

as a Devadasi in Kancheepuram. On the day of her *Arangetral*, the *Thalaikole* was presented to her. At that moment Urvasi and Jayanta were freed from the curse and ascended to the celestial abode of Indra Deva.

Urvasi is said to have taught dancing to the Devadasis, temple dancers of South India. Their devotional dances were an essential part of temple service for centuries, and the Devadasis were highly revered and admired in the community. Dedicated to temples in early childhood, young girls were taught the arts of classical dance and music by dance masters, called *Nattuvanars*, attached to the temple. The dedication ceremony of a Devadasi was performed by the temple priest who tied the marriage Bottu (Tali) around the neck of the Dasi and married her to the diety of the shrine. Devadasis were called *Nitya Sumangalis*, 'eternally married!'

The beginning of dance training was a solemn and ceremonious occasion with worship, flower offering, music and obeisance to the *Nattuvanar*. Anklets of bells were tied, and the young Devadasi danced the first rhythmic beats of her feet while holding a symbolic bamboo staff wrapped in silk. On completion of seven years of training in dance and song, the first dance performance (*Arangetral*) took place in the temple, in the presence of the king, and the accomplished dancer was given the title of '*Thalaikole*'.¹ She had various ritual duties to perform in the daily temple service, in addition to devotional songs and dances.

Under the lavish patronage of the great Chola King, Raja Raja Deva I (984 to 1020 A. D.), four hundred dancing girls were settled at Tanjore as Devadasis to perform ritual dances and ceremonies in Bhrahadiswara Temple. There were also Rajadasis, who danced at royal functions, and Alankara-dasis who danced at marriages, and other social ceremonies.

The classical dance was first taught by Bhagavata Melas or Brahmin guilds, and later came into the hands of Nattuva Melas, or non-Brahmin guilds. Even to-day the Nattuvans guard the secrets of their art which is derived from the *Natya Sastra*, and is now popularly re-named '*Bharata Natyam*'. Other names for the art are Dasi Attam, Sadir Natya and Nattuva Mela.

¹ Reference to the '*Thalaikole*' is found in *Silappidiskaram*, a Tamil classic of the second century A. D. The *Arangetral* of *Madhavi*, a dancing girl takes place at the Indra Festival, in the presence of the king. The '*Thalaikole*' encased in gold, and set with precious gems is placed upon the stage (*Arangam*).