

# A Review Article Exploring Comparative Study of Marathi Lavani and Marathi Padam During the Tanjore Maratha Period (16th–18th Centuries)

Ms. Aaditi Laxman Kulkarni<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Marie Stella<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Music and Fine arts, Vels University

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor, Music and Fine arts, Vels University

## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to map the landscape of the most recent research and studies in the field of Marathi lavani and Marathi padams from the period of Tanjore kings. The research results of past 15 years consisting of around 120 articles in total are overviewed in systematic literature review based on PRSIMA. The research presents the current state of multidisciplinary dance composition studies from the period of Tanjore kings regarding-

- Lavani literature and its performance
- Impact of social life on Marathi Lavani
- Marathi padams and other compositions in the rule of Maratha kings
- Marathi literature and performances in Tanjore court

**Keywords:** Marathi lavani, Marathi padas, Tanjore court, Tanjore kings

## Introduction

The Tanjore Maratha court fostered a unique confluence of regional languages, artistic traditions and performance cultures. Among its most compelling contributions are the Marathi Lavani and and Nritya Padams, which flourished under royal patronages. This review explores the stylistic thematic and performative distinctions between the two genres, both of which were composed and performed in Marathi yet served different aesthetic and cultural functions.

Lavani rooted in folk traditions, evolved into vibrant courtly entertainment form, characterised by rhythmic dynamism, social satire and expressive dance. In contrast, Nritya padams- lyrical compositions embedded in the Bharatnatyam repertoire- embodied classical poetics, devotional themes and nuanced abhinaya. Drawing on archival sources such as the Saraswati Mahal Library manuscripts, this study highlights how both forms reflected the linguistic plurality and artistic hybridity of the Tanjore court. It also examines the shifting social perceptions of these genres, their role in shaping Marathi performance literature and their enduring legacy in south Indian cultural history.

The research related to Lavani mostly consists of case studies and historical studies which traces its roots in the folk traditions and culture of Maharashtra where Lavani was adapted into Tanjore court under Maratha rulers. Most of the Lavani research has targeted on lavani costumes, its aesthetic approach,

purpose of performance, and the impact of social life on the art form. On the other hand, there are several insightful studies that delve into the Padam tradition in the Tanjore Maratha court, especially focusing on their role in music, dance, and multilingual literary culture and its compositional structures.

At the outset of research, based on the general trends of studies present till date researcher hypothesised that there is a lack of empirical research in the field of Marathi Lavani and Marathi Padam performances in the Tanjore court based on its themes, composition, structure and choreography particularly in southern India. Researcher is also curious about the case studies and quantitative research implication of Abhinaya in Lavani as a padam performance and action research reflecting best practices in dance field are predominant and whether empirical studies employing quantitative research paradigms were underrepresented.

Based on problem statements, research questionnaire were as follow-

1. Are there any similarities between performance of Marathi Lavani and Marathi Padam
2. What are the differences in both the dance performances
3. Can composition structure of both genre be related
4. What are themes and topics addressed in the compositions and presentations for both dances
5. To check the role of *duta*, *sakhi*, *sakha*, nature, animals and birds in Lavani as that of padams
6. Which research design is generally used for the most of the multidisciplinary dance in these two genre studies- quantitative or qualitative.

Although there are many examples of dance research in the field of Lavani and Padam in which qualitative research has been carried out most probably and the research has been mainly focussed on the traditional roots of Lavani, its socio cultural impact and its aesthetics. Where in case of Padam studies padams in language other than Marathi are focussed. Telugu, Tamil padams of Kshetrappa, Sarangpani, Swathi Thirunal and other famous composers are focussed more. A few gurus and artisans have provided their focus on Marathi padams. Till date Guru Kittappa Pillai and Dr. Sucheta Chapekar have worked a little on Marathi compositions of Tanjore kings. The current study aims to map the current state of Marathi padams and Marathi Lavanis from the period of Tanjore kings.

## Method-

To answer the research questions, researcher chose the systematic literature review method. For better and non biased results, researcher followed a reliable systematic review protocol, namely-PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses).

The standardised protocols helped researcher to design and map the stages of the review process. To avoid bias during selection and analysing process and to ensure reliability of the research, researcher established clear Inclusion and exclusion criteria, conducted a thorough and transparent search for relevant studies and involved 1 reviewer.

This study follows a qualitative, comparative research design, aiming to analyze the lyrical, musical, and performative elements of *Marathi padas* and *Marathi lavani* during the period of the Tanjore Maratha kings (1674–1855). The research process was guided by adapted PRISMA principles to ensure transparency in source selection and data synthesis.

**1. Source Identification-** Relevant literature was sourced through:

- Digital repositories: JSTOR, Shodhganga, INFLIBNET, and Google Scholar.
- Archival research: Saraswati Mahal Library (Thanjavur), Maharashtra State Archives (Mumbai), and the Asiatic Society (Mumbai).

- Published anthologies and translations of Marathi padas and lavanis.
- Ethnographic notes and interviews with performers and scholars (when available).

The inclusion criteria were aligned with the research topic and aims. The keywords "Marathi Lavani", "Marathi padas", "Tanjore king period" were used in order to compile sample. The sources are also selected based on different criteria such as language availability in Marathi and English, peer reviewed, publication duration of last 15 years and can be accessed in full text format. Only published journal articles, article blogs by scholars and magazines were included in the review while researcher excluded video archives, conference abstracts.

**2. Inclusion Criteria-** Sources were included if they:

- Focused on Marathi *padas* or *lavani* specifically composed or performed under Tanjore Maratha patronage.
- Contained thematic or stylistic details enabling comparison (e.g., rasa, musical scale, dance accompaniment).
- Were available in Marathi, English, or had certified translations.

**3. Exclusion Criteria-** Sources were excluded if they:

- Discussed *padas* or *lavani* from unrelated regions or eras.
- Lacked substantial scholarly analysis or verifiable data.
- Were anecdotal without documentation.

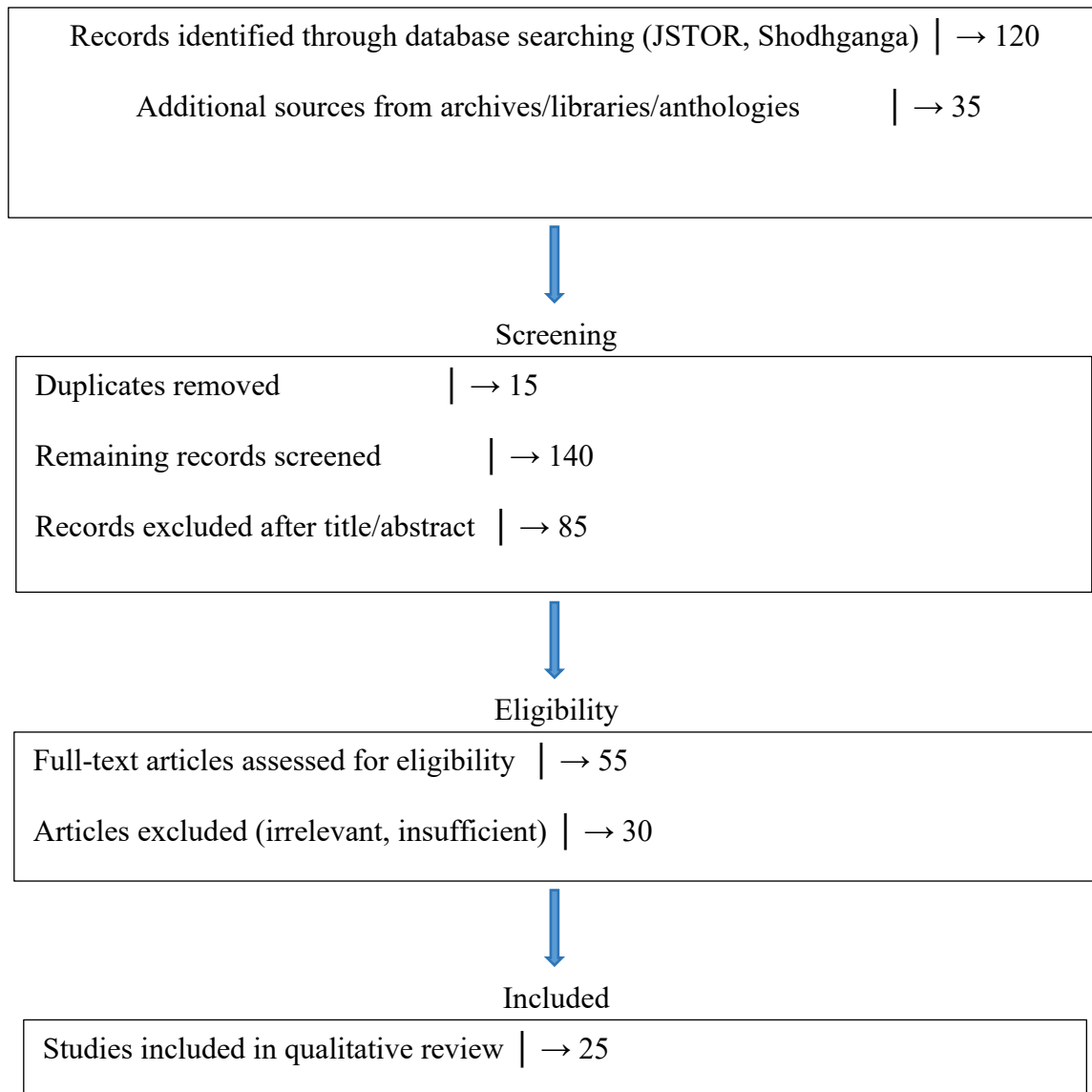
**4. Data Analysis-** The selected sources were analyzed for:

- Literary content: dominant themes, meter, poetic devices.
- Musical structure: ragas, talas, instrumentation.
- Sociocultural context: performance setting, gender roles, court patronage, and spiritual vs. erotic tone.

Following questions guide researcher's inquiry and give structure for comparative study-

1. What thematic and stylistic differences exist between Marathi *padas* and *lavani* during the Tanjore Maratha period?
2. How did royal patronage in the Tanjore court influence the development and preservation of these forms?
3. What were the primary performance contexts for *padas* and *lavani*, and how did they differ in terms of audience, setting, and function?
4. To what extent do gender roles and representations differ between these two forms in lyrics, performance, and authorship?
5. How do the musical structures (ragas, talas, instrumentation) compare across these two traditions during the period in question?
6. What does the evolution of Marathi poetic forms in Tanjore suggest about cross-cultural exchange and regional adaptation?

Here is the flowchart as per PRISMA-Identification



**Synthesis Methods** -following analysis and synthesis methods are to be followed-

**Textual Analysis-** It involves close reading of lyrics and scripts to identify:

- **Themes** (devotion, sensuality, satire)
- **Poetic devices** (meter, rhyme, alliteration)
- **Symbolism and metaphors** rooted in Bhakti or Shringara traditions
- Narrative analysis can also be used to study how stories are structured, and semiotic analysis to decode cultural symbols embedded in the text.

**Discourse Analysis-** This method helps to examine how language constructs social realities:

- How do *padas* and *lavani* reflect caste, gender, or power dynamics?
- What ideologies are embedded in the way performers address gods, kings, or audiences?
- It's especially useful for understanding how these forms were shaped by royal patronage and courtly expectations.

**Performance Analysis-** Since both forms are performative, analyze:

- Gesture, costume, and music (if performance records or descriptions exist)
- Audience interaction and spatial context (temple vs. court vs. public stage)
- Gendered embodiment—especially in *lavani*, which often features female performers or female impersonation

**Comparative Historical Method-** This helps researcher to trace:

- How *padas* evolved from devotional roots while *lavani* leaned into entertainment
- Regional influences (e.g., Tamil or Telugu court traditions in Tanjore)
- Shifts in tone, language, or structure across time

**Ethnographic and Oral History Methods-** If possible, interview:

- Folk performers or hereditary artists
- Scholars of Marathi literature or South Indian court music
- Custodians of temple or court archives

## Discussion

Analytical Framework for Interpreting a *Pada* or *Lavani*

### Contextual Grounding

- **Historical Period:** Identify the era (e.g., Tanjore court, Peshwa period).
- **Cultural Milieu:** Courtly, devotional, or folk? Consider patronage, audience, and performance space.
- **Genre Classification:** Is it a *Shringāra Pada*, *Nirguni Lavani*, or *Padachi Lavani*?

### Textual Analysis

- **Language & Meter:** Note the use of Marathi, Telugu, or Tamil; identify poetic meters (e.g., *ovi*, *abhang*, *chhand*).
- **Themes:** Love, longing, satire, devotion, or social commentary.
- **Imagery & Symbolism:** Look for metaphors, nature references, or erotic codes (*nāyaka-nāyikā bhāva*).

### Performance Aesthetics

- **Āhārya Abhinaya:** Costume, jewelry, and makeup—especially the *nauvari* saree in *Lavani* or temple jewelry in Bharatanatyam.
- **Vācika Abhinaya:** Vocal delivery—intonation, rhythm, and musicality.
- **Āṅgika Abhinaya:** Body language, gestures (*mudrās*), and footwork.
- **Sāttvika Abhinaya:** Emotional expression—how *bhāva* is internalized and projected.

### Musical Structure

- **Rāga & Tāla:** Identify the melodic and rhythmic framework.
- **Instrumentation:** Dholki, harmonium, manjira in *Lavani*; mridangam, veena in classical *Pada*.
- **Tempo & Dynamics:** How does the rhythm support the emotional arc?

### Spatial & Visual Dynamics

- **Stagecraft:** Use of space—linear vs circular movement, frontal vs interactive staging.
- **Visual Motifs:** Props, lighting (if applicable), and symbolic gestures.

### Socio-Cultural Commentary

- **Gender & Gaze:** Who performs? Who watches? How is femininity or masculinity constructed?
- **Subversion or Reinforcement:** Does the piece challenge or uphold social norms?

- **Audience Reception:** Traditional vs contemporary interpretations.

The Tanjore Maratha court endorsed both genres yet valorized Padas within classical canons while Lavani remained socially marginal despite its artistic vitality. This dichotomy mirrors the Sanskritic *marga–desi* divide: Padas embodying codified, elite aesthetics, Lavani representing vernacular immediacy.

## Limitations

- Incomplete cataloguing of Lavani manuscripts and oral variants
- Subjectivity in thematic coding of poetic tropes
- PRISMA’s exclusion of grey literature unless explicitly adapted

## Conclusion and Future Directions

A PRISMA-inspired protocol brings transparency to source identification and selection in cultural–historical reviews, but must be flexible enough to incorporate oral traditions and interpretive scholarship. Future work should develop hybrid workflows—combining systematic mapping with narrative synthesis—to fully capture the richness of both Padas and Lavani.