

CLASSICISM IN INDIAN DANCE STYLES: NATYA, NṚTTA AND NṚTYA

Manasi Raghunandan

Abstract

BharataNāṭyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Mohini Attam, Manipuri, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Sattriya are considered as the Indian classical dance forms. It has a long established timeline of its origin, history and development. And there are several factors affecting the structure of the current format of these classical dance forms, however, each dance form which falls under the classical genre, does have a great source of base from the Natya Shastra and later, influence from Abhinaya Darpana and the latter books on dance.

Classicism in Indian classical dance is non-obsolete as in India people follow the traditions, mythology and cultural aspects closely. Indian dance of the classical genre is not confined any more to the boundaries of being strictly religious in nature however, one cannot identify Indian classical dance without the Indian philosophical ideologies and has socio-spiritual substance

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India, the land of diverse cultures, traditions and ancient practices, is the most celebrated place of pioneering complex, intricate and technical genres of music, dance alongside spirituality. Indian dances cannot be considered to be in its full identity, if the classical forms are not spoken about. Classical practice is an integral part of the Indian society and has been a key source to put India strong up ahead, on the world cultural map. Indian classical dance is complete in its technique and form when it is mapped with classical music, literature, its history along with the geographical and regional interdependences as well as socio-cultural impressions, visible in it.

Perhaps one of the oldest dance practices of the world, Indian classical dance stands out with few peculiarities and specifications. To analyze it and to look at it against the folk dance forms, regional forms and tribal forms of dance, it is inevitable to break it down into its macro form and comprehend what these building blocks have decoded within them.

Natya, Nṛtta and Nṛtya are the structural elements that help analyze study and appreciate the classicism in Indian dance styles.

WHAT IS CLASSICISM?

Classicism is the following of traditional and long-established theories or styles. It also follows the meaning of being a classic expression or a classical idiom - Classicism.

HOW IS CLASSICISM TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN THIS TOPIC'S CONTEXT?

Classicism in the context of the topic of this paper refers to the art produced in antiquity in reference to the tradition, or later inspired by that of antiquity.

Classicism, in the arts, can also be defined as referring generally to a high regard for a classical period. The art of classicism typically seeks to be formal and restrained. It also refers to the classical antiquity in the tradition which sets the standards for taste. These, the classicists seek to emulate.

As per the dictionary meaning, in its purest form, classicism is an aesthetic attitude dependent on principles based in culture, art and literature of ancient Greece and Rome, with the emphasis on form, simplicity, proportion, clarity of structure, perfection, restrained emotion as well as explicit appeal to the intellect.

However, in this paper, Classicism is looked out at a broader sense and not being restricted to that of ancient Greece and Rome but Classicism in the context of tradition, looking at the Indian classical dance forms.

WHAT ARE CLASSICAL INDIAN DANCE STYLES?

BharataNāṭyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Mohini Attam, Manipuri, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Sattriya are considered as the Indian classical dance forms. It has a long established timeline of its origin, history and development. And there are several factors affecting the structure of the current format of these classical dance forms, however, each dance form which falls under the classical genre, does have a great source of base from the Natya Shastra and later, influence from Abhinaya Darpana and the latter books on dance.

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WHAT IS NATYA, NṚTTA AND NṚTYA?

Nṛtta the rhythmic element is composed of only pure dance and with feature striking and elegant poses, but have no expressional meaning and symbolism. There is only physical creativity but no story, theme or narrative.

Even the *hasta*-s become just as a piece of decoration. Nṛtta corresponds to rhythmic movements of the body has just an aesthetic value so do not convey any mood or meaning and its purpose is just creating beauty by making various patterns, lines in space and time.

According to **Abhinaya Darpana**, 'Bhaavabhinayaheenamtunrittmitiyabhdheeyate', that is, that dance which does not relate to any Psychological State (bhaava) is called Nṛtta.

Nṛtta is that form of dance which is void of flavour (rasa) and mood (bhava). Nṛtta and Nṛtya constitute as a separate art. The ordinary performance consists of alternate nṛtya, the former consisting of set dances with some special subject, and accompanied by varied gesture, the latter merely moving to and fro, marking time with the feet, and so forth. It refers instead to the danced interpretation of a poem or a work of literature expressed as songs. Nṛtya corresponds to the mime performed to the song. That is in other words, it is the Interpretative dance. The vaachikaabhinaya of natya where the actors themselves use speech is replaced by the music and song which accompanies dance.

According to **Abhinaya Darpana**, 'Rasabhaavavyanjanadiyuktamnrittamitiryate, etannnutyammahaaraajsabhaayaamkalpayetsadaa', that is, that dance which relates to Sentiment (rasa) and Psychological States (bhaava) is called Nṛtya

Natya This term this is often translated with "dramatic art". In the portion of dramatics the abhinaya through the face and body of the actress-dancer transforms itself into an elaborated alphabet of symbols that are able to tell stories, to interpret lyrics, to communicate emotions, images and thoughts.

This is explained by a verse of the **Natya Shastra** saying: "when the representation of the *deva* (gods), the *daitya* (demons), the kings, the heads of the family and their daily activities is expressed through the gestures of the body and everything which is correlated to them, then it is the natya" (Natyashastra, I,121).

WHAT IS NATYA SHASTRA?

When classicism is explored in the subject of Indian classical dance, through the point of view of classicism with tradition, one cannot omit speaking of the Natya Shastra. Classicism is the following of traditional and long-established theories or styles, and in this context reference to the Natyashastra as a point of origin to understand, appreciate, learn, interpret and reproduce Indian classical dance and aesthetics through the theoretical.

A manuscript, a work of literary significance and of the highest importance for a deeper insight on navigating into the world of Indian drama, dance and music is Natya Shastra. This was authored by Sage Bharata around the 2nd C. BCE. This is a very important *veda* for artists and learners as it is the factor that brings the classicism in the foreground while looking at Indian classical dances.

Major traditional dance institutions, several revered gurus, several schools, few important research institutions and college of performing arts in India, dialects of styles and genres and traditional codified structure of teaching methodology being followed from time to time is what keeps classicism in Indian classical dance intact.

It would not be wrong to think of Natya Shastra doing the function of simulation or acting as a simulator for even the learners of classical dance. This is because such aspects falling in Natya and Nṛtta reproduced in a piece of *abhinaya* using Ashtanayikas and ashtarasas would be an adept. To elaborate more on how classicism comes in from Natya Shastra, thinking of a simulation is the imitation of the operation of a real-world process or system over time would be the best example. Simulations require the use of models; the model represents the key characteristics or behaviors of the selected system or process, whereas the simulation represents the evolution of the model over time. Following the same on *Ashtanayika* or *ashtarasas* makes one better and well practiced before embarking upon the stage.

NATYA, NṚTTA AND NṚTYA- HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY POINTS OF CLASSICISM TRACED:

In Odissi, the Nṛtta *hasta*-s and Nṛtya *hasta*-s are those passed down from Guru to Shishya-s generation after generation. These Nṛtta *hasta*-s and Nṛtya *hasta*-s are holding highest form of classicism and is one of the many examples that need to be highlighted.

Example of single and double hand paramparik Nṛtta and Nṛtya *hasta*-s exclusively used in Odissi are – *Tambula, Bana, Banshi, gabakhya, Deepa, shukhachanchu, bardhamanaka, bastra, balaya, ubhaya kartari, Padma, baddha karkatika, pechamukha, dhanu.*

For example, the hand gestures described in the Natya Shastra are followed closely and strictly in Odissi, thus completing the circle of traditional learning and knowledge.

In Kathakali, the example of following the make-up customs, color code costumes for characters can be one of the best to understand classicism in Natya category and how it affects the dramaturgy of this form of dance.

For example, the *chaturvida nayaka-s* can be very well understood as each different, as soon as the dancer-actor enters the stage.

The green representing the satvik nature, closer to the godliness, and speaking of Dhirothaata Nayaka- s the Pacha which means green goes apt. These would be for characters such as Yudhistira, Arjun. And similarly for red, black and yellow colors there are codifications.

Further classicism is reflected when one looks at the ratio and proportion of the division of Natya, Nṛtta, Nṛtya in the nature of the repertoire as a picture at large, one can observe the following-

HOW DOES THE RENDERING STYLE DIFFER IN DIFFERENT INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE STYLES?

From the traditional passing down of the theoretical and practical aspects of dance, these units can be understood as joining of dots together to bring out a complete picture. In these classical dance forms of India, the *padabhedas*, the *grivabhedas*, the *shirobhedas*, the *dhrishtibhedas*, the *hasta bhedas*, the *urobhedhas*, the *kattibhedas* are just few examples of the units covered. Along with this the *nayikabhedas* and the *navarasas* are also explained in detail.

The structural elements which help in categorization of *angaharas*, *mandalas*, *rechikas*, *chaaris*, *bhramaris*, *aadavus*, *korvais*, *arasas*, *tirmanams*, *todas*, *tukdas*, *chaukas* or *thribhanga-s* are built on the basic units that have branched as aspects of different dance forms of today.

The repertoire of these dance forms focus on pieces that are codified and defined and are crafted on rules of pattern to be followed by the dancer. The pieces in the repertoire are based on the ratio and proportion in which the division of the structural elements of Natya, Nṛtta, Nṛtya is done. This becomes highly important to understand for learning and analyzing the similarities and differences in the selected classical dance forms of India.

HOW CAN INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCES BE UNDERSTOOD AS CLASSICAL DANCES AND WHAT MAKES THEM CLASSICAL IN NATURE?

Classical dance forms have an age old tradition, practice passed down from generation to generation and staunch as it followed the *gurukula parampara* and embraces the *guru – sishya* learning methodology, even till date.

IF NATYA , NṚTTA AND NṚTYA CONTRIBUTE TO BUILDING CLASSICISM IN INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE STYLES?

The division of these components in the repertoire of Indian classical dance forms the way they are interpreted represented and rendered stands varied however, these components hold the importance of being a part of the strict training methodology and works as a manual and even similar to that of being the Morse code for the advance learns.

Since Indian classical dance is a vast subject, the identified limitation during a research would be that of incorporating all forms of Indian classical dance styles. Therefore, in this paper, the research is confined to, as far as possible, four classical dance forms. These, that would be looked at closely in this research are BharataNātyam , Kathak, Odissi and Kathakali. And for additional reference purposes the other classical dance forms of India, when necessary.

Division of Nṛtta, Nṛtya and Natya in the recital of Kathakali

How the size, structure and theme of the presentation has undergone a major shift over the period of years. Its origin can be traced down to the Malabar region and specifically to the Kerala state. The origin can be traced to as early as 300 years ago. It is a form of ballet.

i. Kathakali is usually performed during the late evenings and night times. In the initial phase, a special stage built-up was not essential for a presentation of Kathakali. It was also presented in an open ground, and sometimes, just a slightly elevated mud platform higher raised above the ground. In the olden days, there wouldn't be a curtain, light and sound system for the presentation. To have some light, hugh Copper lamps lit by adding oil and cotton buds. The presentation would commence only by 9 pm and some of the presentations would be going on for 7 days, with each performance commencing by 9 pm to end by early morning.

The stories chosen would be from the Purana-s and the stories were philosophical and spiritual in nature highlighting the stories that can provide moral outcomes and a divine enlightenment.

It is also interesting to note that the place where the performance was to be presented, the villagers would be notified by the announcement that would be done by 2 or 3 people using the *dhol* (a percussion instrument) intimating about the same.

Kathakali presentation would begin by the main artist coming on to the stage, half an hour before hand. But the audience members wouldn't be seeing him as he presents somber movements behind a colorful and traditional curtain, which would be held by two other assistants on the either sides. This act is known as *Thokayam* and the curtain is known as *Theresheela*.

Below the curtain, the dancer's leg and leg movements will be visible and sometimes, the dancer stretches his hand above his head, which would make his hand movements visible beyond the curtain top brim. The tempo of the music played by the musical instruments increases as this piece of showcase reaches to its introductory zenith and then suddenly the assistants would pull away the curtain and move out of the stage.

This dance form usually heavily uses the *natya* aspect and uses *abhinaya* as its integral component. Along with facial expression, hand gestures, body movements add to the character and the story depiction. The learning and practicing of this form of dance is very difficult and requires lot of dedication. Unlike other Indian classical dance forms, Kathakali is more drama technique oriented in its presentation approach.

ii. Kathak means to tell or to narrate a story. This form of dance is believed to have originated in the Northern part of India, especially in the UttarPradesh and has also been spread across the state of Rajasthan. There is a mention about Kathakaar-s in Ramayana and in Mahabharata as well. The Kathakaar-s would sing songs, dance and narrate stories of moral values, to pass on the songs from the mahakavya-s and ethical stories or stories of philosophical or religious importance. During the same time, the popularization of Vaishnavism was at its zenith in the northern part of India. Therefore important episodes from the stories of Lord Krishna were chosen and woven together in the pieces of this dance form.

From being a form which spreads the knowledge of stories of philosophical, moral, spiritual and social it sadly, due to historical reasons saw a downfall and ended up being an entertaining form of dance for the court presented by the courtesans.

Thereafter the form of dance saw two major distinct styles, namely the Lucknow *gharana* and the Jaipur *gharana*. Later the Banaras *gharana* had also branched out. The themes of the Lucknow *gharana* revolve around entertainment. The themes of the Jaipur *gharana* revolve around Hinduism and episodes of knowledge from important songs or stories. Kathak heavily draws from ancient treatises such as the *Natya Shashtra* and the *Abhinaya Darpana*.

In the *Nr̥tta* section of Kathak, the *thath* sequences are initially done. This employs slow, somber movements of head, eye and neck and the bols are rendered by the employment of *tala* which the same is showcased through the footwork. In the *Nr̥tta* section there is *Tora*, *tukra*, *parhant*, *paran*.

The *Nr̥tta* section also has the *tatkar*-s which is associated with the beats of the dancer's footwork, elaborated with the sound of the *gunghrooh* and matching with the sound of the beats given by the musical instruments accompanying.

Abhinaya is the *Nr̥tya* section and is usually in a slower tempo. The lilting music and elaborative time gives an effect that helps the dancer render the story though body movements, gestures and most importantly the facial expressions.

iii. Odissi –

History says that "Gotipua" is a precursor to Odissi dance and therefore its development chronologically falls between the Mahari dance tradition and the Odissi dance tradition.

The reasons for its origin actually fall to the period where the Mahari dance tradition of the temple was on the verge of complete downfall. The situation due to various ill reasons didn't leave space for the Maharis to continue dancing in the temples and surely it was not easy for women to dance and move around, performing at several places, at that point of time.

Later, young boys were chosen and were taught dancing. This would help the dance tradition remain alive in some form or the other. They were known as *Gotipua pilas*, *sangeet pila* or *akhada pilas*. Moreover these young boys were very flexible and could easily do acrobatic movements too, which is an important part of a Gotipua presentation.

Also Vaishnavism was to be brought to foreground so Gotipua became one of the mediums to popularize it. Gotipua gurus lived a life of struggle and kept the tradition alive; however it is interesting to note that some of the major teachers of Odissi were earlier Gotipua artists themselves.

In the *Nr̥tta* section, the *tribhanga* and the *chauka* are the most important positions in this dance form. In *Nr̥tta* and *Nr̥tya* sections, the lucid torso movements add up to the grammar of this dance form, peculiar enough to bring classicism strongly in. Inspired much from Mahari and Gotipua, the refined form and more classical form, Odissi consists of 5 to 6 items. They are *Mangalacharan*, *Batu*, *Pallavi*, *Abhinaya* and *Mokshya*. What is missing in the current Odissi and is there in Gotipua is the "Bandha *Nr̥tta*" which is full of acrobatic movements merged with pure dance movements. Otherwise, much of a similar structure drawn from *Natya*, *Nr̥tta* and *Nr̥tya* is utilized in Odissi dance with some more refinement.

iv. BharataNātyam -

BharataNātyam is believed to have originated from the Southern states of India. It is one of the oldest classical dance forms of India and is also said to be one of the matured forms of Art.

It has a religious as well as a philosophical bend and is also known to be a part of the temple culture. It is an integral part of the Indian culture and traditions. It also is an example of how the *guru-shishya parampara* has been in the Indian cultural context as one of the oldest and best methodologies of teaching and learning.

BharataNātyam also known as Dasiattam and Sadir Nātyam is associated with women offering dance offerings as a prayer to the deity in the temple. Thus the *devadasi* system of the Indian temple culture was strongly rooted. The *Devadasi* system was considered of a noble and higher repute and the women who were the *devadasi*-s were considered as the family of the Lord

Unfortunately due to some reasons there was a decline in the system of the *Devadasi*, which was considered as pure earlier saw it utmost downfall. Those who tried to safeguard it were few *devadasi*-s and their *natuvanaar* guru-s. The base of this form of dance is based on the structures prescribed on the Hindu Shastra-s such as the Nātya Shastra and Abhinaya Darpana.

In this form of dance, there is a good balance of the ratio and the proportion of Nṛtta and Nṛtya which can be well observed in the pieces of the repertoire.

Apart from Nṛtta and Nṛtya, Nātya component is also used in the presentation. Branched out from BharataNātyam, Kuruvanji and Bhagwatmelanatakam are considered to be using the Nātya component. Kuruvanji uses subtle movements in the presentation. Kuruvanji is practiced and performed by female exponents where as Bhagwatmelanatakam is practiced and performed by Men.

The Guru conducts the teaching and training as well as conducts the performance with music accompanists. He uses a *natuvangam* to conduct, what is known as cymbals, made out of metal. In the olden days, the instruments accompanied for the recital would include a *mridangam*, a violin along with a *nadaswaram*.

During the development phase, local influence of the language and literature came to the foreground and thus we seen most of the traditional items from the *margam* of BharataNātyam include languages such as Sanskrit, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam. The genres and schools/ styles of BharataNātyam also branched out slowly.

BharataNātyam training would begin with the training of the basic exercises, basic posture counting and rhythm oriented, speed oriented *adavus*.

It would generally include practical usage of *shiro bheda*, *dhrishthi bheda*, *griva bheda*, *pada bheda*, *hasta-s* and so on along with posture counting and balance exercises such as that of *aramandi*, *mula mandi*, *aalidha*, *pratyalidha* and so on. In the *aadavus* sections sets of *aadavus* such as the *tat-aadavu*, *nat-aadavu*, *sarikal aadavu*, *utplavana-s*, *mandi aadavus* and so on. So one can observe that in the format of learning the Nṛtta components are focused at a higher level in the beginning phase

The learning and understanding of the *tala* system and speaking of the *shollakattu* for the same. The angular, linear and geometric patterns of this dance forms come naturally out in the dancer learning this dance form as from the beginning the emphasis is laid on the *angashuddhi* aspect

The BharataNātyam repertoire includes in Nṛtta pieces includes - Pushpanjali, Alarippu, Jatiswaram and Tillana. The Nṛtya pieces include- Shabdham, Padam, Varnam. There are few other pieces also which are sometimes included in the presentation of the *margam* of BharataNātyam, which include pieces such as Churnika, Kautuvam, Devarnama, Slokam,

It is also good to understand that the choice of the raga-s of the music for each piece will help enhance the Nṛtta, Nṛtya or Nātya elements of the pieces.

HOW DOES ONE TRY MAPPING NATYA, NṚTTA AND NṚTYA IN INDIAN DANCE FORMS INEVITABLE TO OBSERVE CLASSICISM?

Classicism in Indian classical dance is like a synonym to Indian traditions and culture because it belongs to a longer and elaborative as well as distributive timeline of the chart of history, geography and the social structure of this country. Natya, Nṛtta and Nṛtya as explained theoretically in Natya Shastra and practiced and performed as well as taught by the Gurus, passed down from generation to generation and decades to decades, makes it inevitable to map natya, Nṛtta and Nṛtya to observe classicism. Lot of research and studies can be done in this field to understand the vastness and richness which makes classicism non-obsolete in Indian classical dance forms.

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