

Research article

***How do I Communicate Sringara Rasa (the Emotion Love) Through Pulaneri Vazhakku
(Mode of 'Sensing')? Experimental Research Study, Practice-Based***

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Bharathanatyam is practiced for the purpose of experiencing aesthetic pleasure by the actor, dancer and spectator (Rao, 1997). According to ancient treatises such as the *Natya Sastra*, dancing should be experiential, sensorial and pleasurable. When dance is transmitted, do these core values of the practice get lost? How can we heighten sensorial ranges through the facilitation of a shift in the transmission and dissemination of learning the component *Rasa* (emotion)? Some of the problems present in the current landscape of learning Bharathanatyam is problematic due to the codification of the traditional form and the authoritarian style rooted in its pedagogy. This has left many students feeling incompetent and as a consequence, made the form unattainable. The purpose of my intervention is to make the learning of *Sringara Rasa* (the emotion of love) a component in the Bharathanatyam curriculum, accessible to all levels of dancers. I hope to achieve this through a sequential model that interrogates cognitive activities present in the engagement of a role or character performing the emotion. My intervention aims at reexamining the theory and practice of *Padams* (poetic texts) rooted in the *Sringara Rasa* (emotion of love) and bridging the gaps in learning this component. When dancers introspect, it allows them to access the sensorial dimension of Bharathanatyam.

Keywords: autonomy, accessible, progressive, sensing, embodied

Introduction

Background of the Study

Dance (*Nritya*) that which arouses emotion, pleases all the five senses, makes one forget his misery and provides pleasure at all times (*Samgitopanishad*, c. 800 B.C.E.). The purpose of the practice of Bharathanatyam is for the actor, dancer and spectator to experience this aesthetic pleasure (Rao, 1997). According to ancient treatise, dance is meant to be sensorial, experiential and pleasurable. Have these core values of the practice been lost through transmission? Bharathanatyam training is one that is highly disciplined and importance is given to the aesthetics of dance rather than the virtuosity and showmanship. The learning is for the spiritual uplifting more than for mundane pleasures and entertainment. It is therefore important to create an atmosphere, environment and ambience of such variance during one's learning process. The learning and practice of Bharathanatyam involves a following of a tradition (*Sampradaya*) and the teacher-student system (*Guru-Sishya*) succession (*Parampara*) of cultural transmission prevalent in pre-colonial India. This is deeply rooted in India's Heritage. I am a student of the 4th generation of this lineage. My *Gurus* (teachers) Neila Sathyalingam (Singapore) Krishnaveni Lakshmanan (India) were direct alumni of the institution Kalakshetra and the direct disciples of Rukmini Devi Arundale. Rukmini Devi Arundale was the direct disciple of many namely Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai well known for the *Pandanallur* (name of town) style of Bharathanatyam. The *Pandanallur* style is reputed for its emphasis on linear positions in pure dance (*Adavu*) and for intensity and understatement in communicating the story (*Abhinaya*).

Bharathanatyam was first introduced to Singapore by pioneer artists and institutions during the period of 1952 to 1981. For many Indians in Singapore during that time, this dance form provided a means to maintain social identity in diaspora. As such, the most popular style learnt here was that developed by Rukmini Devi Arundale. However, teaching this form while it is placed outside of India can be problematic. Bharathanatyam practitioners in Singapore have faced various problems in areas pertaining to teaching, learning, engaging, innovating and sustaining the art form. During a recent workshop I conducted with six adult dance students from various institutions, I had the opportunity to engage in a dialogue session with them. The discussion revealed that most curriculums are not targeted at making the content relevant to the learner. Over time, this frustrates the learner and removes the joy of dancing. This may be one of the reasons why many drop out of classes. As such, how can the practice of Bharathanatyam be sustained in Singapore? In my studio, I am constantly adapting various teaching methods to keep motivating students of Bharathanatyam in Singapore. I believe a holistic approach towards building the body- mind of a dancer can help break boundaries. My growing years as a dance student were positive as I mastered the curriculum well and did well in my assessments. I was often chosen to play the lead dancer in numerous dance dramas. The curriculum was rudimentary and was grounded by regulation and uniformity. It was somewhat static and removed from reality. My body was in constant pain and I never felt free. When I turned professional in my twenties, I began to realize I was powerless. My practice was mindless and repetitive. I could not explore the mature content or choreograph pieces that required the embodiment of intense emotions.

Problem Statement

This made me look within the current curriculum whereby I discovered several gaps within the system. Historically Bharathanatyam was performed either in the temples according to religious Hindu rituals or in royal courts accompanied by music. In South India, Bharathanatyam, known as 'Sadir', was performed in temples by dancers (*Devadasis*) who specifically performed for the 'gods' who were financially supported by their patrons. The advent of the British rule brought a decline to all forms of traditional dances. Temple dancing

was banned (Coorlawala, 2005). Rukmini Devi Arundale is one of the most important revivalists of this dance (id.). She modified the old system especially by removing all erotic (*Sringara Rasa*) elements eradicating all references to sexuality and sensuality. In 1936, she established Kalakshetra, a cultural academy dedicated to the preservation of Bharathanatyam by institutionalizing it. Here, she evolved a new curriculum modeled after the academically rigorous British text-based methods by incorporating the study of the *Natyashastra* and Sanskrit aesthetic theory into the practical training of dance. The codification of the form has proven to be the biggest gap in the system. By doing so she also eradicated older systems based on the Sangam Tamil Literature (*Pulaneri Vazhakku*). These texts support the learning of embodied components in Bharathanatyam such as the nine emotions or states in dance (*Navarasas*). Understanding how to generate these emotions are crucial in the learning of a specific piece in the repertoire called the *Padam* (Poetic text).

The concept of the unquestioning mind is deeply rooted in the (*Guru-Sishya Parampara*) passing down of traditional art forms such as Bharathanatyam. According to my preliminary findings through interviews with adult dancers, I discovered that many came from learning backgrounds that were highly authoritative. The teacher had absolute control over the class. The power dynamics and unreasonable expectations and discrimination resulted in students having very little self-esteem. The learning of this craft is reliant on the passing down of knowledge from teacher to student generation after generation. Through my experiences and interview findings of adult dancers learning Bharathanatyam, I have gathered that the student expects the teacher to have a certain amount of authority over them. They have been conditioned to respond to authority over time and have accepted this as the mode of learning Bharathanatyam. Having completed their training, many dancers are stuck with mindless regurgitation of repertoires. They are unable to internalize, teach or explore the art form thus not enabling a healthy ecosystem for Bharathanatyam practitioners in the region. Assertion of power and control in a learning environment may be effective in adapting a skill. However, Bharathanatyam is beyond the study of a skill. An important cognitive function of the arts is to help us learn to notice the world. As such, I believe the arts should be present for all. It is crucial to remove the elitist nature within the fundamental social contexts of the practice of Bharathanatyam in the learning space. Bharathanatyam has the quality to reach a diverse group of learners. Art should be allowed to do what it does best- transform and inspire, not regulate and control. However, in the traditional arts, the unquestioning mind is celebrated as authentic says T. M Krishna in reference to Indian Classical Music (*Carnatic Music*).

The context of Bharathanatyam is rooted in 'spiritual' concepts. It has been sanctified as a form by Rukmini Devi Arundale. The repertoire is based on the portrayal of Gods and Goddesses and the worshipping of the *Guru* (teacher) is highly prevalent. Based on these, Bharathanatyam can be mistaken for being 'divine' in nature. Speaking to my adult dancers Megalai, Somi and another dancer, I learnt that this could be true. One of the dancers said she found joy in dancing because she dedicated it to 'God'. Megalai said that as she grew older, faith and religion played a major role in how she viewed characters in the dance. Somi too agreed that with age came an understanding of the values that Bharathanatyam aimed to represent through its deeper meaning and themes. As soon as dancers ground their practice on a theme such as 'divine', they disconnect themselves from human experience, limiting all other characterization possibilities that lie within the form. Language and culture becomes a barrier. My dialogue with these dancers presented me with another discovery. They seemed to be awestruck and possessed a deep sense of admiration for their peers who could perform a poetic text based on the emotion love (*Sringara Padam*) effortlessly. From this, I determined that even though the dancers and their friends attended the same sessions and were taught by the same teacher, some were able to perform and the rest never could. It is important to take note that the dancers', who 'succeeded' in performing, learnt it through voluntary, deliberate facial expressions imitating the teacher. To become thinkers, creators and to make discoveries one has to be able to immerse in the form

experientially. This not only gives agency to students but also empowers them with the confidence to take their art practice forward. According to ancient Roman educator Quintilian (ca. 35 - ca. 99) the diversity of human nature is incredible and it is sadistic to try to force this diversity into any one prescribed mold. Since humans are born curious, their natural curiosity and inquiring spirit, is part of those natural interests by which the child matures. Quintilian described these individualized differences as valuable. As such, individual differences of ability and interests need to be recognized and studied when setting up a curriculum.

Purpose of the study

My intervention is aimed at make the learning of the *Sringara Rasa* (emotion love) a component in Bharathanatyam, by giving access to all levels of dance students through a systematic model that interrogates conscious mental processes that are activated during the engagement of a role or character performing the emotion. The purpose of my intervention is to reexamine the theory and practice of *Padams* (poetic Texts) based on *Sringara rasa* (emotion love) and bridge the gaps in learning this component. In order to equip dancers with the knowledge of using the sense organs-, which, to me is imperative in the expressing of the *Sringara Rasa* (emotion love), I take references from a poem from the Sangam Tamil Literature called the 'Tholkapiam'. *Pulaneri Vazhakku* which means 'to sense', is contextualised in this text. The third section of the 'Tholkapiam' explores the behavior patterns of the Tamils, thereby pointing out how *Pulaneri Vazhakku* was fundamental in the development of love (*Sringara*) amongst people. Through my intervention I will 'reterritorialize' *Pulaneri Vazhakku* and use it as the third mode of expressing the *Sringara Rasa* (emotion love) with the help of specific Psychophysical (Chekhov) exercises. These exercises can aid in heightening the dancer's ability to sense, feel, and communicate the emotive content rooted in the poetry. I hope this newfound awareness encourages dancers to establish an embodied practice. I hope to make available a new vocabulary for communication between dancer and audiences, teacher and student and dancer and other artists. Students will increase their efforts and sustain attention in learning when they are intrinsically motivated. This satisfaction only takes place when they are good at an activity. In return, a sound practice will encourage the overall development and sustenance of future local independent artists who can form their own support framework through shared audiences, spaces, jobs, thoughts and creative processes.

Research question

Being engrossed in self-inquiry will allow dancers to captivate the indigenous nature of Bharathanatyam. How can I support the heightening of the sensorial ranges of my students by making significant shifts in the way in which I transmit and disseminate the learning of *Rasas* (emotions)? How do I express the *Sringara Rasa* (emotion love) through the third mode, *Pulaneri Vazhakku* (sensing) by employing Michael Chekhov's Psychophysical Technique?

Literature review

Learning a Poetic Text (*Padam*)

The *Padam* is a poetic textual piece from the traditional repertoire that is deeply rooted in mood and behavior of the character present. It is steeped in the emotion love (*Sringara Rasa*). In order to present this character in context one has to express it through *Abhinaya* (communicating the dance). How do dancers interpret this material? The context of the *Padam* can be conveyed by two modes; *Natyadharmi*- specifically involves the language of gestures while interpreting words. Here a scene is built on specified grammar and gestures. Every dancer will perform it exactly the same. *Lokadharmi*- is expression through more 'pedestrian' movements. Here, characters make conversation as in natural behavior. This requires lots of observation, understanding and real-life experience. Each dancer may achieve a slight variation. A *Padam* is perceived through its text. Once the base of the character and its behavior is established, the dancer is able to identify its

predominant emotion (*rasa*). This *Rasa* can be interpreted by a third mode called the *Pulaneri Vazhakku*. *Pulan* means sensory organs. *Pulaneri Vazhakku* means 'that which is sensed through sensory organs. However, the third mode has not been taught nor put in practice, as it is not present in the curriculum. In the practice of Bharathanatya the primitive innate nature of the human emerges as a result of external stimuli such as poetry and music. Mimetic representation of life is offered for perception to enable the attendant to experience the sensations offered by a performance (Gazzaniga, 2008). The trigger of this engagement is the very essence of the practice. Why are we moved in particular ways when we dance? How does that engage our audiences? Let me establish how dancers and viewers engage emotionally in a piece. We determine this idea through a pattern - the emotion (*rasa*) flows to the audiences (*rasika*) and they enjoy (*rasana*) this flow. The linguistic modality for generating emotion in a poetic text is called *Sabdavritti*. The inward purpose, feeling, and emotion is called *Cittavritti*. This is the psychological modality for producing emotion in the viewer. The combination of *Sabdavritti* and *Cittavritti* allows a dancer to externalize real time experience through the manifestation of an emotion (*rasa*) (Anandavardhana, c.875). This occurrence - a representation of life enables the audience to experience the sensations offered by the flow of a performance (Gazzaniga, 2008). Interpreting the emotion love, in a *Padam* through the mode of *Pulaneri Vazhakku* allows audiences access to this experience.

Rukmini Devi's codification was functional for ensemble dancing and provided little scope for solo dancers to explore their inherent state. To perform emotion (*Rasa*), the young dancer has to learn from a 'one size fits all' structure. This trajectory is rigid and has compartmentalized the natural states through typical depictions of human behavior patterns and responses. In theory, every student who learns a poetic text based on an emotion would have to perform it in a somewhat similar manner according to the codified behavioral patterns of the archetype representing the poetry. Most times the mode used to interpret and present these dances would be gestural (*Natyadharmi*). (See table 1) The heroine /character/ archetype (deceived) has been categorized on the basis of her behavior and response to the emotion love (*Sringara Rasa*) based on the poetic text titled – *Nettrandhi Nerathile* (Last Evening).

Birth	Behavior	Nature	Age	Situation
<i>Mishra</i> Mix of both categories, divine and human	<i>Svakiya</i> Married and faithful to her husband. She is of good character and spends her time serving her hero passing through every circumstance sincerely.	<i>Uttama</i> She is moderate and tolerant. She is the best among the three as she is well balanced and well behaved. She is devoted to her husband or lover and can't be swayed by others.	<i>Dheera Madhya</i> Partly experienced in Love. She is youthful <i>Nayika</i> who indirectly expresses her ill-feelings and anger sarcastically, who behaves ironically but remains firm in front of her lover. She has patience and does not give any reactions in anger and instead shows respect.	<i>Vipralabdha</i> The deceived heroine. (Established through the <i>Padam</i> (poetic text))

Table 1- Character and Emotion/ State Categorisation in learning the poetic text (*Padam*) – *Nettrandhi Nerathile* based on the deceived Heroine (*Vipralabdha Nayika*).

In exploring this poetic text with my participant, I understood that it would be choreographed based on these codified behavior patterns and responses. The outcome was as expected. My participant and I performed it similarly. This can be seen as recorded in images 3.0 to 3.3. It was revealed during the dialogue post performance that we felt pressured to recollect and keep up with the preplanned movements. This type of 'dancing from memory' is pervasive in the *Natyadharmi* (gestural) style. It is stressful on the dancer and can steer one towards comparison. This leads to peer pressure and ultimately removes the joy of dancing.



Image 3.0: Consequents (*Anubhavas*) - Change in voice and face color, stunned expression.



Image 3.1: Consequents (*Anubhavas*) - Worried, sighing.



Image 3.2: Consequents (*Anubhavas*) - Shaking head, raising eyebrows.

The 'outcome' of the character is established upon the Rasa Theory. The emotional state (*Rasa*) is stimulated by environment, the accompanying music, gestulations, voice, costume and make-up. The characterization of the emotional state is the foundation of *Rasa*. The interconnection of *Vibhavas*, *Anubhavas* and *Sancaribhavas* make up *Rasa*. *Vibhavas* represent the determinants, *Anubhavas* for the consequents and *Sancaribhavas* for the transitions in state of mind, which enable the basic mental disposition (Bharathamuni, 2nd c BC to 4th c AD). These combinations have been charted according to the poetic text once again based on general notions of human state and emotion. The outcome of this performance based on the codified chart identifies that all our responses or consequents (*Anubhavas*) were the same. (See Appendix A Fig 2.0 & 2.1).

My attempt is to individualize the performance of a poetic text like the *Padam*. When the consequents (*Anubhavas*) for each dancer differ, it shows the individual's personal interpretation. The dancer needs to access their true nature in order to find autonomy in practicing and performing the *Padam*. Within the framework of the Bharathanatyam curriculum there are no specific teaching methods recorded to achieve the 'state' in communicating dance (*Abhinaya*). Learning an emotion/state requires the dancer to be established in life experience. However, younger dancers have very few social emotional life experiences to work from. Therefore, when they learn and perform a piece like the *Padam* it ends up looking mundane, as they are not engaged. The dancer lacks enjoyment and thus transfers this to the audiences. Working from social emotional memory can be limiting for the dancer. I believe a learning model making use of specific exercises will be functional in developing sensation. This gives dancers access to learning the various emotions (*rasas*). According to my preliminary findings through interviews with adult dancers, I discovered that their learning of the codified nine emotions (*rasas*) was never experiential. Most of them were taught this component through the 'prompting' method. According to Dhevani and another dancer, they would learn the gestures and facial expressions through emulating their teachers. Megalai gave more insight on how she felt about her position in class. She would follow her teacher by imitating her expressions. She took on a character, sometimes against her will without understanding and internalization. She said that only the best dancers got called out for major roles and this made her bitter.

Methodology

Theoretical framework

Literature was reviewed to define two areas in education that are prevalent in this study. Progressivism - is an educational movement beginning in the last two decades of the 19th century that based its protest against formalism on the philosophy of John Dewey. The basic tenets are commitment to democratic ideals, creative and purposeful activity, receptivity to student needs, and interaction with the community (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). Experiential Learning- the experiential learning theory provides a holistic model of the learning process and a multi linear model of the adult development, both of which are consistent with what we know about how people learn, grow and develop (Kolb, 2014, 2015). Literature was reviewed to define the current practices in Bharathanatyam. *Abhinaya Darpana*, an important resource is an extract of the *Natyashastra*, which is one of the first few encyclopedic treatises on Indian drama, dance, music and literature available. It presents us with an insight of the purpose of the practice and the theories associated with the functions of the practice. All existing Bharathanatya curricula are based on the *Abhinaya Darpana*. Further literature was reviewed to define self-awareness and experience. *Sanatana Dharma*, a Hindu philosophy allows us to understand how any practice (*Yoga*) can lead the human mind onto liberation. Another important literature reviewed for learning emotions (*rasas*) is the Rasa theory.

Study design

The study is based on an experimental design. Two participants in the dance studio will first choreograph the above-mentioned piece (*Padam - Nettrandhi Nerathile*) based on the behavior and response patterns in (Table 1) using the two popular modes - gestural movements (*Natyadharmi*) and pedestrian movements (*Lokadharmi*). This choreography will be based on the codified chart (Appendix A, Fig 2.0) whereby both participants respond the same way- similar *Anubhavas*. Then the participants will be introduced to a new set of exercises to help trigger their impulses to portray an emotion definitively. After exploring the exercises over four sessions, they will re choreograph the same piece. Based on what we are trying to establish the piece should be less static. It would have very little or no representation of *Natyadharmi* and some variations within *Lokadharmi*. The piece the second time around should be dynamic presenting itself with a new flow –with very few gestures, one that is uninhibited, enjoyable and close to the participants' nature. Both of us will work closely with each other to understand how we collect and disseminate our experiences from the exercises. The outcomes will be measured before and after the program using the same participants. This will be achieved through observation, interviews, discussion, and reflective journals. Based on these new designs, the participant's 'consequents' (*Anubhavas*) will change according to their mental/emotional disposition and transitions (Appendix B, Fig 3.0).

Study sample

My participant is a senior dancer at my studio. She practices at the postgraduate level in Bharathanatyam. The participant is trained and experienced in the art form and has been formally trained in the present-day curriculum for the past fifteen years. The participant is thirty years old. I will take part in this study as the other participant. This is necessary for me to perform a comparative analysis.

Intervention

The more often we experience a sensation, emotion or situation, the more familiar it becomes creating a distinct path way within our brain. Therefore, we use our past experience and knowledge to recognize specific stimulation. However, we are not trapped in a static state. Our brains have the capacity to be flexible. We do not always have to learn things by having to

experience them firsthand. We can manipulate what emotions we are stimulating by imagination alone. Different perspectives can lead to stimulating different emotions. This can be done without the presence of any immediately available physical stimulus (Gazzaniga, 2008). Instead of using personal emotional memory as stimuli for communicating the emotion love (*Sringara Rasa*) in a *Padam*, my intervention suggests using structured physical exercises to trigger the specific emotion/ state. These triggers will help achieve a better engagement and indulgence of the senses in preparation for the use of the third mode of communication- *Pulaneri Vazhakku*. These exercises play an active role in the creation of a character and do not rely on the dance student's personality or experience - which can be limiting. It can provide them control and objectivity when creating a character for a poetic text based on love (*Sringara Padam*) and allows the expression of his /her individual interpretation of the character.

A progressive curriculum for Bharathanatyam

The task of education, socialization and acculturation is to transform the brains into minds. (Eisner, 2002) Mind development starts with the activation of our senses. Education uses experience as its primary medium (Dewey, 1910). Art makes possible a certain quality of experience we call *aesthetic*. We secure experiences that are valued intrinsically. Reflecting on my journey as a dancer, I believe the most authentic and efficient way to transmit dance is through experiential learning. The experiential learning theory describes learning as a process whereby concepts are derived from and continuously modified by experience (Kolb, 2014, 2015). Dance has a unique way of developing aesthetic in students. It deals with the use of expression through emotion and thus makes them aware of how they feel towards everything. When teaching a form like Bharathanatyam in Singapore it is important for the student dancer to derive authentic experiences through relevant stimulus and context. A 'hands on' approach allows students to remember learnt material through processes. Learning based on a process helps extroverted students steer their energy and confidence into making creative work and gives introverted students an opportunity to present their ideas and thoughts while building on their self-esteem. Students who seek to become professional dance practitioners will be able to explore and embody the art form. Those who do not pursue the arts professionally could become connoisseurs in the future helping to build a wider community for the traditional arts.

Why use Michael Chekhov's technique?

Michael Chekhov (1891-1955) was a disciple of Constantin Stanislavski. Chekhov, having suffered depression felt that Stanislavski's method of creating a role through 'emotional memory' had potential negative psychological impacts (Gordon, 1983). He also found that confining the artistic expression of an actor to his personality resulted in a shallow portrayal of a character and limited the creativity (Kasponyte, 2012). He believed there should be a clear differentiation between the actor as a person and as an artist (Gordon, 1983). He used imagination to separate the conscious mind from the subconscious ensuring that creative activity played an active role in the creation of a character instead of the performer's personality (Gordon, 1983). This meant that the actor's personal emotions would not be exploited for the purpose of the work. Michael Chekhov's theory of Psychophysical acting is used to trigger an actor's emotions through physical movements. Chekhov's development of this theory was influenced by philosopher Rudolf Steiner- specifically his theory Eurhythmy- a form of movement for expression. Steiner's theory used sensory experiences to bring the performer's inner emotions into harmony with the content of the text. Through this, Chekhov understood that actors cannot directly command their feelings but they can induce them by other modalities. This was the basis of his Psychophysical acting technique. This approach helps conjure up feelings that are associated to the constitution of the chosen movement and these are then converted into impulses.

How does one stay intrinsically motivated over a period of learning? Interest, curiosity, ability, effort and encouragement are key factors in designing a curriculum. The 'prompting'

method is not an option in terms of teaching intense concepts like emotions (*Rasas*). Instead, an environment grounded in the 'growth mindset' can create a safe learning space that encourages the individual's exploration of kinesthetic approaches (Chekhov's exercises) as a means to stimulate and nurture, creative and critical responses. This promotes the willingness to engage through shared expectations and co-creation with given time, patience, trust and respect.

Procedure

The aim of Michael Chekhov's technique is to find the psychological gestures of the character. A psychological gesture is a life-like movement generated to convey the thought process of the archetype. This bodily movement prompts the complementary emotion. For the purpose of developing the character for the emotion love (*Sringara Rasa*) I have chosen to explore and adapt exercises particularly 'expansion and contraction' and 'qualities of movement' from Michael Chekhov's technique (Chekhov, 1991). Chekhov identified these set of tools as a representation of the basic energy patterns. In order to develop sensitivity, an actor awakened the energy within, through these exercises by the use of the body focusing on the image and progressively reducing the physical movement as to achieve the specific style of the performance (Dalton, 2017). According to Chekhov, 'expansion and contraction' is a representation of growing and shrinking and through these physical positions the actor can build an arc of different characters.

Exercises

Moving Flame

The 'moving flame' design I devised, is inspired by 'expansion and contraction'. This design is grounded in visuospatial function whereby one has an ability to imagine objects. The cognitive function includes processes such as analyzing space and visual form giving it detail and structure. In performing technical movement, which is corporeal, the limbs guide the gaze of the participant. However, where expressing emotion is concerned there is no form, nothing tangible to hold on to. The 'moving flame' provides this visual form in imagination to navigate the participant's gaze through their internal/external dichotomy. It also leads them into the next movement. It is useful to provoke internal feelings and trigger impulses that can be converted into movement. For example, the flame, in the shape of a ball held in my hand starts from the center of the chest expanding out and shrinking back into the chest (Image 4.2). While this movement is taking place, the eyes are focused on the subject seated opposite. At this point the isolation of the chest through the use of a ball of flame moving from in to out allows the participant to align and lengthen the spine and neck enabling her to focus intently on the subject seated opposite. Pelvic alignment, breath control, isolation, preparation and engagement of the core spinal structure allow the dancing body to find its balance. This balance enables the participant to focus on 'moments', which in turn create the 'gaze'. This 'gaze' is what we set out to achieve. The experience enables the participant to be in touch and respond to inner impulses that correspond to external movement, which are spontaneous as they arise from the imagination. The 'moving flame' increases the range of movement thus increasing the number of ways in which the participant can portray a character. It makes use of space internally (similar to Chekhov's inner energy pattern) and externally (by my use of an imaginary ball of flame) by exploring various body structures and formation. In this way, it is free of emotions and the expected modes of expressing emotions. The 'moving flame' design is suitable for movement that requires development through motion. See images below.

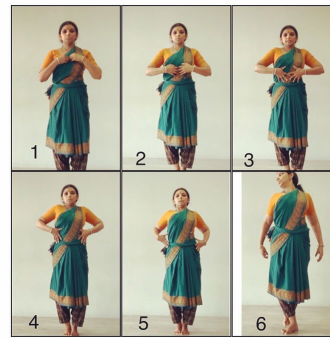
Moving Flame Exercise 1



Flame rolls around in specific direction. Head and eyes follow the direction of the flame.

Image 4.0

Moving Flame Exercise 2



Flame moves downwards from centre radiating around tummy centre to lower back. Head tilts as body rises in opposition.

Image 4.1

Moving Flame Exercise 3



Flame extends out and comes back into the centre .
Head and Eyes focused on subject.

Image 4.2

Oppositional tension

According to Chekhov, in 'qualities of movement' the energy moves like the five elements. It is represented by the extent of the resistance it meets. He suggests that the character may 'float' physically but his internal thoughts may be 'flying' (Dalton, 2017). My next exercise 'oppositional tension' was inspired by Chekhov's 'qualities of movement'. It is the activation of emotion through movement. For example, the inclination of the head in the oppositional direction of the limbs creates severe tension. This physical tension can represent an embrace (joy), surrender (neutral), hatred (anger), and distress (sorrow). Here, the physical movement and mental disposition vary as in Chekhov's method. However, the physical movement coaxes the inner emotion. The opposition elongates the pelvic, ribcage and chest region allowing breath to be released. These breathing patterns produce movement such as 'heaving', leaving the upper body poised, self assured and graceful. This design is suitable for the creation of static positions in choreography. See images below.

In imagining, feeling the inner impulses and spontaneously externalizing movement through these exercises, the participant has attained 'freedom' and can now use a wider range of movement to express an emotion.

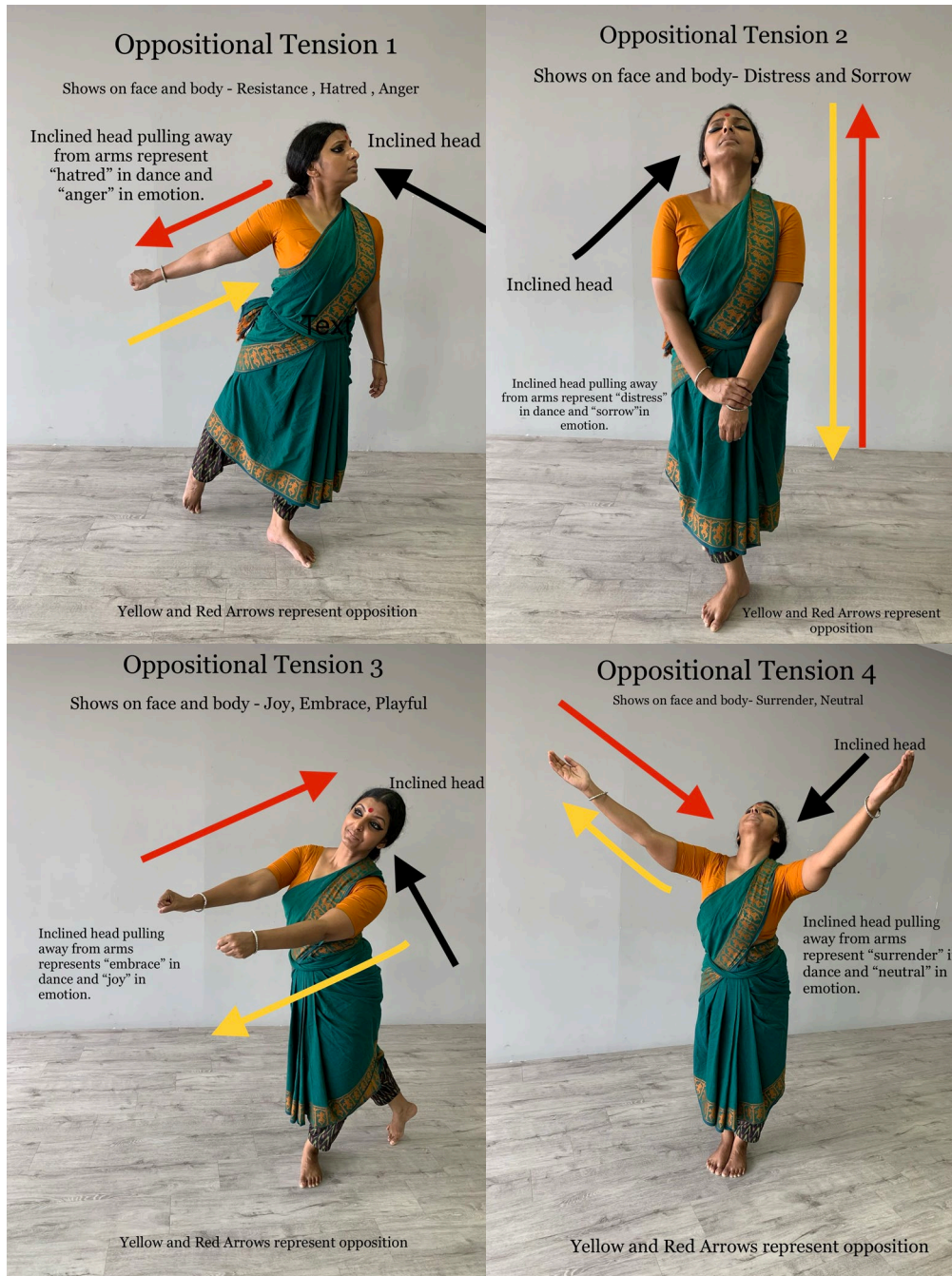


Image 5
Oppositional tension; exercises 1 to 4.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings

My findings are based on our second choreography of the poetic text that incorporated the newly designed exercises. We spent time, exploring the placement of the 'flame'. We placed it around and away from our bodies differently, growing and shrinking with the movement of the flame. The dance started shifting form. It looked different from the usual. These exercises allowed for the discovery of new moves that enhanced the choreography by giving it a fresh new perspective. I observed the other participant being mindful about the flame leading her towards new movement like a curl, or a stretch. I on the other hand used the flame to bring myself back to a neutral state. This allowed me to transform the calm energy into an emotion. We both realized that our breath was setting the pace for our movements. This naturally made us pay more attention to its pattern. The exercises from 'oppositional tension' had a resolute structure that allowed us to expand the thorax region of our bodies granting us more breath control and release. This helped us process abstract concepts in dance training like 'look far', 'be large' or 'use space'. The routines were focused and sensorial in nature, I felt, offering the viewer a real time experience. We felt that the exercises triggered expression through movement. It was as though the body was a box and thoughts occur 'inside' and expressions happen 'outside' (Kemp, 2012). I also observed my participant not acknowledging some of the material that emerged. For example, she would arrive at neutral 'moments' and quickly shift it to something more visibly 'expressive'. This, according to her was due to the fear of 'not conforming'. I, on the other hand found that certain movement patterns developed from the exercises did not work due to the context of the poetic text. For example, in 'freeing' up the body one can lose direction in terms of capturing the salient emotions /states in the poetic text.

Analysis/ Discussion

My discussion with the participant helped me better understand her limitations of the new exercises. She felt that she had imposed strong beliefs and rules on her movements thinking she had to match up to the ideal state. She too, kept trying to fit her new movements to suit the form. She reflected further on how familiarity is comfortable and she saw herself trying to use codified movements in the choreography rather than allowing the movement to arrive through the exercises. However, when she allowed the flow to take place, she felt less daunted and liberated. The exercises had allowed her to embody other stances that were out of the usual dance vocabulary. She learnt how to find mindful responses from the use of the somatic self. She did not have to wait for instructions and therefore felt a sense of belonging towards her interpretation. She also undid her deep - seated ideas about how dancers should react and respond to text. This presented her with a new found sense of freedom. No matter what forms are employed, an actor's body must always be cultivated as an instrument capable of varied and subtle expressive forms (Gordon, 2006). In order to achieve this, a dance student must be presented with efficient methods for creating content themselves. In encouraging independent inquiry, Rabindranath Tagore called for "the education of the mind in self -reliance" (Tagore, 1910). The final piece choreographed by the participant was highly sensorial in nature. She achieved independence through this activity and is now enabled to create her own content and explore her practice. I felt excited choreographing my final piece as it was liberating and not bound by conformity. I enjoyed 'sensing' my way around the space.

Realizing the motive of the practice

The praxis of Bharathanatyam is felt essentially in the harmonizing of the mind, body and soul. It eventually leads the practitioner (*Sadhaka*) towards realization. Therefore, Bharathanatyam in essence is *Natya Yoga* (Union through dance). The practice of any form of Yoga is based on attaining mastery over silencing the mind. According to metaphysics this ultimate union allows the human mind to transcend into a higher consciousness. As such, these

benefits, available in the practice of Bharathanatyam are lost to those who fail to delve into and achieve mastery over embodied components like performing emotions (*Rasas*). Advertently, mastery over these components in dance can allow one to access their 'true nature'. Smell, sight, taste, touch and sound are the five organs of action that allow us to achieve awareness through our experiences. This occurrence is led by our intellect. Through *Natya Yoga* and other forms of *Yoga* one can eventually lead the mind onto the path to liberation (*Sanatana Dharma*). The primordial emotion (*Rasa*), love and devotion (*Sringara*) offers one the easiest path towards this transcendence. As such, dancers may be able to attend to an emotion (*Rasa*) by accessing their 'true nature' with the support of triggering the five organs of action through these specific exercises. The sense organs can be accessed through practices in breathing whereby oxygen is sent to the body and mind. This is known as *Pranayama* – decongests the human systems through exercises to stimulate respiratory impulses in *Yoga*. In the process of breathing, the purpose of big muscles is to reduce muscle tension. As the body re establishes control, it restores emotional balance. Emotional stability helps the participant to adjust to their external and internal conditions (Gharote, 1988). By using the 'moving flame' and 'oppositional tension' as exercises that aid in the practice of developing emotion (*rasa*), the participant consequentially elevates her breathing patterns. This occurrence contributes to the cardiovascular efficiency and is essentially individualistic. The individualistic nature allows the participant to introspect and express through her personal nature.

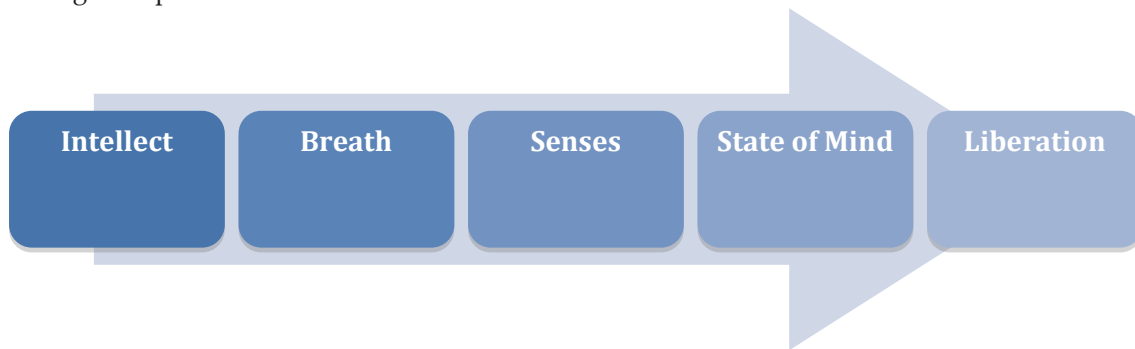


Image 6

Chart for emotional balance; The steps towards finding your "true nature" or liberation.

Through our analysis we discovered that both our final choreographies were visibly different from each other's. Our personal interpretations were well communicated through the mode of *Pulaneri Vazhaku*. Our consequents (*Anubhavas*) were different. See images below (7.0 - 7.2). (See Appendix B, Fig 3.0 – New Chart)



Image 7.0

Consequents (*Anubhavas*) for photo on the left- scorned look, half smile.

Consequents (*Anubhavas*) for the photo on the right- frowning, focusing hard, tightening of the lips.



Image 7.1

Consequents (*Anubhavas*) for photo on the left- staring, tensed eyebrows.

Consequents (*Anubhavas*) for the photo on the right- sharp glances, neutral look.



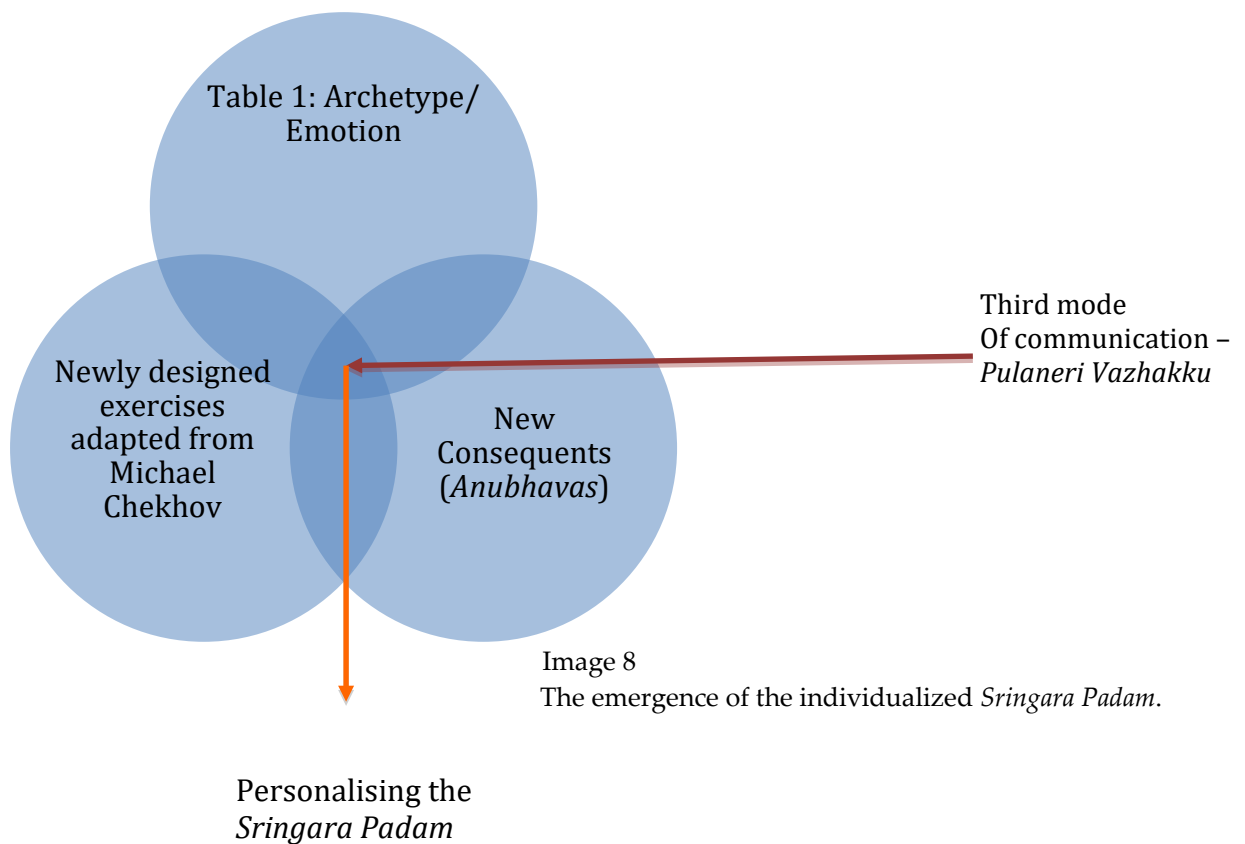
Image 7.2

Consequents (*Anubhavas*) for photo on the left- smile, sigh, neutral look.

Consequents (*Anubhavas*) for the photo on the right- looking away, spacing out, blank face.

As human behavior is the raw material of any acting, understanding the concepts and processes involved in perception and the creation of meaning is of great value to the actor (Lakeoff & Johnson, 1999). My newly designed exercises act as voluntary stimuli for generating emotion through movement. It has presented us with new scope for creativity. It allows the choreographer of the poetic text (*Padam*) to facilitate various interpretations. It strongly advocates solo performance rather than ensemble dancing. It also honors the individual choices of dancers thus enabling the choreographer to create a dance suited for each one. This hybrid approach is systematic and easily adaptable. By using these exercises both the teacher and student will have

an effective tool for communication. This structure makes communication more precise. Before this, much of what we learn and perform in the component emotions (*Rasas*) was intuitive. The failure or success of a performance could never be repeated or defined because of this. This structure provides us with concrete information that can be passed down. This allows the integration of various levels of dancers in one classroom. Each student will be able to adapt these exercises to their nature. There will be no peer pressure present. Teacher-student power dynamics shift as a result of the student acquiring ownership over her dance. Other races can have access to learning Bharathanatyam as there will be no language or cultural barriers. Students can now be assessed according to their individual potential. Although there are limitations, they exist as an outcome of the trained body that insists on using its memory of dance through rehearsed gestures. These limitations may not produce enough movement material but can help to create a state of awareness for the body and mind preparing it to delve into an emotion (*rasa*) later on. J. Krishnamurti genius philosopher emphasizes the need for learning from the understanding of the senses. He says, "One can get used to a tree, to the beauty of a sunset. But to live with the tree and see the sunset everyday anew as though you are seeing it for the first time, with clarity and intensity- that requires not memory; you should look at it anew each day, afresh with an intensity" (Krishnamurti, 1967). Doing away with the rigid template allows for spontaneity. The storyteller can stay true to her ever-changing environment while indulging her senses through the character. In learning a *Padam*, dancers need to acquire a keen sense of alertness in order to discover innate responses everyday. This will shift their previously dull perceptions about the poetic text and now excite them to create it differently every time. The practice of *Sringara Padams* may be 'resurrected'.



Conclusion

Current dance pedagogies serve to bind rather than free the mind, body and soul (Morris, 2003). Perfection in the mechanical execution of technique is highly valued giving no importance to

establishing the 'self' in the curriculum. By nurturing the individual nature of a student, he/she is able to find harmony between the form and themselves. Today I see my learning space as one, which promotes self-discovery. Both teachers and students should unravel endless possibilities. My role as a dance educator should facilitate the embodiment of the form. The learning process should be a deep but relaxed one with no student in a hurry to complete the course and acquire certification. Building a curriculum based on equity is a progressive approach; one that lays a foundation strong enough to instill the passion for the learning, practice, exploration and performance of this age-old art form in Singapore.

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Appendix A

Codified Chart / Rasa



Fig 2.0- Codified chart

This chart identifies all our responses or consequents (*Anubhavas*) to be the same.

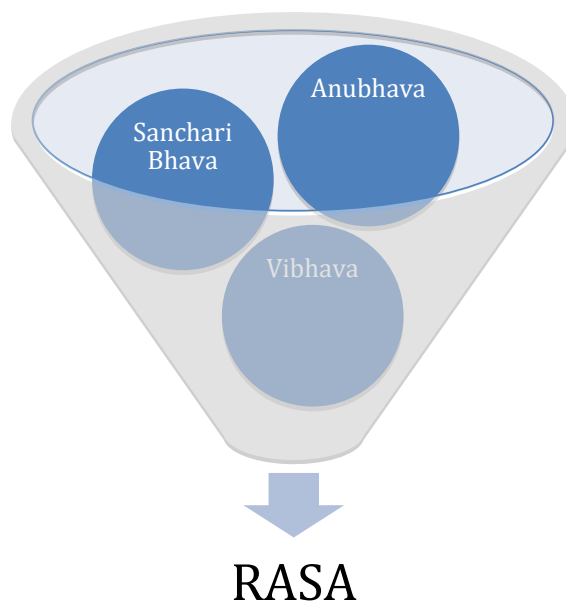


Fig 2.1 – The *Rasa* Theory; How, *Rasa* is generated.

Appendix B

New Charts

These charts identify all our responses or consequents (*Anubhavas*) to be the different.

(*Anubhavas*/Consequents Different)

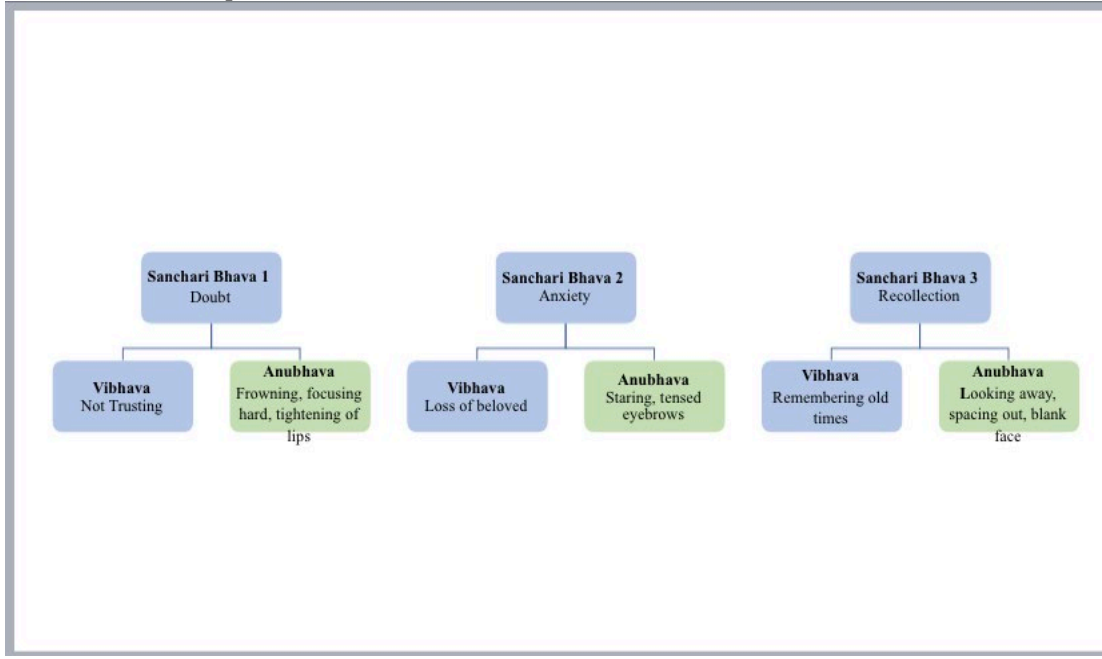


Fig 3.0- New Chart; Participant's *Anubhava* Chart

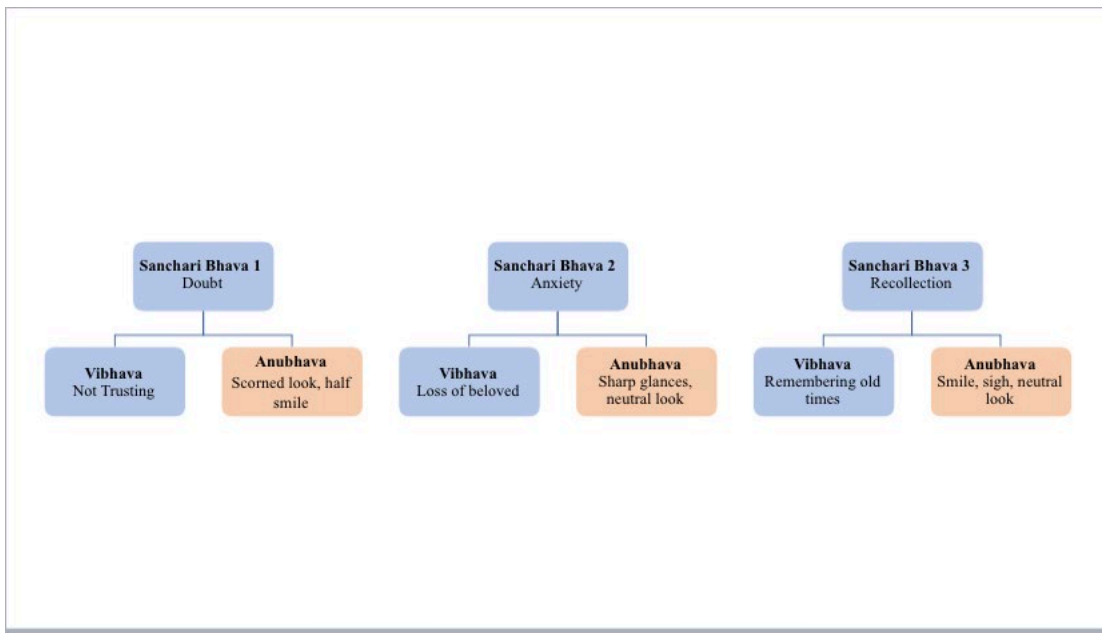


Fig 3.1- New Chart; My *Anubhava* Chart

Appendix C

Glossary

Bharathanatyam – South Indian Classical/ Traditional Dance form accompanied by Carnatic music

Padam – Poetic Text

Sringara- The emotion Love

Rasa- Emotion

Natyadharmi- The mode of communicating through gestures

Lokadharmi- The mode of communicating through pedestrian movements

Pulaneri Vazhakku- The mode of communicating through sensing

Sanchari bhava- Transitory mental state

Vibhava- Determinant

Anubhava- Consequent

Natyashastra- Sanskrit Drama Treatise

Abhinaya- The way in which one communicates dance

Abhinayadarpanam- Sanskrit Dance Treatise

Sangam- Period

Tholkapiam- Tamil Literature / Poem

Sadhaka- Practitioner

Natya Yoga- Union of mind, body and soul through the practice of dance.

Sanatana Dharma- Hindu Philosophy

Nritya- Expressive Dance

Sampradaya- Tradition

Parampara- Succession

Guru- Sishya- Teacher student transmission system

Pandanallur- Name of town

Adavu- Movement technique

Sadir- Temple dance (Pre- colonial)

Devadasi- Temple dancers