical conversation between father and son,recorded in the Srimad Bhagavata Purana – Canto 7,Chapter 5.During this conversation,Prahladha fearlessly declared that true strength comes from Lord Vishnu,who resides in everyone,including Hiranyakashipu himself.In response to his father’s further questioning on the nature of devotion, Prahladha described the Navavidha Bhakti,or the nine forms of devotion.

He explained that practicing these forms with love and sincerity Is the true path to liberation.

### **HIRANYAKASHIPU**

*Hiraṇyakaśīpur uvāca*

*Prahrādānūcyatām tāta*

*Svadhītaṁ kiñcid uttamam*

*Kālenaitāvatāyusman*

*Yad aśikṣad guror bhavān*

### **Translation:**

My dear Prahlada,my dear son,O long-lived one,for so much time you have heard many things from your teachers. Now please repeat to me whatever you think is the best of that knowledge.

## **PRAHLADHA**

Śrī-prahrāda uvāca

*Śravaṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ*

*Smaraṇaṁ pāda-sevanam*

*Arcanaṁ vandanaṁ dāsyam*

*Sakhyam ātma-nivedanam*

*Iti puṁsārpitā viṣṇau*

*Bhaktiś cen nava-lakṣaṇā*

*Kriyeta bhagavaty addhā*

*Tan manye 'dhītam uttamam*

### **Translation:**

Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words)—these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service. One who has dedicated his life to the service of Kṛṣṇa through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge.

Hiranyakashipu became furious upon finding that Prahladha was a devotee of Vishnu, asked him:

*So 'haṁ vikatthamānasya*

*Śiraḥ kāyād dharāmi te*

*Gopāyeta haris tvādyā*

*Yas te śaraṇam īpsitam*

**Translation:**

*Because you are speaking so much nonsense,I shall now sever your head from your body.Now let me see your most worshipable God come to protect you.I want to see it.*

***Yas tvayā manda-bhāgyokto***

***Mad-anyo jagad-īśvaraḥ***

***Kvāsau yadi sa sarvatra***

***Kasmāt stambhe na dr̥śyate***

**Translation:**

O most unfortunate Prahlada,you have always described a supreme being other than me,a supreme being who is above everything,who is the controller of everyone,and who is all-pervading.But where is He?If He is everywhere,then why is He not present before me in this pillar?

**Prahladha's Response**

***“satyaṁ vidhātuṁ nija-bhr̥tya-bhāṣitaṁ***

***Vyāptaṁ ca bhūteṣv akhilaṁ jagat sthitaṁ***

***Nārāyaṇo 'pi vyaruṇat na bhūtabhāvano***

***Yastau stambhe sabhayaṁ na dadr̥śe”***

**Translation:**

To keep the words of His devotees true,

Though all-pervading and existing in everything,

Lord Narayana,the origin of all beings,

Did not appear from anywhere else—

He manifested from the pillar,unseen and feared by all.

*“asti me bhagavān prabhuḥ*

*Sarva-bhūteṣu gūḍhatvāt*

*Na drśyate tvamiśvaraḥ”*

**Translation:**

“He is present, my Lord and Master. Because He is hidden in the hearts of all living beings, He cannot be seen by material eyes. You cannot see Him, O Supreme Lord.”

### **5.1. Prahlada and Vaishnavism**

Prahlada is one of the most revered devotees in the Vaishnava tradition and is celebrated as a symbol of unwavering bhakti (devotion) towards Lord Vishnu. Born to the asura king Hiranyakashipu, who was a staunch enemy of Vishnu, Prahlada's deep devotion stood in stark contrast to his father's arrogance and atheism. Even from a young age, Prahlada was immersed in chanting Vishnu's names and preaching Vaishnava philosophy to his peers. Despite facing cruel punishments and multiple death attempts from his father for refusing to renounce Vishnu, Prahlada remained steadfast and fearless, embodying the ideal of saranagati (complete surrender to God). His life illustrates key tenets of Vaishnavism such as nirguna bhakti (devotion beyond material form), divine protection, and the ultimate supremacy of Lord Vishnu as the protector of dharma. His unshakable faith was rewarded when Vishnu manifested in his fierce Narasimha avatar, emerging from a pillar to destroy Hiranyakashipu and uphold his devotee's truth. This story reinforces the Vaishnava belief that God is always accessible and responsive to sincere devotion, even in the face of extreme adversity. Prahlada's teachings emphasized equality, nonviolence, and the importance of devotion over birth or status. His life became a model for the path of bhakti yoga inspiring generations of Vaishnavas. Through Prahlada, Vaishnavism asserts that true devotion transcends caste, age, and lineage. His legacy is preserved in the Bhagavata Purana, which regards him as a maha-bhagavata, or supreme devotee. Prahlada's devotion continues to be a guiding light for spiritual seekers, showcasing the power of faith, love, and surrender in the path of Vaishnavism.



## **6.NAVAVIDHA BHAKTHI-NINE FORMS OF DEVOTION**

### **6.1.SRAVANAM**– Hearing about the Lord

Shloka (SB 7.5.23):

*Śravaṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ smaraṇaṁ pāda-sevanam*

*Arcanaṁ vandanaṁ dāsyāṁ sakhyam ātma-nivedanam*

**Meaning:**

Hearing and chanting about the holy name, form, qualities, and pastimes of Lord Vishnu, remembering Him, serving His lotus feet, worshiping, offering prayers, acting as His servant, considering Him as a friend, and surrendering everything to Him—these are the nine processes of devotional service.

**Example:**

Maharaja Parikshit perfected his life through Sravanam by listening to Srimad Bhagavata from Sukadeva Gosvami.

### **6.2.KIRTANAM**– Chanting or glorifying the Lord

Shloka (SB 1.5.10):

*Kīrtayann anuraktena mugdha-citto na śṛṇvati*

*Kathāṁ te kathayām eva pravṛtto bhakti-vardhanīm*

**Meaning:**

I shall always speak about Your glories, for such narrations increase devotion, even if the listener is inattentive or ignorant.

**Example:**

Sukadeva Gosvami is the ideal devotee who engaged in kirtanam by narrating the Bhagavatham.

### **6.3.SMARANAM– Remembering the Lord**

Shloka (Vishnu Purana):

***Smartavyaḥ satataṁ viṣṇur vismartavyo na jātucit***

***Sarve vidhi-niṣedhāḥ syur etayor eva kiṅkarāḥ***

**Meaning:**

Lord Vishnu should always be remembered and never forgotten. All other rules and prohibitions are servants of these two principles.

**Example:**

Prahlada Maharaja constantly remembered Lord Vishnu, even amidst torture by his father.

### **6.4.PADA SEVANAM –Serving the Lord's feet**

Shloka (SB 9.4.63):

***Sādhavo hṛdayaṁ mahyaṁ sādḥūnām hṛdayaṁ tv aham***

***Mad-anyat te na jānanti nāhaṁ tebhyo manāg api***

**Meaning:**

The pure devotees are always in My heart, and I am always in theirs. They do not know anything else but Me, nor do I know anyone else but them.

**Example:**

Goddess Lakshmi is the perfect example of Pada-sevanam as she is always at the feet of the Lord.

## **6.5.ARCHANAM – Worship of the Deity**

Shloka (Bhagavad Gita 9.26):

***Patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyaṁ yo me bhaktyā prayacchati***

***Tad ahaṁ bhakty-upahṛtam aśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ***

**Meaning:**

If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf,a flower,fruit,or water,I will accept it.

**Example:**

Prithu Maharaja is known for his opulent and devotional deity worship.

## **6.6.VANDANAM – Offering prayers**

Shloka (SB 10.14.8):

***Tat te 'nukampāṁ su-samīkṣamāṇo***

***Bhuñjāna evātma-kṛtaṁ vipākam***

***Hṛd-vāg-vapurahir vidadhan namas te***

***Jīveta yo mukti-pade sa dāya-bhāk***

**Meaning:**

A person who tolerates all kinds of adverse conditions,offering respects with heart,words,and body,is eligible for liberation.

**Example:**

Akrura offered heartfelt prayers while journeying to see Lord Krishna.

### **6.7.DASYAM– Servitude to the Lord**

Shloka (Ramayana):

*Dāso 'haṁ kosalendrasya rāmasya kliṣṭa-kāriṇaḥ*

*Hanumān śatrusainyānām nihantā mārutatmajaḥ*

**Meaning:**

I am the humble servant of Lord Rama, the destroyer of enemy armies. I am Hanuman, the son of the wind god.

**Example:**

Hanuman is the perfect embodiment of dasya bhakti.

### **6.8.SAKHYAM–Friendship with the Lord**

Shloka (Bhagavad Gītā 4.3):

*Sa evāyaṁ mayā te 'dya yogaḥ proktaḥ purātanaḥ*

*Bhakto 'si me sakhā ceti rahasyaṁ hy etad uttamam*

**Meaning:**

Because you are My devotee and My friend, I am speaking this supreme instruction to you.

**Example:**

Arjuna is known for his close friendship with Lord Krisna.

### **6.9.ATMA-NIVEDHANAM– Complete surrender**

Shloka (SB 8.22.39):

*Sarvātma-nivedane ye tu*

*Mām bhajanti ananyayā*

***Teṣāṁ su-durlabhaṁ daivaṁ***

***Prīty-ātmāham na saṁśayaḥ***

**Meaning:**

Those who surrender everything unto Me without reservation, I become their very own. This is certain.

**Example:**

Bali Maharaja surrendered everything, including his body, to Lord Vamanadeva.

## **7.DANCE AS DEVOTION:Exploring Navavidha Bhakti through Bharatanatyam**

### **7.1.SRAVANAM**

In the Srimad Bhāgavatam(7.5.23), Prahlada Maharaja eloquently describes Sravanam—or devotional listening—as the first and foremost path of the Navavidha Bhakti(nine forms of devotion). Sravanam refers to the attentive and reverent act of hearing the divine glories, names,stories,and teachings of the Lord.It is the stage of devotion where the heart,mind and soul which is aligned to absorb the teachings,names, and stories of the divine. It is said that the heart becomes purified through such focused listening,which opens the path to inner transformation and spiritual connection.The story of King Parikshit,who attained liberation simply by listening to the Bhagavatha from Sukadeva Gosvami over seven days, highlights the power of Sravanam in bhakti-yoga.

In Bharatanatyam Margam Sravana could be mirrored through the piece called Alarippu which means “flowering” or “blossoming,” serves as both an invocation and an awakening—a preparatory ritual for the dancer’s body,mind,and soul.Just as Sravanam prepares the devotee’s heart for deeper experiences of the divine,Alarippu acts as a spiritual and physical awakening for both the dancer and the audience.The dancer,in the silence and rhythm of Alarippu,listens with the body and soul to the tala and prepares herself to express devotion.This quiet,meditative introduction parallels the receptive mood of Sravanam where the devotees humbly open themselves to divine vibrations. Furthermore,just as Sravanam is the foundation upon which other forms of bhakti develop,Alarippu is the seed from which the entire Margam blossoms, guiding the rasika step-by-step through a spiritual journey.In both traditions—devotional listening and classical dance—there is an unfolding of inner awareness through surrender,attention, and sacred discipline.Thus,the contrast between Sravanam in the Bhakti tradition and Alarippu in the Bharatanatyam Margam is not a division but a dance—between sound and movement,stillness and rhythm,listening and offering.Each tradition—scriptural and performative—uses its own vocabulary to guide the aspirant towards the same goal:union with the divine.In Sravanam,the ears are the gate to the heart;in Alarippu,the body becomes a temple of listening.Both open the sacred space within,reminding us that true devotion begins not in what we express, but in how deeply we are willing to receive.

## **7.2.KIRTANAM**

The second form in the Navavidha Bhakti described in the Bhagavatha Purana, emphasizes the devotional act of singing or chanting the glories, names, and pastimes of the Lord. It is considered a powerful medium for invoking divine presence and inner transformation. Kirtanam is not merely a musical or verbal expression—it is a deeply emotional, spiritual practice rooted in surrender (śaraṇāgati) and love (prema) towards the divine. In the context of Bharatanatyam, this concept beautifully aligns with the Margam structure, particularly in pieces like the Varnam and Padam, where the dancer not only portrays stories of divine love and valor but also ‘sings’ them through expressive abhinaya. The performance becomes a visual kirtan, with the dancer as both the devotee and the medium. Just as Kirtanam uplifts the heart through melodious repetition of divine names, the Bharatanatyam Margam uplifts both performer and audience through rhythm, expression, and narrative. In this sense, Bharatanatyam becomes an embodied Kirtanam—where body, mind, and spirit engage in singing the Lord’s glories through movement. The dancer’s role transcends entertainment, becoming a spiritual sadhaka (practitioner) engaged in devotional offering, echoing the same bhakti essence upheld by Kirtanam in the Puranic tradition.

## **7.3.SMARANAM**

The remembrance of the Lord, is the third form of devotion in the Navavidha Bhakti as outlined in the Srimad Bhagavata Purana (7.5.23). It is the continuous inward contemplation and remembrance of the divine name, form, attributes, and leelas (divine pastimes) of the Lord. Among all the forms of bhakti, Smaranam is deeply internal and personal, as it takes place in the devotee’s mind and heart, requiring no external tools or rituals. The essence of Smaranam lies in the transformation of the consciousness through the constant mental connection with the divine, fostering love, surrender and spiritual purity.

This devotional idea of Smaranam finds a powerful resonance in the Bharatanatyam Margam, particularly in its expressive (abhinaya) segments. Smaranam is especially embodied in items like the Varnam, Padam and Ashtapadi, where the dancer internalizes the Bhava (emotion) and recalls divine stories or the beloved deity through abhinaya. The dancer is not merely acting out a narrative but is actively remembering and experiencing the divinity through movement and expression. For Instance, in a Padham where the Nayika (heroine) pines for union with Lord Krishna, every gesture and glance is imbued with remembrance

and longing—this is Smaranam in action. The dancer becomes the devotee, and the stage becomes a sacred space for divine contemplation. Through facial expressions, subtle body language, and musical interpretation, the dancer recollects and relives the leelas of the Lord, inviting the audience into a shared space of sacred memory.

Thus, Bharatanatyam, particularly through its Margam structure, becomes a living and breathing form of Smaranam. It is an artistic meditation where memory and devotion meet, a sacred ritual where the dancer not only remembers the Lord but becomes the medium through which divine remembrance is transmitted to others.

#### **7.4.PADA-SEVANAM**

Pada-sevanam literally means “service at the feet of the Lord.” This bhakti is characterized by humble, devoted service to the divine feet of the Lord, recognizing them as the foundation of protection, grace, and liberation. The feet of the Lord symbolize the source of all spiritual strength, and a devotee immersed in Pada-Sevanam considers every act— physical, mental and emotional—as an offering to the divine feet.

In the Bhagavatham, Goddess Lakshmi is often cited as the ideal example of Pada-Sevanam. Eternally serving the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu with unwavering devotion, she embodies this form of bhakti in its purest sense. This form of devotion is not limited to physical service alone but also includes internal surrender, reverence, and an attitude of total humility.

This concept finds a profound and poetic expression in Bharatanatyam, as it is deeply rooted in bhakti rasa, becomes a living form of Pada-Sevanam when the dancer uses their art as an offering at the Lord’s feet.

The Alarippu, the opening item of the Margam, begins with salutations to the Earth and to the deity through anga (body) and pada (feet) movements. The dancer symbolically offers the first steps to the divine, just as a devotee offers their service in Pada-Sevanam. With every adavus and rhythmic movement striking the ground, the dancer is metaphorically worshipping the feet of the Lord. As the Margam



progresses through Jatiswaram, Varnam and Padams, the dancer uses expressions (abhinaya), stories (kathas) and rhythmic precision to reflect deep devotion. Each composition can be viewed as a spiritual gesture, a movement of surrender, and an emotional act of Pada-Sevanam—embodying the bhakta's yearning to be near the Lord, to serve Him, and to experience divine grace.

With each performance culminating in the ultimate goal of the Margam—union with the divine (moksha), which mirrors the intent behind Pada-Sevanam. Through dance, the dancer becomes both the devotee and the offering—each step a prayer, each gesture an act of worship—at the divine feet of the Lord.

### **7.5. ARCHANAM**

Archanam is the fifth form in the Navavidha Bhakti tradition, refers to worshipping the Lord through ritualistic and heartfelt offerings. Traditionally, this involves offering flowers, incense, food, lamps, and water, accompanied by mantra chanting and devotional intent. It is a structured form of expressing reverence, where the devotee aligns mind, body, and spirit in service to the divine. This practice is not limited to the temple but extends to every sincere act done with a spirit of offering and surrender.

This concept of structured, ritualistic worship through movement, gesture and expression finds a beautiful parallel in the Bharatanatyam Margam, especially when the dancer performs with a devotional intention (Bhakti Bhava).

Just as Archanam involves various ritualistic steps in deity worship (like avāhana, snāna, vastra, gandha, puṣpa, āratī) the Margam also unfolds step by step—from the invocatory Alarippu, through Jatiswaram, Shabdham, and reaching its peak in the Varnam, which is considered the most elaborate and expressive item. Each segment of the Margam is like an offering—a flower, a lamp, a song.

The Varnam can be equated to the core of Archanam. It is here that the dancer pours out emotions, pleads, praises, and expresses longing for the divine—mirroring the emotional intensity of worship. This is not unlike the archaka (priest or devotee) who performs detailed upacharas (services) to the deity, combining action (kriya), song (gāna), and feeling (Bhava). In Padams and Javalis, the dancer

expresses more intimate devotion, akin to the loving offerings of flowers or food in Archanam. The Abhinaya (expressive aspect) transforms the dance into a living altar where the deity is invoked and worshipped. Finally, the Tillana, with its joyous rhythm and celebratory nature, can be seen as the final ārati, where the devotee-dancer celebrates the presence of the divine in all its glory.

## **7.6.VANDANAM**

The term Vandanam literally means offering prayers—a sincere act of bowing down, showing humility, and expressing one's devotion through words and heart-felt salutations to the Divine. This path is not limited to vocal prayers; it encompasses every action and expression that arises from a place of gratitude and reverence. Devotees like Akrura, who offered spontaneous and poetic prayers to Lord Krishna during his journey to Gokula, exemplify this form of devotion.

Vandanam can be both internal and external: internal through meditative reflection and external through verbal or physical expressions, including namaskāra, stuti, and ānjali hasta. This bhakti is deeply emotional and intimate, as the devotee surrenders their ego and glorifies the Lord with folded hands and reverent words. Each piece in the Margam represents a stage in the dancer's devotional journey. Within this sequence, Vandanam finds rich and symbolic expressions, especially through the Alarippu, Pushpanjali, and Mangalam.

Pushpanjali, which often opens a recital, is the literal and symbolic offering of flowers and salutations to the deity, the guru, the musicians, and the audience. This act mirrors the essence of Vandanam—a prayerful offering and a humbling of the self at the feet of the Divine.

In the Alarippu, though abstract in nature, the dancer offers pure movement as an obeisance. The use of anjali hasta (folded hands) and salutations to the eight directions (Ashta-dik) reflect a non-verbal form of Vandanam.

Finally, the Mangalam, the concluding piece, is another example of Vandanam in Bharatanatyam. It is a prayer for auspiciousness and a gesture of gratitude—closing the performance with humility and devotion. Even within pieces like the Padam and Keerthanam, the dancer often embodies a devotee offering prayers to the Lord, surrendering in love and longing. These narrative expressions are deeply rooted in the emotion of vandanam bhakti, where the dance becomes a moving prayer.

## **7.7.DASYAM**

Dasyam, or servitude, is the seventh form of devotion in the Navavidha Bhakti. It refers to cultivating the mood of a faithful and humble servant towards the divine, offering oneself in complete service to the Lord without ego or expectation. The devotee sees themselves as a servant who finds joy in fulfilling the desires of the Lord, acting solely for His pleasure. This Bhava (emotion) is beautifully exemplified in the character of Hanuman, whose unwavering loyalty and selfless service to Lord Rama embodies the essence of Dasya Bhakti.

In Bharatanatyam Margam, Dasyam Bhakti finds profound artistic expression. The Margam meaning “path” or “progression,” is a traditional performance sequence that spiritually parallels the journey of a devotee—from invocation to surrender. Dasyam aligns most closely with the Varnam, which is considered the central and most intense part of the recital. In the Varnam, the Nayika (heroine) is often portrayed as the humble devotee or servant yearning to serve the Lord. Her pleasing, longing, and surrender showcases the emotional nuances of dasya-bhakti—expressed through intricate abhinaya (expression), rhythmic jatis, and lyrical devotion.

Further, items like the Padam and Javali explore the subtle emotions of a devotee in service, sometimes expressing the pain of separation or the joy of fulfilling the Lord’s desires. These pieces highlight the psychological depth and emotional richness of dasyam, where the soul identifies itself not as an independent enjoyer but as the Lord’s eternal sevaka (servant).

Thus, the Dasya-bhakti seen in the Bhagavatha Purana is not only a spiritual ideal but a deeply embodied experience in Bharatanatyam. Through expressive storytelling, bodily discipline and emotional immersion, the dancer becomes both a sadhaka (seeker) and sevaka (servant), merging art with devotion. The performance becomes an offering—a ritual of service—where the dancer’s body, breath and emotion serve the divine, just as a true dasa would.

## **7.8.SAKHYAM**

It is the path of friendship with the Divine. It is one of the most intimate forms of Bhakti described in the Bhagavata Purana. It emphasizes a deep, personal relationship with the Lord, where the devotee sees the Divine not as a distant deity, but as a close and trusted companion. This form of devotion is beautifully exemplified in the bond between Arjuna and Krishna, where Arjuna, despite Krishna being the Supreme Being, treats Him as a friend. This relationship is marked by trust and emotional closeness, transcending the boundaries of reverence and ritual.

In the context of Bharatanatyam Margam, Sakhyam finds its resonance especially in the Padam and Javalis, where the nayika often expresses her intimate emotions with the Divine. These pieces are rooted in sringara bhakti, which, while romantic in tone, often takes on the deeper essence of spiritual companionship. Just as Arjuna could confide in Krishna during his moral and emotional conflict in the Bhagavad Gita, the nayika in a Padam sometimes expresses her longing, joy or even playful quarrels with her Divine Beloved—showcasing the personal, friendly bond between devotee and Lord. Moreover, the Abhinaya aspect of Bharatanatyam allows the dancer to portray nuanced emotions, bringing out the layered expressions of Sakhya Bhakti. In this way, Bharatanatyam becomes not just a performance but a lived experience of devotion. The dancer, through the Margam, walks the path of bhakti, and in Sakhyam, they embody the divine friendship that transcends time—making the audience not just viewers, but participants in that sacred bond.

## **7.9.ATMA NIVEDHANAM**

Atma Nivedhanam, the ninth and most intense form of Navavidha Bhakti, refers to the total surrender of the self to the Divine. It is not just an external offering of actions or words but an internal dedication where the devotee relinquishes ego, ownership, and control, entrusting their body, mind and soul to the will of the Lord. In the Bhagavata Purana, this form of devotion is epitomized by Bali Maharaja, who offered his entire kingdom and ultimately himself to Lord Vamanadeva, despite opposition and personal loss. His surrender reflects the highest state of bhakti, where the devotee becomes one with the will of the Divine, with no expectation in return. This concept resonates deeply within the classical dance form of Bharatanatyam, especially in the concluding piece of the Margam—the Thillana followed by the Mangalam.

In the Bharatanatyam Margam, the dancer progresses from invocation (Alarippu) through various stages of devotion, emotion, and storytelling. By the time the dancer reaches the final item, the Thillana—a vibrant piece filled with complex rhythmic patterns—the body and spirit are fully immersed in divine celebration. However, it is in the Mangalam, the last piece, where the dancer bows down in reverence, offering gratitude and seeking blessings. This act is symbolic of Atma Nivedhanam—a complete offering of the self at the feet of the Lord. The dancer, having expressed devotion through abhinaya, nritta and bhava, now concludes the journey with spiritual humility and surrender, much like a devotee who culminates their path with self-effacement and absolute dedication. Thus, Bharatanatyam becomes not just a performance but a transformative spiritual path, aligning deeply with the ideals of Atma Nivedhanam in the Bhakti tradition.

## **8.FINDINGS**

A comprehensive examination of Navavidha Bhakthi as described in the Bhagavata Purana reveals its deeply rooted philosophical and spiritual framework, which finds a compelling parallel in the traditional structure of the Bharatanatyam Margam. Classical Indian dance, particularly Bharatanatyam, draws extensively from sacred literature, wherein devotion (Bhakti) becomes both the subject and the medium of artistic expression. The integration of Navavidha Bhakti—the ninefold path of devotion — into Bharatanatyam’s performance format reflects the harmonious blending of aesthetics (rasa) and spirituality (bhava). The Margam, meaning “the path,” becomes not just a performance structure, but a metaphorical and experiential journey mirroring the progressive evolution of a devotee’s relationship with the divine.

The first limb of devotion, Sravanam (listening to the glories of the Lord), resonates strongly with Alarippu, the introductory piece of the Margam. Although abstract in nature and devoid of abhinaya (facial expressions), Alarippu prepares the dancer both physically and spiritually for the performance ahead. Just as Sravanam represents the initial opening of the heart and mind to divine wisdom, Alarippu serves as an invocation, opening the body through rhythmic movements, awakening the senses and turning the performer to the sacred nature of the art. It creates an atmosphere of receptivity and concentration, echoing the inner silence and focus required for spiritual listening.

Jatiswaram, composed purely of rhythmic syllables and melodic patterns, showcases the beauty of nritta (pure dance) and aligns with Pada-sevanam (service at the feet of the Lord). This form of Bhakti emphasizes physical service and action without necessarily involving emotional or verbal expression. In Jatiswaram, the dancer offers their physical precision, energy and dedication to the divine through dynamic movement, thereby reflecting the idea of rendering service through one’s body and actions — a form of karma yoga embedded in devotion.

Shabdham, which introduces abhinaya and lyrical content, typically contains simple yet expressive devotional stories or praises, often addressed to deities like Muruga or Krishna. This directly corresponds to Kīrtanam (singing the glories of the Lord). Through the enactment of sacred tales and poetic hymns, Shabdham embodies vocal devotion translated into expressive movement, allowing the dancer to praise and glorify the divine through body and voice. The communicative element introduced here strengthens the devotional connection between performer and audience, creating a shared spiritual experience.

The centerpiece of the Margam, the Varnam offers the richest potential for emotional and narrative exploration. It blends complex rhythmic sequences with intricate abhinaya, allowing for the portrayal of longing, separation, love, and surrender—themes central to Bhakti. The Varnam reflects multiple Bhakti modes, primarily Smaranam (remembrance), Vandanam (salutation), and Dasyam (servitude). Through

narrative storytelling, the dancer constantly remembers and re-enacts the divine episodes of the chosen deity, pays repeated homage, and portrays the role of the humble servant or the yearning devotee. The emotive depth and artistic layering of the Varnam make it the spiritual heart of the Margam, representing the devotee's most intense and intimate engagement with the divine.

Padams, which follows the Varnam, are slower-paced expressive items often exploring deeper emotions of love, separation even surrender with the deity. These pieces align with Sakhyam (friendship) and Atma-nivedanam (complete self-surrender). In these compositions, the devotee interacts with the divine not as a distant god but as a close companion, lover, or confidant. The boundaries between self and divine blur in the emotional surrender of the devotee, who offers not just words or actions but their entire being in the act of performance. This spiritual intimacy is vividly portrayed through nuanced expressions and subtle gestures, drawing the audience into a shared space of inner devotion.

Thillana, known for its vibrant rhythm and celebratory energy, combines pure dance with devotional verses in its final segment. It reflects Archanam—the act of formal worship through offerings. Here, the dancer, after the emotional and spiritual journey of previous pieces, celebrates the divine through joyful movement and rhythm, akin to offering flowers, music, and dance at the deity's feet. It is a moment of ecstatic devotion, where the soul, having traversed various stages of Bhakti, dances in divine presence with freedom and delight.

The final piece, Mangalam, is a formal conclusion that signifies gratitude, blessings. It corresponds again to Vandanam, reaffirming humility and reverence as the dancer offers final salutations to the audience, guru, and the divine. It serves as a symbolic return from the transcendental space of performance to the mundane, closing the spiritual circle that began with Alarippu.

Through this detailed correlation, it becomes evident that Bharatanatyam is not merely an artistic performance but a sacred embodiment of Bhakti philosophy. Each piece of the Margam represents a step on the path of devotion, allowing the dancer to traverse the spiritual spectrum of Navavidha Bhakti. The dance becomes an offering, a prayer in motion, and a means of divine communion—for both the performer and the spectator. The literature of the Bhagavata Purana, therefore, finds a living expression in Bharatanatyam, affirming the inseparable bond between sacred text and classical art.

## 9.CONCLUSION

The sacred relationship between Bharatanatyam and Bhakti literature is more than an aesthetic collaboration-it is a profound spiritual confluence that brings together the heart of devotion and the soul of classical dance. Rooted in centuries of tradition, both are expressions of a higher truth, aiming not merely to please the senses but to elevate the spirit. When Bharatanatyam embodies Bhakti, the stage transforms into a sanctum, the dancer into a devotee, and the performance into an offering.

Bharatanatyam, often referred to as a visual scripture, operates on multiple layers-technical precision, emotional depth and spiritual intent. It is a classical form that demands discipline and mastery, but more importantly, it requires surrender. In its ideal form, Bharatanatyam becomes Natya Yoga, a union through performance, where the dancer's body becomes the medium through which the ineffable is made tangible. Each gesture, posture, and movement becomes a mantra, a sacred utterance choreographed through the limbs. The very roots of Bharatanatyam lie in temple traditions, where the dance was not entertainment but ritual—a living form of prayer offered to the deities by devadasis in the sanctums of temples.

Bhakti literature, on the other hand, is a literary expression of divine love. It arises from the human heart's intense longing for the Supreme. Whether it is the soul-stirring hymns of the Tamil Alwars or the impassioned outpourings of the Nayanmars, the devotion of Andal, or the transcendental compositions of saints like Tulsidas, Kabir, Mirabai, and Surdas—their words were not merely poetic; they were experiential. These mystic poets did not write from a place of philosophy alone, but from personal spiritual encounters. Their verses pulse with bhava, rasa and the unshakeable faith of the devotee who seeks nothing but



union with the Divine. When the dancer interprets these poetic texts through abhinaya, the connection between Bharatanatyam and Bhakti comes alive. The dancer does not simply enact a character or story; she becomes the devotee, the longing, the joy, the pain, and ultimately the realization that these texts embody.

In many ways, the classical Margam repertoire of Bharatanatyam mirrors the trajectory of a spiritual seeker. It begins with Alarippu, a rhythmic invocation symbolizing the blossoming of consciousness and the surrender of the body to divine will. This is followed by the Jatiswaram where melody and rhythm are explored without the use of words. Then comes the Shabdham where meaning enters, often in the form of devotional lyrics, usually simple yet powerful, praising a deity. The Varnam is the heart of the Margam, where the dancer delves deep into the experience of Bhakti—expressing love, longing, frustration, hope and divine union. Following the varnam, pieces like the Padam and Javalis offer intimate expressions of Bhakti, often highlighting the personal relationship between devotees and deity—at times filled with mischief, sometimes with complaints, and often with intense emotion. Through abhinaya, the dancer enacts the yearning, the dream, the waking, the ritual—a sequence that speaks to the archetypal human longing for divine union.

The dancer's tears are the devotee's tears. Her joy is the devotee's ecstasy. Her gestures illuminate verses that may be complex or philosophical, rendering them accessible and deeply moving. In this sense, Bharatanatyam performs the highest function of art—it awakens, transforms and elevates.

Even the final piece of the Margam, the Thillana, which is joyous and rhythmic, carries spiritual symbolism. This mirrors the Bhakti path's emphasis on surrender and contentment, no matter the outcome of one's quest.

In Bhakti traditions, the Navavidha Bhakti—the nine modes of devotion—outline the many ways a devotee can express love for the Divine.

Despite modern reinterpretations and the diversification of themes, many dancers return to devotional content as the source of their deepest inspiration. Bhakti literature offers timeless themes—longing, love, surrender, struggle, realization. Its adaptability allows dancers to continually discover new depths in familiar texts. Even audiences unfamiliar with the Sanskrit or Tamil verses can intuitively understand the emotions being conveyed. This emotional universality is what makes Bhakti literature so suited to a performance form like Bharatanatyam.

Ultimately, the sacred dialogue between Bharatanatyam and Bhakti is a reminder that devotion is not bound by words, rituals, or forms. It is an inner fire that seeks expression, and whether through pen or posture, it flows toward the Divine. When these two traditions meet—when a dancer brings to life the verses of a Bhakti poet—the result is alchemy. It is not merely art. It is an experience of transcendence.

In this fusion of movement and meaning, of rhythm and realization, Bharatanatyam does not simply illustrate Bhakti literature—it becomes it. And in doing so, it assures us that the sacred is not a distant realm. It is here, in the body, in the breath, in the moment of performance, where art, heart, and spirit converge.

Today, Bharatanatyam serves not only as a performance art but as a cultural and spiritual archive. It preserves oral and written traditions, keeping alive the legacy of saints, scriptures and philosophies. The aesthetic principles of rasa (emotive flavor), bhava (expression) and tatva (essence) remain central, ensuring that what is communicated is not simply story or song, but experience. As long as Bharatanatyam continues to draw from Bhakti, it will remain a living, breathing tradition.

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## **11.APPENDIX**

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हिरण्यकशिपुरुवाच –

प्रहादानूच्यतां तात स्वधीते किञ्चिदुत्तमम्।

कालेनैतावता युष्मन् यदशिक्षद्गुरोर्भवान्॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam-Canto 7,

Chapter 5,Verse 5)

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श्रीप्रह्लाद उवाच–

श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम्।

अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम्॥

इति पुंसार्पिता विष्णौ भक्तिश्चेन्नवलक्षणा।

क्रियते भगवत्यद्धा तन्मन्येऽधीतमुत्तमम्॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam –Canto 7,

Chapter 5,Verse 23-24)

**Page:22**

सोऽहं विकथ्यमानस्य

शिरः कायाद् धरामि ते।

गोपायेत हरिस्त्वादय

यस्ते शरणमीप्सितम्॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavata-Canto 10,

Chapter 51,Verse 13)

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यस्त्वया मन्दभाग्योक्तो

मदन्यो जगदीश्वरः।

क्वासौ यदि स सर्वत्र

कस्मात् स्तम्भे न दृश्यते॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam-Canto 7,

Chapter 8,Verse 6)

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सत्यं विधातुं निजभृत्यभाषितं

व्याप्तं च भूतेष्वखिलं जगत्स्थितम्।

नारायणोऽपि व्यरुणद्धि न भूतभावनो

यस्तौ स्तम्भे सभयं न ददर्श ॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam-Canto 7,

Chapter 8,Verse 17)

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अस्ति मे भगवान् प्रभुः

सर्वभूतेषु गूढत्वात्

न दृश्यसे त्वमीश्वरः॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam-Canto 1,

Chapter 8,Verse 18)

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श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पाद-सेवनम् ।

अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यमात्म-निवेदनम् ॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam-Canto 7,Chapter 5,Verse 23)

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कीर्तयन्ननुरक्तेन मुग्धचितो न शृण्वति ।

कथां ते कथयामेव प्रवृत्तो भक्तिवर्धनीम् ॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam-Canto 12,

Chapter 13,Verse 1)

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स्मर्तव्यः सततं विष्णुर्विस्मर्तव्यो न जातुचित् ।

सर्वे विधि-निषेधाः स्युरेतयोरेव किंकराः ॥

(Padma Purana-Uttara Khanda,

Chapter 226,Verse 18)

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साधवो हृदयं मह्यं साधूनां हृदयं त्वहम् ।

मदन्यत् ते न जानन्ति नाहं तेभ्यो मनागपि ॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam-Canto 9,

Chapter 4,Verse 63)

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पत्रं पुष्पं फलं तोयं यो मे भक्त्या प्रयच्छति ।

तदहं भक्त्युपहृतमश्नामि प्रयतात्मनः ॥

(Bhagavad Gita-Chapter 9,Verse 26)

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तत्तेऽनुकम्पां सु समीक्षमाणो

भुञ्जान एवात्मकृतं विपाकम् ।

हृद्वाग्वपुर्भिर्विदधन्नमस्ते

जीवेत यो मुक्तिपदे स दायभाक् ॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam-Canto 10,

Chapter 14,Verse 8)

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दासोऽहं कोसलेन्द्रस्य रामस्य क्लिष्टकारिणः ।

हनूमान् शत्रुसैन्यानां निहन्ता मारुतात्मजः ॥

(Valmiki Ramayana-Sundara Kanda,

Chapter 42,Verse 34)

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स एवायं मया तेऽद्य योगः प्रोक्तः पुरातनः ।

भक्तोऽसि मे सखा चेति रहस्यं ह्येतदुत्तमम्

(Bhagavad Gita-Book:4-Jñāna Karma Sannyāsa Yoga,

Chapter 4,Verse 3)

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सर्वात्मनिवेदने ये तु मां भजन्त्यनन्यया ।

तेषां सुदुर्लभं दैवं प्रीत्यात्माहं न संशयः ॥

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam-Canto 8,

Chapter 22,Verse 39)

