

INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE – ITS FACETS, IMPACTS AND ROLE IN THE SOCIETY

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Abstract

All Indian Performing Arts in general and Classical Dance in particulars have a lofty aim to achieve. It is not mere entertainment but is full of depth and thought. This article gives the insight into the impact and role of Arts in Society for contributing towards Value Education in the true sense.

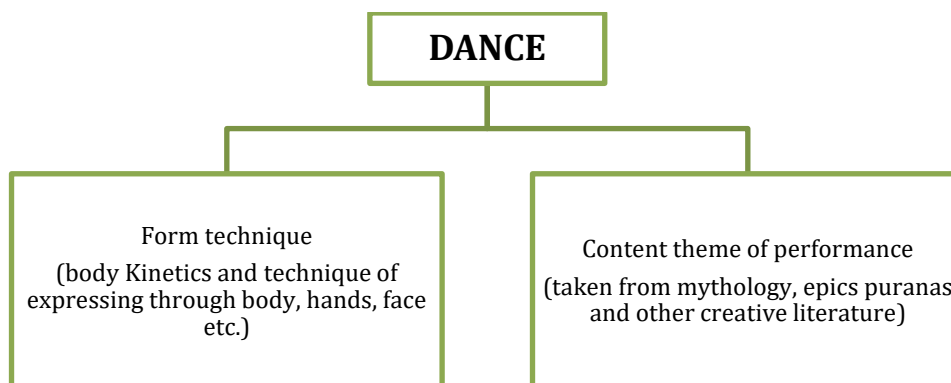
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Performing Arts by itself from antiquity has always been much more than mere performance and Indian Classical Dance is no exception. Dance inculcates a balanced personality with focus, discipline and dedication and this reflects immensely in the dancer's multi-faceted role in today's times. A dance teacher while teaching dance contributes humongously towards shaping of a student's overall personality and all-encompassing growth.

Formal academics in Indian Classical dance was introduced by Padmabhushan Dr.(Smt.) Kanak Rele wherein Degrees (Bachelors), Masters and Ph.D in Dance were commenced with the affiliation of University of Mumbai at Nalanda. Formal education in Dance and its allied arts and synthesis of academics and research in Dance has enhanced and enriched the understanding as a performer. Just as beauty without brain has no significance, performance without knowledge has no depth. It only gives the superficial and surface knowledge which is negligible.

In today's times when one speaks of "Quality Education" or "Education beyond classroom teaching" or "Value Education", dance does this in most appropriate manner.

When one speaks about Indian Classical Dance, There are two aspects:



When one delves deeper into the art, one observes that through technique the lofty ideas are communicated in performing arts. The lofty ideas also contain philosophy and spiritualism and this goes hand in hand in Indian Classical Dance. The stories depicted or narrated somewhere reiterate the strong moral or ethical aspect. In fact the very origin of drama, as mentioned in Naatyaveda (the fifth Veda), is noteworthy here. It is said that when there was suffering and negative emotions like envy, jealousy, greed etc. all around, the living beings approached Lord Brahma, the Creator, to create a "plaything"- "kridaniyaka" which can be both "audio"- "sravya" as well as "visual - "drishya". The new creation was supposed to "edutain" in the true sense of the word, educate as well as entertain the people.

This emergence of drama itself reveals the importance of art in the society at macro level and its importance in the life of an individual at the micro level. It is also believed that both the auditory and visual senses are the most powerful ones which leaves the lasting impression on the minds of human beings. So this new creation was supposed to retain and reveal truths in the minds of the spectators. (Ghosh. M, 1967, p 2)

The Aitreya Brahmana also gives the earliest definition of art. According to it, a work of art must be i) A work of skill ii) Chhandomaya i.e. it must be endowed with chhanda. Chhanda is an overall Indian term for rhythm, balance, proportion, harmony etc. Chhanda could be as varied as human imagination, skill and ingenuity. The classification was not done on the basis of simplicity or complexity or on the degree of the skill required. (Ray. N, 1974, p 75)

According to the Indian tradition there was no sharp distinction made between art and craft or fine arts or applied arts etc. All skilful human activities were called “Shilpakarma” and the art was called “Shilpa”. The literary activity was known as “Kavikarma”. “Shilpa” or art was a concrete form of desire which could be created by the interaction of man and his visible world around him and his invisible world of ideas, visions, thoughts etc. Thus it was merging of the adrishtha, the invisible and drishtha, the visible. It is believed that the artist transforms the outer world by a touch of his inward gaze which he externalises by his exclusive creation of art.

This “internalization” into “externalization” gives art a special status and it helps to culture or civilise the feelings and emotions of the human beings. “Why does man make Shilpa (art)? The straight and unequivocal answer of the Aitreya sage is: man makes art to cultivate or culture his own self (aatmaanaam samskrute). The question is pursued no further nor the answer amplified in explanation, evidently because the person or persons to whom these words are addressed, knew the then current meaning of the term samskaara (to improve, to sharpen, by a constant process of culture or cultivation of the soil of life) and no further elucidation was considered necessary (Roy. N, 1974, p 75). This concept is nothing but to generate healthy human beings (both mentally and physically) or “ideal human capital” for the society.

When one studies Arthashastra of Kautilya (400 BC), the economist of our History of the Gupta Period, one observes the importance of art and artists in the society. His Arthashastra throws light on the status enjoyed by dancers in the society. A Rajanartaki or a courtesan used to be given a special status. She may be looked down upon morally due to her controversial way of living but her presence would get lot of revenue for the state. He also states that the visiting actors have to pay for his license fee for the performance in the other states. According to Kautilya every citizen must co-operate in preparing a public play and contribute for the same. During his time professional dancer and actor has achieved a definite status in the society and arts were no longer hobbies. The professional actor, singer, dancer were clearly distinguished. The distinction between the dancer who performs for the state (Rajjanartaki or Ganikaa) and the devadaasis who performed for state is clearly mentioned. It is said that Amrapali, the great and beautiful dancer was like a precious gem for the state and the king as people used to travel from far and wide just to have a glance of her or see her dance. She was a scholarly woman. Actually not only her, all the courtesans or devadaasis were noted for their knowledge on almost all the subjects be it politics, philosophy, spiritualism etc.

So one can understand the importance of art and its unparalleled contribution in human life. It is strongly believed that “art” civilizes, sensitises people and balances the Emotional Quotient (EQ) of an individual. The stress level has increased in today’s times as we have forgotten to stay in harmony and coherence with our own self and our fellow beings. Today there is specialization and fragmentation in society with immense technical knowledge but the essence of humanity is lacking and so lot of disharmony in organizations, institutions and society at large exists and this somewhere reflects in productivity and end result of every unit of the society. If as an individual one is not at peace with oneself then what peace or quality of life one will generate around oneself? This is the main role of performing arts in general and dance in particular. It fills these gaps of human life.

In Nalanda it has been emphasised that through Dance Education we create “Cultural Ambassadors” or “Total Dancers”. This can be possible with understanding the duty as a citizen of the country and also as a mediator or link between two generations to pass on our rich tradition, art, culture etc.

The items like “Ardhanarishwara” in Dance gives importance to balanced “male-female” principle where none is superior than the other. In today’s times it is spoken about “empowerment of women” but in traditional shastras “women” is referred as “Shakti” (energy, power). The appropriate example of the shakti concept is the oldest and the most unusual representation based on this duality of sexes i.e. the male and the female principle – Shiva and Shakti, is revealed by the yantra “mani-dvipa” or “Island of Jewels”. This is a beautiful pictorial representation exhibiting Devi as Shakti (also understood as Maya) and the two figures of Shiva. The goddess is

red in colour, the colour that suggests creativity and activity. She is called vimarsha shakti, vimarsha meaning deliberation, reasoning, etc. and shakti means 'energy'. She represents the maternal aspect of the whole world. She sits upon the two corpse-like male figures lying one upon the other. The upper one is the sakala shiva where 'kala' means 'small without digits. This Shiva is dormant. The nishkala Shiva is also understood as the unmanifest form of the ultimate, which is neither male nor female, and is the foundation on which rests the manifested form of the universe i.e. Sakala Shiva, And Shakti is understood as the superintending deity of Shiva, thus her importance cannot be overlooked. Infact it is said that

॥ **vinaa shakti shivaha shavaha** ॥

Means without Shakti (Devi) Shiva is mere corpse.

If the Absolute Truth, the Ultimate (Lord Shiva) is corpse without its essence (energy female principle), where is the question of "empowerment of the empowered"? The society that exists on dichotomy and hypocrisy should go back to the original ideas and delve upon them to understand the broad thinking which already existed.

Indian classical dance reiterates these concepts and so is very deep in its nature. It gets body, mind and soul in alignment and hence its facets strikes a lifelong impact and its role is very significant in not only dancers life but also in the rasika connoisseur's mind.

"A dancer is not just a dancer. He / She is part of this environment. He / She does not exist in a vacuum. Society and its happenings have an impact on all individuals, especially artists. If an art form does not reflect the existing milieu, it stagnates." (Dr. Mansingh S)

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