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## Performing Art

In India, various facets of performing arts are all pervading bringing colour and joy to numerous festivals and ceremonies, and reaffirming the faith of the people in their heritage. These facets have been responsible for sustaining the long continuities of ancient traditions. They are the link between the past and the present. It thus exemplifies the complex, organic interaction of all aspects of life implicit in all tribal and folk art forms; art is not seen as something apart from life, a mere ornamentation or entertainment, but as an intrinsic part of it.



## Pre-historic Cave painting, Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh



Under the patronage of Kings and rulers, skilled artisans and entertainers were encouraged to specialize and to refine their skills to greater levels of perfection and sophistication. Gradually, the classical forms of Art evolved for the glory of temple and palace, reaching their zenith around India around 2nd C.E. onwards and under the powerful Gupta empire, when canons of perfection were laid down in detailed treatise - **the Natyashastra and the Kamasutra** - which are still followed to this day. Through the ages, rival kings and nawabs vied with each other to attract the most renowned artists and performers to their courts.

While the classical arts thus became distinct from their folk roots, they were never totally alienated from them, even today there continues a mutually enriching dialogue between tribal and folk forms on the one hand, and classical art on the other; the latter continues to be invigorated by fresh folk forms, while providing them with new thematic content in return. In addition, while links with their folk roots distinguish the regional classical art forms, the myriad folk forms throughout India are bound by common classical religious and mythological themes.



In India, religion, philosophy and myth can not be divorced from their art forms. Dance and music are tied inextricably to ceremony of any kind. Weddings, births, coronations, entering a new house or town, welcoming a guest, religious processions, harvest time , any or all of these are occasions for song and dance.

Music and dance are probably the most elemental art forms, spontaneously expressing the entire gamut of human emotions and



experiences. There are tribal belts throughout India, and although each tribe has its own distinctive music and dances, they all share a similar form, with men and women forming separate rows with linked arms and executing intricate leg movements in a gradually increasing tempo that builds up to a crescendo of vigour.

The folk music and dances of agricultural communities celebrate the rhythms of daily life, the turn of the seasons, the highlights of the agricultural calendar, religious festivals and important events that punctuate the flow of life, such as births and marriages. While folk music and dance share common themes and concerns, there is a wide variety of forms.



Along the entire Himalayan region, from Kashmir to Darjeeling, folk dancers link arms and sway gracefully in undulating movements, celebrate the sowing of the wheat crop; few can resist the infectious beat of the dholak, the two-sided drum, and pairs of dancers take turns to execute complex acrobatic movements in the centre of a circle of abandoned dancers.

Women perform the **Giddha**, also characterised by its spontaneous energy. Rajasthani women, their faces covered with flowing veils, are swirls of colour as they pirouette in the **Ghoomar dance**, while their counterparts in Gujarat perform the famous **Garba**, dancing in a circle with batons. Their men perform the **Dandiya Ras**, a more vigorous version of the same dance, leaping and crouching in twirling patterns. In the fishing communities of Maharashtra, men and women link arms and dance together and the women climb on to the men's shoulders to form pyramids. The women's **Lavani dance** from this area is notable for its unabashed sensuality. There are also several forms of dance-drama or folk theatre, such as the **Nautanki** of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the **Bhavai** of



Gujarat, the irreverent **Tamasha** of Maharashtra , the Bengali **Jatra**, the spectacular **Yakshagana** of Karnataka and **Theyyam** of Kerala, all of which narrate legends of local heroes, kings and deities.

Martial art forms throughout the country have been stylized to quasi dance forms, notable among which are the martial dances of the North-eastern hill tribes, the **Lazim dances** of Maharashtra, the **Kalaripayattu** of Kerala, and the highly stylized masked **Chhau dances** of Orissa, West Bengal and Bihar.

Together these dances have formed a vast reservoir from which the classical dances have drawn sustenance. There are **seven major classical dance styles** — Bharatnatyam from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, Kathakali, a classical dance-drama from Kerala, Manipuri from Manipur, Kathak from Uttar Pradesh, Odissi from Orissa, and Kuchipudi from Andhra Pradesh and Sattriya from Assam which has recently been included in the fold of Classical Dances. In their present format, their history cannot be traced back to over two to three hundred years, but they all have links with the ancient and medieval literary, sculptural and musical traditions of India and of their particular regions. They all adhere to the canons of classical dance laid down in the Natya Shastra, a second century C.E. text ascribed to the sage Bharata, to whom it was supposedly revealed by the Creator, Brahma.

Folk theatre and dance-drama were the common roots of both classical dance and theatre , the traditions of both of which were elaborated upon the Natyashastra.

Kalidasa is India's most famous poet and dramatist, and his plays are still performed today. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, the last ruler of Awadh, was a noted playwright and staged elaborate dramas at his court.

## Classic Dances

Dance in India has a rich and vital tradition dating back to ancient times. Excavations, inscriptions, chronicles, genealogies of kings and artists, literary sources, sculpture and painting of different periods provide extensive evidence on dance. Myths and legends also

support the view that dance had a significant place in the religious and social life of the Indian people. However, it is not easy to trace the precise history and evolution of the various dances known as the 'art' or 'classical' forms popular today.



In literature, the first references come from the Vedas where dance and music have their roots. A more consistent history of dance can be reconstructed from the epics, the several Puranas and the rich body of dramatic and poetic literature known as the **nataka and the kavya in Sanskrit**. A related development was the evolution of classical Sanskrit drama which was an amalgam of the spoken word, gestures and mime, choreography, stylised movement and music. From the 12th century to the 19th century there were many regional forms called the **musical play or sangeet-nataka**. Contemporary classical dance forms are known to have evolved out of these musical plays.



Excavations have brought to light a bronze statuette from Mohenjodaro and a broken torso from Harappa (dating back to 2500-1500 B.C.E.) These are suggestive of dance poses. The latter has been identified as the precursor of the Nataraja pose commonly identified with dancing Siva.

The earliest treatise on dance available to us is **Bharat Muni's Natyashastra**, the source book of the art of drama, dance and music. It is generally accepted that the date of the work is **between the 2nd century B.C.E- 2nd century C.E.** The Natyashastra is also known as the **fifth veda**.

According to the author, he has evolved this veda by taking words from the Rigveda, music from the Samaveda, gestures from the Yajurveda and emotions from the Atharvaveda. There is also a legend that Brahma himself wrote the Natyaveda, which has over 36,000 verses.

In terms of the classical tradition formulated in the Natyashastra, **dance and music are an inextricable part of drama**. The art of natya carries in it all these constituents and the actor is himself the dancer and the singer, the performer combined all the three functions. With the passage of time the status of an independent and specialised art, marked the beginning of the 'art' dance in India.

As per the ancient treatises, dance is considered as having three aspects: **natya, nritya and nritta**.

- Natya highlights the **dramatic element** and most dance forms do not give emphasis to this aspect today with the exception of dance-drama forms like Kathakali.
- Nrityais essentially **expressional, performed specifically to convey the meaning of a theme or idea**.
- Nritta on the other hand, is **pure dance where body movements do not express any mood (bhava), nor do they convey any meaning**.



To present nritya and natya effectively, a dancer should be trained to communicate the **navarasas**. These are:

1. love (shringaara),
2. Mirth (haasya),
3. compassion (karuna),
4. valour(veera),
5. anger (roudra),
6. fear (bhayanak),
7. disgust (bibhatsa),
8. wonder (adbhuta) and
9. peace (shaanta).

An ancient classification followed in all styles is of **Tandava and Lasya**.

- Tandava the masculine, is heroic bold and vigorous.
- Lasya the feminine is soft, lyrical and graceful.

**Abhinaya, broadly means expression.** This is achieved through

1. **angika**, the body and limbs,
2. **vachika** song and speech and
3. **aharya**, costume and adornment; and
4. **satvika**, moods and emotions.

**Bharata and Nandikesvara**, the main authorities conceive of dance as an art which uses the **human body as a vehicle of expression**. The major human units of the body (anga) are identified as the head, torso, the upper and lower limbs and the minor human parts (upangas), as all parts of the face ranging from the eyebrow to the chin and the minor joints.

Two further aspects of natya are the **modes of presentation and the style**. There are two modes of presentation, namely

1. the **Natyadharmi**, is the formalised presentation of theatre,
2. the **Lokadharmi** sometimes translated as folk, realistic, naturalistic or regional.

The style or vrittis are classified into **Kaishiki**, the deft lyrical more suited to convey the lasya aspects, the Arhati, the energetic masculine the **Satvati** often used while depicting the rasas and the Bharati, the literary content.

Nurtured for centuries, dance in India has evolved in different parts of the country its own distinct style taking on the culture of that particular region, each acquiring its own flavour. Consequently a number of major styles of 'art' dance are known to us today, like Bharatnatyam, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Kathak, Manipuri, Odissi and Sattriya. Then, there are regional variations, the dances of rural and tribal areas, which range from simple, joyous celebrations of the seasons, harvest or birth of a child to dances for the propitiation of demons or for invoking spirits. Today there is also a whole new body of modern experimental dance.

## **Bharatnatyam Dance**

Bharatnatyam Dance is considered to be **over 2000 years old**.

1. Several texts beginning with **Bharata Muni's Natya Shastra** (200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.) provide information on this dance form.



2. The **Abhinaya Darpana by Nandikesvara** is one of the main sources of textual material, for the study of the technique and grammar of body movement in Bharatnatyam Dance.
3. There is also a great deal of visual evidence of this dance form in paintings and stone and metal sculptures of ancient times. On the **gopurams of the Chidambaram temple**, one can see a series of Bharatnatyam poses, frozen in stone as it were, by the sculptor. In many other temples, the **charis and karanas** of the dance are represented in sculpture and one can make a study of the dance form.
4. Bharatnatyam dance is known to be **ekaharya**, where **one dancer takes on many roles in a single performance**.
5. In the early 19th century, the famous Tanjore Quartette, under the patronage of **Raja Serfoji** are said to have been responsible for the repertoire of Bharatnatyam dance as we see it today.
6. The style was **kept alive by the devadasis**, who were young girls 'gifted' by their parents to the temples and who were married to the gods. The devadasis performed music and dance as offerings to the deities, in the temple courtyards. Some of the renowned performers and gurus of the early part of the century belong to the devadasi families, a well-known name is **Bala Saraswati**.



The repertoire of Bharatnatyam is extensive, however, a performance follows a regular pattern.

1. At first there is an **invocation song**.
2. The first dance item is the **alarippu**, literally meaning - **to adorn with flowers**.
  - It is an abstract piece combining pure dance with the recitation of sound syllables.
3. The next item, the **jatiswaram** is a
  - short pure dance piece performed to the accompaniment of musical notes of any raga of Carnatic music.
  - **Jatiswaram has no sahitya or words, but is composed of adavus which are pure dance sequences - nritta.**
  - They form the basis of training in Bharatnatyam dance.



As a solo dance, Bharatnatyam leans heavily on the **abhinaya or mime aspect of dance - the nritya**, where the dancer expresses the sahitya through movement and mime.

4. **Shabdham** follows the jatiswaram in a Bharatnatyam dance performance. The accompanying song is generally in adoration of the Supreme Being.
5. After the shabdham, the dancer performs the **varnam**.
- The varnam which is the most important composition of the Bharatnatyam repertoire, encompasses both nritta and nritya and epitomises the essence of this classical dance form.
  - The dancer here performs complicated well graded rhythmic patterns in two speeds showing the control over rhythm, and then goes on to depict in a variety of ways, through abhinaya the lines of the sahitya.
  - This portrays the dancer's excellence in abhinaya and also reflects the endless creativity of the choreographer.

**The varnam is by far one of the most beautiful compositions in Indian dance.**



6. After the strenuous varnam, the dancer performs a **number of abhinaya items** expressing a variety of moods. The bhava or rasa is woven into the sahitya and then

expressed by the dancer. The common pieces are **keertanam, kritis, padams and javalis**.

- In the **keertanam, the text is important** whereas **kriti is a composition in which the musical aspect is highlighted**. Both are usually devotional in character and represent episodes from the lives of Rama, Siva, Vishnu, etc.
- Padams and javalis, are on the theme of love, often divine.

7. A Bharatnatyam performance ends with a **tillana** which has its origin in the tarana of Hindustani music. It is a **vibrant dance performed to the accompaniment of musical syllables with a few lines of sahitya**. The finale of the piece is a series of well designed rhythmic lines reaching a climax. The performance **ends with a mangalam invoking the blessings of the Gods**.

The accompanying orchestra consists of a vocalist, a mridangam player, violinist or veena player, a flautist and a cymbal player. The person who conducts the dance recitation is the **Nattuvanar**.



## Kathakali Dance

Kerala is the home of several traditional dance and dance - drama forms, the most notable being Kathakali.

Kathakali, as a dance form popular today, is considered to be of comparatively recent origin. However, it is an art which has evolved from many social and religious theatrical forms which existed in the southern region in ancient times.

- **Chakiarkoothu, Koodiyattam, Krishnattam and Ramanattam** are few of the ritual performing arts of Kerala which have had a direct influence on Kathakali in its form and technique. Legend has it that the refusal of the Zamorin of Calicut to send his Krishnattam troupe to Travancore, so enraged the Raja of Kottarakkara, that he was inspired to compose the Ramanattam.
- In the temple sculptures in Kerala and the frescoes in the **Mattancheri temple of approximately the 16th century**, dance scenes depicting the **square and rectangular basic** positions so typical to Kathakali are seen.
- For body movements and choreographical patterns, Kathakali is also indebted to the early martial arts of Kerala.



- Kathakali is a blend of **dance, music and acting and dramatizes stories**, which are mostly adapted from the Indian epics.
- It is a stylised art form, the four aspects of abhinaya - angika, aharya , vachika, satvika and the nritya, nritya and natya aspects are combined perfectly.
- The dancer expresses himself through codified **hastamudras and facial expressions**, closely following the verses(padams) that are sung.
- Kathakali derives its textual sanction from **Balarama Bharatam** and **Hastalakshana Deepika**.
- The **attakkathasor stories** are selected from the epics and myths and are written in a highly Sanskritised verse form in Malayalam. Many Malayalam writers have also contributed to the vast repertoire of Kathakali literature.



- Kathakali is a visual art where aharya, costume and make-up are suited to the characters, as per the tenets laid down in the Natya Shastra.
- The characters are grouped under certain clearly defined types like the
  1. pacha,
  2. kathi,
  3. thadi,
  4. kari or minukku.
- The face of the artist is painted over to appear as though a mask is worn. **The lips, the eyelashes and the eyebrows are made to look prominent.** A mixture of rice paste and lime is applied to make the chutti on the face which highlights the facial make-up.
- Kathakali dance is **chiefly interpretative.**

The characters in a Kathakali performance are broadly divided into **satvika, rajasika and tamasika types.**

1. **Satvika characters** are noble, heroic, generous and refined. In **pacha**, green colour dominates and kirita (headgear) is worn by all. Krishna and Rama wear special crowns decorated with peacock feathers. The noble characters like Indra, Arjun and the Devas are some of the pacha characters.



2. The **kathi** type depict **anti-heroes**. Though they are of the **rajasika category**, they are sometimes great warriors and scholars such as Ravana, Kamsa and Sisupala to name a few. The moustache and the small knob called **chuttippu** fixed on "the tip of the nose and another in the centre of the forehead, is peculiar to the kathi character.
3. The characters of the **thadi (beard) category** are the chuvanna thadi, (red beard), vellathadi (white beard) and the karutha thadi (black beard).
  - Vellathadi or the white bearded character is generally that of Hanuman, the dancer also wears the costume of a monkey.
4. **Kari** are characters whose make-up have a black base, they wear black costume depicting a **hunter or forest dweller**. Apart from these, there are minor characters like minukku which are the women and sages.

Kathakali costumes and make-up are elaborate and designed so as to give a super human effect. The make-up of Kathakali can be classified into the **teppu, chuttikuthu and uduthukettu**.

- The **teppud** done by the actor himself. Each character has a distinct teppu.
- The second stage is done by experts who specialise in make-up.
- The wearing of huge bellowing skirts is called **uduthukettu**.

A simple stage is used. **A large oil-fed lamp** is placed in front of the stage and two people hold a curtain called **Tirasseela** on the stage, the main dancers stand behind it before the performance.

In no other dance style is the entire body used so completely as in Kathakali. The technical details cover every part of the body from facial muscles to fingers, eyes, hands and wrists. The facial muscles play an important part. **The movement of the eyebrows, the eye-balls and the lower eye-lids as described in the Natya Shastra are not used to such an extent in any other dance style.**

**The weight of the body is on the outer edges of the feet which are slightly bent and curved.**



**Kalasams are pure dance sequences** where the actor is at great liberty to express himself and display his skills. The leaps, quick turns, jumps and the rhythmic co-ordination make kalasams, a joy to watch.

1. A Kathakali performance **begins with the kelikottu**, calling the audience to attention followed by the **todayam**. It is a devotional number performed where one or two characters invoke the blessings of the gods. **Kelikottu is the formal announcement of the performance done in the evening when drums and cymbals are played for a while in the courtyard.**
2. A pure nritta piece known as the **purappadu** comes as a sequel to this. Then the musicians and drummers hold the stage entertaining the audience with an exhibition of their skills in melappada.
3. **Tiranokku** is the debut on the stage of all characters other than the pacha or minukku. Thereafter, the play or the particular scene of the chosen play begins.

## **Musicians**

Kathakali music follows the traditional sopana sangeet of Kerala. It is said to be the ritual singing of the Ashtapadis on the flight of steps leading to the sanctum sanctorum. Now, Kathakali music also uses Carnatic ragas-the raga and tala conforming to the bhava, rasa and dance patterns (nritta and natya). The orchestra which is also used in other traditional performing arts of Kerala, normally comprises the Chenda, Maddalam, Chengila, Ilathalam, Idakka and Shankhu.

**Ilakiattam** is that part of the performance when the characters get an opportunity to demonstrate their excellence in abhinaya.

For the most part of the performance the dancers engage themselves in **chodiattam** which means acting in strict conformity to the words in the padams sung by the accompanying musicians.

Thanks to the service done by the poet Vallathol, this classical dance form received a new impetus and today many innovations are also being made to suit the needs of a changing society.

## Kathak Dance

1. The word Kathak has been derived from the word Katha which means a story. Kathakars or story-tellers, are people who narrate stories largely based on episodes from the epics, myths and legends.
2. It probably started as an oral tradition. Mime and gestures were perhaps added later on to make the recitation more effective. Thus evolved a simple form of expressional dance, providing the origins of what later developed into Kathak as we see it today.
3. The Vaishnavite cult which swept North India in the 15th century and the resultant bhakti movement contributed to a whole new range of lyrics and musical forms. The Radha-Krishna theme proved immensely popular alongwith the works of Mirabai, Surdas, Nandadas and Krishnadas.



4. The emergence of **Raslila** , mainly in the Braj region (Mathura in Western U.P.) was an important development. It combined in itself **music, dance and the narrative**. Dance in Raslila, however, was mainly an extension of the basic mime and gestures of the Kathakars or story-tellers which blended easily with the existing traditional dance.
5. With the coming of the Mughals, this dance form received a new impetus. **A transition from the temple courtyard to the palace durbar took place which necessitated changes in presentation**. In both Hindu and Muslim courts, Kathak became highly stylised and came to be regarded as a sophisticated form of entertainment. **Under the Muslims there was a greater stress on nritya and bhava** giving the dance graceful, expressive and sensuous dimensions.
6. The nineteenth century saw the golden age of Kathak under the patronage of **Wajid Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Oudh**. He established the **Lucknow gharana** with its strong accent on bhava, the expression of moods and emotions.
7. The **Jaipur gharana** known for its **layakari or rhythmic virtuosity** and the **Benaras gharana** are other prominent schools of Kathak dance.



### The technique of movement in Kathak is unique to it.

1. The weight of the body is **equally distributed along the horizontal and vertical axis**.
2. The **full foot contact** is of prime importance where only the toe or the ball of the foot are used, their function is limited.

3. There are **no deflections and no use of sharp bends or curves** of the upper or lower part of the body.
4. **Torso movements emerge from the change of the shoulder line** rather than through the manipulations of the backbone or upper chest and lower waist muscles.
5. In the basic stance, the dancer stands straight, holds one hand at a level higher than the head and the other is extended out on the level of the shoulder.

The technique is built by the use of an **intricate system of foot-work**.

- Pure dance (nritta) is all important where **complex rhythmic patterns are created through the use of the flat feet and the control of sound of the ankle bells** worn by the dancer.
- As in Bharatnatyam, Odissi and Manipuri, **Kathak also builds its pure dance sequences by combining units of movement.**

The cadences are called differently by the names **s tukra, tora, and parana**, all indicative of the nature of rhythmic patterns used and the percussion instrument accompanying the dance.

1. The dancer commences with a sequence called **That** where soft gliding movements of the neck, eyebrows and the wrists, are introduced.
2. This is followed by a conventional formal entry known as the **Amad (entry) and the Salami (salutation)**.
3. Then follow the various **combinations of rhythmic passages** all punctuated with and culminating in a **number of pirouettes**. **The pirouettes are the most characteristic feature of the dance style in nritta portions.**
4. **Recitation of the rhythmic syllables** is common; the dancer often pauses to recite these to a specified metrical cycle followed by execution through movement.

The nritta portion of Kathak is performed to the **nagma**. Both the drummer (here the drum is either a pakhawaj, a type of mridangam, or a pair of tabla) and the dancer weave endless combinations on a repetitive melodic line. The metrical cycle (tala) of 16, 10, 14 beats provides the foundation on which the whole edifice of dance is built.



In the mime portions (nritya or abhinaya), words are not used in simple numbers called the **gata**, which is performed in a lyrical manner to gentle rhythm. **These are short narrative pieces which portray a brief episode from Krishna's life.** A poetic line set to music is interpreted with gestures in other numbers, such as the tumri, bhajan, dadra - all lyrical musical compositions.

In these sections, there is a word to word or line to line synchronisation in the same fashion as in Bharatnatyam or Odissi. Both in nritya (pure dance) and the abhinaya (mime) there is **immense scope for improvisation of presenting variations on a theme.** The interpretative and the abstract dance techniques are interwoven into each other, and the dancer's greatness lies in his capacity for improvisation on the melodic and metric line on the one hand and the poetic line on the other.

Today, Kathak has emerged as a distinct dance form. Being the only classical dance of India having links with Muslim culture, it represents a unique synthesis of Hindu and Muslim genius in art. Further, Kathak is the only form of classical dance wedded to Hindustani or the North Indian music. Both of them have had a parallel growth, each feeding and sustaining the other.

## Manipuri

Manipuri, one of the main styles of Indian Art or Classical Dances originated in the picturesque and secluded state of Manipur in the north-eastern corner of India. Because of its geographical location, the people of Manipur have been protected from outside influences, and this region has been able to retain its unique traditional culture.

The origin of Manipuri dance can be traced back to ancient times that go beyond recorded history. The dance in Manipur is associated with rituals and traditional festivals, there are legendary references to the dances of Shiva and Parvati and other gods and goddesses who created the universe.

## Lai Haraoba

Lai Haraoba is one of the main festivals still performed in Manipur which has its roots in the pre-Vaishnavite period. Lai Haraoba is the earliest form of dance which forms the basis of all stylised dances in Manipur.

Literally meaning - **the merrymaking of the gods**, it is performed as a ceremonial offering of song and dance. The principal performers are the maibas and maibis (priests and priestesses) who re-enact the theme of the creation of the world.



*Khuning Kaulhokpa, basic stance*

With the arrival of Vaishnavism in the 15th century A.D., new compositions based on episodes from the life of Radha and Krishna were gradually introduced.

It was in the reign of **King Bhagyachandra** that the popular Rasleela dances of Manipur originated. It is said, that this 18th century philosopher king conceived this complete dance form along with its unique costume and music in a dream. Under successive rulers, new leelas, and rhythmic and melodic compositions were introduced.

Manipur dance has a **large repertoire**, however, the most popular forms are the **Ras**, the **Sankirtana** and the **Thang-Ta**. There are five principal Ras dances of which four are linked

with specific seasons, while the fifth can be presented at any time of the year. In Manipuri Ras, the main characters are Radha, Krishna and the gopis.

## Radha and Krishna



The themes often depict the pangs of separation of the gopis and Radha from Krishna. The parengs or pure dance sequences performed in the Rasleela dances follow the specific rhythmic patterns and body movements, which are traditionally handed down. The Ras costume consists of a richly embroidered stiff skirt which extends to the feet.

A short fine white muslin skirt is worn over it. A dark coloured velvet blouse covers the upper part of the body and a traditional white veil is worn over a special hair-do which falls gracefully over the face. Krishna wears a yellow dhoti, a dark velvet jacket and a crown of peacock feathers. The jewellery is very delicate and the designs are unique to the region.

## Pung Cholam



The Kirtan form of congregational singing accompanies the dance which is known as **Sankirtana in Manipur**. The male dancers play the Pung and Kartal while dancing. The masculine aspect of dance - the Choloms are a part of the Sankirtana tradition. The Pung and Kartal choloms are performed at all social and religious festivals.

## Kartal Cholam



The **martial dancers of Manipur** - the **Thang-ta** - have their origins in the days when man's survival depended on his ability to defend himself from wild animals.

## Thang-Ta

Today, Manipur has an evolved and sophisticated repertoire of martial dances, the dancers use swords, spears and shields. Real fight scenes between the dancers show an extensive training and control of the body.

Manipuri dance incorporates **both the tandava and lasya** and ranges from the most vigorous masculine to the subdued and graceful feminine. **Generally known for its lyrical and graceful movements, Manipuri dance has an elusive quality.**

In keeping with the subtleness of the style, Manipuri abhinaya does not play up the mukhabhinaya very much - the facial expressions are natural and not exaggerated - **sarvangabhinaya**, or the use of the whole body to convey a certain rasa, is its forte.

The **rhythmic complexities are usually overlooked** as the **dancers do not wear ankle bells** to stamp out the rhythms in a theatrical display, as this interferes with the delicate body movements. However, Manipuri dance and music has a highly evolved tala system.

## Musicians

1. The Manipuri **classical style of singing** is called **Nat** - very different from both north and south Indian music, this style is immediately recognizable with **its high pitched open throated rendering with particular type of trills and modulations.**



2. The main musical instrument is the **Pung** or the **Manipuri classical drum**. There are also many other kinds of drums used in Manipuri dance and music.
3. The **Pena**, a stringed instrument is used in Lai Haraoba and Pena singing. Various kinds of cymbals are used in Sankirtana and Ras. The flute is also used to accompany vocal singing.
4. The Ashtapadis of Jayadeva's Geeta Govinda are very popular and are sung and danced in Manipur with great religious fervour.



Besides the Ras and other leelas, each stage in one's life is celebrated with Sankirtana performances - child birth, upanayanam, wedding and shradha are all occasions for singing and dancing in Manipur. The whole community participates as song and dance form part of daily life expressions.

## Odissi



Sculptural relief, Dancers, Sun Temple,

Konarak, Odisha

Odisha, on the eastern sea coast, is the home of Odissi, one of the many forms of Indian classical dance.

**Sensuous and lyrical**, Odissi is a dance of love and passion touching on the divine and the human, the sublime and the mundane. The Natya Shastra mentions many regional varieties, such as the south-eastern style known as the **Odhra Magadha** which can be identified as the earliest precursor of present day Odissi.

Archaeological evidence of this dance form dating back to the 2nd century B.C. is found in the caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri near Bhubaneswar. Later, innumerable examples of the Buddhist sculptures, the tantric images of dancing Yoginis, the Nataraja, and other celestial musicians and dancers of early Shaivite temples bear testimony to a continuing tradition of dance from the 2nd century B.C.E to the 10th century C.E. These influences found synthesis in an unique philosophy - the dharma or faith of Jagannath.

With Hinduism taking roots in Odisha by about the 7th century A.D., many imposing temples were erected. The magnificent Sun Temple at Konarak, built in the 13th century, with its Natya mandap or Hall of dance, marks the culmination of the temple building activity in Odisha. These dance movements, frozen in stone, continue to inspire Odissi dancers even today.

For centuries **maharis** were the chief repositories of this dance. The maharis, who were originally temple dancers came to be employed in royal courts which resulted in the degeneration of the art form.

Around this time, a class of boys called **gotipuas** were trained in the art, they danced in the temples and also for general entertainment. Many of today's gurus of this style belong to the gotipua tradition.

Odissi is a highly stylised dance and to some extent is based on the classical Natya Shastra and the Abhinaya Darpana. In fact, it has derived a great deal from the Abhinaya Darpana Prakasha by Jadunatha Sinha, the Abhinaya Chandrika by Rajmani Patra, and the Abhinaya Chandrika by Maheshwara Mahapatra.

As in other parts of India, creative literature inspired the Odissi dancer also and provided the themes for dance. This is especially true of the 12th century Gita Govinda by Jayadeva. It is a profound example of the nayaka-nayika bhava and surpasses other poems in its poetic and stylistic content. The devotion of the poet for Krishna permeates through the work.



*Angika Abhinaya*



*Chowk-Basic Standing position*

Odissi closely follows the tenets laid down by the Natya Shastra. Facial expressions, hand gestures and body movements are used to suggest a certain feeling, an emotion or one of the nine rasas.

The techniques of movement are built around the two basic postures of the **Chowk** and the **Tribhanga**.

- The chowk is a position imitating a square - a very masculine stance with the weight of the body equally balanced.
- The tribhanga is a very feminine stance where the body is deflected at the neck, torso and the knees.



1. The torso movement is very important and is a unique feature of the Odissi style.
2. With the lower half of the body remaining static, the torso moves from one side to the other along the axis passing through the centre of the upper half of the body.
3. Great training is required for this control so as to avoid any shoulder or hip movement.
4. There are certain foot positions with flat, toe or heel contact. These are used in a variety of intricate combinations.
5. There are also numerous possibilities of leg movements. Almost all leg movements are spiral or circular, whether in space or on the ground.
6. In addition to the leg movement, there are a variety of gaits for doing pirouettes and jumps and also certain postures inspired by the sculptures. These bhangis, as they are called are really units of movement ending in one particular stance.

7. Hand gestures play an important role both in nritta where they are used only as decorative embellishments and in nritya where they are used for communication.

**The formal repertoire of Odissi has a certain order of presentation, where each successive item is systematically put together to produce the desired rasa.**

1. The opening item is **Mangalacharan** where the dancer slowly enters the stage with flowers in her hands and makes an offering to mother earth.
2. This is followed by an **invocation to the deity of the dancer's choice**. Generally, Ganesha is called upon to grant an auspicious beginning.
3. The item ends with a **nritta sequence with salutations to God, the Guru and the audience**.
4. The next item is called **Batu** where the basic concepts of the Odissi nritta technique are highlighted bringing out the duality of the masculine and the feminine through the basic stance of the **chauk and tribhanga**. This is danced in praise of Batukeshwar Bhairav or Shiva. The accompanying music is very simple -only a refrain of dance syllables.
5. After the very basic exposition of nritta in Batu, comes the **flowering and ornamentation of music and movements in Pallavi**.
6. A musical composition in a particular raga is visually represented by the dancer with slow and subtle movements, building up into complex patterns highlighting rhythmic variations within the talastructure.
7. This is followed by the rendering of **abhinaya**.
8. Odisha has a continuing tradition of dancing of the **Ashtapadis of Jayadeva's Gita Govinda** since the 12th century. The lyricism of this poem is particularly suited to the



**Odissi style.** Apart from the Gita Govinda, the compositions of other Odiya poets like Upendra Bhanja, Baladeva Ratha, Banamali and Gopal Krishna are also sung.

9. The **concluding item of the repertoire**, which may consist of more than one pallavi and items based on abhinaya, is called **moksha**. Pakhawaj syllables are recited and the dance moves from slow to quick sequences to reach a climax, when the dancer pays the final obeisance.



An Odissi orchestra essentially consists of a pakhawaj player (usually the Guru himself), a singer, a flutist, a sitar or violin player and a manjira player.

The dancer is adorned in elaborate Odiya silver jewellery and a special hair-do. The sari, usually stitched nowadays, is unique to the style.

In each performance, even a modern Odissi dancer still reaffirms the faith of the devadasis or maharis where they sought liberation or moksha through the medium of dance.

## Kuchipudi

Kuchipudi is one of the classical styles of Indian dance. Around the third and fourth decade of this century **it emerged out of a long rich tradition of dance-drama of the same name.**

*Basic standing position, male and female character*



In fact, Kuchipudi is the name of a village in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. It is about 35 km. from Vijayawada. Andhra has a very long tradition of dance-drama which was known under the generic name of **Yakshagaana**.

In 17th century Kuchipudi style of Yakshagaana was conceived by **Siddhendra Yogi** a talented Vaishnava poet and visionary who had the capacity to give concrete shape to some of his visions. He was steeped in the literary Yakshagaana tradition being guided by his guru **Teerthanaaraayana Yogi** who composed the Krishna-Leela tarangini, a kaavya in Sanskrit.



*Nritta-pure dance*



## Nritta-hasta, Angika abhinaya

It is said that Siddhendra Yogi had a dream in which Lord Krishna asked him to compose a dance drama based on the myth of the bringing of **paarijaata flower for Sathyabhaama**, the most beloved queen of Krishna.

In compliance with this command Siddhendra Yogi composed the **Bhaamaakalaapam** which is till now considered the piece-deresistance of the Kuchipudi repertoire.

Siddhendra Yogi initiated young Brahmin boys of Kuchipudi village to practice and perform his compositions particularly Bhaamaakalaapam. The presentation of Bhaamaakalaapam was a stupendous success. Its aesthetic appeal was so great that **the then Nawab of Golconda, Abdul Hasan Tanishah issued a copper plate in 1675 A.D. granting the village Kuchipudi as an Agrahaarama to the families of Brahmins who pursued this art.** At that time all the actors were male and the female impersonation was of a superb quality. To have an idea of the high standard of female impersonation one should see Vedaantam Satyanarayana Sharma, a great Kuchipudi dancer, even today doing the role of Satyabhaama.

The followers of Siddhendra Yogi wrote several plays and the tradition of Kuchipudi dance-drama continues till today. It was **Lakshminarayan Shastry** (1886-1956) who introduced many new elements including **solo dancing and training of female dancers** in this dance style.

Solo dancing was there earlier, but only as a part of the dance drama at appropriate sequences. At times, even though the dramatic situation did not demand, solo dancing was being presented to punctuate the presentation and to enhance the appeal. One such number is **tarangam** inspired by the Krishna-leela tarangini of Teerthanarayana Yogi.

Satyabhama





To show the dexterity of the dancers in footwork and their control and balance over their bodies, techniques like dancing on the rim of a brass plate and with a pitcher full of water on the head was introduced.

Acrobatic dancing became part of the repertoire. By the middle of this century, Kuchipudi fully crystallized as a separate classical solo dance style.

Thus there are now two forms of Kuchipudi; **the traditional musical dance-drama and the solo dance.**

From the later part of the fourth decade of this century a sequence of the presentation of the solo recital has been widely accepted.

1. A recital of Kuchipudi begins with an **invocatory number**, as is done in some other classical dance styles. Earlier the invocation was limited to Ganesha Vandana. Now other gods are also invoked.
2. It is followed by nritta, that is, non-narrative and abstract dancing. Usually **jatiswaram is performed as the nritta number.**
3. Next is presented a narrative number called **shabdham**. One of the favourite traditional shabdham number is the **Dashaavataara**.
4. The Shabdham is followed by a natya number called **Kalaapam**.
5. Many Kuchipudi dancers prefer to perform entry of Satyabhama from the traditional dance-drama Bhaamaakalaapam. The song "bhamane, satyabhamane, the traditional praveshadaru (the song that is rendered at the time of the entry of a character) is so tuneful that its appeal is universal and ever fresh.

6. Next in the sequence comes a **pure nritya abhinaya number** based on literary-cum musical forms like padam, jaavli, shlokam, etc. In such a number each of the sung words is delineated in space through dance, drishya-kavita (visual poetry).
7. A Kuchipudi recital is usually concluded with **tarangam**. **Excerpts of Krishna-leela-tarangini are sung with this number.** In this the dancer usually stands on a brass plate locking the feet in shakatavadanam paada and moves the plate rhythmically with great dexterity.



*Sthitaavarta Adavu*

The music that accompanies the dance is according to the classical school of Carnatic music and is delightfully syncopatic. The accompanying musicians, besides the vocalist are: a mridangam player to provide percussion music, a violin or veena player or both for providing instrumental melodic music, and a cymbal player who usually conducts the orchestra and recites the sollukattus(mnemonic rhythm syllables).

## Sattriya

The Sattriya dance form was **introduced in the 15th century A.D** by the great Vaishnava saint and reformer of Assam, **Mahapurusha Sankaradeva** as a powerful medium for

propagation of the **Vaishnava faith**. The dance form evolved and expanded as a distinctive style of dance later on.

This neo-Vaishnava treasure of Assamese **dance and drama** has been, for centuries, nurtured and preserved with great commitment by the **Sattras i.e. Vaishnava maths or monasteries**. Because of its religious character and association with the Sattras, this dance style has been aptly named Sattriya.

**Sankaradeva** introduced this dance form by incorporating different elements from various treatises, local folk dances with his own rare outlook. There were two dance forms prevalent in Assam before the neo-Vaishnava movement such as **Ojapali and Devadasi** with many classical elements.

Two varieties of Ojapali dances are still prevalent in Assam i.e. **Sukananni or Maroi Goa Ojah and Vyah Goa Ojah**.

- Sukananni Oja paali is of Sakti cult and Vyah Goa Oja paali is of Vaishnava cult.

Sankaradeva included **Vyah Goa Ojah into his daily rituals in Sattra**. Till now Vyah Goa Ojah is a part of rituals of the Sattras of Assam.

The dancers in a Oja paali chorus not only sing and dance but also explain the narration by gestures and stylized movements.

As far as Devadasi dance is concerned, resemblance of a **good number of rhythmic syllables and dance postures along with footwork with Sattriya dance is a clear indication of the influence of the former on the latter**.

Other visible influences on Sattriya dance are those from Assamese folk dances namely Bihu, Bodos etc. Many hand gestures and rhythmic syllables are strikingly similar in these dance forms.



Dancers dancing with drums and cymbals

Sattriya dance tradition is governed by strictly laid down principles in respect of hastamudras, footworks, aharyas, music etc.

This tradition, has two distinctly separate streams - the Bhaona-related repertoire starting from the Gayan-Bhayanar Nach to the Kharmanar Nach, secondly the dance numbers which are independent, such as Chali, Rajagharia Chali, Jhumura, Nadu Bhangi etc. Among them the Chali is characterized by gracefulness and elegance, while the Jhumura is marked by vigor and majestic beauty.