



STUDY ON HISTORY OF INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCES

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction: In India, religion, philosophy and myth cannot be divorced from their art forms. Dance is tied inextricably to ceremony of any kind. Weddings, births, coronations, entering a new house or town, welcoming a guest, religious processions, harvest time, any or all of these are occasions for dance.

Purpose of study: Purpose of this article is to know the different Indian classical dances.

Sources of data: This article study on based of secondary data collected form journal, textbooks, and thesis.

Discuss of the paper: This article discuss with various Indian classical dances like Bharatnatyam, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam , and Sattriya..

Conclusion: Conclusion on the Indian classical dances.

Keywords: History, Culture, Dances, India

INTRODUCTION:

In India, various facets of performing arts are all pervading bringing colour and joy to numerous festivals and ceremonies, and reaffirming the faith of the people in their heritage. These facets have been responsible for sustaining the long continuities of ancient traditions. They are the link between the past and the present. It thus exemplifies the complex, organic interaction of all aspects of life implicit in all tribal and folk art

forms; art is not seen as something apart from life, a mere ornamentation or entertainment, but as an intrinsic part of it.

Gupta Empire:

Under the patronage of Kings and rulers, skilled artisans and entertainers were encouraged to specialize and to refine their skills to greater levels of perfection and sophistication. Gradually, the classical forms of Art evolved for the glory of temple and palace, reaching their zenith around India around 2nd C.E. onwards and under the powerful Gupta empire, when canons of perfection were laid down in detailed treatise - the Natyashastra and the Kamasutra - which are still followed to this day. Through the ages, rival kings and nawabs vied with each other to attract the most renowned artists and performers to their courts.

Communities Dances:

The dances of agricultural communities celebrate the rhythms of daily life, the turn of the seasons, the highlights of the agricultural calendar, religious festivals and important events that punctuate the flow of life, such as births and marriages. While dance share common themes and concerns, there is a wide variety of forms:

Himalayan region: From Kashmir to Darjeeling, folk dancers link arms and sway gracefully in undulating movements, celebrate the sowing of the wheat crop; few can resist the infectious beat of the dholak, the two-sided drum, and pairs of dancers take turns to execute complex acrobatic movements in the centre of a circle of abandoned dancers. Women perform the Giddha, also characterised by its spontaneous energy.

Communities of Rajasthani : Rajasthani women, their faces covered with flowing veils, are swirls of colour as they pirouette in the Ghoomar dance, while their counterparts in Gujarat perform the famous Garba, dancing in a circle with batons. Their men perform the Dandiya Ras, a more vigorous version of the same dance, leaping and crouching in twirling patterns.

Communities of Maharashtra: Men and women link arms and dance together and the women climb on to the men's shoulders to form pyramids. The women's Lavani dance from this area is notable for its unabashed sensuality.

In their present format, their history cannot be traced back to over two to three hundred years, but they all have links with the ancient and medieval literary, sculptural and musical traditions of India and of their particular regions.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY:

- To know the Indian classical dance during past and present cultural history in India., and
- Highlight the peculiar features of interpreting dancing culture in India.

CLASSICAL DANCES IN INDIA:

Dance in India has a rich and vital tradition dating back to ancient times. Excavations, inscriptions, chronicles, genealogies of kings and artists, literary sources, sculpture and painting of different periods provide extensive evidence on dance. Myths and legends also support the view that dance had a significant place in the religious and social life of the Indian people. However, it is not easy to trace the precise history and evolution of the various dances known as the 'art' or 'classical' forms popular today.

History of classical dances:

In Mohenjodaro and Harappa (2500-1500 B.C.E): Excavations have brought to light a bronze statuette from Mohenjodaro and a broken torso from Harappa. These are suggestive of dance poses. The latter has been identified as the precursor of the Nataraja pose commonly identified with dancing Siva.

In 2nd century B.C.E : The earliest treatise on dance available to us is Bharat Muni's Natyashastra, the source book of the art of drama, dance and music. It is generally accepted that the date of the work is between the 2nd century B.C.E. The Natyashastra is also known as the fifth veda. There is also a legend that Brahma himself wrote the Natyaveda, which has over 36,000 verses.

In classical tradition: Formulated in the Natyashastra, dance and music are an inextricable part of drama. The art of natyacarries in it all these constituents and the actor is himself the dancer and the singer, the performer combined all the three functions. With the passage of time the status of an independent and specialised art, marked the beginning of the 'art' dance in India.

In ancient treatises: Dances are considered as having three aspects: natya, nritya and nritya. Natya highlights the dramatic element and most dance forms do not give emphasis to this aspect today with the exception of dance-drama forms like Kathakali. Nrityais essentially expressional, performed specifically to convey the meaning of a theme or idea. Nritya on the other hand, is pure dance where body movements do not express any mood (bhava), nor do they convey any meaning. To present nritya and natya effectively, a dancer should be trained to communicate the navarasas.

Dance in India has evolved in different parts of the country its own distinct style taking on the culture of that particular region, each acquiring its own flavour. Consequently a number of major styles of 'art' dance are known to us today, like Bharatnatyam, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Kathak, Manipuri, Odissi and Sattriya. Then, there are regional variations, the dances of rural and tribal areas, which range from simple, joyous celebrations of the seasons, harvest or birth of a child to dances for the propitiation of demons or for invoking spirits. Today there is also a whole new body of modern experimental dance.

Bharatnatyam Dance:



Bharatnatyam Dance is considered to be over 2000 years old. Several texts beginning with Bharata Muni's Natya Shastra (200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.) provide information on this dance form. The Abhinaya Darpana by Nandikesvara is one of the main sources of textual material, for the study of the technique and grammar of body movement in Bharatnatyam Dance. There is also a great deal of visual evidence of this dance form in paintings and stone and metal sculptures of ancient times. On the gopurams of the Chidambaram temple, one can see a series of Bharatnatyam poses, frozen in stone as it were, by the sculptor. In many other temples, the charis and karanas of the dance are represented in sculpture and one can make a study of the dance form.

Bharatnatyam dance is known to be ekaharya, where one dancer takes on many roles in a single performance. In the early 19th century, the famous Tanjore Quartette, under the patronage of Raja Serfoji said to have been responsible for the repertoire of Bharatnatyam dance as we see it today.

The repertoire of Bharatnatyam is extensive, however, a performance follows a regular pattern. At first there is an invocation song. The first dance item is the **alarippu**, literally meaning - to adorn with flowers. It is an abstract piece combining pure dance with the recitation of sound syllables. The next item, the **jatiswaram** is a short pure dance piece performed to the accompaniment of musical notes of any raga of Carnatic music. Jatiswaram has no sahitya or words, but is composed of adavus which are pure dance sequences - nritta. They form the basis of training in Bharatnatyam dance.

As a solo dance, Bharatnatyam leans heavily on the abhinaya or mime aspect of dance - the nriya, where the dancer expresses the sahitya through movement and mime. **Shabdham** follows the jatiswaram in a Bharatnatyam dance performance. The accompanying song is generally in adoration of the Supreme Being.

After the shabdham, the dancer performs the **varnam**. The varnam which is the most important composition of the Bharatnatyam repertoire, encompasses both nritta and nritya and epitomises the essence of this classical dance form. The dancer here performs complicated well graded rhythmic patterns in two speeds showing the control over rhythm, and then goes on to depict in a variety of ways, through abhinaya the lines of the sahitya. This portrays the dancer's excellence in abhinaya and also reflects the endless creativity of the choreographer.

After the strenuous varnam, the dancer performs a number of abhinaya items expressing a variety of moods. The bhava or rasa is woven into the sahitya and then expressed by the dancer. The common pieces are keertanam, kritis, padams and javalis. In the keertanam, the text is important whereas kriti is a composition in which the musical aspect is highlighted. Both are usually devotional in character and represent episodes from the lives of Rama, Siva, Vishnu, etc. Padams and javalis, are on the theme of love, often divine.

A Bharatnatyam performance ends with a tillana which has its origin in the tarana of Hindustani music. It is a vibrant dance performed to the accompaniment of musical syllables with a few lines of sahitya. The finale of the piece is a series of well designed rhythmic lines reaching a climax. The performance ends with a mangalam invoking the blessings of the Gods.

The accompanying orchestra consists of a vocalist, a mridangam player, violinist or veena player, a flautist and a cymbal player. The person who conducts the dance recitation is the Nattuvanar.

Kathakali Dance:



Kerala is the home of several traditional dance and dance - drama forms, the most notable being Kathakali. Kathakali, as a dance form popular today, is considered to be of comparatively recent origin. However, it is an art which has evolved from many social and religious theatrical forms which existed in the southern region in ancient times. Chakiarkoothu, Koodiyattam, Krishnattam and Ramanattam are few of the ritual performing arts of Kerala which have had a direct influence on Kathakali in its form and technique. Legend

has it that the refusal of the Zamorin of Calicut to send his Krishnattam troupe to Travancore, so enraged the Raja of Kottarakkara, that he was inspired to compose the Ramanattam. In the temple sculptures in Kerala and the frescoes in the Mattancheri temple of approximately the 16th century, dance scenes depicting the square and rectangular basic positions so typical to Kathakali are seen. For body movements and choreographical patterns, Kathakali is also indebted to the early martial arts of Kerala.

Kathakali is a blend of dance, music and acting and dramatizes stories, which are mostly adapted from the Indian epics. It is a stylised art form, the four aspects of abhinaya - angika, aharya, vachika, satvika and the nritya, nritya and natya aspects are combined perfectly. The dancer expresses himself through codified hastamudras and facial expressions, closely following the verses (padams) that are sung. Kathakali derives its textual sanction from Balarama, Bharatam and Hastalakshana Deepika. The attakkathasor stories are selected from the epics and myths and are written in a highly Sanskritised verse form in Malayalam.

Kathakali is a visual art where aharya, costume and make-up are suited to the characters, as per the tenets laid down in the Natya Shastra. The characters are grouped under certain clearly defined types like the pacha, kathi, thadi, kari or minukku. The face of the artist is painted over to appear as though a mask is worn. The lips, the eyelashes and the eyebrows are made to look prominent. A mixture of rice paste and lime is applied to make the chutti on the face which highlights the facial make-up.

Kathakali dance is chiefly interpretative. The characters in a Kathakali performance are broadly divided into satvika, rajasika and tamasika types. Satvika characters are noble, heroic, generous and refined. In pacha, green colour dominates and kirita (headgear) is worn by all. Krishna and Rama wear special crowns decorated with peacock feathers. The noble characters like Indra, Arjun and the Devas are some of the pacha characters.

The kathi type depict anti-heroes. Though they are of the rajasika category, they are sometimes great warriors and scholars such as Ravana, Kamsa and Sisupala to name a few. The moustache and the small knob called chuttippu fixed on "the tip of the nose and another in the centre of the forehead, is peculiar to the kathi character. The characters of the thadi (beard) category are the chuvanna thadi, (red beard), vellathadi (white beard) and the karutha thadi (black beard). Vellathadi or the white bearded character is generally that of Hanuman, the dancer also wears the costume of a monkey. Kari are characters whose make-up have a black base, they wear black costume depicting a hunter or forest dweller. Apart from these, there are minor characters like minukku which are the women and sages. Kathakali costumes and make-up are elaborate and designed so as to give a super human effect. The make-up of Kathakali can be classified into the teppu, chuttikuthu and uduthukettu. The teppud done by the actor himself. Each character has a distinct teppu. The second stage is done by experts who specialise in make-up. The wearing of huge bellowing skirts is called uduthukettu. A simple stage is used. A large oil-fed lamp is placed in front of the

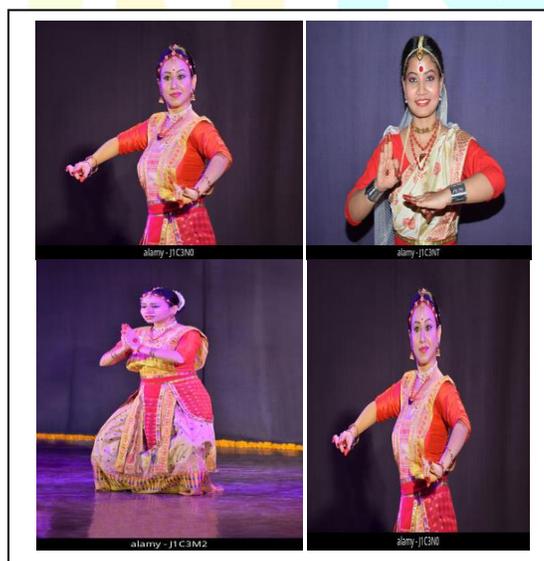
stage and two people hold a curtain called Tirasseela on the stage, the main dancers stand behind it before the performance.

In no other dance style is the entire body used so completely as in Kathakali. The technical details cover every part of the body from facial muscles to fingers, eyes, hands and wrists. The facial muscles play an important part. The movement of the eyebrows, the eye-balls and the lower eye-lids as described in the Natya Shastra are not used to such an extent in any other dance style. The weight of the body is on the outer edges of the feet which are slightly bent and curved. Kalasams are pure dance sequences where the actor is at great liberty to express himself and display his skills. The leaps, quick turns, jumps and the rhythmic co-ordination make kalasams, a joy to watch.

A Kathakali performance begins with the kelikottu, calling the audience to attention followed by the today am. It is a devotional number performed where one or two characters invoke the blessings of the gods. Kelikottu is the formal announcement of the performance done in the evening when drums and cymbals are played for a while in the courtyard. A pure nritta piece known as the purappadu comes as a sequel to this. Then the musicians and drummers hold the stage entertaining the audience with an exhibition of their skills in melappada. Tiranokku is the debut on the stage of all characters other than the pacha or minukku. Thereafter, the play or the particular scene of the chosen play begins.

Kathakali music also uses Carnatic ragas-the raga and tala conforming to the bhava, rasa and dance patterns (nritta and natya). The orchestra which is also used in other traditional performing arts of Kerala, normally comprises the Chenda, Maddalam, Chengila, Ilathalam, Idakka and Shankhu. Ilakiattam is that part of the performance when the characters get an opportunity to demonstrate their excellence in abhinaya. For the most part of the performance the dancers engage themselves in chodiattam which means acting in strict conformity to the words in the padams sung by the accompanying musicians.

Sattriya Dance:

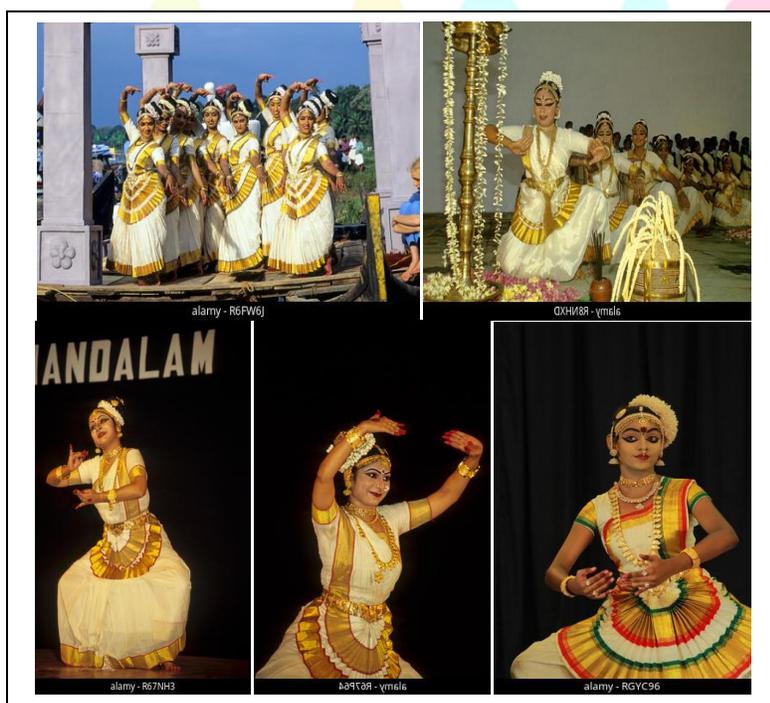


The Sattriya dance form was introduced in the 15th century A.D by the great Vaishnava saint and reformer of Assam, Mahapurusha Sankaradeva as a powerful medium for propagation of the Vaishnava faith. The dance form evolved and expanded as a distinctive style of dance later on. This neo-Vaishnava treasure of Assamese dance and drama has been, for centuries, nurtured and preserved with great commitment by the Sattras i.e. Vaishnava maths or monasteries. Because of its religious character and association with the Sattras, this dance style has been aptly named Sattriya.

Sankaradeva introduced this dance form by incorporating different elements from various treatises, local folk dances with his own rare outlook. There were two dance forms prevalent in Assam before the neo-Vaishnava movement such as Ojapali and Devadasi with many classical elements. Two varieties of Ojapali dances are still prevalent in Assam i.e. Sukananni or Maroi Goa Ojah and Vyah Goa Ojah. Sukananni Oja paali is of Sakti cult and Vyah Goa Oja paali is of Vaishnava cult. Sankaradeva included Vyah Goa Ojah into his daily rituals in Sattra. Till now Vyah Goa Ojah is a part of rituals of the Sattras of Assam. As far as Devadasi dance is concerned, resemblance of a good number of rhythmic syllables and dance postures along with footwork with Sattriya dance is a clear indication of the influence of the former on the latter. Other visible influences on Sattriya dance are those from Assamese folk dances namely Bihu, Bodos etc.

Sattriya dance tradition is governed by strictly laid down principles in respect of hastamudras, footworks, aharyas, music etc. This tradition, has two distinctly separate streams - the Bhaona-related repertoire starting from the Gayan-Bhayanar Nach to the Kharmanar Nach, secondly the dance numbers which are independent, such as Chali, Rajagharia Chali, Jhumura, Nadu Bhangi etc. Among them the Chali is characterized by gracefulness and elegance, while the Jhumura is marked by vigor and majestic beauty.

Mohiniyattam Dance:



Mohiniyattam literally interpreted as the dance of 'Mohini', the celestial enchantress of the Hindu mythology, is the classical solo dance form of Kerala. According to a Puranic story, Lord Vishnu took on the guise of a 'Mohini' to seduce the Asuras, both in connection with churning of the ocean and episode of the slaying of Bhasmasura. The delicate body movements and subtle facial expressions are more feminine in nature and therefore are ideally suited for performance by women. This dance form of Kerala was structured into the present day classical format by the Travancore Kings, Maharaja KartikaTirunal and his successor Maharaja Swati Tirunal (18th -19th century C.E.).

Mohiniyattam as seen today has evolved through a long process of evolution. It traces its origin to the temples of Kerala. The dancers were called by different names during different periods of time. They were called as TaiNangai or Nangachi (one with beautiful hand), Dasi (servant), Tevitichi or Deva-Adi-Achi (the one who served at the feet of the Lord), Koothachi (who performed koothu or dance). Their dances were known as 'Nangai Natakam, Dasiyattam, Tevitichiyattam, etc.

The Nangiars, who are the women folk of Nambiar community, still follow a strict code of dance, performed in a small performing space, within the temple precincts, as practised in the olden times. Some scholars opine that around 19th century C.E, the Perumaals, rulers from Tamilnadu, ruled the Chera Empire, with their capital in Tiruvanchikulam (presently Kodungallur, Kerala). These rulers brought along with them fine dancers who were settled in temples that were constructed in different parts of the capital. Their dance was called as 'Dasiyattam'. The existence of Dasiyattam is further corroborated in the epic 'Cilappatikaram', written by the Chera Prince Illango Adikkalin 2nd-5th century C.E.

With the fall of the Chera Empire or the Perumal regime and the subsequent socio-economic changes, these Dasis were forced to come out of the temple precincts. Few united with the Nangiars, who lived and performed in the temples of other regions of Kerala and enhanced the Nangiar Koothu. Dasiyattam was revived with the able efforts of the Tanjore Quartets (Ponnayya, Chinnayya, Sivananda and Vadivelu). They were the Nattuvanar-s (the dance teachers) who also structured the present day Bharatanatyam. One of the Tanjore brothers 'Vadivelu' along with a Devadasi 'Sugandhavalli' found refuge in the court of Maharaja Swati Tirunal.

Swati Tirunal, who ascended the throne when he was barely 16 years old in 1829, promoted all fine arts, particularly music and dancing. During his reign there was a flow of artists and scholars from all parts of India to Travancore, the region of the Kerala Maharajas. It was during that time, Swati along with his court musicians (Kilimanoor Vidwan Koyil Tampuran and IrayimmanTampi) was engaged in developing Mohiniyattam.

Vadivelu structured Mohiniyattam with a proper repertoire that included Chollukettu (the first invocatory item in Mohiniyattam), Jatiswaram, Padavarnam, Padam and Tillana. The dance was then performed by the

Devadasi Sugandhavalli. Swati himself composed Padams in Malayalam, Telugu and Sanskrit which dancers eagerly embraced.

Salient Features of Mohiniyattam Dance:

- Mohiniyattam is characterized by graceful, swaying body movements with no abrupt jerks or sudden leaps. It belongs to the lasya style which is feminine, tender and graceful.
- The movements are emphasized by the glides and the up and down movement on toes, like the waves of the sea and the swaying of the coconut, palm trees and the paddy fields.
- The foot work is not terse and is rendered softly. Importance is given to the hand gestures and Mukhabhinaya with subtle facial expressions.
- Movements have been borrowed from Nangiar Koothu and female folk dances Kaikottikali and the Tiruvatirakali.
- Mohiniyattam lays emphasis on acting. The dancer identifies herself with the character and sentiments existing in the compositions like the Padams and Pada Varnams which give ample opportunity for facial expressions.
- The hand gestures, 24 in number, are mainly adopted from Hastalakshana Deepika, a text followed by Kathakali. Few are also borrowed from NatyaShastra, AbhinayaDarpana and Balarambharatam.
- The gestures and facial expressions are closer to the natural (gramya) and the realistic (lokadharmi) than to the dramatic or rigidly conventional (natyadharmi).
- Most of the compositions included in the repertoire have been composed by Swati Tirunal, which emphasizes the Sahitya Bhava i.e. the literary content.
- These are portrayed through appropriate hand and facial expressions that include the nine sentiments.

CONCLUSION:

As you can see India is a very intricate culture full of diversities which makes our culture unique as a whole. and I hope that by reading this piece you will understand that dance is full of passion and technique. Many foreign people are also attracted towards the classical dance forms and are learning them. In this way, Classical Dance forms are playing their part in glorifying the Indian culture.

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