

## An Exploration into Understanding Movement Narratives and Characterization in the Choreographies of V. Sheshu Parupalli in Select K. Vishwanath Films

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### Abstract

This paper explores the narrative function of choreography in Indian cinema through the collaborative works of choreographer V. Sheshu Parupalli and filmmaker K. Vishwanath. Renowned for his mastery in Kūcipūdi, Sheshu introduced classical dance vocabulary into mainstream Telugu films, particularly in six iconic collaborations with Vishwanath: *Śaṅkarābharaṇam* (1980), *Saptapadī* (1981), *Śubhalēkha* (1982), *Sāgara Saṅgamam* (1983), *Śrutilayalu* (1987), *Svarṇakamalam* (1988). The study examines how Sheshu's choreography moves beyond aesthetic presentation, functioning instead as a vital narrative tool that shapes character development, emotional arcs, and thematic expression.

Through a qualitative analysis of dance sequences across these films, this research identifies how movement replaces dialogue, symbolizing internal struggles, relationships, and transformations. For instance, in *Sāgara Saṅgamam*, the protagonist's journey of rise, fall, and redemption is conveyed through the language of dance. Similarly, in *Svarṇakamalam*, dance becomes a metaphor for personal growth and self-realization. The research also highlights the integral synergy between classical music and movement, as seen in the guru-śiṣya dynamic of *Sankarabharanam*, where choreography reinforces the film's devotional and pedagogical themes.

By focusing on this specific collaboration, the paper contributes to the underexplored area of choreographic storytelling in Indian cinema, positioning dance as a central, rather than supplementary, cinematic language.

### Keywords

Telugu Cinema, Kūcipūdi, Sheshu Parupalli, K. Vishwanath, choreography, narrative movement.

### 1.0 Introduction

V. Sheshu Parupalli, known as Dance Master Seshu, was a distinguished choreographer specializing in Kūcipūdi. He was responsible for introducing classical dance movements to many Indian films, particularly in his collaborations with the legendary director K. Vishwanath. Vishwanath, celebrated for integrating classical arts into cinema, worked closely with Seshu master in films such as *Śaṅkarābharaṇam*, *Sāgara Saṅgamam*, and *Saptapadī*. Movement serves as a powerful storytelling technique in choreographed dance sequences in many

films. For instance, in *Bāhubalī*, the choreography of 'Kanna Niduricchā' becomes a narrative tool, utilizing spatial dynamics, synchronized formations, and symbolic gestures to enhance the storytelling, making the romance visually immersive and emotionally resonant.

## Methodology

The study follows a qualitative research approach, employing close film analysis to identify storytelling techniques in choreography. Secondary sources, including articles and interviews, supplement the analysis, addressing gaps in prior research, which has often prioritized aesthetics over narrative function.

## 2.0 Analysis

### 2.1 *Śaṅkarābharaṇam*

#### Plot

*Śaṅkarābharaṇam* (1980), directed by K. Viswanath, is a Telugu film that explores themes of classical art, devotion, and societal hypocrisy. The film follows Shankara Sastri, a celebrated Karnāṭaka musician, and Tulasi, the daughter of a devadasi who reveres him deeply. After a traumatic assault and public humiliation, Tulasi chooses to live in the shadows, secretly ensuring her son becomes Sastri's disciple. As classical music declines in popularity, Sastri's fame fades. Tulasi's son, raised unknowingly by Sastri, carries forward his legacy. In the final concert arranged by Tulasi, Sastri realizes the boy is her son and anoints him as his musical heir before dying peacefully. Tulasi, overwhelmed, dies at his feet. The film ends on a tragic yet uplifting note, celebrating the enduring power of music, love, and sacrifice.

#### Analysis of songs choreographed by Seshu V. Parupalli

In the song *Śaṅkarābharaṇamu*, Tulasi, a dancer, attends a concert of Shankara Shastry — whom she is devoted to. In the beginning of the song one can see her resisting the urge to dance as she immerses herself in his singing—the scene involves her dancing through hasta-s and stopping herself before someone sees her. Then as the song progresses one can see her dancing for the song, *Śaṅkarābharaṇamu*, this scene serves as the introductory scene for the flashback. The relation between two artists is clearly established in this scene. Tulasi, as a dancer, worships the singer Shankara Shastri's singing and, by extension, him. She resonates to the songs through her dance. As the story progresses she accidentally meets Shankara Shastry near a lake teaching music to his daughter. Tulasi without her knowledge commences to dance and the choreography for both the dance sequences is done in Kūcipuḍi form. Nritta Hasta-s can be traced.

The Svara sequence near the lake in *Śaṅkarābharaṇam* depicts the bonding of Tulasi and Shankara Shastry as she shows her appreciation for his music and he is moved by her dancing. This scene is an amalgamation of their arts and through their actions their mutual respect for not only one another's art, but also the other individual is re-established.

revealed. Here, Shankara Shastry is teaching his new student (his daughter) the saralī varisai. Saralī varisai is the first set of svara patterns that are generally taught in Karnāṭaka music. In the beginning, her steps are slower and more rigid. However, as the song progresses, her steps become more carefree and flow with the music, depicting her devotion for him and his art. This is an apt soundtrack for this scene as it represents the blossoming of their new relationship. It is a scenic episode where the body of water serves as their backdrop representing the vastness of their deep relationship and artistry. As thus, their beautiful relationship of mutual respect blooms.

In the song Brōcevārevarura Tulasi and Shankara Shastry do not interact with each other at this point of the film. However, her son does take music lessons from shankara shastry. In this scene, the son learns the song Brochevarevarura. He later repeats the song for Tulasi to hear. She dances to his singing passionately. This is a significant moment in the film because this is the first time she is depicted to be dancing to the singing of anyone other than Shankara Shastry. This reveals the way she sees her son — as a replica of Shankara Shastry. She gives her son that status and this scene exemplifies the deep artistic connection that Shankara Shastry and Tulasi share.

## 2.2 *Saptapadī*

### Plot

*Saptapadī* (1981), is a profound Telugu film that explores the conflict between rigid tradition and individual freedom. The story centres on Yajulu, an elderly orthodox Brahmin who holds unshakable faith in customs and rituals passed down through generations. He values tradition above all—even over family bonds—and arranges the marriage of his grandson Gauri to Hema, his granddaughter's daughter, despite her love for a flutist from another caste.

On their wedding night, Gauri, a devout worshipper of Goddess Durga, sees the goddess in Hema and cannot bring himself to consummate the marriage. He comes to view Hema as a divine figure rather than a wife, realizing her heart belongs to another. This divine moment acts as a turning point, shaking Yajulu's long-held beliefs. For the first time, he begins to question the rigidity of caste, tradition, and societal expectations. Eventually, Yajulu chooses love and understanding over orthodoxy and personally ensures Hema is united with her true love. The film is a moving commentary on transformation, empathy, and the deeper essence of dharma.

### Analysis of songs choreographed by Seshu V. Parupalli

One of the dance sequences in *Saptapadī*, is the Durgā Sūktam. Hema is summoned by her grandfather to the temple. Here, he expresses that he accepts her as his grandchild by veda chanting with his fellow priest. He wants her to dance to this chanting. This sequence directly depicts the joining of their two worlds — Hema's world is dancing and her grandfather's world is the temple and his work as a priest. He had previously disapproved of her career, but now shows acceptance through this gesture. Thus, this sequence depicts a very essential plot point. The movements are controlled. The choice for choreography was to portray the meaning of the Durgā Sūktam

through gestures, which is referred to as padārtha in Bharatanātyam. The movements complement the vedic chanting and her expressions are also very sober and mostly muted. It is a substantial contrast to the previous dance sequence that acted like her introduction song, where her costumes were flashy and made to impress and her steps were more graceful. Her interaction with the audience in terms of evocative expressions was also a focus of the performance. The camera focuses on her hasta-s more which could be to emphasise her prowess over the artform.

In his interview with ETV, Parupalli shares that choreographing for this particular vedic chant was challenging since it was a new concept for him and he was not aware of the meaning of Durga sūkatam ; he shares that he mentally struggled with choreographing this piece. This number from the film was choreographically dealt with like any other abhinaya piece like padam or jāvali with hasta abhinaya and minimal foot work (“*ETV Interview: Dance Direction Insights – Vedic Chant Choreography.*” 7:52-8:23).

In the song ‘Nemeli ki nerpina natyam idi’ there is a flashback sequence that shows the viewer how she meets the love interest of the film. Hema is in a performance when Haribabu, the love interest, adds to the music through his flute playing. Here, there is a confluence of their artforms and this is their first impression of each other. Their art plays a major role in their relationship and the romantic elements are portrayed through the song and the events that take place within it.

Hema’s movements are very peacock-like and cheerful. Sheshu master has expressed that he wanted the actress to look exactly like a peacock and therefore, his choreography reflected that through hunched body, neck movements, and unique hand gestures as well (“*ETV Interview: Dance Direction Insights – Vedic Chant Choreography.*” 17:53-19:33). Overall, the sequence is cheerful and reflects the wondrous and exciting nature of the first meeting of Hema and Haribabu.

A few months into her marriage with Gowri Sagar, Hema begins to face probing questions from her neighbours—and even her kind-hearted mother-in-law—about why she isn’t pregnant yet. Underneath the silence lies a complex truth: Gowri Sagar, who sees the divine Durga Devi in Hema, reveres her with such devotion that he struggles to treat her as a wife in the traditional sense. This creates an emotional distance between them. Caught in this painful reality, Hema finds herself in a deep dilemma. She is unable to fulfil the role expected of her as a wife, while still carrying the heartbreak of a past love. Torn between sacred reverence and personal longing, she stands at a crossroads—neither fully a wife nor free to be a lover—trapped in an emotional void that slowly consumes her from within. The dance sequence here begins with intense movements—strong, heavy steps, big jumps, and fast-paced footwork—reflecting her inner turmoil and anger. The dance sequence is that of a tāndava representing female rage and acts as her form of breakdown. As the scene progresses, she imagines the sound of the flute—bringing back memories of the hero playing it in the same spot during a past moment of love. Her movements slowly become softer and more graceful, and the dance ends with her collapsing to the ground, overwhelmed by her emotions.

## 2.3 *Subhalēkha*

### Plot

*Subhalekha* (1982), is a socially conscious Telugu film that critiques the dowry system through a powerful and emotional narrative. The story follows Narasimha Murthy (Chiranjeevi), a humble and talented hotel waiter who befriends Sujatha (Sumalatha), a college lecturer. When Sujatha rejects a marriage proposal due to the groom's dowry demands, it sparks a chain of events leading to her dismissal and social isolation. Murthy stands by her, and the two eventually move to Hyderabad seeking a new start.

Meanwhile, Sujatha's sister Lakshmi marries into the same dowry-hungry family and takes a bold legal stand against it. The film ends with Sujatha choosing to marry Murthy, and the once-arrogant Adiseshayya realizing the damage caused by his greed. With a mix of drama, humour, and strong social messaging, *Subhalekha* delivers a poignant critique of societal evils.

In the film *Subhalēkha*, Narasimha Murthi takes on a job as a dancer in an advertisement. Here, he dances Kathakali, Kathak and Kūcipuḍi. The advertisement is for the brand 'Allwyn'. Here the steps are simple and more energetic. They are set against the backdrop of quintessentially Indian locations like the temple. The advertisement itself is attempting to attach their brand with a certain Indian-ness to appeal to the Indian audience. Through this sequence the audience learns of the talents and skill sets of Narasimha Murthi. One also learns about the kind of work he does. Hence, the sequence not only enhances the narrative but also an understanding of the character is created.

## 2.4 *Sāgara Saṅgamam*

### Plot

*Sāgara Saṅgamam* (1983), directed by K. Viswanath, is a poignant Telugu film that explores the life of Balakrishna, a gifted classical dancer who struggles with poverty and unfulfilled dreams. Trained in various Indian classical dance forms like Bharatanātyam, Kūcipuḍi, and Kathak, he works as a stagehand and occasional dance assistant to survive. Despite his immense talent, his financial condition prevents him from flourishing as an artist. His life takes a turn when Madhavi, an art patron and documentary filmmaker, recognizes his potential and helps revive his career. Through her encouragement, Balakrishna begins to teach dance again and reconnects with his artistic self. However, emotional complexities arise as Madhavi, a widow, silently struggles with her feelings for him. The film beautifully portrays his inner conflict between personal longing, artistic passion, and societal limitations. Ultimately, *Sāgara Saṅgamam* is a tribute to classical arts and the sacrifices of artists, emphasizing that true art transcends personal suffering. The film is celebrated for its soulful music, emotionally rich performances, and choreography that weaves storytelling into movement.

### **Analysis of songs choreographed by Seshu V Parupalli**

The film opens with Sailaja's dance performance on the song 'Om Namashivaya'. In this sequence, she is honoured with the title 'Natya Mayuri'. Balakrishna, a well-known dance critic, attends the event and later writes a review of her performance. However, his review isn't very flattering, which upsets Sailaja.

The song "Om Namah Shivaya" highlights Sailaja's character. It shows that she is more focused on how the audience views her rather than on the depth of her art. There is a noticeable absence of nuanced abhinaya, and instead, the piece emphasizes technique, stamina, and audience impact. The movements are structured to dazzle with quick footwork, layered formations, and moments that seem choreographed for applause. This choice of choreography reinforces Sailaja's character as someone deeply concerned with image, public validation, and external recognition, rather than internalizing the spiritual essence of the song or surrendering to its devotional meaning.

The next song is the 'Muvva Gopala' song. As the film unfolds through a flashback, one witnesses the hardships Balakrishna endures in his youth. Struggling to make ends meet, he takes on the responsibility of supporting his aging mother, who continues to work tirelessly despite her frailty. In an attempt to help him, a friend secures him a job as an assistant to a film dance choreographer. However, this new role brings its own challenges, his superior is arrogant, self-absorbed, and dismissive of classical dance. This environment deepens Balakrishna's inner conflict, as he is forced to work under someone who neither values tradition nor respects the art form he holds so dearly.

Balakrishna begins with gentle, composed movements rooted in classical dance — filled with hasta abhinaya, and graceful movements that pay homage to Lord Krishna for the song 'Muvva Gopalude'. However, as pressure mounts to add flashy steps, the choreography feels fragmented. One can sense his struggle to keep the dignity of the form alive amid the imposed superficiality. Immediately after the song, there's a solo dance sequence where his frustration bursts out. The movements become sharp, aggressive, and emotionally charged. One can see traces of Kathak — spins, footwork, and rhythmic patterns, aligning with the recent scene where he joins a Kathak class. The dance reflects his inner chaos and disappointment at how the classical art form is treated.

In the present timeline of the film, Balakrishna is a drunkard and his life is on a downward trajectory. The intoxicated dance sequence, 'Takiṭa Tadhimi' portrays self-destruction, using movements associated with devotion and spirituality in an ironic manner. For example, Balakrishna uses alcohol as thīrtham and reveals the utter disrespect and disinterest he has for his own life.

'Vēdam anu anuvuna Nādam' in *Sāgara Saṅgamam* shows Sailaja dancing in complete surrender to her artform without arrogance or self-absorption. Sailaja, Madhavi's daughter, dances with new-found devotion and respect towards her artform, finally making her a good artist.

## 2.5 *Śrutilayalu*

### Plot

*Śrutilayalu* (1987), is a Telugu musical drama that explores the themes of classical music, family bonds, and emotional healing. The story revolves around Ravi, a talented mṛdangam player who inherits his musical gift from his father. However, Ravi is emotionally estranged due to the loss of his mother and the misunderstandings with his father, who is also a renowned musician.

Ravi is taken under the wing of a music-loving couple who raise him with affection and encourage his musical growth. He later meets a young flautist, and the film focuses on how their artistic collaboration gradually heals his emotional wounds. As Ravi matures both musically and personally, he reconnects with his roots and eventually comes to terms with his past, particularly with his father.

The film beautifully illustrates how music becomes a bridge between broken relationships and lost identities. With heartfelt performances and a soul-stirring soundtrack rooted in music, *Śrutilayalu* celebrates the spiritual power of music as not just an art form, but as a force of unity, healing, and self-realization.

### Analysis of songs choreographed by Seshu V. Parupalli

In a certain sequence, Srinivas requests his father, Narayana Murthy to quit his drinking habit. However, Narayana Murthy holds a condition. He says that if the boy can balance the bottle of alcohol on his head while dancing, then he would agree to quit drinking. This establishes that such an act would be a feat. The boy manages to do it and this depicts his skills in his artform. It also emphasises his determination to make his father quit alcohol.

The song 'Taanadu Vaarasatvam' of *Śrutilayalu* is the last song in the film and in this song one can see the long lost family finally united. The mother, son and father are reunited. The father realizes that the boy he had been in touch with is in fact his own son. Their art brings them together and their union came to be because of their art. Towards the end of the film, the son performs while the father sings and the mother is the *naṭṭuvanār*.

## 2.6 *Svarṇakamalam*

### Plot

*Svarṇakamalam* (1988), is a film that beautifully blends classical dance with themes of self-discovery and artistic passion. The story follows Meenakshi, a young Bharatanātyam dancer born into a traditional family of artists. Despite being trained by her father, a respected dance guru, Meenakshi is reluctant to pursue dance as a career due to the financial struggles and lack of recognition faced by classical artists. Enter Chandrasekhar, a free-spirited and sensitive painter who admires Meenakshi's talent and encourages her to embrace her art wholeheartedly. Through their evolving relationship and his unwavering support, Meenakshi gradually reconnects with her heritage, overcomes her self-doubt, and begins to see the spiritual and transformative power

of dance. The film showcases the journey of an artist from resistance to realization, set against the picturesque backdrop of the Himālayā-s and accompanied by a soulful Ilaiyaraaja soundtrack. *Svarṇakamalam* is not just a love story between two individuals but a tribute to the love for art itself—a poetic reflection on how classical dance can awaken one's purpose, identity, and inner beauty.

### **Analysis of songs choreographed by Seshu V Parupalli**

One of the first songs in the film is 'Koluvai Vunnade'. Meenakshi's father insists that she learn Kūcipuḍi. She feels suffocated by this as she doesn't want to dance Kūcipuḍi. This is the first Kūcipuḍi performance that is witnessed by the viewers of the film. She is more interested in catching up with the times. In this song, the spectator is able to watch her practice session with her father and sister. The heroine's initial disinterest in classical dance is evident. She mocks the form, playfully executing only the footwork to deceive her father, showing a lack of respect for her training. The sequence draws a parallel between her and a child who sees her dancing and dances along due to his interest in the form. She is privileged because she is able to learn this artform from her father, yet she does not acknowledge this privilege.

In the song 'Ākasamlo', one can see how freely the heroine dances. For the first time in the film she does not express any aversion to dancing. This can be attributed to the fact that she is not dancing classical forms and, to her knowledge, she is not being surveilled by anyone. One can see how she expresses herself freely in this form rather than in classical dance in the beginning of the film. This song showcases her free spirit. While she is dancing, the hero of the film spots her unbeknownst to Meenakshi. During this sequence he is enamoured by her and falls in love with her and her dancing. He sees pure joy in her dancing, which he later searches for in Meenakshi over the course of the film.

Swinging of the hands, jumping, hopping, free movements, hip movements, are few of the movements that can be spotted in the choreography. Here, the dancing leans more towards being more folk dance than classical. This choice also holds a significance—Meenakshi is shown to feel like in folkish steps she is not under the control of her family's legacy and expectations. Therefore, she can express her enjoyment of dancing here. It is not the dance that she hates, but the legacy she is expected to live up to. She feels like classical dance isn't revered any longer in society and does not see the value in it.

The song is set outside in a garden which is out of the surveillance of her family which allows her to feel free of their expectations of her in terms of dance. Classical dance is usually performed on stage and has restricted space compared to folk dance which is done in public spaces and is a community activity. This could also represent her need to be 'with the times'.

Another song is ‘Ghallu Ghallu’. Throughout the film, Chandrashekhar, an art enthusiast, encourages Meenakshi to take a genuine interest in the artform. In this song he imagines Meenakshi doing just that and dancing Kūcipudi with abandon with a scenic backdrop. The narration during this song is done in a unique way.

Chandrashekhar is seen painting the scenery which comes to life. He also applies the alta and eyeliner for Meenakshi. This denotes that this is taking place in a world of his own creation and establishes his wish for Meenakshi to become a devoted artist.

With the enthusiasm and help of Chandrashekhar, Meenakshi’s father, Seshendra Sarma, arranges an official solo performance for Meenakshi. Unable to express her reluctance to perform, Meenakshi agrees. However, on the day she pulls various antics to somehow have the performance cancelled. Somehow, Chandrashekhar manages to get her on stage. Still, Meenakshi decides to be immature and is not serious about the performance at all. Her ankle bells unravel on stage and she decides to stop dancing abruptly to retrieve the bells. This shows her utter disrespect for dance. She takes any opportunity she can to simply stop dancing. Her father is feeling disrespected and decides to dance in her stead. He is unable to bear the stress of it and goes into cardiac arrest.

He passed away.

Meenakshi dances another time on stage. This time, it is after her father’s passing. This song is a very short, but influential one. Her movements and expressions, again, depict her disinterest and it poses a contrast to her father’s artistry and devotion. It is also a scene that pushes Meenakshi into more contempt for the artform. It allows the viewers to understand what true artistry is and how much gravity and significance it holds in her father’s life. It is a turning point in the narrative because the tone had been light-hearted up to this point in the film— her reluctance to be a classical dancer didn’t pose as grave a conflict. However, through this scene, the need for Meenakshi to continue the legacy is emphasised to the viewer. Her privilege as the daughter of Seshendra Sarma and as someone who gets to learn the artform is conveyed to the viewer.

‘Siri Siri Muvva’ is a song that, once again, is inside the imagination of Chandrashekhar. However, this song has a more melancholic undertone than the previous one that had taken place in his imagination. This is because this song plays after Meenakshi blames him for the death of her father. She rips her ankle bells apart and Chandrashekhar stitches it up. There is a sort of sorrow in this song which depicts his belief that she may never dance again. Here, he sees her dancing in various different styles and he realizes she may not dance again regardless of the form.

‘Andela Ravamidhi’ is one of the last songs of the film. The heroine realizes her father’s greatness and the value of the art she once rejected. She is dressed in a white costume with rudrākṣa as her jewellery. Her dancing indicates the loss of arrogance. Her movements become more powerful, covering more space, reflecting her newfound conviction. Her dṛṣṭi and recaka-s indicate deep immersion and bhakti. Initially, the heroine expresses herself

freely through folk-inspired movements, symbolizing her desire for independence. Later, she reconciles her personal freedom within the discipline of classical dance. The hero envisions her as a passionate classical dancer, reinforcing his belief in her untapped talent. His drawings of her alta (hand decoration) and kohl-lined eyes symbolize his role in shaping her artistic journey. During her stage performance, she performs completely devoid of discipline and behaves immaturely. She does not recognize the gravity of the situation. Her father interrupts with an aggressive jati, frustrated by her lack of sincerity. The contrast between her struggle to complete a piece and her father's unwavering dedication, even after a heart attack, highlights their differing attitudes toward dance. In the hero's dream sequence, she effortlessly performs multiple classical styles, showcasing his idealized version of her as an artist. This contrasts sharply with her real-life struggle to embrace classical dance. The heroine's transformation is seen more in her *sātvika abhinaya* than in her *āngika abhinaya*. The backdrop is outside and not on a stage. When compared to the song *Akashamlo*, they both take place outside. However, in the former, her being outside means she is outside of the surveillance of her family and is free to dance the ways she wants. However, in his song she is outside and has completely devoted herself to *Kūcipudi*. This shows her growth as a character. She went from lacking devotion or respect for her art to someone who is completely devoted to her art. Comparing '*Koluvai Vunnadē*' and '*Andēla Rāvamidhi*', her external movements evolve, but the true depth of her change is reflected in her emotional and spiritual connection to dance.

### **3.0 Findings and Conclusion**

#### **Seamless Integration of Dance and Narrative**

The choreography often reflects the character's internal transformation and their relationship with art as one can see through *Swarna kamalam*.

#### **Stylistic Authenticity and Character-Specific Dance**

Each film features dance styles true to the protagonist's background and journey— *Swarna Kamalam* with *Kūcipudi* and folk elements, *Sāgara Saṅgamam* with Multiple dance styles reflecting the protagonist's versatility, and *Sankarabharanam* with classical *Kūcipudi*.

The characters learn and perform dance forms that are integral to their personal and artistic growth. For example one learns that in *Sāgara Saṅgamam*, Balakrishna, the main character of the film, knows these various styles because he has a dream of creating a new dance style by combining all the classical styles. Balakrishna is a struggling artist at the beginning of the film and doesn't even have money to pay for dance classes. He depends on the kind heart of his guru-s to take him in and teach him for free. Balakrishna has plans of learning Odissi and Manipuri as well. Throughout the film, the movements of Balakrishna in his dance sequences reflect this dream by the integration of Kathakali, *Kūcipudi* and Kathak movements.

## The central characters are all artists

All the six films mentioned feature main characters who are artists. The character relationships develop through their art. The choreography emphasizes their bond. For example, the song *Taanadu Vaarasatvam* of *Śrutilayalu* brings together the family of three, father, mother and the son after a period of separation.

The Svara sequence near the lake in *Śaṅkarābharaṇam* depicts the bonding of Tulasi and Shankara Shastry as she shows her appreciation for his music and he is moved by her dancing. As thus, their beautiful relationship of mutual respect blooms.

## Dance as a conduit for Self-Realization and Character Development

The final dance performances often symbolize artistic surrender and spiritual awakening. Andela Ravamidhi in *Swarna Kamalam* shows the heroine's transformation into a true artist, using energetic, space-covering movements and deep facial expressions.

'Vedam anu anuvuna Nadam' in *Sāgara Saṅgamam* shows Sailaja dancing in complete surrender to her artform without arrogance or self-absorption. Sailaja, Madhavi's daughter dancing with new-found devotion and respect towards her artform finally making her a good artist.

## Symbolism in Choreography

Dance is often used metaphorically to reflect deeper emotions. In *Sāgara Saṅgamam* the intoxicated dance sequence (Takita Tadhimi) portrays self-destruction, using movements associated with devotion and spirituality in an ironic manner. For example, Balakrishna uses alcohol as theertham and reveals the utter disrespect and disinterest he has for his own life. In *Saptapadī* the grandfather's acceptance of dance is reflected in the controlled, sacred nature of the choreography in the Durga Suktam. The piece depicts the bridging of the two worlds of the grandfather and the world of Hema by dancing to vedic chanting.

In all these films, dance emerges not just as performance but as lived experience—an inseparable extension of identity, emotion, and transformation. Whether symbolizing inner conflict, spiritual awakening, or the bonds of love and respect, choreography functions as a narrative language that deepens character development and anchors the stories in cultural authenticity. Through this seamless blend of art and life, dance becomes both the journey and the destination. **References**

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