



## Unraveling the Importance of Indian Classical Dances on Mental Well-Being of Performers

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### **Abstract**

Dance has held significant importance in Indian culture and history. It has been used as a form of artistic expression, as a means of indulging in recreation and leisure, as a medium of conveying emotions like joy during special occasions of wedding and festivities. The mental health field has also recognised the importance of dance in recent years with dance movement therapy becoming popular worldwide. Ayurveda has emphasized the power that dance holds in healing and creating inner awareness. Various Indian philosophies support the idea of dance and music being beneficial for human physical and mental health. During the Aryan period, Nritya (dance) was linked to yoga, giving it a spiritual meaning. Dance forms were utilised by the Aryans to purify and strength the mental capabilities. The seven major Indian classical dance forms are Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Manipuri and Mohiniattam. These dance forms possess three common aspects of Natya (drama), Nritta and Nritya (dance). There exists very limited research about the importance of these traditional dance forms in terms of improving mental well-being. Even though traditionally the traditional dances were deeply rooted in spirituality and philosophy. The present paper aims to examine how classical Indian dance forms can serve as a means of improving mental well-being by thoroughly reviewing literature.

**Keywords:** *Classical Dance; Mental Health; Mental Well-Being; Veda*

## 1. Introduction

Historically, dance has always been a popular means of transferring knowledge from generation to generation even in times when written scripts were not in use. It has rightly been said that dance has been used as a means of connecting emotionally with the audience. Initially, it was used to help narrate stories to people through the use of hand gestures, poses and facial expressions. Body language thus played a crucial role in Indian Classical Dances wherein the poses and the gestures had to be interpreted by the performer. Even the ancient Indian civilizations of Harappa and Mohenjodaro when excavated found sculptures with various striking dance poses. The Chidambaram temple in the southern part of India has various dance poses of Bharatnatyam sculpted on the walls. This provides evidence of the existence of dance in prehistoric times and how valuable the art form has been in the Indian heritage. Indian classical dances have been recognized as a combination of movements and poses that connect the mind and soul. They help in bringing out the innermost feelings and depict cultural aspects of a civilization (Pai, 2020).

In Indian culture, dance has helped in creating cohesion and diversity. Every Indian state has its own classical dance style which people use in a number of special occasions and for religious events. Indian dances focus heavily on bodily movement and maintaining harmony with the classical Indian music. Dance has benefits for physical and mental health, which have been recognized by researchers worldwide. Exercises such as swimming, walking, sports, cheerleading etc. are commonly performed by people, yet there exists a group of individuals who do not enjoy partaking in these physical activities. It may be due to a cultural preference that some individuals prefer learning traditional dances as a form of physical exercises instead. This non-competitive engagement in dance is beneficial for females who might not want to undergo injuries from sports. Dance has been recognized as a medium of emotional expression, a means to help in reducing stress and enhancing creativity.

## 2. Historical Context of Traditional Dance

The origins of Indian classical dance forms can be traced back to 200 BCE and 200 CE with Natya Shastra being compiled during this time period. This Sanskrit text is considered the richest and the oldest source of knowledge for performing arts. Apart from Natya Shastra, other remarkable texts in ancient Indian history shed light on the dance forms as Acharya Nandikeshawara's "Abhinaya Darpan" and Sharangdev's "Sangeeth Ratnakar (Nartanadhyaya)." What sets Indian classical dances apart from others is Rasanubhuti – which is the ultimate aim of these dance forms. The eight rasas (emotions evoked through the dance form) are that of shringar (love), hasya (humor), karuna (sorrow), raudra (anger), veer (heroism), bhayanak (fear), bibhats (disgust), adbhoot (wonder). The Indian classical dances differ from the folk dances of India in terms of their technicalities and regulation.

Indian classical dances have followed the NatyaShastra which provides knowledge about the anatomy and psychology, by describing the various poses, hand and leg movements and even aids in musical composition, dance and drama. According to the NatyaShastra, Indian classical dances are a form of peaceful mind therapy, where the music is designed to compel certain emotions out from the individuals even during stressful moods. Indian classical dances aim at reducing stress, preventing diseases, increasing body flexibility, strengthening the muscles and overall improving mental well-being of the performers. Not only is practicing dance regularly beneficial for the mental health of the performers, but also improves physical health. It helps in boosting individual mood, posture and gradually even improves appearance. The NatyaShastra lists benefits of classical dances which includes prevention and management of mental illnesses, improving body balance and coordination. To the unfamiliar observer, all Indian classical dances might look the same. However, the techniques and movements incorporated by the practitioners are widely different.

The Ministry of Culture, Government of India has recognized nine classical dance forms.

### **3. Different Forms of Classical Dances**

#### **3.1. Bharatnatyam**

Bharatnatyam originated in Tanjore, Tamil Nadu. This sublime Indian classical dance form encompasses the traditional aspects of classical dance, which includes, mudras through hand positions, abhinaya referring to facial expressions and padams which are narrative dances. Bharatnatyam dance thus makes considerable usage of hand and eye movements to express various emotions (Rajamanoharan, 2014). The word Bharatnatyam has been derived from the conjunction of two words, Bharata and Natyam. The word Bharata comprises “bha” which refers to bhava or emotions, “ra” that signifies raga or melody and “ta” which stands for rhythm. Natyam in Sanskrit means dance. Bharatnatyam as a dance form is closely related to religion and spirituality. In Hindu religion art is regarded as an expression of one’s true self and helps connect with one’s own sense of spirituality. Bharatnatyam also helps its performers attain that connection. This classical dance form has been given its due respect with various temples of India displaying it in the sculptures on the walls (Bharath, 2021).

Bharatnatyam requires the performer to move barefoot and rhythmically strike their foot on the ground. This balance on the toes as the dance jumps, leaps and squats, combined with various head gestures and hand-eye movements has various health benefits. Research has found that Bharatnatyam helps to improve the overall blood circulation of the body and boosts resistance and immunity, maintains a healthy blood pressure, while also helping to prevent poor eyesight, and thyroid problems (Sudhakar, 1994). Those who regularly practice this dance form have a better lung capacity, increased respiratory functioning and improved pulmonary functions.

The physical movements, postures, facial expressions, muscle contractions and relaxations create a strong therapeutic effect on the human body. Because of these beneficial effects, various Indian dance therapists are trying to incorporate these classical dance movements as well within their sessions. History is evidence of the fact that several classical dances have been recognized to help better the health of the dancers. After all, dance is a physical and mental exercise. Within the Bharatnatyam dance form specifically, with the hand-eye movements being used by the dancers to express various emotions and unravel their inner feelings, the mental health benefits cannot be denied. The most sublime of Indian classical dances – Bharatnatyam – brings a sense of peace to the performers (Sreebhadra, 2022).

#### **3.2. Manipuri**

Manipur, an Indian state in northeastern India, is where Manipuri dance first originated. It was formerly limited to temple performances and is now a vital component of Manipur’s social and religious life. Manipuri dance has a religious quality and is only associated with the Hindu deities Radha and Krishna, who are frequently portrayed as the primary protagonists in dance pieces such as Raslila. Rabindranath Tagore’s efforts enabled it to gain more recognition outside of the area. In contrast to other classical dances, Manipuri dancers never make physical contact with the ground when performing. This helps them avoid getting hurt during lengthy dancing practice. Delicate, poetic, and beautiful movements are embodied in the indigenous Manipuri dance form. This type of dance always has a strict regimen of body control behind its seemingly gentle exterior. Manipuri dancers avoid abrupt movements, straight lines, and sharp edges by using circular motions. It provides them a delicate, flowing look, appropriate bodily control, and mental clarity.

#### **3.3. Kathak**

Kathak, a classical dance form, has its roots in North India. It is a partly narrative dance style distinguished by unique spins (chakkar), fast footwork (tatkar), and creative acting in abhinaya (acting) employing bhav (expression). It has evolved into a very sophisticated system of rhythm and movement

throughout time, able to convey both abstract form and composition and intricate human relationships. The dancer's postures, hasta mudras (hand gestures), and even gait all contribute to the story and overall emotion that is portrayed (Vats, 2023). The dancer's postures, hasta mudras (hand gestures), and even gait all contribute to the story and overarching emotion that is portrayed. Kathak is a comprehensive, dynamic theater when considering dance therapy. For balance in chakkars (spins), the dancer uses their ghungroos (dancing bells), facial muscles for abhinaya (expression), appropriate arm and foot placement, as well as mudras, among other things. Kathak is a stimulant that has an overall effect on the body. The quick movement relieves stress and rage. This dancing style incorporates therapeutic torso motions and is being employed as a kind of physical exercise in addition to therapy. Kathak is a revolutionary new manner that represents the significance of dance.

### 3.4. Odissi

The traditional dance form of Odissi is performed in the Indian state of Odisha. This dance form contains a unique movement which enables hip mobility that other dance forms do not imbibe. Traditionally, this dance form was performed as a part of temple services offered by female temple servants called 'maharis'. It was around the fifteenth century that King Prataparudradeva held that maharis would perform solely on songs from Gitagovinda, which is a Sanskrit text written by Jayadeva about the love between Radha-Krishna. In the twentieth century, it was molded as a theater art and found representation in Odisha's medieval sculpture, painting and literature. This remolded form of Odissi is what gained popularity across the country. The Sangeet Natak Akademi recognized Odissi with the "classical" status between 1947 and 2000. It was 1960s onwards that Jayantika developed a five-part repertoire that became widely practiced by Odissi dancers. Firstly the mangalacharan which includes mancha pravesha (entering the stage), pushpanjali (offering flowers), bhumi pranam (offering respect to mother Earth), vandana (prayers offered to a deity), sabha pranam (offering respect to God and teachers); batu/sthai which helps develop the physical features of the dance and is drawn from sculptures and gotipua movements along with bhangis, belis and arasas (postures, movements and short dance phrases); pallavi is that part where the rhythm, melody and dance are elaborated and a "blossoming" occurs; abhinaya refers to the dramatic representation carried on for the stage, Sanskrit and Odia texts are interpreted through the dance and this primarily includes Gitagovinda; and finally moksha which literally translates to "liberation" is emphasized by rhythmic patterns and speed.

### 3.5. Kathakali

Kerala, a state in southern India, is where the Indian classical dance form referred to as kathakali originated. Five components of fine art are thought to be combined in kathakali: expressions (natya, the component emphasizing facial expressions); dance (nritta, the component emphasizing movement and rhythm of hands, legs, and body); enactment (nrittya, the dramatization element emphasizing hand gestures and mudras); vocal accompaniment (geet); and instrument accompaniment (badya). The elements that make up Kathakali dancing style include facial emotions, rhythm, and the way the hands, legs, torso, and hands are moved. This dance form's therapeutic component primarily addresses the face muscle. This dancing style mostly requires male dancers, who must possess significantly more muscle. The human being's body is composed of several tiny anatomical components that may operate separately or in combinations, according to the Kathakali school of thought (Raina, 2015). Kathakali dancers cover space by creating geometric patterns that are either rectangles or squares. There are leaps, sweeps, and hops in this dancing style. Although it is occasionally handled as a number of separate components, the torso is often employed as a single element. The dancers alter their foot placement by extending their legs. They simultaneously make complex facial expressions when they execute these motions. In contrast to other traditional dances, Kathakali accentuates the use of muscles (Hegde et al., 2020).

### 3.6. Mohiniattam

Mohiniattam with its literal sense 'Dance of the Enchantress', is a classical dance form from the state of Kerala, India. It has gained immense popularity in India. It's a solo dance form usually performed by women. The term Mohini signifies a maiden who purloins the heart of the audience (Krishna, 2016). The dance form has its roots originated from Dasiyattam as it was formerly performed by the Devdasis with the objective of portrayal of feminine affection in multiple paradigms including carnal, devotional and maternal. *Lesya* (grace) & *sringara bhava* (facial gestures of elegance and affection) are considered more important than *Nritta* in the primary works of this art form. This art form's artistic effect is enhanced by the gold and white clothing, the classic hairdo, and the extremely elegant motions performed at a medium pace. Mohiniattam is distinguished by unique upper body swaying motions. The direction of the movement is emphasized in part by the eyes. Mohiniattam includes some of the fundamental moves of the *Adavus* including *Taganam*, *Dhaganam*, *Jaganam*, and *Sammisram* (Hegde et al., 2020). Although the dance form finds its mention in handful eighteenth century texts, it is believed the art was revitalized and gained its significance in the 19th century under the rule of Maharaja Swati Tirunal, who strongly endorsed the dance form. The repertory of Mohiniattam has been meticulously cultivated and broadened over the last several decades by committed artists who have made sure that this exquisite dance form stays unique among India's traditional dance forms. In addition to mythology, Mohiniattam has other topics pertaining to nature. *Manipravalam*, an artistic fusion of Malayalam and Sanskrit, is the language employed in the songs.

### 3.7. Kuchipudi

Kuchipudi refers to a dance style synonymous to the Telugu speaking state of Andhra Pradesh. For those who do not have training in classical dance, Kuchipudi appears similar to Bharatanatyam. However, the two styles are indeed distinct from one another. In Andhra Pradesh, there lies a village about fifty kilometers from Vijayawada, known as Kuchipudi. It is from this village that this dance form is said to have originated (Putcha, 2015). Kuchipudi has its roots in religion and spiritual beliefs. Overtime Kuchipudi has grown in popularity due to the utilization of rhythmic hand gestures, expressive *abhinaya* and use of musical instruments for the performance (Hegde et al., 2020). Tradition, performance, and experimentation are three major components of Kuchipudi's history as drawn in the twentieth century. Pious and artistic levels are quite strong, particularly in the performance tradition, and they are effective in upholding ancestral commitments. This art form is regarded as Guru Siddendra yogi's indelible contribution to the Kuchipudi youth as a result of his tireless efforts and dedication. He pledged to offer them the next generation of younger artists who would choose this art form as their spiritual career, with the reasonable requirement that each family member transmit *BHAGAVATHA KATHA* through music and dance. Since then, this art form has become a family profession as well as a source of cash for their daily needs (Basa & KK, 2021). Female replication is a distinctive phenomenon in the performing arts. Approximately twenty members of India's performing arts traditions use impersonation, which involves men dancers playing female characters.

## 4. Psychological Benefits of Traditional Dance

Engaging in physical activities leads to positive health consequences such as improved cardiovascular fitness, better psychological and physiological health and increase in bodily strength. Physical activities are even advised for prevention and treatment of diseases. It is no wonder that dance is a popular physical activity which offers various psychological benefits such as improved quality of life, psychological well-being and positively influences social connectedness. Psychological well-being signifies a broad concept that encompasses affective aspects of daily experience. Both negative and positive components of well-being can be assessed with ease through self-report measures of variables such as anxiety, happiness, job satisfaction, self-esteem. However, how these feelings are structured and



the content that governs them needs to further be investigated. Positive aspects of well-being have been discussed widely by researchers such as Maslow (1973). Studies have revealed that dance elevates mood, increases self-esteem, psychological well-being and social connectedness. These findings have been replicated by various researchers particularly among young adult and professional dancers (Hui et al., 2009).

Dance has been used since prehistoric times for different purposes such as expression, social connectedness and spiritual-emotional healing. Researchers have suggested that dance interventions have the potential to reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression and enhance the quality of life. Dance creates a sense of self-awareness which increases mindfulness (Laird et al., 2021). The history of Indian classical dances reveals that from the beginning these dance forms were aimed towards improving the health of the performers. Yogis have often compared them with physical and mental exercise. To an extent, the various Indian classical dances are rooted in Natyashastra and as a result they embody some common features like mudras, certain body positions, usage of dramatic acting (abhinaya). All classical dances are accompanied by classical music. These traditional dances center around the idea of expressing their innermost feelings via movement. However, their benefits are beyond entertainment. Through the communication of various emotions, these dances carry forth a therapeutic effect (Chatterjee, 2013).

#### **4.1. Managing Stress and Enhancing Self-Esteem**

Indian classical dances are renowned for their benefits including stress reduction, disease prevention, increase in flexibility, muscle strength, and improving well-being. In the Natyashastra, the benefits of Indian dances to prevent and manage mental illnesses and improve body coordination have been explained as well. Researchers have reported that using dance as a form of exercise reduces the level of stress, anxiety and depression, whilst positively improving cognition by enhancing mood, confidence and energy levels (Kulshreshtha et al., 2023). Indian traditional dances offer psychotherapeutic effects by engaging in creative movements that lead to emotional, physical, social and cognitive integration of the individual performer (ADTA, 2020). Practising Odissi dance for 120 minutes for 4 days reduced stress and anxiety among the young adult performers (Garg et al., 2023). Bharatanatyam also promotes improved physical health by optimizing body functioning. By making use of mudras, rhythmic breathing and limb movements, Bharatanatyam has an effect on the mind, body, soul (Bajaj & Vohra, 2011). Utilizing Kuchipudi for managing psychological distress and physical injury, found that after performing the dance for 6 months, there was a decrease in anxiety, stress, and depression levels (Konduru, 2020). Between non-dancers and Kathak dancers, those who practiced Kathak had lesser depressive symptoms and generalized anxiety. The dance form Kathak was found to be an effective psychotherapeutic tool (Kulshreshtha et al., 2023).

Engaging in dance is said to improve concentration, calm the mind, improve focus and even helps to create a better relationship with the body by improving self-esteem and confidence (Lal, 2020). Loganathan & Zakaria (2023) studied Bharatanatyam performers and found that this Indian classical dance helps the performers to understand their body strength better. In this way it promotes self-esteem, self confidence and provides a creative space to the dancers. Once they are engrossed in the performance, they undergo stress reduction and begin to enjoy the moment. A positive link between flow experience and well-being was found among Indian classical dancers. This suggests a link between performers having a positive self-concept and a sense of personal growth, wherein the dancers gained a meaning from the dance (Vig & Srivastava, 2018).

#### **4.2. Indian Classical Dance and Mind-Body Connection**

Human experience is filled with examples of mind-body connection being practised. Dance movement therapists utilise movement to delve deeper into the emotional, cognitive and social integration of the participants. The main premise governing dance movement therapies is that there is an

interconnection between body, mind and spirit (Acolin, 2016). The main essence of Indian classical dances also lies in their mind-body connection. Through practising rhythmic movements, synchronised footwork and managed facial expressions that require focus, concentration and ultimately promote an enhanced connection between mind & body (Desk, 2023). This profound mind-body connection is what allows Indian dances to transcend the boundaries of language and become an outlet for communicating deep human emotions. In Kathak, there is harmony between the mind and body through rhythmic footsteps, hand gestures called mudras and facial expressions. These together exemplify the mind-body connection and have a positive effect on mental health of the performers (*The Healing Power of Kathak*, 2023).

In dance therapy, there is a notable increase of neurotransmitters called endorphins that promote psychological well-being. By engaging in total body movement via classical dance, improvement is seen in the circulatory, respiratory, skeletal and muscular systems (Chatterjee, 2013). Traditional Indian dances lay emphasis on abhinaya, which helps keep the face youthful and young. Classical dances are equivalent to meditation, in the sense that they help keep the soul happy. It is a great physical and mental exercise that helps in strengthening the mind-body connection (Kaushik, 2023).

#### 4.3. Cognitive Benefits: Memory, Focus, and Creativity

Dance offers a plethora of cognitive, physical and psychological benefits. There exists a fundamental relationship between movement and our being. Studies have revealed that the interaction between body and spirit while engaging in dance movement is significant (Wisung, 2023). When engaging in dance, the attention is directed towards following the music and matching the movements in accordance with the rhythm. These movements are non-repetitive in nature and in Indian classical dances, they are considered as a medium of expression of emotions. In this manner, dance makes use of various cognitive abilities.

In order to understand how dance impacts cognitive abilities, research has been carried out to study the various different parts of the brain that are activated in response to different dances. The motor cortex for instance, is responsible for learning new movement patterns and is activated during dance. The cerebellum on the other hand is responsible for coordination and refining motor control, it plays a crucial role in balance and posture maintenance. In Indian classical dances, where posture and body control plays a crucial role, cerebellum is stimulated (Sreebhadra, 2022).

Drawing comparisons between females who practised Indian classical dance forms of Bharatanatyam and Kathak, and those who did not practise Indian dance, the dancers reported a better cognitive ability and had a better cognitive performance (Chatterjee et al., 2022). Indian traditional dances are an expression of culture, emotion and creativity. They are an integral part of the country's social fabric and provide an interesting medium of storytelling and spiritual connection (Vishal, 2024). Dance has been awarded a high prestige in the Indian subcontinent.

### 5. Physical Health and Traditional Dance

Participation in traditional dance is associated with positive outcomes on physical health among various age groups. Several studies have reported that traditional dance interventions improve physical fitness traits, such as muscular strength, flexibility, cardiovascular endurance, and body composition (Alamilla et al., 2022). Furthermore, physical health can be well-supported through dance programs because assessments of physical functioning score better in traditional dance programs than in traditional exercise programs (Douka et al., 2019). Unsurprisingly, It has been indicated that traditional dance interventions improve balance, mobility, and physical fitness, which contributes to a better quality of life among senior adults; related studies have focused on HRQoL (Buransri & Phanpheng, 2021;

Anastasopoulou et al., 2020). Indian traditional dances such as Bharatnatyam, Chhau, and Kathak can provide significant physical advantages. These dance forms necessitate complex body movements that help burn calories, strengthen muscles, and improve the health of the heart and lungs (Balaji Deekshitulu, 2019). Traditional Indian dances which require extensive body movements including Bhangra, Karagam, and Manipuri have been shown to maintain balance in the body. Indian dances are primarily concerned with delicate and focused movements of the body which can contribute to the overall well-being and mental peace. Research has indicated that dancers who engage in Indian classical dance gain high self-esteem and fitness parameters, such as agility, flexibility and functionality, are high, as are their quality of life (Bag & Ghosh, 2023). Similarly, therapy via dance forms based on Indian dances is recognized for its health and emotional benefits. As a result, Indian traditional dances provide a comprehensive approach to culture and physical fitness.

### 5.1. Cardiovascular benefits

Classical Indian dances such as Bharatnatyam and exposure to Indian ragas have been linked with cardiovascular effects. Banerjee et al. (2018) reveal a beneficial influence of Bharatnatyam on blood pressure readings like systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure, pulse pressure, and mean arterial pressure. Dance performance on a regular basis with active footwork and hand movements provides better contractility of cardiac muscles and efficacy of the respiratory system. Exposure to bhupali, a type of Indian raga, is associated with reduced sympathetic action, improved vagal firing, and lower tension, which all contribute to cardiovascular benefits (Nagarajan et al., 2015).

### 5.2. Improving flexibility, strength, and coordination

The Indian classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam place inherent importance on flexibility that is needed for ideal mechanical function. Studies conducted on the Bharatanatyam dancers have proven the association of flexibility parameters like flexibility and hamstring tightness with optimal musculoskeletal health among the injured dancers who portrayed decreased flexibility (Anbarasi et al., 2012). Similarly, training approaches like aerobic dance and yoga have been explored to improve professional student flexibility significantly, critical of several exercises for enhancing the range of motion (Kedhar, 2011). Therefore, adopting some of these popular exercises can help improve Indian dancers' flexibility levels, thereby reducing injury chances and availing optimal performance factor.

Indian classical dance forms, such as Kathak and Bharatnatyam, have been shown to significantly enhance strength and balance in dancers (Bharnuke et al., 2020; Kulshreshtha et al., 2022). These dance forms involve intricate footwork, torso movements, and shifts in body weight, which challenge balance and muscle control. Research has demonstrated that dancers exhibit better balance performance, muscular strength, and endurance compared to non-dancers. Additionally, dance movements like fast footwork in Kathak and rounded movements in Manipuri contribute to releasing tension, improving body control, and enhancing muscle flexibility. Indian classical dance can positively impact postural stability, leading to better functional ability and reduced risk of falls in later stages of life (Balaji Deekshitulu et al., 2019).

Classical dance forms in India, as well as North Indian instrumental music, aid in the achievement of integration and synchronization between mind, body, and spirit (Clayton et al., 2019). Dance types that are Indian classics involve the use of footwork, hand gestures, and emotional expressions that are neurological, muscular, and emotional, and that are unique to the body and its movements (Saha, 2013). By Indian classical dance styles gesture recognition algorithm, the Kinect sensor method to Indian classical dance styles is described, which emphasizes the distinction of emotions, i.e. 'Anger', 'Fear', 'Happiness', 'Sadness,' and 'Relaxation,' based on body movements (Ivanov, 2015). The core of the mechanism configured to collect video data from dance performers is the utilization of Kinect 3D sensors. The crucial characteristic points are then removed for posture prediction and the Arousal-Valence emotion model is employed, which is finally validated by a fusion neural network model



FUSNN to achieve fine emotions (Pradeep, 2023). Recognition of hand gestures, which are called mudras in Indian classical dance, has also been explored via pre-trained CNN models, object detection techniques for dance videos, and deep learning algorithms (Kilari, 2023). These techniques contribute to the development of the field of recognizing and classifying gestures and emotions in Indian classical dance. It has also been established that danced-jumped exercises combined with some movement applications for special sorts of motions offer a high potential to increase coordination abilities, motivational readiness-making readiness, and technical competitive training of Indian dancers. Dance indeed is a universal indicator practice that implies full coordination of natural-mechanistic and psycho-physiological structures rather than a coordination practice.

### 5.3. Pain management and rehabilitation

Indian dance forms, including Bharatanatyam, may lead to traumatic injuries requiring specialized pain management. A case study focusing on Bharatanatyam dancers with patellofemoral pain syndrome showed that rehabilitation comprising specific exercises, taping, and neuromuscular training proved successful (Nair et al., 2023). The same can be said about improvised somatic dance (ISD) in terms of pediatric surgery. ISD reduces pain in children after operations, which refers to non-pharmacological options for pain management. A study in India even put emphasis on the necessity to change current pain treatment approaches since both the Indian healthcare course system and private sector domination are hindering the treatment of pain among the local population (LDowler, 2016). Music therapy involving the classical ragam Anandhabhairavi demonstrated considerable alleviation of post-operative pain emphasising music as a preventive practice (Roques, 2018).

A case report emphasized the successful rehabilitation of a Bharatanatyam dancer with patellofemoral pain syndrome on a program targeting flexibility, core stabilization, and neuromuscular training focusing on the stem, leaves and roots of the body (Kaikobad, 2021). Besides, traditional Indian dance forms such as Bharatanatyam include rhythmic footwork and hand gestures to increase skeletal muscle activation and cardiac muscle contractility, leading to benefits to the heart through an improved cardio-respiratory system. Finally, dance movement therapy is pervasively used in the rehabilitation of conditions that target the convoluted and the processed rooted in the mindful intervention between the mind and the body. Dance therapy has rehabilitative benefits in specific disorders among individual conditions. For people with conditions like intellectual disability and cerebral palsy, the use of dance therapy intervention demonstrated positive outcomes on the cognitive, emotional and social roots of activity (Dorn, 2011). These examples show numerous ways that Indian dance and dance therapy contribute to rehabilitation.

## 6. Cultural and Community Aspects

India's rich heritage of culture is captivantly represented through traditional dance, which has become an integral part of the nation's communities. It is an assortment of art that transcends beyond simple amusement and is an effective means for communicating unity within society, cultural identity, and devotion to religion. Each traditional dance form in India reflects the many traditions, customs, and beliefs of the communities of people which make up each of the nation's different geographic areas (O'Shea, 1998). Traditional Indian dances remained a part of all facets of life, but their main intent was to convey abstract notions of faith symbolically. Hindu philosophy emphasized the strong connection that exists between dance and religion from early on, and references to dance frequently depict dance performances in both secular and sacred contexts. The field of temple sculpture is an outstanding instance of this blending of religious and secular art; there as well secular subjects are frequently portrayed alongside the meticulously iconographic representation of deities. In India, dancing is conveyed through initiatives that reflect stories of heroes and deities. The focus is not the dancer but the concept being displayed. It is not only an artistic endeavor or diversion (Lavanya & Ramesh, 2017).

Traditionally, Bharatanatyam had been offered to the gods—especially Lord Shiva—as an auspicious tribute. The method of dancing is characterized by its deft footwork, complicated hand gestures (mudras), and emotive facial expressions that unite to tell stories about mythological and spiritual subject matter. Dancers in Bharatanatyam undergo prolonged instruction under the direction of seasoned gurus in order to internalize the philosophical foundations of the art form, making it far more than a physical performance but a spiritual journey. The intricate costumes, embroidered with traditional jewelry and embellishments, entice audiences for their grace and elegance while adding to the graphic majesty of Bharatanatyam presentations (Kang, 2020).

Kathak, a dance style that effectively integrates Hindu and Muslim cultural traditions, is a mesmerizing space that can be discovered in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Many Hindu rulers and Mughal emperors supported the expansion of Kathak in the royal palaces of North India, where it first emerged. Delicate spins (chakkar), emotive gestures (abhinaya), and speedy footwork (tatkar) are characteristic of Kathak storytelling, which conveys stories from Persian poetry, Indian folklore, and Hindu mythology (Lalli, 2004). Dancers and musicians collaborate in an appealing interaction that transports spectators to an earlier time of wealth and elegance, while the intricate rhythms of Kathak are frequently combined by the stunning observations of classical music. Beyond its aesthetically pleasing qualities, Kathak builds bridges across disparities in culture through encouraging harmony and understanding among individuals with disparate backgrounds in religion and culture (Skiba, 2017).

The sculptures that embellish the state of Odisha in the east excite the motions that comprise ancient Odissi art, which cultivates like a lovely verse. The leisurely beauty of Odisha's landscape and the rich folklore of its people are apparent in Odissi's delicate postures, complex expressions, and flowing movements. Based on the spiritual customs of Vaishnavism, Odissi is frequently shown as a means of prayer, with dancers portraying the ethereal beauty of idols like Lord Jagannath and Radha-Krishna. The complex patterns and patterns that inspire a sense of enduring elegance and sophistication are indicative of the clothing depicted in ancient temple sculptures, as are the jewelry and costumes carried by Odissi dancers. The ancient custom of Odissi dancers has been preserved and continued on by them in order to honor their cultural heritage and act as custodians of a sacred legacy via their performances (Sikand, 2012).

Communities gather around to celebrate Navratri, a nine-day holiday devoted entirely to the worship of the Goddess Durga, through the colorful festivals of Garba and Dandiya Raas. Although Dandiya Raas contains rhythmic performances with sticks (dandiyas), it represents the amusing antics of Lord Krishna and Radha. Garba is a circular dance performed by ladies around an earthenware lamp (garbo), indicating the holy light of the goddess. People of different ages and backgrounds gather around to celebrate the festival's enthusiastic surroundings throughout these dances, and this serves as a means of social bonding and additionally a form of celebration. A magnificent and cheerful sight is produced by the participants' vibrant clothing, including traditional kediyus for men and embroidered chaniya cholis for women, adding to the content ambiance (Dave, 2009).

Manipuri dance's gracefulness emerges like a surreal dream, with its movements echoing the melodies of hymns from heritage and the rhythms surrounding nature. Manipuri dance, which finds its roots in the mystical practices of Vaishnavism, is characterized by its fluidity, grace, & spiritual zeal. Dancers frequently employ their performances to represent scenes from the lives of Lord Krishna and Radha. The magnificent costumes worn by the Manipuri dancers, which have complex patterns and themes rooted in nature, add to the dance's ethereal moral character and provoke a feeling of sublime transcends that takes the spectator to a world of transcendent beauty and happiness (Sana, 2020).

In addition, traditional dancing unifies people at celebrations such as weddings, festivals, and other cultural events by serving as a vibrant expression of social unity. Indian traditional dance, and this

transcends boundaries about language, religion, and place to bring people together in a shared celebration of history and tradition, is an ongoing testimony to the tenacity about cultural belonging and the enduring spirit of society as a whole whether it is performed in the revered halls of temples or on the bustling sidewalks of villages.

## **7. Challenges and Considerations**

Indian traditional dance is facing competition and exploitation in India and other countries. In India, dancers face numerous issues as they seek to stay relevant in contemporary society while keeping the purity of the form intact (Mandala, 2021). For instance, post-colonial governments linked art to nation-building, leading to the classification of modern dance styles as classical or neoclassical (Bharnuke, 2020). Classical and modern perspectives are critical in maintaining and developing Indian dance forms as older elements are fused with more recent structures (Karttunen, 2016).

### **7.1. Accessibility and Inclusivity**

Indian traditional dances such as Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, and Kathak have wide implications. These implications include cultural preservation, yet many other spheres are affected by Indian traditional dances. Thus, the development of such forms as Bharatanatyam might be viewed in terms of the balanced interaction of the conservative elements and the change. Change is not something that stands in opposition to the tradition; instead, it is something entirely comprehensive. In other words, traditional Indian dances provide individuals with access to cultural heritage, health implications, and ethical narratives, among various areas.

### **7.2. Addressing Cultural Appropriation**

Indian traditional dance, being deeply related to Hindu culture and ideals, carries a high amount of ritual and mysticism in it. The *Natyashastra* authored by Bharata Muni describes the divine nature of dance and the connection each performance allows man to make with the Absolute (Simoncelli, 2021). The concept of cultural appropriation refers to cases in which non-Indians make use of the Indian origins of a dance without understanding or appreciation for their meaning (Williams, 2000). Furthermore, the various dances, ceremonies, and rituals are often changed over time to fit different contexts, thus losing their true values. Therefore, the issue of cultural appropriation is still relevant to Indian traditional dance, despite its rich variety of folk styles (Riley et al., 2015).

### **7.3. Overcoming Stigma and Misconceptions**

Indian traditional dances, such as Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam, are considered a powerful narrative tool that can be used to confront and eliminate stigma and stereotypes in various situations (Darivemula et al., 2021; Tavormina & Tavormina, 2017). Indian movement art is united by the performance of certain idioms. This approach using a narrative can help professionals actively challenge uncritical judgment and express feelings while breaking barriers of help and social alienation (O'Shea, 1998). Additionally, the comparison between the two dance styles of Indian classical dance reveals artists' historical contributions and changes that have occurred, drawing attention to the concept of authenticity and authority. Classical Indian dance is united by some movements that were passed on by pedagogues and different teams. In addition, media plays a crucial role in reducing stigma creation, promoting of traditional dance techniques and reducing the stigma creation of hundreds of HIV/AIDS, utilizing strong formative research evidence strengthens the case that coordinatively incorporating cultural systems does have a stigma reduction effect (Catalani, 2013). This demonstrates the importance of using cultural factors in fighting stigma. High stigmatized successful people typically used a kind of empowerment model as a rejection of stigma.

## **8. Future Directions and Implications**

### **8.1. Preservation and Documentation**

Traditional Indian dances encompass a wide range of styles, including Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, and many others. There's a possibility that traditional dances will lose their authentic spirit due to contemporary society and globalization. Thus, ensuring the documentation and preservation of traditional dance styles is a necessary path to follow. This involves capturing dance technique, filming performances, and preserving oral narratives related to different mediums of art. In order to make sure that future generations are able to gain access to these irreplaceable cultural resources, digital platforms and technological innovations in multimedia can be greatly beneficial in this endeavor (Tiwari et al., 2023).

### **8.2. Integrating Current Elements**

Indian traditional dances evolved throughout ages in reaction to cultural, social, and institutional shifts; they have never been static. These forms of dance can be rendered easier to comprehend for spectators in modern times through the incorporation of contemporary elements yet preserving their basic principles. This might consist of preserving the originality of the traditional dance style while inserting aspects based on current music, choreography, or narrative content. Fusion performances, often combine indigenous Indian dance alongside other international dance styles, have the opportunity to expand an audience's accessibility and foster cross-cultural communication (Mallikarjuna & Bharathi, 2023).

### **8.3. Education and Training**

Initiatives for education and training are required to be financed while traditional Indian dances are to continue. This includes establishing official dance institutions of higher learning, supporting aspiring dancers with financial assistance and scholarships, and incorporating dance education into the curriculum of colleges and universities. Bridging the complexities of these art forms through one generation to the others necessitates providing young talent their opportunity to study underneath qualified experts and skilled mentors (Manjula, 2017).

### **8.4. Fostering Cultural Diplomacy**

Indian traditional dances may serve as strong symbols of culture on an international level. These dances can be used by governmental and non-profit organisations as tools of cultural diplomacy that encourage cooperation and understanding across nations. As a way to promote intercultural understanding and discussions, it is important to bring awareness of India's rich artistic heritage to audiences around the world through the organization's variety of mutually beneficial cultural activities, international dance occasions, and performance excursions (Sahay, 2019).

### **8.5. Social and Economic Empowerment**

For numerous communities, traditional Indian dances act as both a means of livelihood and an avenue for displaying culture. Their social and economic empowerment can be assisted by providing incentives in the form of healthcare benefits, and development of infrastructure support to creative individuals involved in various dance styles. In addition, promoting tourism in the immediate vicinity of cultural landmarks and performances of traditional dances helps promote sustainable development by raking in revenues for local organizations (Jha, 2021).

## Conclusion

Every society has a history of dance in its many forms. It serves not only as a means of relaxation and escape from daily routine, but in the absence of competition, it helps in improving physical and functional abilities of the performers. It can be said that dance can greatly impact both physical and psychological well-being. Indian classical dance forms can be used by groups that report barriers to practicing traditional exercise programs. For these groups, dance can be the preferred form of exercise. Studies all across the world have indicated the same results that traditional dance based interventions do have several physical and mental health benefits. Since every culture has their own unique dance style, that makes dance a well-accepted part of life for people across cultures. Even within Indian culture, dance has been recognized as a hobby and a worthy practice. Furthermore, Joshi (2022) added dancing to have physical and psychological benefits, trait emotional intelligence and self-esteem.

To conclude, the benefits of dance are many. With the passage of time dance is being used more and more as a therapeutic intervention. Indian classical dances can also offer the same benefits that western forms of dance can provide. Moreover, Indian dances have a great cultural significance since ancient times where stories of mythology come alive with magnificent dance moves. But with the passage of time, modernization and globalization have adversely impacted the trajectory of traditional dances. The scarcity of cultural knowledge, limited resources and lack of preservation of traditional dance have resulted in its downfall. Initiatives to revive our traditional dance forms ought to be taken not just by government but at community and individual level as well. The educational institutes should promote and propagate the knowledge of these dance forms, the community ought to encourage its participation in these dance forms on different occasions, and the government must make policies for the welfare of the traditional dancers and promotion of traditional dances.

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