

Dance Forms

The dance art of India has a history of around 2500 years, as evident from the Gandharva Veda. As per tradition, Nataraja Shiva is considered the first dancer of India. Two distinct styles of dance evolved from Shiva's influence. The first style is called Tandav, which portrays fierceness and destruction, reflecting Shiva's anger. In Tandav, Shiva holds a drum in his right hand and fire in his left hand, symbolizing the reduction of Kamadeva to ashes. Interestingly, the influence of Shiva's Tandav can be seen in the Kathak classical dance form that exists today.

However, Shiva's persona is not solely associated with fierceness; a gentle aspect is also depicted in certain idols where both the fierce and gentle forms coexist. This gentle form is represented through a dance called Lasya. Both Tandav and Lasya have influenced various styles of classical dance practiced in contemporary times.

When we categorize dance in India, we recognize two main types: classical dance and folk dance. Although there are numerous classical dance forms, they all share a common foundation based on Bharata's Natyashastra, an ancient treatise from the early centuries of Christ. These classical dances draw inspiration from shared narratives found in epics like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Quran, Gita Govinda, and others. Consequently, despite the apparent diversity, Indian culture emphasizes the underlying unity.

Question- Discuss the Tandava dance as recorded in the early Indian inscriptions.

[UPSC 2013]

Answer-The 'Tandav' dance embodies the cosmic system of creation and destruction, symbolizing the rhythm of life and death. According to tradition, Nataraja Shiva is regarded as the first dancer of India. From him, two early

styles of dance emerged - Tandav and Lasya. The knowledge about Tandav dance is derived from mythology, as well as ancient inscriptions and temple idols.

Shiva's anger finds expression in the 'Tandava' dance. As a dance of fury and devastation, Shiva holds a drum in his right hand and fire in his left hand while performing this dance. His third eye also opens during the dance, signifying its intense energy. It is believed that in this state, Shiva reduced Kamadeva to ashes. In the present day, we can observe the influence of Shiva's Tandav in the Kathak classical dance form.

■ Bharatanatyam

Bharatanatyam, a dance drama originating from Tamil Nadu, has flourished in the districts of Tanjore and Tirunelveli for centuries. The expressive movements and graceful postures of this art form bear a striking resemblance to the bronze sculptures found in South India. Originally performed by Devadasis in temples, it came to be known as Devadasi Attam. It is a religious dance that draws inspiration from stories found in Krishna Leela, Ramayana, and other religious texts. As the name suggests, its classical style and sequences are derived from Bharat Muni's Natyashastra. Traditionally, the music accompaniment is conducted by the dancer's teacher, but nowadays, men also perform this dance. Over the past 40 years, Bharatanatyam has gained worldwide acclaim, with notable performers including Mrs. Balasaraswati, Rukmani Devi, Yamini Krishnamurthy, Ramgopal, Vyjayanthimala, and Sonal Mansingh.

■ Kathakali

Kathakali is a dance form that originated in the Malabar region of Kerala state. The term "Kathakali" literally translates to "story performance." Maharaja Veer Kerala Varma of Travancore played a significant role in shaping

Kathakali into its present form. During the 17th century, he wrote several works in the vernacular Malayalam, which serve as the foundation for this captivating dance-drama. The tradition of Kathakali dates back approximately 2000 years and draws inspiration from the epic stories of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Shaiva literature.

Kathakali is performed outdoors and often continues throughout the night. The performance involves a narrator who tells the story, while the dancers convey the main actions solely through hand gestures known as mudras. In Kathakali, the dancer remains silent, as speaking or singing is prohibited. Traditionally, this dance form is exclusively performed by men and young individuals who skillfully portray female characters. Due to its complexity, participation in Kathakali is not mandatory for girls and women. A Kathakali dancer should master the Tandav and Lasya styles of movement. Additionally, the remarkable aspect of this dance lies in its elaborate costumes and intricate decorations. The face is adorned with vibrant colors such as red, green, black, or yellow, with white lines delicately drawn around the eyes. One of the most renowned and accomplished artists of Kathakali in the present era is Kunju Kurup.

■ Kathak

Kathak is the primary classical dance form of North India, which flourished under the influence of the Mughals on Indian culture. Its origins can be traced to the traditional pastimes of Krishna and Radha, performed in the temples of Mathura and Vrindavan. Additionally, Kathak developed within the court of the Nawab of Awadh.

The dance is widely known as 'Katha Kahe So Kathak Kehlae'. Kathak dance finds its roots in the stories of the Bhagavata Purana and is deeply intertwined with the love between Radha and Krishna. Consequently, it is often referred to as 'Natwari'. Kathak has gained popularity among both men and women due to its

incorporation of both Lasya and Tandava aspects. Its inclusive nature enables participation from both genders, establishing a close connection with the lives of the people.

The influence of the Mughals is evident in the elaborate costumes adorned in Kathak dance. Presently, Kathak is classified into three Gharanas: Lucknow Gharana, Jaipur Gharana, and Banaras Gharana. Eminent figures in the art form from the Lucknow Gharana include Acchanji Maharaj, Shambhu Maharaj, and Lachhu Maharaj. Among them, Birju Maharaj, who sadly passed away on January 17, 2022, is hailed as a maestro of Kathak dance.

■ Manipuri

Manipuri is a delicate dance form originating from the state of Manipur, located in the northeastern region of the country. It dates back approximately 2500 years and is based on the NatyaShastra of Bharata. The dance's narratives often revolve around the lives of Radha, Krishna, and the Gopis. Moreover, it showcases the influences of both Shaiva and Vaishnava ideologies. Manipuri dance embodies both Lasya and Tandav aspects. It features compositions by renowned poets like Jayadeva, Chaitanya, and Vidyapati. The essence of Manipuri lies in its Rasleela performances.

One remarkable characteristic of Manipuri dance is its versatility, as it can be performed solo, as a duet, or in a group. The costumes worn by Manipuri dancers are equally unique. They typically wear long, shiny ghagras (skirts) with expandable cardboard underneath. These skirts are adorned with round pieces of glass. The credit for popularizing this dance style goes to the great poet Rabindranath Tagore, while Shri Udayashankar played a significant role in promoting it worldwide. Among the present artists, Naina Zaveri and her sisters are considered exceptional performers of Manipuri dance.

■ Odissi

The Odissi dance is a 2000-year-old classical dance form from Odisha, based on the Natya

Shastra of Bharata. Initially, it developed within the temples and later found its way into the courts. It was popular in the temples of Bhubaneswar, Konark, and Puri, with depictions of this dance adorning their walls. Odissi dance shares roots with Bharatanatyam.

Renowned artists like Sanjukta Panigrahi, Sonal Mansingh, and Madhuri Mudgal have made significant contributions to this captivating dance form.

■ **Kuchipudi**

This dance-drama originates from the village of Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh. Its themes are drawn from epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata. The art form was initiated by Siddhendra Yogi, who provided the initial training to young Brahmin boys from Kuchipudi. The performance of this dance begins with worship rituals.

■ **The other Classical Dance**

Among these, Bhagavath Mela, Mohiniyattam, and Katha Kuruvanki are famous. Bhagavata Mela is celebrated every year on the occasion of Narasimha Jayanti in the village of Melattur, Tamil Nadu state.

Mohiniyattam- is based on Hindu mythology, where Mohini portrays the role of a seductress to attract Shiva. It is a fusion of Bharatanatyam and Kathakali, accompanied by Carnatic music and Malayalam songs. Late Chinnamu Amma and Kalyani Kutty Amma have gained tremendous fame in this dance form.

Similarly, **Krishna Attam** is a beautiful dance form originating from the state of Kerala. The **Kuruvanki**, on the other hand, is a popular rhythmic dance drama from Tamil Nadu, involving the participation of 4 to 8 women. This dance form combines elements of both folk and classical styles of Indian dance.

■ **The Satriya Dance of Assam**

In the Assamese language, satras are called mathas or viharas. Traditionally, this dance was performed in monasteries and viharas. The great

Vaishnava saint Shankar Dev of Assam composed this dance in the 15th century. For approximately 500 years, Satriya dance remained confined within the boundaries of monasteries and viharas. However, recently, Satriya dance has been recognized as an Indian classical dance form, and it is now being performed on stage.

■ **The Yakshagana**

Yakshagana is a dance-drama deeply rooted in rural Karnataka, blending the elements of dance and drama. Its essence lies in 'Gaan,' which signifies music. For nearly 400 years, this captivating art form has delved into subjects derived from Hindu epics. Although the language used is Kannada, the costumes bear a striking resemblance to those seen in Kathakali. Within Yakshagana, Jesters and Sutradhar play significant roles, adding depth and charm to the performances.

Music Arts

■ **Since Ancient India**

The development of music in India has a rich and extensive history. Firstly, the mention of Gandharva Veda in the Vedic period sheds light on the description of music and dance. Prior to that, the Samaveda is also regarded as an important treatise on music. Furthermore, Natyashastra, written by Bharata in the early centuries of the Christian era, provides insights into the three arts of music, dance, and drama.

Among the ancient Indian rulers, Samudragupta is said to have had a special interest in music. This is evident from one of his coins depicting him playing the veena. Additionally, the Paramara ruler Bhoja extended generous patronage to music. Similarly, music received encouragement from various Rajput rulers during the early medieval period, contributing to the development of classical music in India. Indian music is believed to have originated from Brahma, and Mahadev bestowed stability upon it. Indian classical music

comprises six ragas(Melody) and thirty ragani. The six ragas are Bhairavi, Hindola, Megh, Shiraag, Deepak, and Malkosh.

The Indian musical tradition continued its gradual evolution, with three important scholars known as '**Sangeet Ratnakar**' contributing significant texts on music in India. These scholars were Bhoja Parmar, the Chalukya ruler Someshwar, and Sarangdev in the Yadav court.

In the southern region, the Alvars and Nayanars played a pivotal role in promoting music in their own unique ways. They expressed their emotional devotion to God through their songs. Based on the teachings of these saints, Carnatic music was formally established in the 15th century by an esteemed saint of South India.

