

THE LEGEND OF INDIAN WOMEN IN ARTS

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Women have played pivotal roles in society throughout history, contributing as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. Their influence extends beyond the domestic sphere, shaping cultural norms, traditions, and even political landscapes. In this paper, we explore the transformation of women's roles over time, focusing on their participation in the ancient Indian dance form of Kuchipudi.

In ancient times, women primarily occupied domestic roles. Mothers were the nurturing center of the family, responsible for caring for the household and raising children. Their contributions were often behind the scenes, yet essential for the family's well-being. Over the centuries, societal attitudes evolved. Women began to break free from traditional constraints, venturing into diverse fields. We witnessed remarkable changes: women excelling as national players, poets, doctors, judges, and politicians. One historical example is Rani Rudrama Devi, who, despite carrying her child on her back, donned male attire to fight for her kingdom.

Kuchipudi, a classical dance form originating from a small village in Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh, has a rich history dating back to the 13th century. Traditionally, only boys from Brahmin families (such as the Vempatis, Vedantams, Chintas, Pasumarthis, and Bhagavathulas) received rigorous training in dance and music. They performed elaborate Yakshaganas lengthy plays based on epics like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavatham as a means of livelihood.

As time progressed, Vendantam Lakshmi Narayana Shastry Garu challenged conventions. He extended his teaching to girls and women from various communities. Today, we witness female dancers seamlessly transitioning into male roles within Kuchipudi dance dramas. They embody characters like the personified Sutradhara, Lord Rama, Vishnu, Shiva, and even demons like Ravana, Kamsa, and Mahishasura. The scriptures written by the great sages of Bharatha khanda which were most ancient literature known to mankind and, these literature include the subjects like epics, theological aspects, along with scientific elements like astronomy, economics, ayurveda, surgery, mathematics, engineering, biology, anatomy etc. The only disadvantage is that it has been written in Sanskrit which is unknown to the world which made it inaccessible and left unknown to the world. Bharath is motherland of sixty-four varieties of arts and is a cultural powerhouse. Literature, Music, Sculpture and dance are the most important arts. One such literature is the Shiva Tandava sthotra in its preliminary lines state that "damad damad damad ninadhamadh dhamarvayam chakaara chanda thandavam thanothuna shiva Shivam" Lord Shiva being the Godfather of Thandavam (Dance) and the founder of the Pradhmanadam – the first sound (music) offered left half from midline of his body to his wife Goddess Parvathi who is an embodiment of feminine aspect of thandavam called laasyam. The Apsaras who was considered to be storehouse of arts are known to be profound in the forms of Dance, Music and choreography were celestial fairy goddess of clouds and water in the court of Lord Indra, the King of Swargam.

- The Indus Valley civilization is one of the most ancient known human existences which proves the process of evolution. The Dancing girl in Indian history and architectural proof of existence of dance women.
- In sculpture of Ramappa temple walls 108 karnas on the walls of lord Nataraja swamy temple in tamil nadu located in Chidambaram.
- Legendary painter of Ancient India, Raja Ravi Varma's spell-bounding paintings include Women. He was said to fuel his inspiration from the Hindu Goddess and many episodes from the epics.

Legendary Indian Women in Arts:

- 16th century – saint and poet called Meera bai, who lived and followed the philosophy of emphasizing pure love as a form of worship
- 19th century – Poet and the First Governor of United Province, post-Independence, Sarojini Naidu, The Nightingale of India who authored world famous "The palanquin bearers"
- 20th century - Legendary Bharathanatyam Dancer and Former Member of Rajya Sabha – Padma Bhushan Rukmini Devi Arundale who reformed the devadasi system of Bharathanatyam to the performance style prevalent in the modern era and founder of a world class Art University, Kalakshetram
- Esteemed Carnatic Singer and First musician to ever receive Highest Indian civilian award, Bharat Ratna – M S Subbalakshmi, who is alive in her world-famous renditions like Sri Venkateshwara Suprabhatam, Bhaja Govindam, Hanuman Chalisa, Vishnu sahasranamam.

- Queen of Kathak, Dancer who revolutionized the artform of kathak with her immense contributions and choreographies, Padmasri Sitara Devi. She is well-known for her swift Nritha movements and perfect finishings.
- Bharathanatyam Dancer, Padmavibhushan Vyjayanthimala, one of the few women who popularized the classical art of dance through Indian cinema.
- Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam Exponent, Padmavibhushan Yamini Krishnamurthy one of the reforms who strived to change the tag of Kuchipudi as 'folk dance' into its original classical title
- Kuchipudi Dancer, Padmasree Sobha Naidu, who choreographed and performed numerous solo dances and nritya roopakas. She was the first woman fore bearers in propagation of Kuchipudi to the world.
- The evolution of women's roles from homemakers to multifaceted contributors reflects societal progress. Kuchipudi dance, once exclusive to male performers, now celebrates the artistic prowess of women. As we continue to break barriers, let us appreciate the resilience and creativity of women across cultures and generations