**HISTORY**

**Bharatanātyam** is an [Indian classical dance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_classical_dance) form that originated in [Tamil Nadu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu), India. It is a classical dance form recognized by the [Sangeet Natak Akademi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sangeet_Natak_Akademi" \o "Sangeet Natak Akademi), and expresses South Indian religious themes and spiritual ideas of [Hinduism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism).

*Bharatanatyam* contains different types of *bani*. *Bani*, or "tradition", is a term used to describe the dance technique and style specific to a guru or school, often named for the village of the guru. *Bharatanatyam* style is noted for its fixed upper torso, bent legs, and flexed knees (*Aramandi*) combined with footwork, and a vocabulary of [sign language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sign_language) based on gestures of hands, eyes, and face muscles. The dance is accompanied by music and a singer, and typically the dancer's [guru](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guru) is present as the *nattuvanar* or director-conductor of the performance and art. The performance repertoire of Bharatanatyam, like other classical dances, includes *nrita* (pure dance), *[nritya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nritya" \o "Nritya)* (Conveys a meaning to the audience through hand gestures) and *[natya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_classical_dance" \o "Indian classical dance)* (Consists of the elements of drama). A program of bharatanatyam usually lasts two hours without interruption and includes a specific list of procedures, all performed by one dancer, who does not leave the stage or change costume. The accompanying orchestra—composed of drums, drone, and singer—occupies the back of the stage, led by the guru, or the teacher, of the dancer.

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The theoretical foundations of dance Bharatanatyam are found first in *[Natya Shastra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natya_Shastra" \o "Natya Shastra)*, a Sanskrit text of performance arts and later in a Tamil text called Kootha nool taken from Tholkappiyam (250 BCE).

*Natya Shastra* is attributed to the ancient scholar [Bharata Muni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bharata_Muni" \o "Bharata Muni), and its first complete compilation is dated to between 500 BCE and 200 CE, but estimates vary between 500 BCE and 500 CE.[]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bharatanatyam#cite_note-FOOTNOTEWallace_Dace1963249-25) Richmond et al. estimate the *Natasutras* to have been composed around 600 BCE. The most studied version of the *Natya Shastra* text consists of about 6000 verses structured into 36 chapters. The text, states Natalia Lidova, describes the theory of *Tāṇḍava* dance ([Shiva](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva)), the theory of *rasa*, of *bhāva*, expression, gestures, acting techniques, basic steps, standing postures—all of which are part of Indian classical dances. Dance and performance arts, states this text, are a form of expression of spiritual ideas, virtues and the essence of scriptures.

Historical references to dance are found in the Tamil epics *[Silappatikaram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silappatikaram" \o "Silappatikaram)* (c. 2nd century CE) and *Manimegalai* (c. 6th century). The ancient text *Silappatikaram*, includes a story of a dancing girl named Madhavi; it describes the dance training regimen called *Arangatrau Kathai* of Madhavi in verses 113 through 159. The carvings in Kanchipuram's Shiva temple that have been dated to 6th to 9th century CE suggest dance was a well-developed performance art by about the mid 1st millennium CE.