



Devadasi Repertoire Workshop

with Dr. Saskia Kersenboom

Paramparai Arts

<https://www.paramparai.eu>

Review by Csilla Tyahun



Date: 14th of April 2025

Pushpanjali

Today's practice opened with a sonic exploration of Sanskrit vowels, accompanied by the veena. The resonance of sound was not treated as a warm-up but as a mode of attuning — the body was invited into language, not from the throat but from the ribs. We explored initiating movement from the breath held within the ribcage, guided by the subtle intelligence of the body rather than external rhythm.

Breathing, the secret alignment in dance:

I was struck by how breath became both rhythm and initiator — a silent choreographer. The vowels were described as feminine — the breath, the flow, the life-force — while consonants, structured and precise, were likened to Shiva, inert without activation. This reframed voice work not just as a vocal or physical task but as a cosmic interplay: the female vowel (shakti) breathes life into the male consonant (Shiva), echoing the metaphysical principle that the subtle feeds the gross, the unseen becomes form. In the singing practice, we resonated the lymphatic points in the upper throat. The sound's vibration gently massaged the body's internal landscape, reminding me that the inner body holds memory, and that perhaps the lymph — often associated with purification — is also a conductor of subtle knowing.



This encounter felt less like training and more like remembering. My body carried the memory of other breath practices — from Kalari and yoga — but this had its own pulse. I began to understand that my research will not be gathered intellectually, but through layers of felt experience. It begins with the breath of life force.

As we entered the Puspanjali, I felt a rush of something simple, raw and generous — like worship that was newborn yet ancient. Each gesture, though familiar, felt unpractised in a beautiful way. Not unfinished, but sincere. The idea that the subtle feeds the gods became real in the body — not metaphorical, but energetic.

Date: 15th - 16th of April 2025

15th Padam - Nagasvaram, Tiruvarur, and 16th Varnam – Tanjore Balasaraswati Bani

Today's session 15th deepened the felt understanding of intention in movement — not as an aesthetic choice, but as a bridge between the subtle and the divine. The task of becoming the divine—and the submission of the ego—felt like an opening into subconscious and archetypal realms. It gave me a profound sense of growth, and inner power. It was as if the movement wasn't expressing devotion — it was devotion. I felt the melting of form into feeling, of body into offering, and of the self into something greater.



Musicality in Balasaraswati's style 16th :

The rhythmic syllables follow the work of the feet and how they sound, pure dance steps prepare the abhinaya in rhythm and mood.

Mode of practice is offering, not rehearsing, not analysing, excusing but trying to make it an offering.

Insights

***Voice in dance:**

If you can sing it, you can dance it.

Using the voice through movement became a way to fine-tune expression and infuse it with rhythm. Working with words, syllables, and voice while moving was a new approach for me. It supported clearer expression, helping me attune to the right flow. This discovery of flow in Bharatanatyam was unfamiliar, as was the feminine, organic use of the upper body and gestures. Tuning the bodily voice to embody the goddess's strength and quality followed the tonal shifts of the vocal cords. From now on, I will incorporate singing, speaking, and rhythmic recitation into my creative dance practice, too.



Bhakti as Embodied Protection is a ritual manifestation of divine presence. I was introduced more deeply to the idea of merging with the genuine emotion of Bhakti, rather than simply performing or acting it out. The clear introduction of miraculous stories helped to ground this understanding. In this sense, the dance is not a display of affect but a reinstatement of cosmic order through the dancer's body. What struck me most is how profoundly this works on an emotional level—not just intellectually or artistically—but by reaching into the deepest layers of human experience.

***Hands and Feet in Dance**

The stamping of the feet comes not from force, but from gravity; it must be claro—clear and resonant. I could feel the vibration when it truly landed. Walking the Padam brought the feet into a grounded dialogue with the earth—a devotional gesture of anchoring spirit to soil.

The hands and eyes also became central to the awareness. Looking at my own hands during the dance made the experience feel more powerful, more inward. Letting go of the audience's gaze—ceasing to perform for others—was a pivotal shift in my practice.

***Corrections in *Pushpanjali Shloka* and *Nritta*:** Attention to posture (slightly leaning forward), the release of the feet, the curving of the fingers, the stillness of the elbows, and initiating movement from the shoulder blades.



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https://youtu.be/8z3EB_nToco