

CLASSICAL DANCES OF INDIA

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The dance in India can be classified into three groups as tribal, folk and classical dances. But it is a waste subject to describe it in a limited article. For this reason I am explained different aspects of classical dances of India very briefly.

In India art is a way of living, and also it is an intertaining and social development and spiritual awakening. Dance, music, poetry and sculpture are all accepted sacred and designed to illuminate the way leading to ultimate reality.

The ancient Hindus considered dance the purest manifestation of rhythm. Rhythm was a basic concept to the development of Hindu thought. Thousands of years before science discovered a structural link between the solar system and the nucleus of an atom, sages in India asserted that the same essential rhythm linked all stages of creation and all matter. Dance was the perfect revelation of this reality.

Millions of Indians the legends are never just a collection of ancient stories but a vital part of everyday life. The dance was an inseparable aspect of this rich totality for centuries. It is believed that a long time ago during the transitional period between two periods of time people traced an uncivilised ways. At that time the Lord was approached that He might grant men as a toy which could not only be seen but heard so that their mind was put away from evil pursuits. Then the Lord gave the fifth Veda. That is the Veda of Theatre "the Natya Veda" and he ordained that it should be accessible for all the people. Thus the drama was given a provided ample scope for individual expression in the fields of performing as well as pastic arts.

There is a reference to god as a dancer in the Rg Veda which incidentally, establishes both the sacredness and antiquity of Indian dance. Nataraja the symbol of Indian dance, is a form of Lord Shiva, who is also the symbol of universal creative force. Nataraja, the cosmic

dancer, is represented as having four hands signifying His four divine activities as creation, preservation, evolution and liberation. The arch that encircles the figure represents Nature that is inert which Nataraja galvanises into activity. It is said that he dances with fire, water, ether and wind, and is believed to shower His blessings of liberation on whoever contemplates on His form.

Nataraja is Lord of dancers; natya is His "action and cosmos is His theatre. His activity is appealing to the eyes and ears.

The technique of classical Indian dance forms is directly based or otherwise on certain ancient and revered treatises. The earliest textbook, the Natyasatra was written nearly two millenia ago by Bharata Muni. The Natyasatra is a monumental treatise on the art of dramaturgy in which music and dance are indispensible together. The rules governing the intricate technique of classical dance are also encompassed within its encyclopedic range.

Basic concepts:

According to these treatises, dancing is considered as having three principal and distinct aspects: nritya, nritya and natya.

Nritya is the actions of human movements and poses which are devoid of dramatic content.

Nritya is suggestive, expressive, interpretative dance with every movement and gesture invested with meaning.

Natya, the third variety, is dramatic exposition of the theme. This concept consists features of social living. In simple terms, it is histrionic, but it is elegant and dignified one.

Another cardinal division recognised by the ancient authorities is that of Tandava and Lasya.

Tandava is the more dynamic, forceful masculine aspect and Lasya is more delicate, graceful, feminine counterpart.

The gesture code called abhinaya is a medium of expression. Its meaning is take towards or present a theme to the audience. The abhinaya consists of four main items:

- 1- The uttered word, speech and song;
- 2- The gestures and movements, poses of the different parts of the body;

3- The external aids, such as costumes and make-up;

4—The physical or outward manifestations of the psychical state of mind.

The gesticulation of the hand and fingers through a variety of single-handed and two handed poses (*hasta mudras*). It is the sing language of the hand that makes people refer to Indian dance as the (*Language of Gestures*).

Mudras or finger movements involved in the performance of a religious rite; mimetic or imitative gestures which symbolise an act, attribute to an object or person. Everday gestures use stylised and made decorative poses for the dance. On the other side, there is the expression of the mood which is technically referred to as *bhava* or the main motif evokes *rasa* (aesthetic sentiment). *Rasa* is the sentiment or taste that leads to complete aesthetic experience. The carefully trained eyes play the key role. The mathematical abstraction *tala* and rythm(*laya*) of the dance are the greatest factors of discipline to help the dancer in his attempt to attune himself to the cosmic content of the Universe. Briefly this is the basic concept of classical dance in India, as expounded in the treatises. These laws are applied as same as first formulated over three tousand years ago. Similar laws govern even the person of the dancer, the accompanying musicians and the members the person of the dancer, the accompanying musicians and the members of the audience. The dancer is expected to be young, beautiful, light step and physically well-proportioned. The musicians should accompaigne the singer, the cymbalist, the flute player, the drummer and the *veenaplayer*. Classical music and dance are in the presence of learned audience.

Schools of Classical Dances

The best known and generally accepted schools of classical dance in India are *Bharatanatyam* of TamilNadu, *Kathakali* of Kerala, *Kuc-hipudi* of Andhra Pradesh, *Odissi* of Orissa, *Kathak* of North India, *Manipuri* of the North-East Region, *Bhagavata Mela Nataka* of Tanjore and the *Yakshagana* of Karnatak. Like the *Kathakali* of Kerala, these are dance dramas traditionally performed by men who are called *Bhagavatars*. Brahmins by birth, the *Bhagavatars* are well trained in dance and pantomime as embodied in the *Natya Śāstra*.

The impornancee of these schools, particularly the Kuchipudi and the Bhagavata Mela Nataka, as also of the Orissi dance of Orissa, is now being realized and before long they may hold their own against the other dances of the country.

Bharatanatyam:

Bharatanatyam is perhaps the oldest among the dance styles in India, and flourished mainly in the South India as Dasiattam, after it had changed its character in the Norh. The chief exponent of Bharata Natyam in the South was the Davadasi. Indian tradition of Devadasis means literally "servants of God" who were girls and women dedicated to the service of the temple as dancers, singers and musicians. Devadasi dancer acquired her art from its sole repository, the nattuvanar. In course of time the dance was given the present secular forme and the classification, during the early 19 the century by the brothers Chinnaya, Ponnaya, Vadivelu and Şivanandam of Tanjore. However, the style received its popular name Bharatanatyam around the year 1930.

The dancer usually a woman, is accompanied on the stage by musicians and instrumentalists. The song represents the Karnataka school of music. A programme of Bharatanatyam opens with: invocation in pure dance (alarippu) in slow tempo for doing obeisance to gods. Pure dance sets to music but there is no song (jatisvaram) in which the dancer's limbs create numerous pattern of beauty, through movement and rhythm. Interpretative dance with the music and song (şabdham) continous in expressive gestures. Piece de resistance which presents the cream of the dance, is a combination of pure dance and gestures. The last item of the programme is pure dance (tillana). It is beautiful piece in fast tempo with sculpturesque poses, graceful and elegant movements.

Kathakali:

Kathakali is the dance drama of Kerala of South India. Its literary meaning is "story play". Kathakali represents India's ancient tradition when dramas were acted and sung. This dance was performed by men. But there is Mohini attam, the dance of the enchantress, the women of Kerala have their exquisite and subtle medium. The dance is attributed to the genius of a ruler who evolved the new technique

out of an older form, namely Krishnattam, sometime between the end of the 16th century and beginning of the 17th. Episodes from the epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana are presented as dance dramas.

The candidate is initiated into Kathakali in kalari or gymnasium. He studied the difficult technique of the dance slowly but surely. He kneaded into his very system by a process of massage, exercise and technical training for ever a period of five to seven years. He had extraordinary elasticity of the body capable of performing the tandava, symbolizing energy and dynamism. It also means complete manipulation of the eyes and control of every muscle of the face which, combined with the flexibility of the fingers. Kathakali has its unique character type facial make-up. Different cosmetics are applied to each person's face. Red, green, black, amber and white colours are dominant. The mouth and the eyes are outlined with the thick red and black lines. The headgear and the costumes of character types are also distinct. There are different types as like red, black and white meant, respectively, for evil, aboriginal and half-human characters, sages, women, messengers etc.

For the performance, the villagers in Kerala begin to gather in a temple or open air, illuminated by the great flame or a single brilliant lamp. The drums explode, the gong is beaten, the singer begins his chant and the play starts. Sometimes the dance begins lasts all nights sometimes continues longer than that duration, more few days, Kathakali is remembered the visions of celestial grandeur and the grandeur of the ancient past. Kathakali has now emerged on the modern stage. A dance academy founded by poet Vallathol. The Kerala Kalamandalam became for many years the main center for the renaissance of Kathakali.

Kathak:

Kathak can be performed by men as well as women. The story teller Kathika, who danced and song his stories from the epic days of India's history, continues to be the teacher as well as the performer. During the recent years the Kathika's dance became stylised into the Kathak dance of today. Kathak style excels in intricate footwork of an almost mathematical precision. The rapid, lightning turns, the speed, virtuosity and technical brilliance leave the audience gasping. The Kathak style sums up the diverse influences on the dance tradition

thus from a temple art, dance became a court art. Muslim influence on Kathak is seen in the costumes of the dancers.

Weaving delicate arabesques of movement, Kathak, narrator, tells the stories of eternal dalliance of Radha and Krishna, Shiva and Parvati as also the love story of kings and princes. The dances are like appearances of a series of the joyous life. Kathak is the court dance, par excellence, harmonious with its setting of marble corridors, latticed balconies and jewelled darbar halls.

A Kathak programme is made up of three main items: firstly, *amad*, a dance salutation; secondly a series of intricate and complex steps called *toras* and thirdly *gathas* or interpretation through gestures of fragmentary stories.

Manipuri:

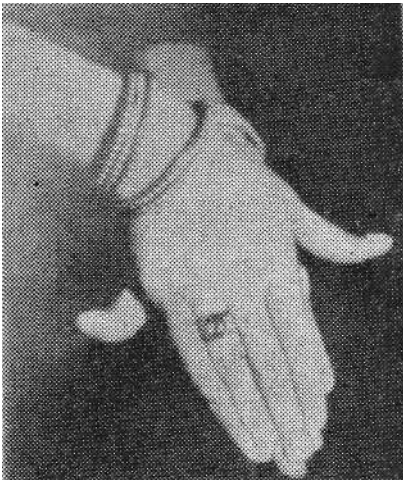
This dance belongs to Manipur. It is influenced of Manipuri folklore and Hindu mythology. This is a religious dance drama in which specially trained dancers and the village folk in general. Like Kathakali, this dance drama is spread over a period of days and is divided into many sections. With the introduction of Hinduism, Manipur became Hinduized as late as 18th century. With religion, she adopted the religious songs the *kirtans*, group sings of hymns, and the religious dances, like *Rasa lila*, which is danced practically in all parts of the country. This extraordinary circular dance symbolises the union of the individual souls with the Supreme Soul. She interpretes in terms of the love of the milk-maids of Brindaban, particularly Radha for Lord Krishna. Compared with the other classical dances of India, the technique employed is less rigid and less vigorous but the dance is sweetly lyrical. The dancers dance in the temple and specially in the decorated arenas. For pure beauty, and lyrical grace, the Manipuri dances are restfully delightful and add to the heritage of Indian classical dances.



Love



She speaks only of you..



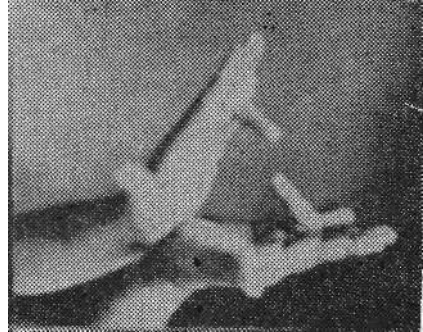
Boar gesture



She thinks only of you .



Bharata Natyam pose



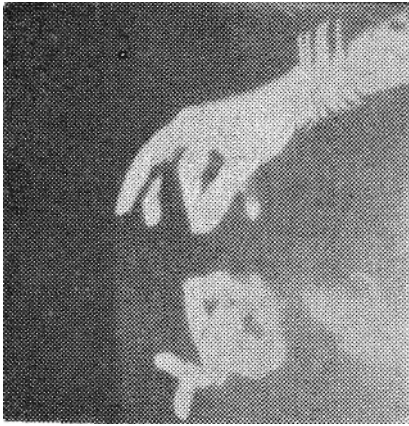
Tortoise gesture



A Manipuri dancer



Kathak (Salutation pose)



Bec and flower



A scene from kathakali