

DANCE

(Important considerations for classical dances:

Area

Origin

Themes

Nature

Features

Exponents(only those in news)

For the folk dances just try to know the region and communities but do try to find the details on the above mentioned classical line if they have been in news for some reasons)

Dance in Indian culture is accepted not only as a form of artistic expressions but also as a mode of worship, and so , the art (Dance) has a religious significance as well. The history of the art can be traced back to the pre-historical times, when we find depiction of the dancing scenes even in the rock paintings. The Indus inhabitants were also familiar with the art, which is evident from the discovery of the famous 'Bronze Dancing Girl' from Mohenjodaro.

In the later days, dancing poses and gestures have been frequently used in other art forms like sculptures and paintings particularly at places like Konark , Kajuraho and Ajanta. Even in the royal paintings and depiction of court life the art provides a constant theme. It has always been an important aspect of the folk culture and folk traditions and can be regarded as one of the most popular art forms in the subcontinent.

We find references to the art and its performers in the literary sources like, the Sangam Literature, the Tamil Epics, the Natya Shashtra by Bharatmuni, Kamasutra of Vatsayayna, Arthashastra of Kautilya, etc.

We also find references to the art in the religious literature belonging to all most all sects emerging in the subcontinent including the references to the divine dancers called 'gandharvas'. The dance also developed ritualistic significance in both the tantric and temple traditions.

According to the Puranic traditions, the origin of the art is related to the Lord Shiva and its popularity or diffusion is associated with his divine consort - Parvati. Lord Shiva is generally associated with the so-called Tandava aspects of the art (dance), which includes elements like strength, vigour and movement. Parvati is generally associated with the Lasya aspects of the art, which includes elements like beauty, grace and expression. These elements in their different permutation and combination give birth to a number of gestures, postures and poses (mudras). These postures , at

times, carry special meaning and significance. It is for this reason, most of the Indian dances are in the nature of Dance Drama—communicating some themes with specific gestures, postures, and movements.

The Tandava is also mentioned as a distinct form of the art, associated with Lord Shiva and his role as a part of the divine trinity —the destruction of the universe. The Tandava has multiple forms and the dancing form of Lord Shiva is known as Natraja. The Natraja is supposed to be the most perfect expression of the art, serving as a source of inspiration for the artists. The gestures, postures and poses, associated with the Tandava, are known from the representation of the Natraja in other art forms like, painting and sculpture. The most famous representation of Natraja in the painting is obtained from Ellora. One of the earliest representation of the Natraja in sculpture can be seen in the famous Kailashnath temple of Kanchipuram. But in this context, the most noticeable are the bronze idols of the Natraja belonging to the age of the Cholas. The pieces have been discovered from many places in the South including Thanjavur(Tanjore), Chidambaram and Thiruvalangadu. Thanjavur and Chidambaram has been identified as the craft sites whereas the Thiruvalangadu has produced the most famous of the Chola Bronzes(please note that these points can be used even in the sculptural art).

The Indian dances are broadly categorised into the classical dance and the folk dances. The classical dances are recognised by Sangeet Natak Academy and it has given recognition to Bharatanatyam (Tamilnadu) , Kathakali (Kerala), Mohiniattam(Kerala), Odishi/ Odissi (Odisha), Kuchipudi (Andhra Pradesh), Manipuri (Manipur), Kathak (U.P.), and Sattriya (Assam) as the classical dances. The ministry of culture includes even Chhau (Bengal/ Odisha) among the classical dances. Some scholars consider even some other famous dances such as the Yakshanga (Karnataka) and Bhagvat mela(Tamilnadu) as the classical dances but they yet await the formal recognition.

Classical dances

Except Mohiniattam which is earthly and sensual, the most of the Indian classical dances are religious in nature. They mainly belong to the Puranic, Bhakti and the Temple traditions—though they can not be very rigidly categorised in this matter due to their overlapping nature and association with multiple traditions.

Among the classical dances inspired by the Puranic and epic traditions we can mention the Bharatnatyam and the kathakali. The former is the oldest of all classical dances mentioned even in the Tamil Epics.

Both of them derived their themes mainly from the Puranas and the Epics the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Of late Kathakali has also started deriving its themes from Western plays.

Bharatnatyam is particularly known for its graceful movements, combining elements of both the Tandava and the Lasya. The dance was revived by Rukmini Devi and the famous nationalist leader E. Krishna Iyer. Chief exponents: Mallika Sarabhai, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Padma Subrahmanyam, Swapna Sundari, Balasaraswati, Anita Ratnam etc.

Kathakali is particularly known for the predominance of the elements of Lasya and generally takes the form of 'story play'.

Kathakali is also known for its open air performance (not in theatres) with emphasis on striking harmony with the nature—blending with the landscapes. It is also known for a highly creative use of colours in depicting the characters, for example, the green for good characters, red for the bad characters and black for the demonic characters. The dance was revived by the famous Malayalam poet V.N. Menon. The chief exponents: Ragini Devi, Shanta Rao, Rita Ganguly, Kanak Rele, Mrinalini Sarabhai etc.

In the Bhakti traditions, the art is generally associated with the legends of the Krishna and Radha traditions, particularly with the traditions of Ras lila - involving divine dances of the lord Krishna, Radha and the Gopis. The art emerged as an important component of the 'Raag marga' preached by Chaitanya for emotional identification with Radha. Even the lord Krishna came to be depicted in the dancing poses with the most popular depiction in a pose called 'Tribhang' which is primarily associated with the Odissi. The art was also used by the Bhakti Saints to express their sense of love, surrender and devotion towards their personal deities and the trend not only shaped the nature of some classical dances, but also gave birth to the new ones.

Among the classical dances inspired by the Bhakti movement or having origin in it we can particularly mention Odissi, kuchipudi, Manipuri, Sattriya and Kathak. Odissi is the oldest classical dance after Bharatnatyam, which came to be modified under the Bhakti impulses. Odissi is particularly inspired by the rich sculptural heritage of the region seen in the temple premises like Konark Sun Temple. Most of its gestures and postures, including tribhang, have been borrowed/derived from the sculptural pieces. And for this reason, the odissi is also termed as the 'moving sculpture'.

The depiction of Krishna in Tribhang the most famous pose of the Odissi highlights the role of the Eastern traditions associated with Jayadeva and Chaitanya, in shaping most of the legends of the Krishna and Radha traditions. Odissi is largely performed as Ras lila with its themes mainly derived from the Geet Govinda of Jayadeva. Initially, it was performed only by the Brahman youths below the age of 18 years in female attire. But in due course of time, it came to be performed by all irrespective of gender and caste. Odissi is also characterised by rich Guru- Shishya traditions. The dance was popularised by Indrani Rahman. The Chief exponents: Guru Pankaj Charan Das, Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Sonal Mansingh etc.

The Kuchipudi developed in 13th-14th centuries in a village namely, Kuchilapuram, and the dance derives its name from the same village. Important role in its evolution was played by Siddhendra Yogi. Kuchipudi in its initial days was performed only by the bands of the Brahman youths moving from one village to another. But in due course of time, it came to be performed by all castes and both men & women and even solo. One important feature of the dance is the Bal Gopal Tarang.

The chief exponents: Yamini Krishnamurthy, Swapnasundar, Vijaya Prasad

Manipuri is mostly performed as Ras lila, and it was introduced even in Shantiniketan by Rabindra Nath Tagore. The dance is particularly known for the use of extremely bright colours in dresses and ornaments. It involves no use of

anklets (Payal) and is particularly known for the use of a musical instrument called Pung. The chief exponents: Jhaveri sisters, Guru Bipin Singha, Guru Nileswar Mukherjee, Sohini Ray etc.

Sattriya has been recently included in the list of the classical dances . In its evolution, important role was played by a Bhakti Saint, Shankar Deva - a disciple of Chaitanya in

Assam. The chief exponents: Moniram Datta, Mridusmita Das etc.

Kathak before developing its secular and sensual character, was mainly a religious dance inspired by the Bhakti traditions. And was largely performed in Temples in form of Ras leela. The chief exponents: Birju Maharaj, Sitara Devi, Uma sharma, Manisha Gulyani etc.

In the category of or in the tradition of religious dances, we also find a rich tradition of the temple dances involving dances performed by the Devadasis. Some of the Indian Classical dances like Bharatnatyam and Odissi, are particularly known for their temple origins. Bharatnatyam evolved out of a solo dance called Sadir performed by the devdasis. When Kathak took its shape mostly in temples before it came to be performed even in the royal courts in the turko- Persian influences.

Apart from the kathak in later days, among Indian Classical dances, the secular and sensual elements can be noticed only in the Mohiniattam of Kerala, which is also known as the Dance of enchantresses. The main objective of Mohiniattam is to enthrall the audience, through beauty, grace and sensuality. It is performed solo, only by Women. This is also supposed to be latest of all Classical Indian dances, which took its shape in the 18th-19th Centuries and in its evolution important role was played by Maharaja Swati Thirunal. The chief exponents: Jayaprabha Menon, Pallavi Krishnan, Gopika Varma, Vijaylaxmi etc.

Folk Dances

India has a rich tradition of folk dances of both religious and non-religious character, which also includes a large number of tribal dances. Some of the folk traditions have also contributed to the growth of classical traditions and the classical dances. In this context we can mention the following classical dances:

having their folk origins are-

1. Kathakali, which evolved out of a folk dance called Ramattam and Krishattam
2. Mohiniattam
3. Kuchipudi
4. Manipuri

5. Sattriya

6. Kathak - The Kathak evolved from a local tradition of storytelling, in which the artists used even the gestures and postures while narrating the stories.

But most of the folk dance are dances are particularly noticeable for their non-religious character, and their association with day to day life expectancies. They are generally meant to express joy and ecstasy or happiness of the day to day life. They are also mainly associated with the crop cycle and seasonal changes.

(Kindly refer to the coaching booklet for a list of folk dances but more useful it would be to have a watch on current developments)