



9

CLASSICAL DANCES

Indian classical dances traditionally are expression of love, devotion or bhakti through gestures, body movements synchronized with music and words or composition. They are kind of expressive drama-dance form of religious performance art. Classical dances of India are foundation of Natya Shastra and attributed to ancient Bharat Muni.

Rasa of bhava in expression, gestures, acting techniques, basic steps, standing postures are key features of Indian classical dances. These dances often depict spiritual ideas, virtues and the essence of scriptures. Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, Mohiniyattam and few more are given status of Indian classical dances. Hand Mudras, postures, gestures, foot work in musical rhythm are special characters of classical dances. In this lesson you will get aware of these dances.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to :

- define classical dance;
- identify classical dances from different states of India; and
- describe briefly the basic aspects of different dances.



Notes

9.1 CLASSICAL DANCE

The term classical has come from a Sanskrit word "Shastriya". It means the ancient Shastra-based performing arts. The classical dance demonstrates the story or any other musical composition in dance form. It emphasizes the grace and accuracy of movements and gestures and poses. It strongly expresses the calmness and harmony in life. It requires devotion and regular practice and strong and active body.

The classical dances express Navarasas meaning nine bhava or emotions. These are as follows-

1. Sringara is love, pleasure and delight.
2. Hasya means comic and laugh.
3. Karuna indicates sadness.
4. Raudra is the expression of anger and fury.
5. Vira shows power and vigor.
6. Bhayanaka means fear, concern, worry.
7. Bibhatsa is disgust.
8. Adbhuta for wonder and curiosity.
9. Shanta for peace, tranquility.

9.2 DIFFERENT TYPES OF CLASSICAL DANCES

Sangeet Natak Akademi and the Ministry of Culture have recognized following dances as classical dances of from different states of India:



1. Bharatanatyam, from Tamil Nadu
2. Kathak, from Uttar Pradesh.
3. Kathakali, from Kerala.
4. Kuchipudi, from Andhra Pradesh.
5. Odissi, from Odisha
6. Sattriya, from Assam
7. Manipuri, from Manipur
8. Mohiniyattam, from Kerala

1. Bharatanatyam

Bharatanatyam dance is done having fixed upper body, legs bent or knees flexed out combined with spectacular footwork, with varied gestures of hands, eyes and face muscles. The dance is accompanied by singer usually Guru. Carnatic music provides the beat. Musical composition includes narration of mythology



Fig. 9.1 Bharatnatyam



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from Hindu Gods. It is done solo or in group. Rukmini Devi Arundale, Balasaraswati and Yamini Krishnamurti revived Bharatnatyam and they were famous dancers.

There are 7 stages of Bharatnatyam dance. Order of dance is Alarippu, Jatiswaram, Shabdam, Varnam, Padam, Thillana and Shlokam or Mangalam

1. Alarippu depicts vandana or beginning of dance and bring focus.
2. Jatiswaram adds rhythm, melody and movements to dance.
3. Shabdam is words in short composition.
4. Varnam is actual dance that may stay long.
5. Padam is abhinaya or (emotional expression of rasa) for devotional prayers.
6. Thillana is the ending stage where music and movements are rhythmically.
7. Shlokam or Mangalam is final salute sequence may be in the form of shlokas.

Bharatnatyam dancers wear costumes made of silk sarees with gold zari embroidery designs. The pleats are so stitched that opens beautifully in a particular posture especially arai mandi (half sitting) and muzhu mandi (full sitting). Makeup and ornaments are also unique.

2. Kathak

The name Kathak is derived from the Sanskrit word - Katha (Story). Kathak is a story telling dance. The story is narrated

through the expressions and body movements. It is also a sufi form of dance. This dance belongs to specific schools called Gharanas. Lucknow Gharana, Banaras Gharana and Jaipur Gharana are popular and have their unique style, composition and instruments. Its beauty lies in the foot work wearing ghonngroos and chakkar (swirling rounds by the body).

**Notes**

Fig. 9.2 Kathak

Some of the kathak dance composition includes

- Taal teen taal of 16 counts, jhaptaal of 10 counts, dadra of 6 counts and so on
- Aamad
- Tukra
- Toda
- Paran
- chakkar (swirling rounds by the body)



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Dress of Kathak dancer is Anarkali or long Kammez with churidaar. Odhni is so taken that it is tied on waist. Hand and neck are so embroidered to give a look of ornaments. Dress is so designed that it does not hinder performance and chakkar or turns. Ghongroos are tied in both feet over churidaar.

Birju Maharaj, Sitara devi, Shobha narayan and many others are famous Kathak dancers of India who have taken the legacy forward.

3. Kathakali

Kathakali is classical dance usually performed by Malayalam speaking people from south western region of Kerala. It was developed in Hindu temples and some schools of art. Its elaborate makeup, face masks and its voluminous dress immediately clicks



Fig. 9.3 Kathakali



the image of Kathakali dance. It is generally done by male dancers. Now women artists also perform this dance.

It includes the movements of Indian martial art and athletic tradition of South India. The mythologies, spiritual ideas, Hindu scriptures and purans are expressed through this dance form. Kathakali is Attakatha (literally, "enacted story"). For examples Krishnanattam is dance-drama art form about the life and activities of Hindu God Krishna and Ramanattam is based on the Ramayana.

Kathakali performances are long, starting at dusk and continuing through dawn with breaks. It may continue for days, starting at dusk every day. Modern performances are shorter. Performances are often done open place such as open grounds outside a temple. Special theatres called Kuttampalam are built inside the temple compounds are also used.

Makeup is important and takes long time to do. There are seven types of makeup used in this dance, namely Pachcha (green), Pazhuppu (ripe), Kathi (knife), Kari, Thaadi, Minukku and Teppu. Colours are made from rice paste and vegetable colors for face. Use of colours depends upon the character such as Krishna, Vishnu, Rama, Shiva, Surya, Yudhishtira, Arjuna, Nala and kings.

The dancer uses the "sign language" for the character's dialogue and "hand signs (mudras)". Emotions or bhava are expressed through "facial and eye" movements. There are 24 main mudras in Kathakali dance.

A Kathakali dance starts with warm up beats and a signal to tuning their instruments and warming up with beats, signaling



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the readiness of dance and arrival of audience. Totayam and Puruppatu then it come to actual drama with songs. There are different methods of presentation.

Singer sings song with high and low notes to express the emotion. Musical instruments used in Kathakali are three types of drums namely Maddalam , Chenda and Idakka.

4. Kuchipudi

Kuchipudi is beautiful dance form from Andhra Pradesh. It is known for its fast footwork, dramatic characters, expressive eye movements and narration. It is a blend of tandava and lasya form of dances. It is done on carnatic music and uses brass plate. Languages used in this dance are Sanskrit and Telugu languages. It takes several years (may be more than seven) to master this art form.

This dance form is somewhere related to Bharathanatyam. There



Fig. 9.4 Kuchipudi



are two parallel dance forms Nattuva Mela and Natya Mela. Nattuva Mela is developed into Bharathanatyam and Natya Mela into Kuchipudi. It is performed by both men and women.

Kuchipudi still has strong ties to the dance-drama tradition. It combines the elements of speech, mime and pure dance.

Costume or dress of Kuchipudi and Bharatnatyam dancers is similar and very attractive. They wear light make-up and ornaments like the Rakudi (head ornament), Chandra Vanki (arm band), Adda Bhasa and Kasina Sara (necklace). Flowers and light ornaments made with the light wood called Boorugu are used. Saree is tied up in special manner having fan shaped cloth in front and a Pallu (portion of saree hanging over the shoulder) stitched at the back. Ghungroos are worn on the feet to create sound to the rhythm of the footwork.

It is often done by solo female dancer. The main composition of this dance includes Jaidev's Ashthapadi, the Ramayana, the Puranas and Tyagaraja's compositions.

Vempati Chinna Satyam and Lakshmi Narayana Shastry are leading artists of Kuchipudi who have worked hard to restore this art and established an Academy in Chennai.

5. Odissi dance

Odissi is also known as Orissi. It was an old dance form originated from Hindu temples of eastern coastal states of India such as Odisha. It expresses the devotion to Lord Vishnu as jagannath, Shiva, Surya and Shakti. It is usually done by female dancers solo or in groups. Today young girls also participate in stage performance of odissi dance.

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The dance motifs are called Bhangas (symmetric body bends). Body movement, abhinaya (expressions) and mudras (gestures and sign language) are used. During performance lower (footwork), mid (torso) and upper (hand and head) are used to form geometric symmetry and rhythmic musical tone.

The stages of Odissi dance are-

- Invocation- Mangalacharana
- nritta (pure dance) Batu, or Battu Nrutya or Sthayee Nrutya or Batuka Bhairava
- nritya (expressive dance), Abhinay
- natya (dance drama) - story telling
- moksha (dance climax connoting freedom of the soul).

Three main poses of Odissi are

- Samabhanga
- Abhanga
- Tribhanga

The Odissi dancers wear colorful patta sari (generally of Odisha) with makeup and silver jewellery. Pleats are so stitched in front to allow maximum flexibility during the footwork. Hairs are tied and decorated with white flowers in half moon shape or mukut.



Fig. 9.5 Odissi

Bindi and kajal are face makeup. Special ear rings are called Kapa, armlet on upper arm is Bahichudi or Bajuband and bangles are worn dancer's hands are painted with red colour called alta.

Kalyana, Nata, Shree Gowda, Baradi, Panchama, Dhanashri, Karnata, Bhairavee and Shokabaradi Ragas are used in Odissi for dance. Musical instruments include Mardala (barrel drum), harmonium, flute, sitar, violin, cymbals held in fingers and others.

6. Sattriya dance

Sattriya dance is classical dance from Assam. It 500 years old dance founded by a great saint Srimanta Sankardev. The social and religious group known as the 'Satras' formulated this dance to express Hinduism and its various teachings. It shows the colourful Assamese grandeur and cultural legacy. It portrays life of Lord Krishna and Radha and Lord Ram and Sita. The Sattriya dance when performed in masculine style is called Paurashik Bhangi and when in feminine style is known as 'Stri Bhangi'.

This dance form has structure grammar called Mati-Akhora. Mati-Akhora is basic exercise pattern that facilitate various dance poses. Poses include body bending, body movements, foot movements, jumps, hand, head and neck movements and eye movements.

Initially this dance was only performed by males. Now female dancers also do



Fig. 9.6 Sattriya



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this dance form. Female dancers wear muga silk sarees with matching blouse. Red large bindi on the forehead, red or coral colored lips, dark kohled eyes and flowers on hair style help to give dramatic look while dancing. A mix of gold and silver jewelry is used for head gear, waist belt, earrings and heavy neckpieces.

Musical instruments used in this dance are Khol (drum), Bahi (flute), Violin, Tanpura, Harmonium and Shankha (Conch Shell). Dr. Malika Kandali is award winner dancer of sattari classical dance.

7. Manipuri Dance

Manipuri dance is classical dance from Manipur state from north east corner of India. It is slow and graceful dance as against many other classical dances. It is mainly shows bhaktirasa or the emotion of devotion in the glory of lord Krishna and His childhood stories. The Cholom meaning movement is a male dance form of Manipur. The fundamental dance movement of Ras dances of Manipur is Chari or Chali. Often dancers include Krishna, Radha and Gopis.

There are 3 main styles of Manipur dance

1. Laiharoaba
2. Samkirtana
3. Rasalila

Laiharoaba means merry making for God. The story of Khamba and Thoibi are played here. Characters of other stories are named as Nongpokningthou and Panthoibi. These are basically love stories. The characters also depict Hindu Gods Shiva and Parvati. Pena instrument is used. In Chaitanite Vaishnavism phase people



Fig. 9.7 Manipuri Dance

have started offering the prayer with singing, playing instruments and dancing together.

Samkirtana is basically performed by male dancer in which he plays instruments, sang and dance. It is called the Pung Cholom. There is also the Kartal Cholom, where the movements are grander and follow the sound and playing of Kartalas instrument. The singing, called the ishei, follows the kirtana style of Bengal. Singers use a trembling tone which is typical of the Manipuri style of singing. The talas (rhythm patterns) have wide variety used in interesting combinations. There are 64 different talas for the Pung. Dress is very simple white having different turban styles. The Samkirtana is performed on other occasions also such as birth ceremonies, weddings, and funerals.

The Rasalila of Manipur is said to be one of the highlights of India culture. It followed the story of Bhagvad. Stories of child Krishna are called Goparasa and Udukhalrasa. Compositions of Rasalilas are Vasantarasa and Kunjarasa.

The dress or costumes for Manipuri dancers is very unique. By seeing only one can make out. A male dancer wears a bright



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coloured dhoti or dhora or dhotra from waist to cover legs and crown on head decorated with peacock feather to portray the character of Lord Krishna. The costume of female dancers is known as Kumil costume. It is decorated long skirt in the shape of a barrel with a stiffened bottom. At waist it opens up like a flower. A decorated velvet choli or blouse is worn. A translucent veil in white colour covers the head. Facial make up is also different. Dancers also wear different ornaments in different parts of body. Dancers look like floating apsaras.

8. Mohiniattam

Mohiniattam dance is another attractive (mantramungd) dance performed by women of kerela. It is also done on carnatic music. It is another dance which considered relative to bharatnatyam.

Mohiniyattam demonstrates the actions or leela of Vishnu in his Mohini (enchantress) avatar. It is very charming form of classical dance form.

Rhythmic dance steps called advat in Mohiniattam. There are four adavats each having certain number of cholus or syllables in this dance which are as follows-



Fig. 9.8 Mohiniattam



- Thaganams -14
- Jaganams 6
- Dhaganam - 4
- Samishrams or vakrams (varies)

It is Lasya type of dance and follows the sequence as

1. Cholkettu
2. Jatisvaram,
3. Varnam,
4. Padam,
5. Tillana,
6. Shlokam
7. Saptam

Facial expression and footwork are exclusive.

Dress: The dancer wears a white or off-white plain sari having bright golden colour border and matching choli or blouse. It is known as Kerela kasavu saree. Its pleats are different from Bharatnatyam style saree. Ornaments include golden belt around her waist, jewellery on head, hair, ears, neck, wrists and fingers and ghunghru in ankles. Red colour tikka on forehead, red lipstick and black kajal in eyes support expression in dance. White jasmine is also often used in hair styles.

Music and instruments: Vocal musical compositions are in Manipravala that is a mix of Sanskrit and Malayalam language and music style is Carnatic. Instruments used are Kuzhitalam or cymbals; Veena; Idakka (an hourglass-shaped drum), Mridangam, a barrel-shaped drum with two heads; and flute.



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9. Yakshgana

Yakshgana is a theatre form developed in Kannad districts of Karnataka. A sage named Narahari Thirtha started Dashavathara performance in Udipi which now we know as Yakshagana of today. Yakshgana means the songs of the Demi-Gods (yaksh 'meaning Demi-God, and 'gana' mean song). Its stories are influenced by vaishnava Bhakti movement. The performers wear interesting and colourful costumes, and elaborate headgears and look unique artists. It is kind of poetic drama or play.

Main musician is known as the ' Bhagvata' who controls the narrative. The play begins with a "Sabhalakshana' followed by the "Prasanga" with the flow of the song. In lyrics the raga and the tala dominate the musical notes. The background music group is known as "Himmela". The background music uses a mix of drums, pipes and organs. It narrates the stories Mahabharata and the Ramayana and the Puranas. Yakshaganas also have humor performed by the clown called the " Hasyagar".



Fig. 9.9 Yakshgana

Both male and females portray Yakshagana and decorated differently for Kings and for the demons. It is played in the open air over a period of dusk to dawn or in "Rangasthalla" (stage) in the temple on festivals.

**Notes****INTEXT QUESTIONS 9.1**

1. Write the name of any two bhava.
2. Write the name of any one dancer of following dance form :
 - i) Bharatnatyam ii) Kathak
 - iii) Kuchipudi iv) Sattriya

**WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT**

Classical dances are performed in the glory of Hindu Gods and Goddesses and narrate many stories of Hindu epics Ramayana. Lord Krishna, Vishu, Shiv, are portrayed. These dances have originated since ages. Dances are praised for their music dresses, beautiful hand, body and foot work. Gestures and postures are unique in each style. Following are 8 classical dances. They are discussed with their forms, song type, music, musical instruments, dresses etc.

1. Bharatanatyam, from Tamil Nadu
2. Kathak, from Uttar Pradesh.
3. Kathakali, from Kerala.
4. Kuchipudi, from Andhra Pradesh.
5. Odissi, from Odisha



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6. Sattriya, from Assam
7. Manipuri, from Manipur
8. Mohiniyattam, from Kerala



TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Name 8 classical dances of India.
2. Name navarasa and meaning of each of them.
3. Write taal and bhav used in any two types of dances
4. Write dresses used in any four dances.
5. Write difference in Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi and Mohiattam.
6. What are crucial points in Sattriya and Manipuri Dances?
7. Mention two differences between Bharatnatyam and Yakshgana.



ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

9.1

1. Shringara, Hasya (any other)
2. i) Rukmini Devi (any other)
ii) Birju Maharaj (any other)
iii) Vempati Chinna Satyam (any other)
iv) Dr. Malika Kandali