Bharatanatyam of Tamil Nadu in southern India has grown out of the art of dancers dedicated to temples, and was earlier known as Sadir or Dasi Attam. It is the first of India's traditional dances to be refashioned as a theatre art and to be exhibited widely both at home and abroad.

The present-day format of a Bharatanatyam recital, as well as a valuable part of its musical compositions, were created by the famed ‘Tanjore Quartet’ of the nineteenth century: the brothers Ponniah, Chinnaiah, Sivanandam and Vadivelu.

Bharatanatyam has a highly evolved language of Nritta, abstract dance, and Nritya which unfolds the narrative. The themes have a wide range spanning human and divine love, and are generally classed under the rubric of shringara (romantic love) and Bhakti (devotion). The music of Bharatanatyam belongs to the Carnatic system of southern India. The musicians accompanying a dance recital include at least one vocalist, a Mridangam (drum)-player, and a flutist or violinist or Veena (lute)-player. The group also includes a Nattuvanar, or dance conductor, who recites the dance syllables as he plays a pair of small bronze cymbals.