

## **Rhythmic patterns and musicality in the Bharatanatyam choreographic works of Adyar K Lakshmanan**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Adyar K. Lakshmanan remains a pivotal figure in Bharatanatyam, celebrated for his inventive choreography deeply rooted in musicality and expressive depth. His profound dedication to the classical dance idiom and his extensive repertoire of choreographic masterpieces have consistently resonated with audiences and stood the test of time. This research endeavors to dissect and evaluate the rhythmic frameworks, compositional strategies, and inherent musicality present within Lakshmanan Sir's choreographic creations, aiming to elucidate the core principles that define his enduring artistic impact. The study undertakes a thorough examination of diverse segments within the traditional Margam structure, encompassing introductory pieces, abstract dance forms (Jathiswarams), narrative-driven compositions (Varnams), and concluding pure dance sequences (Thillanas). Through the analysis of specific works such as Nandi Chol, Mallari, Stuti Pancharathnam, Jathiswarams set in Abhogi and Hemavati ragas, Varnams exemplified by "Nee indha maayam" and "Enthanine thelupudura," alongside his approach to Thillanas, this investigation seeks to uncover the fundamental tenets that informed his creative methodology. Within his Varnam choreographies, a deep-seated

reverence for the composer's original intentions was consistently observed, with movement vocabulary meticulously aligning with the musical rhythm. Furthermore, his resourceful employment of varied rhythmic flourishes within Varnams introduced elements of surprise and complexity. A notable technique in his Varnam presentations involved the continuous vocalization of lyrical lines during the narrative elaborations (Sancharis), ensuring temporal and musical cohesion. His discerning application of contrasting movement patterns in Varnam rhythmic passages, informed by the musical register and meter, further highlights his acute sensitivity to musical nuance. Finally, his Thillanas consistently incorporated the five fundamental rhythmic patterns (Pancha Nadais), integrated within the rhythmic frameworks (Korvais) or connecting dance units (Usi-adavus), imbuing his concluding pieces with a distinctive rhythmic identity. This research underscores Lakshmanan Sir's profound skill in seamlessly fusing rhythmic intricacy with melodic beauty, offering valuable insights for emerging choreographers and enriching the understanding of his significant contributions to the art of Bharatanatyam.

Keywords: Bharatanatyam, Choreography, musicality, rhythmic patterns

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Adyar K. Lakshman occupies a distinguished place in the field of Indian classical dance, particularly within the tradition of Bharatanatyam. As a dancer, choreographer, and educator, his contributions have been instrumental in preserving and advancing the art form. Deeply rooted in the classical tradition, Lakshman Sir is widely recognized for his technical precision, aesthetic sensibility, and pedagogical rigor. Central to his artistic identity is his exceptional command over rhythmic structures (laya and tala), which he explored and expanded with remarkable creativity. His choreographic works are characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns, sophisticated improvisational techniques, and a profound integration of music and movement. Through his innovative approach, he not only maintained the traditional framework of Bharatanatyam but also enriched its expressive possibilities.

Bharathanatyam as a classical artform has over the years taken many shapes and has transformed through the different ages. The traditional Bharathanatyam dance format adheres to a "Margam" framework. This framework has an inclusion of different dance pieces, from

the most simpler ones to complex ones. The teaching pedagogy also adheres to this format. The format is such that the opening items has less of laya or nritta patterns pertaining to jathis and korvai patterns and transverses to complex nritta patterns in the varnam and the thillana.

Hailing from Kuppam Village in Andhra Pradesh, Adyar K. Lakshman's early life was influenced by his father, Krishnaraja Rao, who worked as a school teacher there. A significant turning point occurred when P.D. Doraiswamy Iyer, representing Smt. Rukmani Devi, the visionary founder of Kalakshetra, recognized the exceptional musical and rhythmic abilities of young Lakshman and his brother, Rama Rao. This led to an offer of comprehensive fine arts education at Kalakshetra, which their father readily accepted.

Lakshman commenced his rigorous training at Kalakshetra in 1944 at the age of eleven. He was fortunate to receive initial guidance directly from Smt. Rukmini Devi. His artistic development encompassed Bharatanatyam, Mridangam, and Nattuvangam, under the tutelage of some of the most respected figures in these fields. Although initially admitted for his vocal talent, Rukmini Devi encouraged him to embrace Bharatanatyam as a form of physical discipline.

His Bharatanatyam instruction came from esteemed teachers such as Karaikal Saradamba Ammal, Peria Sarada teacher, Sarada Hoffman, and Mylapore Gowri Ammal. In Vocal Music, he learned from luminaries including Budalur Krishnamoorthy Sastrigal, Tiger Varadachari, Veena Krishnamachari, T.K.Ramaswamy Iyengar, Mysore Vasudevacharya, Mudicondan Venkatrama Iyer, Kamalarani Teacher, and Viswesvarayya (prior to his Kalakshetra enrollment, in Tiptur). He refined his Nattuvangam skills under the guidance of Rukmini Devi, Peria Sarada Teacher, and K.N. Dandayuthapani Pillai.

Lakshman completed his studies at Kalakshetra in 1954, earning diplomas in Bharatanatyam, Carnatic Music, and Nattuvangam. He continued his association with the institution, receiving a Government of India Scholarship and obtaining his postgraduate diploma in 1956. Subsequently, he specialized in the Mridangam, learning from renowned maestros Thanjavur Rajagopala Iyer, V. Vittala Iyer, and Karaikudi Muthu Iyer.

His extensive years of learning at Kalakshetra and interactions with numerous artists provided Lakshman with a rich and profound artistic foundation. Recognizing his diverse talents, Rukmini Devi provided him opportunities to participate in Kalakshetra's dance dramas,

including *Kutrala Kuravanji* and *Kumarasambhavam*. He portrayed Janaka in the *Ramayanaseries' Sita Swayamvaram* and Shiva in *Usha Parinayam*, a Bhagavatha Mela Natya Natakam from Melattur. Lakshman also received training in Kathakali from Ambu Panicker and Chandu Panicker, with his portrayal of Sudhama in *Kuchela Vrittam* being a particularly noteworthy performance. He shared the stage with Rukmini Devi in *Kumarasambhavam*, where she played Parvathi and he the young Brahmin Vatu, making him one of the select few to have danced alongside her in her productions. At the invitation of Rukmini Devi, he began his teaching career at Kalakshetra at the age of 22.

In 1956, Lakshman was chosen to be part of the Indian Cultural Delegation that toured Russia and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, he commenced broadcasting his Carnatic vocal music concerts on All India Radio in 1958. He is also credited with recording a Long Playing Disc (LP) titled *Inde Thala*, which was produced and marketed in France.

Lakshman sir's childhood and the exposure to different aspects of dance helped him to compose and choreograph many different pieces, which are quite challenging till date for the present generation of dancers and also poses to be moderate to difficult to wield the cymbals. He has worked on many dance pieces in his lifetime and has contributed immensely to the newer patterns and explorations within this format. This paper aims to critically examine Adayar K. Lakshman's contributions to the development of rhythmic complexity in Bharatanatyam, situating his work within the broader context of contemporary practice and pedagogy.

### **LITRATURE SURVEY:**

- ☐ The relationship between music and dance has been a subject of academic inquiry across various dance forms and cultures. (1)
- ☐ **Choreomusicology** has emerged as a field of study, exploring the interrelationship of sound and movement within performance.
- ☐ Some studies have focused on how choreographers use musical elements (rhythm, melody, harmony, etc.) to structure their dances. For instance, researchers have categorized

choreography based on its primary relationship to either the rhythm or the melody of the music.

(2)

□ Research has also explored the cognitive and perceptual aspects of musicality in dance, examining how dancers perceive and respond to music, and how audiences perceive the relationship between music and dance. (3,4)

□ The concept of "'dancers' somatic of musicality'" highlights the variance in how dancers internalize and express music through movement. Some dancers synchronize better with rhythm, while others align more with melody.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

This research employs a qualitative, analytical methodology centered on a detailed examination of the choreographic works of the esteemed Bharatanatyam exponent and choreographer, Adyar K. Lakshmanan Sir. The primary objective is to identify and analyze recurring patterns, stylistic nuances, and innovative approaches within his compositions across various traditional Bharatanatyam forms. To achieve this, a structured approach focusing on specific categories of his repertoire will be undertaken (Figure 1).

### **1. Analysis of Opening Items:**

This segment of the research will focus on the foundational pieces typically presented at the beginning of a Bharatanatyam performance. The specific compositions under scrutiny include:

- **Nandi Chol:** This analysis will concentrate on the inherent rhythmic structure (*chol*) and its choreographic rendering, paying close attention to the use of syllables, their tempo variations, and the overall spatial design.
- **Mallari (Sankeerna Jaathi Triputa Talam):** The examination of this item will emphasize the intricate rhythmic cycles of *Sankeerna Jaathi Triputa Talam*. The study will detail the choreographic interpretation of the *jaathi* patterns, the handling of the complex time signature, and the transitions within the composition.
- **Stuti Pancharathnam:** This analysis will explore the choreographic embodiment of these five devotional verses. The focus will be on how the movements articulate the

lyrical content and the underlying rhythmic framework, including any distinct rhythmic interludes.

- **Thodayamangalam:** The study of this auspicious concluding opening item will investigate its rhythmic patterns and their choreographic translation. Special attention will be paid to the timing and any variations in tempo or rhythmic emphasis.

For each of these opening items, the analysis will specifically aim to:

- Identify and document the rhythmic patterns: This involves transcribing and categorizing the recurring rhythmic phrases and their variations.
- Analyze timing and tempo: This will involve examining the pacing of the choreography and any shifts in tempo employed to enhance the musical and emotional content.
- Characterize rhythmic interludes: Where present, the nature and function of rhythmic breaks or transitions will be analysed in relation to the overall structure and impact of the piece.

## 2. Examination of Jathiswaram Compositions:

This section will delve into the abstract dance form of Jathiswaram, focusing on the interplay between movement and musicality in selected compositions:

- **Abhogi:** The analysis of this Jathiswaram will center on how the choreography interprets the melodic contours and rhythmic structures inherent in the Abhogi raga.
- **Hemavati:** This examination will explore the choreographic visualization of the Hemavati raga, paying attention to the movement vocabulary used to reflect its specific mood and musical phrases.
- **Saraswati:** The study of this Jathiswaram will focus on the choreographic interpretation of the Saraswati raga, analyzing the relationship between the dance movements and the instrumental music.
- **Varali:** This analysis will investigate how the choreography embodies the characteristic musicality of the Varali raga, considering the rhythmic and melodic emphasis within the composition.

The primary focus in analyzing these Jathiswaram compositions will be on the musicality of the choreography, how the movements align with, interpret, and enhance the musical phrases, tempo, and overall aesthetic of each raga.

## 3. Analysis of Varnam Choreographies:

The Varnam, a central and complex form in Bharatanatyam, will be analyzed through a selection of Lakshmanan Sir's choreographies:

- **Nee indha maayam:** This Varnam will be examined for its narrative and expressive content, with a particular focus on the choreographic patterns within the *charanam* section, specifically the *swarams* and *arudis*.
- **Enthanine thelupudura:** Similar to the above, the analysis of this Varnam will emphasize the choreographic interpretation of the lyrical content and the structural design of the *charanam* section, including the *swarams* and *arudis*.
- **Mohamana en meedil:** This Varnam will be studied to understand how the choreography navigates the emotional nuances of the lyrics and the rhythmic complexities of the *charanam* section's *swarams* and *arudis*.
- **Swami ninekori:** The analysis of this Varnam will focus on the choreographic articulation of the devotional sentiment and the specific movement patterns employed within the *charanam* section's *swarams* and *arudis*.

The core of this analysis will be to detail the choreographic patterns within the *charanam* section *swarams* and *arudis*. This involves identifying recurring movement sequences, their relationship to the melodic and rhythmic phrases, and how they contribute to the overall dramatic and aesthetic impact of the Varnam.

#### 4. Understanding Rhythmic Progression in Keerthanams and Thillanas:

This final section will explore the rhythmic aspects of Keerthanams (devotional songs) and Thillanas (pure dance pieces) choreographed by Lakshmanan Sir. The aim is to understand the progression of rhythmic patterns within these diverse forms. This will involve:

- Analyzing how rhythmic motifs are introduced, developed, and varied throughout the choreography.
- Identifying any distinct rhythmic climaxes or shifts in tempo and their choreographic representation.
- Examining the relationship between the rhythmic structure of the music and the corresponding dance movements.

Through this systematic analysis of Adyar K. Lakshmanan Sir's choreographic works across these key Bharatanatyam forms, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of his choreographic vocabulary, his innovative approaches to rhythm and musicality, and his



significant contributions to the field of Bharatanatyam. The findings will contribute to a deeper appreciation of his artistic legacy and offer valuable insights into the evolution of contemporary Bharatanatyam choreography.

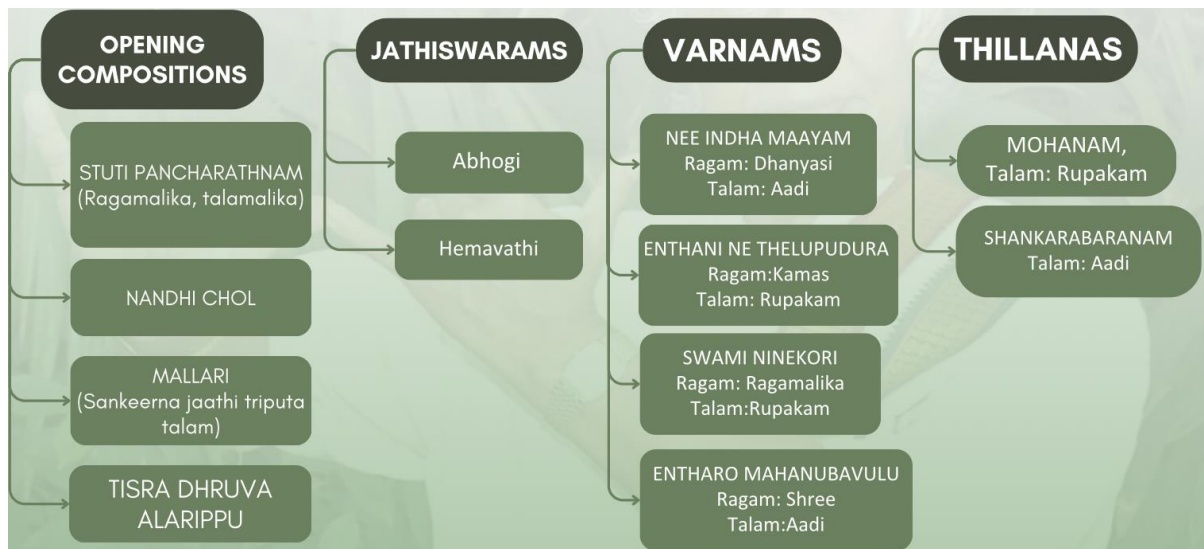


Figure 1: Represents the various composition taken into consideration for the study.

## **RESULTS:**

The analysis of Adyar K. Lakshmanan Sir's choreographic works reveals several distinctive characteristics and innovative approaches across different Bharatanatyam forms.

### **Opening Compositions:**

In Stuti Pancharathnam (Ragamalika, Talamalika), a notable feature is the synchronous recitation and singing of jathis by the Nattuvanar and vocalist, respectively. This highlights a deliberate culmination of sollukattu and music, where rhythmic patterns are both articulated and melodically rendered, creating a unified aural experience.

Regarding Nandi Chol, Lakshmanan Sir's training in Mridangam significantly influenced his jathi compositions, developed in collaboration with Trichur P. Ramanathan. He uniquely incorporated drum and mridangam vocal patterns, culminating in the characteristic "Nandi" ending for this composition. An interesting analytical point is his utilization of the Goputchayathi pattern in the sollukattu, drawing a symbolic connection to the bull ("Nandhi"). This demonstrates his insightful integration of rhythmic structure with thematic representation. His profound understanding of Carnatic music and Mridangam further enabled him to explore



diverse talams within his Natyam choreographies. A hallmark choreographic work identified within the opening repertoire is the Trisra Dhruvam - Alarippu, suggesting a significant contribution to this foundational form.

### **Jathiswarams (Abogi and Hemavati):**

The Jathiswaram choreographies of Lakshmanan Sir in ragas such as Abogi and Hemavati are characterized by korvais exhibiting a natural and logical progression. This development is evident in his structuring, which typically begins with single avarthanam korvais and gradually expands to encompass multiple avarthanams. A key principle observed is that his adavu patterns are consistently aligned with the swara patterns, ensuring a seamless flow and maintaining a strong sense of musicality throughout the dance.

### **Varnams:**

In the Varnam Nee Indha Maayam (Ragam: Dhanyasi, Talam: Aadi), a consistent alignment between adavus and rhythmic syllables is evident in his jathi compositions. Furthermore, the "Nee indha maaayam" theme is explored through crisp arudhi portions that effectively narrate various Krishna Leela stories.

The Varnam Enthani Ne Thelupudura (Ragam: Kamas, Talam: Rupakam) showcases a variety of arudis or flourishes specifically designed for the charanam portions, adding complexity and visual interest to this section. A significant contribution to the Sanchari aspect of Varnams is his introduction of singing the lyrical lines during the Sanchari, providing both rhythmic stability through the raga pattern and facilitating the dancer's exploration of *manodharma* on stage. His imaginative Sanchari on the "mantra swaroopam," depicting Shiva and Parvathi's dice game, not only reveals his intellectual depth but also his ability to integrate well-researched and appropriate narrative elements into his choreographies.

Similarly, the Varnam Swami Ninekori (Ragam: Ragamalika, Talam: Rupakam) also features a variety of arudis or flourishes within the charanam sections. For Entharo Mahanubhavulu (Ragam: Shree, Talam: Aadi), it is significant to note that Lakshmanan Sir choreographed for two of the Pancharathna Kritis, including "Dudugugala." His approach consistently demonstrated a deep respect for the original intent and thought process of

the *vageyakaras* (composers), with a firm insistence that choreographic work should never compromise the composer's originality.

### **Thillanas:**

In his Thillana choreographies, such as the one in Mohanam (Talam: Rupakam), Lakshmanan Sir adhered to the major mandatory elements of a Thillana, including Attami, Meiadavus, Korvais, and charanam portions. A unique and trademark feature of his Thillanas was the incorporation of Pancha Nadais, often found within the korvais or Usi Adavus, adding rhythmic complexity and dynamism.

A unique analytical observation for the Thillana in Shankarabaranam (Talam: Aadi) is his innovative approach of alternating between a Mei adavu and a Korvai throughout the composition, creating a distinct structural and visual rhythm.

### **DISCUSSION:**

The findings from the analysis of Adyar K. Lakshmanan Sir's choreographic works offer significant insights into his distinct style and innovative approaches within the Bharatanatyam repertoire. Several key trends and unique characteristics emerge across the opening compositions, Jathiswarams, Varnams, and Thillanas, highlighting his deep understanding of both dance and music.

A notable observation in his opening items is the prevalent use of jathi interludes, occurring in approximately 90% of the analyzed pieces. This suggests a deliberate structuring that integrates pure rhythmic sequences within the foundational pieces, setting a dynamic and rhythmically engaging tone for the performance. The strategic placement and complexity of these interludes likely served to showcase the dancer's technical prowess and establish the rhythmic framework for the subsequent narrative or abstract explorations.

In his Jathiswaram compositions, Lakshmanan Sir demonstrated a clear and methodical approach to korvai construction. The analysis reveals a natural progression in the korvais, moving from simpler structures to more intricate patterns, and expanding from single *avarthanam* (rhythmic cycle) phrases to complex, multi-cycle sequences. This gradual increase in complexity not only provides a logical flow within the abstract nature of the Jathiswaram but also challenges the dancer to exhibit increasing rhythmic mastery and stamina.

The adherence to setting adavu patterns according to the swara patterns underscores his commitment to maintaining musicality within the pure dance form, ensuring that the visual and auditory elements are intrinsically linked.

The analysis of Lakshmanan Sir's Varnam choreographies reveals several significant characteristics. Firstly, his unwavering respect for the composer's original intent is a guiding principle, suggesting a deep understanding of the symbiotic relationship between music and dance. Secondly, the strategic use of arudhis with varying patterns within the same Varnam introduces an element of surprise and dynamism, captivating both the audience and the dancer. This variation in rhythmic flourishes within the narrative structure of the Varnam likely served to heighten dramatic impact and showcase the multifaceted nature of the central theme.

Furthermore, his approach to the Sanchari (narrative elaboration) in Varnams is particularly noteworthy. The consistent practice of singing the lyrical lines repeatedly during the Sanchari served a dual purpose: maintaining the tempo of the song and providing a stable melodic framework for the dancer's improvisational explorations (*manodharma*). This technique ensured that the emotional and narrative content was deeply rooted in the musical structure, preventing deviations in tempo and enhancing the overall coherence of the performance. Additionally, the observation that his Varnam choreographies did not feature musical breaks further emphasizes his focus on a continuous and immersive experience for the audience, where the dance seamlessly unfolds with the music.

A fascinating detail emerges from the analysis of the adavu patterns employed in his Varnam jathis. Lakshmanan Sir demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the expressive potential of different movement qualities in relation to the musical register. He strategically utilized grounded adavus for high octave syllables, creating a sense of stability and perhaps emphasizing the intensity or power of those musical phrases. Conversely, for patterns in the medium octave or those with a repeating meter, he favored softer adavus that did not involve the percussive tapping of the feet. This subtle yet significant distinction in movement vocabulary highlights his meticulous attention to detail and his ability to translate the nuances of the music into corresponding physical expressions, enriching the overall aesthetic impact.

Finally, the analysis of his Thillanas consistently reveals the incorporation of Pancha Nadais as an integral component of either the korvais or the Usi-adavus. This recurring feature underscores his innovative approach to rhythmic structuring within this vibrant concluding piece. The inclusion of these five distinct rhythmic variations likely added layers of complexity, dynamism, and a unique signature to his Thillana choreographies.

### **FUTURE SCOPE:**

While there is recognition of Lakshmanan's contributions, there is a need for more in-depth analysis of his specific choreographic works. Further research could examine how Lakshmanan uses rhythm to create specific moods and emotions, the relationship between the music and the dance in his choreographies, how Lakshmanan's style has influenced contemporary Bharatanatyam dancers and choreographers, the specific *tala* structures and their variations in his compositions, and the selection of *ragas* and their impact on the overall aesthetic experience.

### **CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, Adyar K. Lakshmanan Sir's choreographic methodology, as evidenced in this analysis, is characterized by a deep musicality, a thoughtful approach to rhythmic structuring, a respect for tradition coupled with innovative exploration, and a keen understanding of the expressive potential of movement in relation to the underlying music. His works demonstrate a cohesive integration of rhythmic patterns, melodic contours, and narrative elements, leaving a lasting impact on the landscape of Bharatanatyam choreography.

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