

# INFLUENCE OF INDIAN KINGS ON CLASSICAL MUSIC AND DANCE

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## Abstract:

*The influence of Indian kings on classical music and dance has been profound and transformative, shaping the evolution of these art forms throughout history. From ancient empires like the Mauryas and Guptas to medieval dynasties such as the Cholas, Vijayanagar, and Mughals, royal patronage provided vital support for artists, enabling them to flourish. Rulers recognized the cultural significance of music and dance, often incorporating them into religious rituals, court ceremonies, and public celebrations. During the Gupta period, the codification of musical theories laid the groundwork for classical traditions, while the Chola kings established temples as cultural hubs where dance forms like Bharatanatyam thrived. The Mughal emperors, particularly Akbar, promoted a synthesis of diverse styles, fostering the development of the gharana system and enriching forms like Kathak.*

*Regional influences emerged, with Rajput and Maratha kingdoms contributing unique musical and dance traditions. The colonial era saw a decline in royal patronage but led to revival movements supported by modern rulers, reinforcing cultural identity amidst changing political landscapes. In contemporary India, the legacy of royal patronage continues through various cultural institutions that promote classical music and dance. This enduring influence underscores the intricate relationship between political power and artistic expression, highlighting how kings and emperors played pivotal roles in preserving and evolving Indian classical arts. Ultimately, the history of classical music and dance in India is a testament to the profound impact of royal patronage, ensuring that these art forms remain vibrant and integral to India's cultural heritage.*

**Keywords:** Influence, Indian Kings, Classical Music and Dance.

## INTRODUCTION:

The history of Indian classical music and dance is deeply intertwined with the patronage of royal dynasties. From ancient times to the modern era, kings and emperors played a pivotal role in shaping the artistic landscape of India. Their patronage not only provided financial support but also created an environment where artists could thrive and innovate.

## Historical Context

Indian classical music and dance have roots that trace back thousands of years, with references found in ancient texts such as the Vedas and the Natya Shastra. Music and dance were integral to religious rituals, royal courts, and community celebrations. The evolution of these art forms was significantly influenced by the political landscape, with various dynasties promoting or suppressing cultural expressions according to their values and interests.

## **Ancient Period**

During the ancient period, particularly under the Maurya and Gupta empires, there was a flourishing of arts and culture. The Mauryan king Ashoka (c. 268–232 BCE) is known for his support of Buddhism and the arts. While he is primarily recognized for his promotion of Buddhist teachings, Ashoka's reign also saw the patronage of music and dance as part of religious ceremonies. The Gupta period (c. 320–550 CE) is often referred to as the Golden Age of India. This era witnessed significant advancements in various art forms, including classical music and dance. The Gupta kings encouraged artists and scholars, leading to the codification of musical theories. Treatises such as the "Natyashastra" by Bharata Muni elaborated on the relationship between music, dance, and drama, influencing the development of classical Indian arts.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:**

This study explores the Influence of Indian Kings on Classical Music and Dance.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

This study is based on secondary sources of data such as articles, books, journals, research papers, websites and other sources.

## **INFLUENCE OF INDIAN KINGS ON CLASSICAL MUSIC AND DANCE**

The Chola Dynasty, the Vijayanagara Empire, and the Mughal Empire represent three pivotal periods in Indian history, each contributing significantly to the country's cultural, political, and artistic heritage. These empires not only shaped the political landscape of their times but also fostered remarkable advancements in art, architecture, music, and dance. This study explores the contributions of these dynasties, particularly focusing on their influence on Indian classical music and dance, illustrating how royal patronage facilitated the flourishing of these art forms.

### **THE CHOLA DYNASTY**

The Chola Dynasty, one of the longest-ruling dynasties in South Indian history, reached its zenith between the 9th and 13th centuries CE. The dynasty is known for its military prowess, maritime trade, and cultural achievements. Under rulers like Rajaraja Chola I and Rajendra Chola I, the empire expanded significantly, encompassing parts of modern-day Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and even territories in Southeast Asia.

#### **Patronage of Arts**

The Chola kings were renowned patrons of the arts, particularly in architecture, sculpture, and dance. They constructed magnificent temples that served as cultural hubs, where music and dance played essential roles in religious ceremonies. The Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a prime example of Chola architecture, showcasing intricate sculptures depicting dancers and musicians.

## **Influence on Dance**

The Chola dynasty significantly contributed to the development of Bharatanatyam, one of India's oldest classical dance forms. Temples became centers for the performance of Bharatanatyam, which was initially performed by Devadasis (temple dancers) as a form of worship. The Chola kings' patronage ensured that this dance form thrived, allowing it to evolve into the structured art form we recognize today.

## **Musical Developments**

The Chola period also saw advancements in music, with the establishment of musical traditions that integrated various regional styles. The temples not only served as venues for dance but also for musical performances, often accompanying religious rituals. The integration of classical music with dance created a rich cultural synergy, leading to the development of new ragas and compositions.

## **THE VIJAYANAGARA EMPIRE**

The Vijayanagara Empire (c. 1336–1646 CE) emerged in South India as a response to the fragmentation caused by the Delhi Sultanate's incursions. Founded by Harihara I and Bukka Raya I, the empire was known for its wealth, military strength, and cultural vibrancy. It became a refuge for Hindu culture and arts during a time of Muslim rule in other parts of India.

## **Cultural Flourishing**

The Vijayanagara rulers, particularly Krishnadevaraya, were significant patrons of arts and literature. The empire became a melting pot of various cultural influences, fostering a renaissance of classical music, dance, and literature. The court attracted talented artists, poets, and scholars, creating an environment ripe for artistic innovation.

## **Dance and Drama**

Dance forms such as Yakshagana and classical forms like Bharatanatyam continued to thrive under Vijayanagara patronage. Krishnadevaraya himself was an accomplished poet and writer, promoting Telugu literature and integrating it with performance arts. The fusion of music and dance during this period led to the development of intricate dance-dramas that depicted mythological themes, further enriching the cultural landscape.

## **Musical Contributions**

The Vijayanagara Empire also saw significant developments in music. The establishment of the "Gharana" system allowed for the categorization of musicians based on style and lineage. This period witnessed the codification of musical theories and the creation of new compositions that blended traditional and regional elements. The promotion of classical music in temples and courts played a crucial role in preserving and innovating these art forms.

## THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

The Mughal Empire (c. 1526–1857 CE) marked a significant chapter in Indian history, known for its cultural synthesis and artistic achievements. Founded by Babur, the empire reached its zenith under Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan. The Mughals were known for their administrative prowess, architectural marvels, and patronage of the arts.

### Cultural Synthesis

The Mughal emperors embraced a diverse array of cultural influences, leading to a unique blend of Persian, Indian, and Central Asian elements in art, music, and dance. Akbar, in particular, is credited with fostering a cultural renaissance that celebrated diversity, bringing together artists, musicians, and scholars from various backgrounds.

### Influence on Dance

Kathak, one of the major classical dance forms of India, evolved significantly during the Mughal era. Initially rooted in temple traditions, Kathak transitioned into a court dance, characterized by its intricate footwork, expressive gestures, and storytelling. The Mughals' appreciation for drama and aesthetics influenced the dance style, leading to the incorporation of Persian themes and costumes.

### Musical Innovations

The Mughal Empire was also a crucial period for the evolution of Indian classical music. The gharana system, which categorizes musicians based on style, was further developed during this time. Prominent figures such as Tansen, who served in Akbar's court, were instrumental in creating new ragas and compositions. The blending of various musical traditions led to the emergence of innovative styles, enriching the classical music landscape.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

### Patronage and Cultural Identity

All three empires recognized the importance of arts in establishing cultural identity and asserting political power. The Chola and Vijayanagara empires used temples as centers for cultural activities, while the Mughals transformed courts into vibrant cultural hubs. Royal patronage was essential in sustaining and promoting the arts, allowing them to flourish.

### Evolution of Dance Forms

The evolution of dance forms across these empires highlights the adaptability and resilience of Indian classical arts. Bharatanatyam's transformation under the Chola dynasty, Yakshagana's growth during the Vijayanagara Empire, and Kathak's refinement in the Mughal courts illustrate how dance forms absorbed influences from their environments while maintaining their core elements.

## **Musical Legacy**

The musical developments during these periods laid the foundation for contemporary Indian classical music. The codification of musical theories, the establishment of gharanas, and the creation of new ragas contributed to a rich musical heritage that continues to thrive. The collaboration between musicians, poets, and dancers across these empires fostered an artistic synergy that enriched the cultural landscape.

## **REGIONAL INFLUENCES AND INNOVATIONS**

While kings played a central role in the patronage of music and dance, regional variations emerged, leading to the development of distinct styles across India.

### **The Rajput Kingdoms**

In the Rajput kingdoms of North India, rulers such as Maharana Pratap and the Kachwaha dynasty of Jaipur promoted folk and classical music. Gharanas like the Jaipur Gharana emerged, emphasizing vocal traditions and improvisation. The Rajputs also embraced dance forms like Ghoomar, which were performed during festivals and royal celebrations, further enriching the cultural landscape.

### **The Maratha Empire**

The Maratha Empire (c. 1674–1818 CE) contributed to the classical music scene, especially through the patronage of the Peshwas. Figures like Balaji Baji Rao (Nana Dada) were instrumental in supporting musicians and dancers. The influence of the Marathi theatre and Lavani dance became prominent, blending classical and folk elements. This period saw the rise of several musical forms that incorporated local themes and styles, reflecting the diversity of Indian culture.

### **The British Colonial Era**

The arrival of the British in India marked a significant shift in the patronage of arts. The colonial era saw the decline of royal courts and a corresponding change in the cultural landscape. However, many kings and nobles adapted to the new political reality by continuing to support the arts, albeit in a modified form.

### **Revival Movements**

In response to colonial rule, there was a revival of interest in classical music and dance during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Rulers like the Maharaja of Mysore, Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar, played a key role in promoting traditional art forms. The establishment of institutions like the Mysore Palace School of Music contributed to the preservation and dissemination of classical music.

### **The Role of Kings as Patrons**

During this period, the patronage of music and dance was often linked to the efforts of kings and nobility to assert their cultural identity. The promotion of classical forms was seen as a means to reclaim a sense of pride in Indian heritage. Events such as the annual music conferences organized in Madras (now Chennai)

became platforms for musicians to showcase their talents, and royal patronage was critical in providing resources and recognition.

## **Modern Era and Cultural Renaissance**

The post-independence era marked a significant turning point for Indian classical music and dance. While the political structure changed, the legacy of royal patronage continued to influence the arts.

## **Institutional Support**

With the establishment of independent India, several cultural institutions emerged to promote classical music and dance. The All India Radio, Sangeet Natak Akademi, and various state-sponsored festivals provided platforms for artists to flourish. Many royal families transitioned into patrons of the arts, continuing their ancestors' legacy.

## **International Recognition**

As Indian classical music and dance gained international recognition, the contributions of kings and emperors were celebrated. Performances at cultural festivals and international collaborations highlighted the richness of Indian traditions. The influence of royal patronage in the preservation and promotion of classical arts was acknowledged globally.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The influence of Indian kings on classical music and dance is a testament to the deep connection between art and power throughout history. Royal patronage not only provided the necessary resources for artists but also created an environment where cultural expressions could thrive. From the ancient Mauryan and Gupta empires to the vibrant courts of the Mughals and regional dynasties, rulers recognized the importance of music and dance as vehicles of cultural identity and spiritual expression. As these art forms evolved, they absorbed various regional styles, leading to a rich diversity that continues to characterize Indian classical traditions today. Even in the modern era, the legacy of royal patronage persists, with contemporary institutions and festivals keeping these art forms alive and relevant.

Ultimately, the historical relationship between Indian kings and classical music and dance highlights the vital role of leadership in nurturing cultural heritage. This enduring influence ensures that Indian classical arts remain an integral part of the nation's identity, celebrating the artistic achievements of the past while inspiring future generations. The richness of these traditions stands as a living legacy of the profound impact of royal patronage on the cultural landscape of India.

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