

# Four Quadrants for Learners of Indian Performing Arts: The Learning Ecosystem of Vidyā-Kalā-Shilpa-Sādhanā

Parwati Dutta

Mahagami Gurukul Centre for Performing Arts, MGM University, Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India

## ABSTRACT

India, one of the world's oldest civilizations, has endured the test of time. What distinguishes Indian culture from other ancient civilizations is its remarkable capacity to absorb and integrate external influences, seamlessly incorporating them into its own cultural framework. This amalgamation has not only enriched but also fortified India's cultural landscape. The main goal of Indian traditional arts is not a mere creative engagement and pleasure, but to preserve, promote, and perpetuate traditional cultural forms and practices, as well as artistic manifestations - including folk forms, literature, indigenous crafts, and other cultural expressions of various regions of the country. This paper illustrates the synergy between the four quadrants of learning in the ancient Indian learning system while exploring the dynamics of each. 'Vidyā' meaning knowledge, 'Kalā' representing creative pursuits, 'Shilpa' - the physical skills and 'Sādhanā' meaning immersive repeated practice are the four quadrants that nurture and enrich the entire learning ecosystem of a traditional art.

## INTRODUCTION

A diversity of influences is evident in Indian art, architecture, music, language, philosophy, and religion, reflecting a rich tapestry woven over centuries. This dynamic interplay is central to Indian culture and heritage. While numerous traditional Indian arts such as classical dances, music, folk arts, visual arts, and crafts—are practised by artists from various demographics today, it is particularly intriguing to investigate the traditional methods of learning and transmitting these art forms. The realm of Indian traditional arts encompasses a vast array of practices, including various dance forms, music genres, instruments, theatrical forms, literary traditions, puppet and mask dances, martial dances, dance-dramas, and storytelling forms, amounting to several thousand distinct art forms. The broad classification of the Indian traditional arts can be seen in Fig 1.

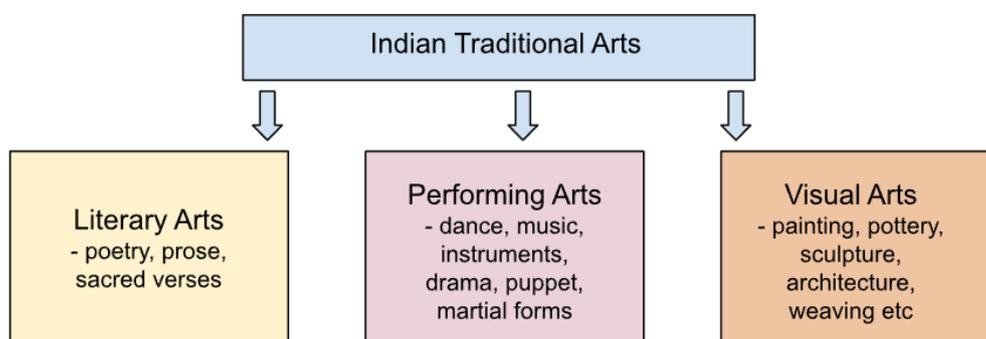


Figure 1 : Classification of the Indian traditional arts

The earliest evidence of the arts in India dates back to the Indus Valley Civilization (circa 3300 BCE – circa 1750 BCE). Numerous gold, terracotta, and stone figurines depicting girls in dancing poses suggest the existence of early dance forms. Additionally, remnants of figurative art and pottery from this period indicate that such artistic practices were widespread and integral to the civilization.

The Vedic period is renowned for its profound literary contributions and symbolic artistic practices, which were closely linked to ritualistic offerings and spiritual expressions.

### Genesis of Performing Arts

The Nāṭyaśāstra is the world's oldest available treatise on performing arts, dating back over 2,500 years. Attributed to Bharata Muni, this encyclopaedic work on art is organised into 36 chapters and comprises more than 6,000 verses. The first chapter provides a semi-historical and purāṇic narrative detailing the creation of the Nāṭyaśāstra. The Nāṭyaśāstra addresses the structural aspects of the art form, including lyrics, music, and the language of gestures, all essential for conveying content and evoking an aesthetic experience ('rasa'). It provides comprehensive guidance on both form and content. Additionally, it ensures the fulfilment of the four goals of human pursuit (puruṣārtha) - 'dharma', 'artha', 'kāma'—and offers insights into the experience of bliss ('mokṣa'). The first chapter of Nāṭyaśāstra elaborates on the purpose and components of the performing arts as seen in the sanskrit verses below:

धर्म्यमर्थं यशस्यं च सोपदेश्यं ससङ्ग्रहम् ।  
भविष्यतश्च लोकस्य सर्वकर्मानुदर्शकम् ॥

It provides valuable guidance for individuals in their pursuits of 'dharma', material needs, and fame. Furthermore, it is poised to offer enduring counsel to the world in the future too in all their endeavours.

सर्वशास्त्रार्थसंपन्नं सर्वशिल्पप्रवर्तकम् ।  
नाट्याख्यं पञ्चमवेदं सेतिहासं करोम्यहम् ॥

It will embody the essence of all the śāstra-s and serve as the foundation for all artistic endeavours. I shall establish the Nāṭyaveda, the fifth Veda, alongside the itihāsas.

एवं सङ्कल्प्य भगवान् सर्ववेदानुस्मरन् ।  
नाट्यवेदं ततश्चक्रे चतुर्वेदाङ्गसम्भवम् ॥

Having made this decision, the deity consolidated all the Vedas and created the Nāṭyaveda, which emerged from the essence of the four Vedas.

जग्राह पाठ्यमृगवेदात्सामभ्यो गीतमेव च ।  
यजुर्वेदादभिनयान् रसानाथर्वणादपि ॥

He extracted the lyrics (पाठ्य) from the Ṛgveda, the music (गीत) from the Sāmaveda, the language of gestures (अभिनय) from the Yajurveda, and the aesthetic experience (रस) from the Atharvaveda.

वेदोपवेदैः सम्बद्धो नाट्यवेदो महात्मना ।  
एवं भगवता सृष्टो ब्रह्मणा सर्ववेदिना ॥

Thus, the Nāṭyaveda was created by Brahma, the all-knowing and omniscient deity, closely linked to the Vedas and the Upavedas.

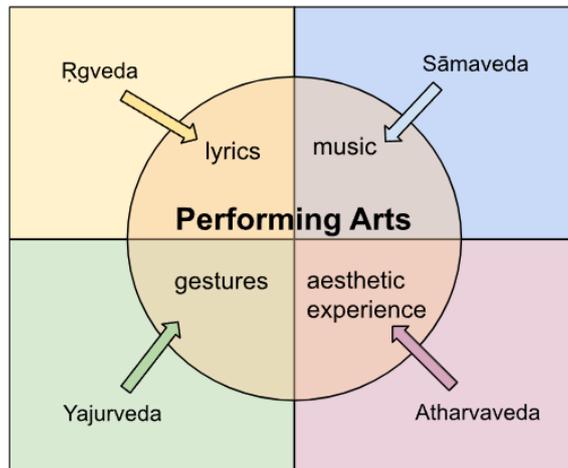


Figure 2 : Genesis of Performing Arts (Natyaveda) from the Vedas

In the traditional Indian framework, Performing Arts are recognized through the lenses of **Vidyā** (knowledge), **Kalā** (creative pursuits), **Shilpa** (skills), and **Sādhanā** (repeated practice). These four aspects provide a comprehensive perspective for examining the performing arts.

**Vidyā - valid knowledge**

The term ‘Vidyā’ primarily signifies "correct knowledge" across various fields of science, learning, philosophy, or any factual knowledge that is indisputable and irrefutable. Its Sanskrit root, ‘vid’, conveys meanings such as "to reason upon," "knower," "finding," "knowing," "acquiring," or "understanding." Vidyā involves the pursuit of truth through systematic observation and analysis of empirical data, followed by the development of theories for documentation and further investigation. Vidyā provides insight, enhances intelligence, and boosts power and efficiency. It cultivates and refines the intellect, guiding individuals towards spiritual salvation and fostering progress and prosperity in the material world.

Four kinds of Vidyā have been mentioned in ancient scriptures :

1. **Trayi** - the study of the Vedas and auxiliary texts
2. **Anviksiki** - logic and metaphysics;
3. **Dandaniti** - science of governance;
4. **Varum** - practical arts such as agriculture, commerce, medicine etc.

Vidyās are considered to be 14 in number and expressed as ‘Chaturdasha Vidyā’ - the fourteen abodes of knowledge.

Veda	Upaveda	Vedānga
1. <b>Rig Veda</b> (ऋग्वेद) - Earliest form of Veda  2. <b>Samaveda</b> (सामवेद) - Earliest reference for singing  3. <b>Yajurveda</b> (यजुर्वेद) - Also known as the Book of Prayers  4. <b>Atharvaveda</b> (अथर्ववेद) - Folkloric and shamanistic aspect, rituals	1. <b>Artha shastra</b> (अर्थशास्त्र) - statecraft, political science, economic policy and military strategy  2. <b>Dhanurveda</b> (धनुर्वेद) - art of warfare, including strategy, weaponry, and martial skills  3. <b>Gandharva Veda</b> (गंधर्ववेद) - theory and practice of music, dance, and performing arts  4. <b>Ayurveda</b> (आयुर्वेद) - principles of holistic health, including medicine, diet, and surgery	1. <b>Shiksha</b> (शिक्षा) - phonetics and phonology  2. <b>Kalpa</b> (कल्प) - Ritual Detail  3. <b>Nirukta</b> (निरुक्त) - Etymology  4. <b>Vyakarana</b> (व्याकरण) - Grammar  5. <b>Chandas</b> (छंद) - Metre  6. <b>Jyotisha</b> (ज्योतिष) - Astronomy/ Astrology

Table 1 : Fourteen Vidyās

Performing Arts (Natyā as mentioned in Natyashastra) was created by blending elements from the four **Vedas** - the abodes of knowledge, while **Gandharva Veda** is the Science of music and dance. Thus the elements of Vidyā are applied to Performing Arts.

**Kalā - creative pursuit**

Kalā encompasses the physical or mechanical arts that require individual skill and talent. It represents the manifestation of imagination, creativity, and idealism, serving as a profound expression of the aesthetic sensibility inherent in the human mind.

Vātsyāyana's Kāmasūtra (300 CE) is the oldest known source for the widely recognized classification of the 64 kalās. Among the broad categories of these 64 kalās, one significant classification based on purpose is:

- a. **Lalita** kalās- Fine arts that are pursued for pure aesthetic pleasure like music, dance and painting.
- b. **Kuṣāla** kalās- The artistic pursuits that also served as means for livelihood like basket weaving, tailoring, jewellery making, etc.
- c. **Upayukta** kalās- The kalās that prominently are utilitarian in nature and could serve as fruitful occupations like building, carpentry, tailoring, laying tiles.

Another classification is as below:

- a. **Vijnāna** kalās (scientific arts)
- b. **Lalita** kalās and kusalakalās (fine arts and crafts)
- c. **Vāñijya** kalās (commercial arts)
- d. **Vinoda** kalās (entertainment arts)
- e. **Sankirṇa** kalās (complex arts)

Out of the 64 (Chatu-shashti) kalās, those that come within the folds of Performing Arts are:

- 1) **Geet** : Art of singing.
- 2) **Vadya** : Art of playing on musical instruments.
- 3) **Nritya** : Art of dancing.
- 4) **Natya** : Art of theatricals.
- 5) **Aalekhya** : Art of painting
- 6) **Vishesh Kacchedya** : Art of painting the face and body with coloured unguents and cosmetics.
- 7) **Dashanvasanang raag** : Art of applying preparations for cleansing the teeth, cloths and painting the body.
- 8) **Udak vadya** : Art of playing on music in water.
- 9) **Chitrayog** : Art of practically applying an admixture of colours.
- 10) **Malya grantha vikalpa** : Art of designing a preparation of wreaths.
- 11) **Kesha-shekhara-pidyojana** : Art of practically setting the coronet on the head.
- 12) **Nepathya Yog** : Art of practically dressing in the tiring room.
- 13) **Karnapatrabhang** : Art of decorating the tragus of the ear.
- 14) **Gandhayukti / Sugandhayukti** : Art of practical application of aromatics.
- 15) **Bhushanayojan** : Art of applying or setting ornaments.
- 16) **Suchikarma** : Art of needleworks and weaving.
- 17) **Sutrakarma** : Art of playing with thread.
- 18) **Vina-damuraka-vadya** : Art of playing Veena and Damaru.
- 19) **Pratimala** : Art of reciting verse for verse as a trial for memory or skill.
- 20) **Durvachakayog** : Art of practising language difficult to be answered by others.
- 21) **Pustakvachan** : Art of reciting books.
- 22) **Natakakhyayika darshan** : Art of enacting short plays and anecdotes.
- 23) **Kavyasamasyapurti** : Art of solving enigmatic verses.
- 24) **Pattika vetra-ban-vikalpa** : Art of designing preparation of shield, cane and arrows.
- 25) **Keshmarjan koushal** : Art of combing hair.
- 26) **Deshbhashadnyan** : Art of knowing provincial dialects.
- 27) **Abhidhankosh chhandodnyan** : Art of the use of lexicography and metres.
- 28) **Vyayamiki vidyadnyan** : Art of awakening master with music at dawn.

### Shilpa - skills and crafts

Shilpa in the ancient Indian context refers to any skill or craft. The term \*Shilpa\* encompasses a range of elements including creativity, skill, craft, labour, ingenuity, ritual, form, and creation. In its broader connotation, Shilpa refers to all practical arts and crafts that involve both imaginative design and skilled workmanship. The Shilpa Shastras are comprehensive manuals that provide guidelines for sculpture, iconography, architecture, and other related skills. They detail the proportions of sculpted figures, compositional techniques, underlying principles and meanings, as well as architectural rules and standards. Shilpa includes various types of chitra (full painting), ardhachitra (sketch work), chitrabhasa (communication through painting), varna samskara (preparation of colours), carpentry, metal casting, weaving, stitching and various creative acts that are executed through specialised physical skills.

### Sādhanā - repeated practice

According to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Sādhanā is defined in relation to Abhyāsa (practice) and Kriyā (action). Sādhanā refers to a disciplined effort undertaken in pursuit of a specific goal. Abhyāsa involves repeated practice characterised by careful observation and reflection, while Kriyā signifies the flawless execution of actions through

study and investigation. A Sādhaka (practitioner) is one who adeptly applies their mind and intelligence in the practice of these principles to achieve a spiritual objective.

The term Sāadhanā refers to a "methodical discipline aimed at achieving a desired knowledge or goal," which requires the cultivation of three essential virtues:

1. **Tapas** (discipline) – rigorous practice and self-control necessary for progress.
2. **Svādhyāya** (self-study) – reflective study and understanding of one's own mind and actions.
3. **Īśvara-praṇidhāna** (dedication to the divine) – commitment and surrender to a higher power or divine principle.

Patanjali's foundational premise is that human consciousness is divided into two distinct aspects: 'mundane awareness' and the 'existential seer'. The ability to differentiate between these two dimensions - 'mundane consciousness' and the 'existential seer', is essential for practice that has significant implications in the phenomenology of dance and music.

Sāadhanā cultivates the body for independent 'somatic thinking', which is crucial for performing artists. This process helps them develop a personal reference point, allowing them to achieve excellence by fully realising their individual potential.

### **Learning ecosystem in Indian Performing arts**

In Indian Performing Arts, teaching and learning have traditionally been conducted through the Guru-Shishya Paramparā, which translates to "succession from master to disciple." The term 'Paramparā' literally means an uninterrupted series or succession, reflecting a continuous tradition or order.

In this traditional residential educational system, the shishya (student) would live with the 'guru' (teacher) as a family member, receiving education and training in a holistic and immersive manner, embodying the role of a dedicated learner. In contemporary practice, while disciples no longer typically reside with their guru, the core philosophy of the Guru-Shishya Paramparā is still largely upheld. This includes - genuineness of the guru and shishya's reverence, commitment, devotion and obedience towards the guru.

Both the mentor and the learner are viewed as 'pātra' (container) that hold and transmit the rich knowledge, artistic skills, and philosophical dedication essential for attaining higher realisation. This conceptualisation underscores their mutual role in the preservation and advancement of the art form and its underlying principles. Here is a Sanskrit verse from mediaeval text Abhinaya Darpan on the 'prāna' (vital life) of a 'pātra' -

पात्रस्य प्राणाः

जवः स्थिरत्वं रेखा च भ्रमरी दृष्टिश्रमः ॥

मेधा श्रद्धा वचो गीतं पात्रप्राणा दश स्मृताः ।

एवंविधेन पात्रेण नृत्यं कार्यं विधानतः ॥

The ten factors of the Inner Life of the 'pātra' are swiftness, composure, symmetry, versatility, glances, ease, intelligence, confidence, speech, and song.

The attributes associated with Indian Performing Arts extend beyond mere physical skills, encompassing knowledge, creativity, practice, and a pure spirit. Over centuries, it has been established that an effective learning ecosystem in this tradition necessitates an ideal balance among the four quadrants: Vidyā (knowledge), Kalā (creative pursuits), Shilpa (skills), and Sāadhanā (repeated practice).

Every Vidyā incorporates elements of innovation, while each Kalā eventually becomes codified into a Shāstra through systematic documentation. In this framework, Vidyā is characterised by the dominance of facts, logic, and experimentation, whereas Kalā is distinguished by its focus on aesthetic enjoyment and creative endeavour.

Through Shilpa, which encompasses dexterity, agility, and physical skill, enhanced by immersive practice (Sāadhanā), the effectiveness of creative expression is maximised, ultimately leading to the experience of profound bliss, or 'rasa-anand'. This holistic approach ensures a comprehensive and profound development in the performing arts.

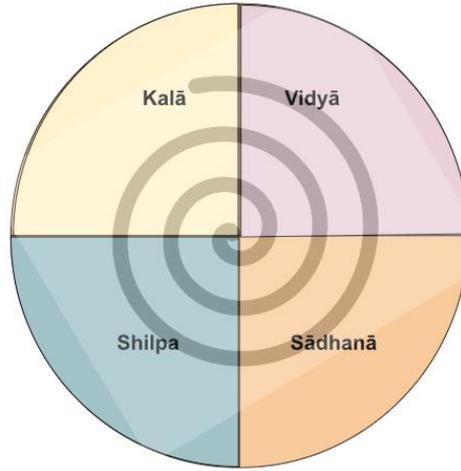


Figure 3 : Synergy between the four quadrants: Vidyā, Kalā , Shilpa and Sādhanā

### CONCLUSION

In contemporary times, performing artists often aspire to evolve as artists, teachers, researchers, or creative professionals. To meet the diverse needs of learners, an adaptive learning model is essential. The Four Quadrants model comprising Vidyā, Kalā , Shilpa and Sādhanā provides an ideal pedagogical framework. This model accommodates the varied goals, backgrounds, and age groups of learners, teachers, and practitioners, facilitating a comprehensive and flexible approach to education in the performing arts. The concept of continuous learning and self-assessment is crucial for both the personal growth of the seeker and the advancement of their chosen performing art. Regular self-assessment and ongoing education ensure that practitioners remain engaged in their development, refine their skills, and adapt to evolving artistic standards, thereby fostering both individual and artistic progress.

### REFERENCES

- [1]. Ghosh, Manomohan (1951). The Natyasastra : a treatise on ancient Indian dramaturgy and histrionics ascribed to Bharata-muni. The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta.
- [2]. Vedvidya, Maharishi Sandipani Rashtriya (2023). Veda Kalpataru. National Book Trust.
- [3]. Sharma , Ramanand (2001) (Trans). Kamasutra Of Vatsyayan. Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series.
- [4]. Vidyabhusana, Satish Chandra (1920). A History of Indian Logic (Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Schools). Motilal Banarasiidass Publication.
- [5]. Coomaraswamy, A & Duggirala, G.K. (1917) (Trans). The Mirror of Gesture being the Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikesvara. Cambridge University Press.
- [6]. Chandorkar, Vijaya. 2012. Compositional Forms of Hindustani Music - A Journey, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- [7]. Thakaray, R.C. 2013. Bharatiya Upmahadripathi ki Sanskritiya, Hindi Madhyam karyaniya nideshalaya Delhi Vishwabidyalaya, Part-I.
- [8]. Varadpande, M.L. 1987. History of Indian Theatre (in 6 volumes), Abhinav Publications, New Delhi.
- [9]. Prajnanananda, Swami. 1973. Historical Development of Indian Music, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay 257B, Calcutta.
- [10]. Singh, Thakur Jaideva. 1995. Indian Music, Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata.