



THE ORAL TRADITION GIVING RISE TO DIFFERENT BĀNIS OR
PRACTICING TRADITION OF BHARATANĀṬYA

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Introduction:

Cultural Heritage is an expression of the way of living of a community, which is passed on from generation to generation. There are two types of Heritage, Tangible and Intangible. Tangible heritages are physical, such as artefacts, monuments, temples, paintings etc. that can be seen and felt. Intangible heritages are oral traditions, performing arts, local knowledge, traditional skills and certain folk dances, that are passed on from generation to generation through *Guru Śishya Parampara*.¹ When a *Parampara* is firmly established, it is called a *Sampradāya*² In India the *Guru Shishya Parampara* existed for centuries in all fields, be it education, spiritual or any of the art forms. In *Bharatanāṭya*³, the oral or practicing tradition developed based on the way *Aḍavus*⁴ were taught by the different teachers, who developed a distinct technique of their own. This came to be known as *Bāṇi*⁵. *Bāni* was named after the village or town, from which the teacher hailed. There are eight major *Bānis* in *Bharatanāṭya*. Kalakshetra *Bāni*, the most recent one is based on the name of the institution Kalakshetra started by Rukmini devi Arundale around 1936 AD. The eight major *Bānis* are Maisūru, Mūguru, Nañjanagūḍu and Kōlāra of Karnāṭaka (of the old Maisūru State) and Pandanallūr, Tañjāvūr, Vaļuvūr, and Kalakshetra of Tamil Nāḍu (of the old Madras state).

Tracing the Trail of Bānis Historically

Tamil Nadu Bānis:

Establishment of *Bānis* is closely related to the '*Devadāsi Paddhati*'.⁶ In the oldest Tamil literature, we may distinguish two types of possible antecedents to the *Devadāsi*⁷ 'proper'. "The first category, the Tatumakal, kontimakaliar and mutuvay pentir seems to have continued in the village cults of South India. The second category the Virali and Patini, represents a most likely antecedent of the later *Devadāsi* proper" (Kersenboom 1987: 180). The relocation of devadāsis, especially the *Viralis*⁸, in temples began during Pallava period and reached the peak during the reign of late Cōlā period. Dance done at the temple also became a hereditary profession and the dominance of the *Devadāsi* community was established. The dance done by *Devadāsis* came to be known as *Cadir Nāc* or *Dāsi Āṭṭam*. "Sadir is a dance style which is mainly based on the Adavu technique which emerged after the 14th Century". (Subrahmanyam 1979:77) *Naṭṭuvaṇārs*⁹ of *Ōduvār*¹⁰ community who were into teaching dance and doing

¹ Guru Sishya Parampara - uninterrupted teacher-student succession for many generations.

² Sampradāya - tradition

³ Bharatanāṭya – renamed as Bharatanāṭya in the 20th Century owing its origin in Cadir Nāc or Dāsi Āṭṭam Or Nrutya which was the name under which all the Bānis developed except Kalakshetra

⁴ Aḍavus - basic steps or building blocks of Nṭṭa (pure dance based on the movement of Aṅgas the main organs, Prathyāṅgas the ancillary organs and Upāṅgas the minor organs present in the face) in Bharatanāṭya

⁵ Bāṇi – oral or practicing tradition developed based on the way Adavu technique was developed and taught by the Guru who started the Bāṇi

⁶ Devadāsi Paddhati – tradition of dedicating young girls to the God in the temple.

⁷ Devadāsi - servant of the God.

⁸ Viralis – Dancing women who went from court to court seeking patronage and wealth.

⁹ Naṭṭuvaṇārs – they were most of the time teachers of Devadāsis or accompanists of Devadāsis who kept the beat (Tāla), with the help of cymbals (Naṭṭuvāṅgam).

¹⁰ Ōduvār – A community which excelled in music, dance and writing Tēvārams, (short poems in praise of God). They were skilled in many languages such as Tamil, Telugu and Samskr̥ta.



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Naṭṭuvāṅgam developed *Bāṅis*.

Maisūru Parampares

After the fall of Vijayanagara Empire in the 15th Century, Oḍeyars who were their serfs came to Maisūru and established their reign. All the artists also migrated with them and thus Maisūru became the center for all fine arts.

Due to unfortunate happenings, full details of all the *Bāṅis* are available only from the 19th century. Maisūru *Parampara* of *Dāsi Nṛtya* became established during Mummaḍi Kṛṣṇarāja Oḍeyar (1799 – 1831 AD). His son - in - law Liṅgarāja was a very prolific composer of Kṛtis, Jāvalis and, Yakshagānas and son 10th Cāmarāja Oḍeyar (1831-1868/1894 AD) was a connoisseur of Music and Dance. *Jāvali*¹¹ was his favorite and Maisūru became famous as the birthplace of *Jāvali*. During his time, dance teachers came up with new items in dance. This trend continued during the reigns of Nālvaḍi Kṛṣṇa Rāja Oḍeyar (1895 -1940 AD) and Jayacāmarāja Oḍeyar (1940 – 1972 AD).

Objective

This paper traces how the Oral tradition of *Guru-Śishya Parampara* led to *Bāṅis* in *Bharatanāṭyam*. Data collected for the MPhil dissertation “Tracing the origin of *Aḍavus* through Dance Literature and Practicing Traditions” by the Author has been used for this. A summary of this is presented in Table 1 given in the end. Mūguru *Bāṅi* from Karnāṭaka has been described in detail as an example.

Scope of the study

Senior Gurus of the eight *Bāṅis* have been interviewed to gather information about their lineage, specialties of the *Aḍavus* and dances and the method of teaching *Aḍavus* in the earlier days. The *Aḍavus*, as taught currently, by each of the Gurus interviewed, have been documented by video-taping a live demonstration. Each of the *Bāṅi* has distinct characteristics of its own, that can be immediately identified when a performance is witnessed. These aspects have been brought out in Mūguru *Bāṅi* which have been dealt in detail this paper. Only analysis and inference have been given for the other *Bāṅis*.

Limitations

In view of the fact that only one Guru has been interviewed for each *Bāṅi*, the *Aḍavus* as practiced by that Guru has been used in the research. There could be variations within the *Bāṅi* in a larger sense.

Methodology

Since dance is art it is qualitative. It is Historical, since the lineage of *Bāṅis* is traced through centuries. It is descriptive since all aspects of the *Bāṅi* are described. A Senior Guru has been interviewed to gather information about the *Bāṅi* and *Aḍavus* have been video-taped.

Māguru Sampradāya:

Lineage: Mūguru Sampradāya was started by Nāṭyācārya Amrutappa and Mūguru Subbaṅṅa who in 1850 AD established a school. Guru Amrutappa’s ancestors, who were artistes in the court of Vijayanagara, migrated to Śrīraṅgapaṭana and then to Maisūru. The school was developed to its full potential by Nruthya Visharada Gundappa who taught there. Amrutappa went to the palace dance school of Maisūru and remained as the director and court scholar for three generations. His granddaughter Jējamma carried on the lineage. She taught Koḍavūr Bāgavata Mādhava Rao who passed away at the age of 94 in 2016. His student Ramakrishna Kodancha is carrying on the lineage.

Specialty: Guru Amrutappa arranged seminars and workshops and supported scholars to do research in dance. Many unique and difficult *Aḍavus* are done in this *Bāṅi*. *Citra Nṛtya*¹² was taught by Amrutappa.

¹¹ Jāvali – meaning of Jāvali is poem or song in Kannaḍa. It is a light composition based on Nāyaka Nāyika Bhāva with love as the central theme sung and danced.

¹² Citra Nṛtya - figures being drawn on the floor with foot and toes as the dancer is dancing through different materials spread on floor such as sand, color powder or Raṅgoli



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He once took up the challenge of a rival Guru from Tañjāvūr and made his students perform Gītopadeśsa dance drama on a stage covered with white cloth when At the end of dance when it was removed a beautiful picture of Kṛṣṇa in the chariot holding the reins of four horses was drawn on the sand beneath it.

Unique Adavus: *Kṇḍṛshṇa Mandi*, *Digidigi tai*, *Vāli Mukṭāya* done bending in *Cakrāsana*¹³ and doing hand and leg movements and coming back to *Ardhmaṇḍala* from *Cakrāsana* and finishing the *Aḍavu* by doing *Munde Mukṭāya*.

Total Aḍavus taught today: 80.

Teaching Methods and Performance explained by Koḍavūr Bāgavata Mādhava Rao

The lessons started on an auspicious day. Student was asked to bring *Pūja Sāmagri*¹⁴ with five *Serūs*¹⁵ of Paddy. The sequence in which the student learnt the dances was as follows:

Sādhaka Pūje – *Pūja* would be done on the first day after which exercises would be taught.

Aḍavu Pūje – After teaching how to do *Namaskāra*¹⁶ or *Bhūmi Vandana*¹⁷ the student was made to stand on cloth with paddy spread underneath and taught the first step *Taṭṭaḍavu*. All *Aḍavus* were taught first.

Alari Pūje – *Pūja* done before starting *Alari*, the word used for *Alaripu*¹⁸.

*Varṇa*¹⁹ *Pūje* – *Pūja* done before starting to learn *Varṇa*. More of *Svarajatis* than other *Varṇas* were taught.

Oddige Pūje – *Pūja* done before the rehearsal for the performance; and finally

Gejje Pūje – The formality of tying the jingles which involved many rituals done before the girl matured if she was to be dedicated to God. It was done at the temple. After the *Gejje Pūje*, the girl would give her debut performance.

Performance:

There would be *Pūrvaraṅga Vidhi*²⁰ before the actual performance began in which *Prabhanda*²¹, *Cūrṇike*²² in *Ārabi Rāga* would be sung and *Mēlaprāpti Jati*²³ would be played on *Mṛdaṅga*, then *Nāṭya Maṅgalam*²⁴ was sung and the screen opened. *Pushpāñjali*²⁵ followed by *Alari* would be done. Then all the other dances in the *Mārga*²⁶ were done. *Maṅgala* was not sung at the end.

¹³ Cakrāsana – Yoga posture of bending backwards with the two hands and legs touching the floor near each other, resembling a wheel.

¹⁴ Pūja Sāmagri – materials needed to worship God.

¹⁵ Serū - a little more than a Kg

¹⁶ Namaskāra – Salutation

¹⁷ Bhūmi Vandana – Prostration to Earth considered as mother

¹⁸ Alaripu – Meaning blossoming, this is the first Nrṭta item taught in the class and danced in a program

¹⁹ Varṇa – Varṇa is the most important item in a Bharatanāṭya program giving equal emphasis to Nṛṭta and Nṛṭya (dance involving showing of expression with face and hand gestures to the meaning of lyrics). It involves Nāyaka Nayikā Bhāva. There are Pada, Cauka, Svarajati, Tāna and Daru Varṇas danced in Bharatanāṭya

²⁰ Pūrvaraṅga Vidhi – It is the sequential rituals done and the musical instruments played on the stage before the screen opens for performance. Pūrva – before, raṅga – stage, Vidhi - ritual

²¹ Prabhanda – It is a composition having intricate Jatis and small piece of Sāhitya (lyrics) in the end.

²² Cūrṇike – A small composition with four to 16 lines of lyrics in praise of or hailing God or King either in Sanskrit or regional languages.

²³ Mēlaprāpti Jati – Four to eight Āvartas (if the sequence of a Tāla with all its parts called Aṅgas are put once, it makes one Āvarta) are played in Āditāla on Mṛdaṅga followed by other accompanying instruments.

²⁴ Nāṭya Maṅgalam – It was sung as an auspicious song before the screen opened for the performance.

²⁵ Pushpāñjali – It was the first dance done after the opening of screen with different combinations of Jatis and offering of flowers to Nataraja, the lord of dance on the stage and Vinayāka, the god removing obstruction, to the Gurus, accompanists, earth and audience.

²⁶ Mārga – Items done in a sequential manner starting from Pushpāñjali and ending with Tillāna as set by the Tañjāvūr Quartet.



The special dance items were *Pada Varṇas*, *Svarajatis* in *Husseini* and *Yadukulakāmbodi* rāgas. *Tillāna* was not taught to Guru Mādhava Rao. The '*Gaṅgādhara Jati*' done before *Alari* was the Special item taught only in Guru Jējamma's *Paddhati*.

Analysis and Inferences

Analysis (observation)

Mūguru Parampare had 120 *Aḍavus* earlier only 80 are taught now, 40 *Aḍavus* have been lost over the years. *Citra Nr̥tya* was not taught after Amrutappa. The elaborate method adopted in teaching dance and the rituals are lost in the fast paced world of today.

Maisūru Sampradaya has 86 *Aḍavus* now. There are 19 *Nāṭu* and 10 *Kuditta Meṭṭu* varieties. *Pūrvaraṅga Vidhi* was very elaborate before the *Mārga* started in a performance. Both *Svarajiti* and *Padavarṇa* were performed in one program, showing the practice and stamina of the dancer.

Nañjanagūḍu Paramapare has *Aḍavus* under three categories *Śuddha*, *Miśra* and *Jāti*²⁷, *Aḍavus* done in pure form, mixed form and in all the five *Jātis*, This gives a very strong control over *Tala* and *Nr̥tta* to the student. Geometrical patterns are followed while doing certain *Aḍavus* in the five *Jātis*. The vigorous regime under Guru Śrī Koushik was very beneficial to students.

Kōlāra Bāṇi had Dancing in Temples, King's courts and Sabhas, having different items suited to that particular place of performance. Accordingly, the dancers were called *Dēvadāsi*, *Bhogamēla* and *Tāpē Kaṭṭuvaru*. Dancing for many genre of compositions such as *Prabhanda*, *Ṭhumri*²⁸, *Ṭhāya*²⁹, *Svara Pallavi*³⁰ was adapted with *Mārga* that gave variety to the performance.

Pandanallur Bāṇi perpetuated by the Tanjore Quartet had *Mārga* set by them for *Sadir*, followed in *Bharatanāṭya* even today. They wrote the lyrics and composed music for all the items performed in the *Mārga*. They defined ten main *Aḍavus* having 12 varieties under each of them. Many are lost since there was no documentation.

Taṅjāvūr Bāṇi had around 100 *Aḍavus*, practiced in three speeds, during the time of Guru Rajendram, reduced to 38 now. This shows the importance of documentation for posterity. Practicing of 100 *Aḍavus* everyday helped the students to build up stamina and attain *Aṅgaśuddhate*³¹.

Valūvūr Bāṇi had more of *Dvibhaṅga*³² and *Hasta Karaṇas*³³ while performing *Aḍavus* under the genius Śrī Rāmaiyya Piḷḷai. Blending the *Nāṭyaśātra* techniques with *Aḍavus* by the present Guru Shobha, show how certain changes become inevitable over the course of time.

Kalakshetra was started by Guru Rukmini Devi. There was a need to refine *Cadir Nāc* and make it acceptable. Therefore many of the suggestive *Nr̥tta* movements and *śr̥ṅgāra*³⁴ elements other than *Madhura Bhakti*³⁵ were avoided. The present generation of Kalakshetra dancers have readapted some of them. The innovative method of teaching *Aḍavus* by Guru Vasanthalakshmi and the items choreographed by her show this trend.

The most common *Aḍavus* done by the eight *Bāṇis* have been listed below. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze them.

Taṭṭu, *Meṭṭu*, *Nāṭu*, *Kaṭṭu*, *Egari Meṭṭu* (*Kudicchu Meṭṭu*), *Tā tai tai ta* (*paraval*), *Ta tai ta ha*, *Ta tai tam*,

²⁷Jāti – It is one of the *Daśaprāṇas* (ten breaths) of the *Tāla* (rhythmic meter), which has *Tiśra*, *Caturaśra*, *Khaṇḍa*, *Miśra* and *Saṅkīrna* having 3,4,5,7, and 9 *Aksharakālas* (syllabic time measure)

²⁸Ṭhumri – A love song which is part of Hindustani music and Kathak repertoire.

²⁹Ṭhāya – it is elaborating a *Rāga* through *Ālapane* (singing done without mouthing the notes), *Svaras* (notes) and a line of *Sāhitya* (lyrics) for the *āvarta* of a particular *Tāla*.

³⁰Svara Pallavi – This is done to a particular *Rāga* and *Tāla* only with the combination of *Svaras* (notes). This item has been adapted from *Oḍissi* dance repertoire.

³¹Aṅgaśuddhate – Executing *Aḍavus* with proper stance, hand and leg movements as prescribed by rules.

³²Dvibhaṅga – Body assuming two angles while executing *Aḍavus*.

³³Hasta Karaṇas – The wrist turning with the fingers folding and opening in four ways - *Āvēṣṭita*, *Udvēṣṭita*, *Vyāvartita* and *Parivartita*.

³⁴Śr̥ṅgāra – One of the nine *Rasas* (sentiments) depicting erotic love.

³⁵Madhura Bhakti – Love with devotional feeling rather than erotic feeling.



Jāru (Sarikkal), Maṇḍi, Taṭṭi Meṭṭu and Mukṭāya (three types front, back and side). In addition all the Karnāṭaka *Paramapares do Bhramarī and Plavana* and Tamiḷ Nāḍu *Bāṇis* many types of *Korvai Aḍavus*.

Inference

It is very essential to preserve the Unique *Aḍavus* practiced in **Mūguru Parampare**. The teaching methods and order of dances which enhance a performance can be revived. *Pūrvaraṅga Vidhi* confined to a composition or *Śloka* on Gaṇeśa sung and entry beat on Mṛdaṅga today, can revive some of the rituals of *Pūrvaraṅga Vidhi* of **Maisūru** and **Mūguru**. The method of teaching *Aḍavus* and the three years taken to learn all the variations in **Nañjanagūḍu Sampradāya** will make the student emerge confident. The *Pūrvaraṅga Vidhi* was altered by Guru Sri Koushik to suit the changing times. **Kōlāra Parampara** was bold enough to experiment with dance compositions like *Thumri, Thaya, Prabhandā, Svāra Pallavi* thus adding other Genre of compositions to the *Mārg* in a Performance. The **Pandanallūr Bāṇi**'s popularity is still at its peak and some of the items like *Prabhandam, Sūlādi*³⁶, *Navasandhī*³⁷ and *Pañcamūrti Koutuvams*³⁸ have been revived adding richness to the *Bāṇi*'s repertoire. The **Taṅjāvūr Bāṇi**'s insistence of Practicing *Aḍavus* in every class is a good example to follow. Aesthetic way of blending *Karaṇas* and *Aḍavus* done in **Valuvūr Bāṇi** by one of the present Gurus enhances the performance. **Kalakshetra** style developed because of certain needs of the time. Changes could be done in certain elements of dance such as *Āṅgika* or *Sātvika*, to enhance a performance.

The Guru interviewed can only speak about what he has learnt from his Guru. The lack of documentation of the practicing traditions makes the information gathered from one Guru scanty when the lineage goes back to eight to nine generations. All the Gurus said that *Bāṇis* cannot remain static since each teacher puts his/her creativity into it. Elements remain the same but when applied in dance and choreography, artistic liberty is taken. Many feel liberties can be taken with *Sātvikabhinaya* but not *Āṅgika*. The change of technology such as mike, lighting; the presentation changing to stage from temples; the seating of audience in an auditorium becoming uni-directional have all made changes inevitable. The Gurus opined safeguarding the unique features of each of the *Bāṇis* is very important but the creative input of each Guru of the *Bāṇi* within the framework is also as important.

Conclusion

The information gathered about the four *Bāṇis* each in Karnāṭaka and Tamiḷ Nāḍu firmly establish the lineage in each of the *Bāṇis*. Interviewing the senior Gurus of the eight *Bāṇis* yielded wealth of information about the *Aḍavus*, unique *Aḍavus*, practices and performances of the *Bāṇis*. It has been a fascinating as well as fact finding expedition. It has given insight into the richness of the heritage inherited by us. It also shows unity in diversity when it is seen how the same *Aḍavu* is being done in different ways by different *Bāṇis*, an *Aḍavu* being done in the same way having different names and how some of the *Bāṇis* have taken certain attractive foot movements and postures, some dance pieces from other classical dances of India to make their *Aḍavu and Mārga* repertoire richer.

On a final note the *Aḍavu* Technique developed well in the practicing traditions or *Bāṇis*, rooted in *Sadir*. The eight *Bharatanāṭyam Bāṇis* still practice the 16 *Aḍavus* of *Cadir* documented in the treatise '*Saṅgīta Sārāmṛta*'.³⁹ This clearly establishes the objective of the paper of how the intangible heritage of Oral or Practicing tradition has been carried to present generation.

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³⁶ Sūlādi – A dance composition, involving the seven Tālas and five Jātis 7 x 5=35, giving rise to 35 Tālas.

³⁷ Navasandhī Koutuvam – Salutation to nine gods protecting the stage, in the form of dance composition called Koutuvam attributed to Gaṅga Mutthu Piḷḷai, grandfather of Taṅjāvūr quartet, choreographed by one of the quartet Civānanda.

³⁸ Pañcamūrti Koutuvam – Koutuvam composed on five gods, attributed to Gaṅga Mutthu Piḷḷai

³⁹ Saṅgīta Sārāmṛta – A Samskṛta Treatise written by the King of Taṅjāvūr, Tulajāji –I



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TABLE 1 (Reference – Section Objectives)

Name of the Bāṇi	Guru interviewed	Founder	No of Aḍavus recorded	Special Aḍavu of the Bāṇi
Mūguru	Guru Bhagavata Madhava Rao	Natyachaarya Amrutappa and Mūguru Subbaṇṇa	80	Kṛshṇa Maṇḍi, Digi Digi Tai, Vali mukthāya
Maisūru	Guru Prof. M. Shakuntala	Natyasarawati Jatti Tāyammā	86	Some of the Nāṭu Aḍavu, Pani aḍavu, Maṇḍii Cuttu Aḍavu
Kōlāra	Guru Kalamani C. Radhakrishna	Guru Kolar Yajamāna Kittappa	69	Four spl. Nāṭaḍavus, Special Raṅgakramaṇa aḍavu, Combination of Nāṭu and Pañca Neḍai aḍavu
Naṅjungūḍu	Guru Dr. Mala Shashikanth	Natyachaarya Amrutappa and Mūguru Subbaṇṇa	115	Sama pāda Thatu, Mai Aḍavus in five jatis, Making geometric shape with leg, Aḍavus done in Śuddha (Pure form), Mīśra (mixed form) and jāti
Pandanallūr	Guru V.N. Kanakambhujam (Chidambaram)	Taṅjāvūr Quartet	83	Few of the Nāṭaḍavus, Tā tai Tai ta aḍavus, Nedai aḍavu and Korvai aḍavus
Vaḷuvūr	Guru Dr. Shobha Shashikumar	Guru B. Ramaiah Piḷḷai	55	Ālīḍa, Pratālīḍa aḍavu, Tandava aḍavu, and Kartari aḍavu
Taṅjāvūr	Guru Dr. R .Madhavi	Guru Panchapakesha Naṭṭuvaṅṅār	38	Pakka Aḍavu combined with three types of Nāṭu aḍavus
Kalakshetra	Guru B.K. VasanthaLakshmi	Guru Rukmini Devi Arundale	69	The Last Nāṭu aḍavu, Kartari utplava aḍavu and Maṇḍi aḍavu, in combination with Sarana cari and Bhramarī aḍavu