

Rhythm, Expression, and Devotion: An Analytical Exploration of Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, and Kathakali

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ABSTRACT

Indian classical dance forms, rooted in ancient temple rituals and spiritual storytelling, represent one of the richest aspects of India's cultural heritage. These diverse dance traditions—Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, and Kathakali—each evolved from different regions of India and are defined by unique techniques, aesthetics, and philosophies. Bharatanatyam emphasizes precision and devotion through structured movements and expressive gestures. Kathak is noted for its intricate footwork, rhythmic patterns, and emotive storytelling, blending Hindu and Mughal influences. Odissi, from Odisha, features lyrical grace, sculptural poses, and spiritual themes. These dance forms trace their origins to texts like the Natya Shastra, serving as mediums for cultural expression, religious devotion, and social commentary. Over time, they have adapted to modern stages while maintaining their traditional essence. Together, these forms preserve India's intangible heritage, reflecting its mythology, literature, and daily life through rhythm, movement, and expression.

Keywords: *Indian Classical Dance, Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi*

I. Introduction

Indian classical dance forms have a rich cultural heritage that extends back thousands of years, encompassing diverse styles, themes, and regional variations. Originating from ancient Hindu temples, these dance forms were originally performed as a form of worship and storytelling, serving as a medium to convey mythological narratives and spiritual teachings. Over time, they evolved into intricate art forms characterized by their distinct movements, gestures, facial expressions, and costumes. Among India's most prominent classical dance styles are Kathak in the north, Manipuri in the south, Kuchipudi in the east, Odissi in the northeast, and Kathakali in the west. As a result of

regional cultural and historical influences, each style has developed its own distinctive aesthetic, methodological toolkit, and repertory. Themes explored in Indian classical dance often revolve around mythology, folklore, spiritual concepts, and social themes. These dances not only entertain but also educate and inspire audiences, preserving cultural traditions and values through graceful movements and emotive expressions. This investigation aims to delve into the origins, evolution, styles, and themes of Indian classical dance forms, shedding light on their cultural significance and enduring relevance in the modern world. Through a comprehensive exploration, we seek to deepen our understanding of these art forms' profound impact on Indian society and their contributions to the global cultural landscape.

Origins of Indian Classical Dance Forms

The origins of Indian classical dance forms trace back to ancient cultural and religious traditions that have evolved over millennia. These dances were initially performed as part of religious rituals, storytelling, and social ceremonies. Ancient texts such as the *Natya Shastra*, written by Sage Bharata, serve as foundational treatises outlining the principles and aesthetics of classical dance. Indian classical dance forms emerged from diverse regional influences across the Indian subcontinent, each with its unique styles, techniques, and themes. For instance, Bharatanatyam originated in the temples of Tamil Nadu, characterized by its intricate footwork and expressive hand gestures, known as *mudras*. Kathak, with its roots in northern India, blends elements of storytelling, rhythm, and grace. Odissi, originating from the state of Odisha, emphasizes fluid movements, lyrical expressions, and sculptural poses. Kathakali, from the southern state of Kerala, is renowned for its elaborate makeup, costumes, and dramatic storytelling. These classical dance forms reflect the rich tapestry of Indian culture, drawing inspiration from mythology, literature, nature, and everyday life. Over time, they have evolved, adapting to changing social, cultural, and political landscapes while retaining their essence and spiritual significance.

Styles of Indian Classical Dance

Indian classical dance encompasses a rich diversity of styles, each with its unique characteristics, techniques, and regional influences. Four prominent styles are Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, and Kathakali. Bharatanatyam, originating from the temples of Tamil Nadu, is characterized by its precise footwork, intricate hand gestures (*mudras*), facial expressions, and graceful movements. It typically follows a structured format, consisting of items such as *Alarippu*, *Jatiswaram*, *Varnam*, *Padams*, and *Tillana*. Bharatanatyam often portrays mythological stories, devotional themes, and expressions of love and devotion. Kathak, rooted in northern India, is known for its rhythmic footwork, intricate spins (*chakkars*), and storytelling through mime and gesture. Kathak dancers often perform compositions called "*kavits*" or "*bandishes*" accompanied by *tabla* and other classical music instruments. It blends elements of Hindu and Muslim cultures, reflecting its historical evolution through Mughal courts and Hindu temples. Odissi, originating from the state of Odisha, is characterized by its lyrical movements, sculptural poses (*bhangis*), and fluid grace. It draws inspiration from temple sculptures, particularly those of the Sun Temple at Konark. Odissi repertoire includes *Mangalacharan*, *Pallavi*, *Batu Nritya*, *Abhinaya*, and *Moksha*. Odissi dancers often depict

stories from Hindu mythology, nature, and love. Kathakali, from Kerala in southern India, is renowned for its elaborate makeup (chutti), costumes, and stylized movements. It combines elements of dance, music, drama, and ritual, often performed in temples and palaces. Kathakali repertoire includes stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and other Hindu epics, with characters portrayed using distinct facial expressions and hand gestures. Despite their regional variations, all these classical dance styles share a common foundation in ancient texts such as the Natya Shastra and a commitment to preserving India's rich cultural heritage through storytelling, expression, and artistic excellence. They continue to evolve and innovate, reflecting contemporary sensibilities while maintaining their timeless appeal and spiritual significance.

Bharatanatyam

The Hindu temples in southern India's Tamil Nadu region are the birthplace of Bharatanatyam, a traditional dance form unique to India. Traditional Bharatanatyam dance has deep roots in India's rich cultural heritage. Respected all over the world, Bharatanatyam is a dance form that mesmerises onlookers with its seamless mix of sacred and secular elements. Delicate movements and emotive gestures define its distinctive precision, which has enchanted audiences for years. In spite of its suppression for long periods of time, Bharatanatyam has been revitalised by dedicated teachers and students across the globe. Its legacy will remain because of this. The Sanskrit terms "Natyam" (dance) and "Bharata" (emotions, melody, and rhythm, especially Bhava, Raga, and Tala) are closely related. The very wording of the expression conveys what dancing is all about. The use of these aspects emphasises Bharatanatyam's innate ability to communicate profound emotions via its structured and not too intuitive framework. The fact that it has been revived shows how culturally significant and resilient the past is. Bharatanatyam bridges cultural divides and brings joy to people's lives because its practitioners make it energetic. This sculpture embodies the essence of Indian history and is a lasting monument of artistic brilliance and spiritual devotion.



Fig 1: Bharatanatyam Dance

Source: Bharatanatyam Dance (riddhimasoni.blogspot.com)

Bharatanatyam Principles and techniques: The three main categories of Bharatanatyam dance are Nritta, Nritya, and Natiya. Nritta refers to the technical component of the performance when the dancer executes the steps of Bharata Natyam precisely, paying close attention to the timing, pattern, shape, range, and rhythm of each step and excluding any aspects of interpretation. A dancer's incorporation of spiritual concepts, emotions, and expressive movements is known as Nritya. The Nritya is communicated via slower, more in sync body motions and gestures with the notes of the song.

Kathak

In Vedic Sanskrit, "Katha" means "story" and "Kattakar" means "the one who tells a story," both of which are etymologically related. Travelling bards, also known as wandering Kathakars, used dance, song, and music to tell stories based on our ancient myths and epics. Elegant hand gestures, elaborate footwork, supple body movements, and, most significantly, strong facial expressions that may evoke a spectrum of emotions are the tools that Kathak artists use to tell tales. Stories about the Hindu god Krishna's infancy was an integral part of Kathak as it developed throughout the Bhakti movement.



Fig 2: Elements of Kathak

Source: Kathak / Dance of india, Indian classical dance, Kathak dance (pinterest.co.uk)

Elements of Kathak: Kathak, a classical dance form originating from North India, is characterized by its intricate footwork, graceful movements, and expressive storytelling. Its elements encompass as discussed below.

- **Tatkar (Footwork):** Kathak is renowned for its complex rhythmic footwork, known as Tatkar, which involves intricate patterns of steps executed with precision and speed. These footwork patterns often sync with the music's rhythm, showcasing the dancer's skill and agility.

- **Mudras (Hand Gestures):** The dance incorporates a vast array of hand gestures, or mudras, each conveying specific meanings and emotions. These mudras enhance the narrative aspect of Kathak performances, allowing dancers to portray characters and stories with expressive finesse.
- **Abhinaya (Facial Expressions):** Abhinaya, or expressive storytelling, is a central element of Kathak. Dancers convey a wide range of emotions and narratives through subtle facial expressions, bringing characters and stories to life on stage. The eyes, eyebrows, and lips are particularly important in conveying nuanced emotions.
- **Chakkar (Spins):** Kathak is renowned for its graceful spins, or Chakkars, which are executed with remarkable speed and precision. These spins add dynamism and flair to the dance, showcasing the dancer's mastery of balance and control. Spins are often integrated seamlessly into choreography, enhancing the overall visual impact of the performance.
- **Taal (Rhythmic Patterns):** Taal, or rhythmic patterns, form the foundation of Kathak performances. Dancers often perform intricate sequences of rhythmic footwork and hand gestures, synchronized with the beat of the accompanying music. Taals vary in complexity and time signature, providing a rich rhythmic tapestry for dancers to explore.
- **Costume and Jewellery:** Kathak costumes are elaborate and traditional, typically featuring flowing skirts (Ghagras) for female dancers and intricately embroidered outfits for male dancers. Jewellery, such as anklets (Ghungroos) worn by both genders, adds to the auditory and visual richness of the performance, accentuating the rhythms of the footwork.
- **Musical Accompaniment:** Kathak performances are accompanied by live music, typically featuring instruments such as the Tabla, sitar, sarangi, and flute. The interplay between dance and music is integral to the art form, with musicians and dancers often engaging in improvised exchanges (Sawal-Jawab), enhancing the dynamic energy of the performance.

Odissi

Odissi, originating from the state of Odisha in Eastern India, is a classical dance form that embodies the rich cultural heritage and artistic traditions of the region. Characterized by its graceful movements, intricate footwork, and expressive storytelling, Odissi is a captivating art form that seamlessly blends devotion, mythology, and aesthetic beauty. A typical Odissi performance begins with Mangalacharan, an invocation piece that pays homage to divine entities and the guru, setting a sacred and auspicious tone. This is followed by Bhumi Pranam, where the dancer reveres Mother Earth, symbolizing humility and connection to nature. Nritya, the pure dance sequences, showcase the dancer's technical prowess with intricate footwork and rhythmic patterns, accompanied by complex musical compositions. Nritya, the expressive storytelling aspect, brings characters and narratives from Hindu mythology, poetry, and folklore to life through facial expressions, hand gestures, and body movements. Abhinaya, the art of expressive mime, further enhances the emotional depth of the performance, allowing dancers to convey a range of sentiments and evoke rasas or emotions such as love, devotion, joy, and sorrow. Odissi costumes are a visual delight, featuring vibrant colours, traditional attire, and elaborate jewellery. Female dancers adorn themselves with draped sarees,

odhnis (scarves), and an array of ornaments, while male dancers don dhotis, kurta, and waistbands, enhancing the visual appeal of the performance. Live music is an integral part of Odissi, featuring classical Odissi music with instruments like the Mardala, flute, violin, and vocals. The rhythmic patterns (Taals) and melodic compositions complement the dance movements, creating a harmonious synthesis of sound and movement.

Tribhangi: Tribhangi, fundamental to Odissi, epitomizes the art's grace and sculptural elegance. Dancers master the subtle articulation of head, torso, and hips, creating sinuous, S-shaped forms reminiscent of temple carvings. Through precise control and fluid transitions, they embody divine grace and earthly beauty, mirroring the divine forms immortalized in stone. Each bend, meticulously crafted, narrates tales of devotion, love, and longing, echoing the timeless expressions of Odia culture. Tribhangi thus becomes not just a physical technique but a spiritual journey, connecting the dancer with the divine and the audience with the eternal.

Chowk: Chowk, a cornerstone of Odissi, epitomizes stability and readiness, with dancers adopting a square stance, knees slightly bent, and weight evenly distributed. Serving as the bedrock for movement, this posture enables seamless transitions into intricate footwork, graceful turns, and expressive gestures, ensuring precision and control throughout performances. Beyond its practical function, Chowk symbolizes preparedness, embodying strength, focus, and presence as dancers embark on storytelling journeys. Rooted in discipline and artistry, Chowk connects performers with the earth, the audience, and the divine, facilitating moments of transcendence and beauty on stage.

Basic Footwork (Tandava): In Odissi, the art of Tandava footwork embodies a symphony of precision and rhythm, enriching performances with its intricate patterns and dynamic sequences. Dancers masterfully navigate a diverse array of foot positions, including graceful heel-toe movements, emphatic stamps, fluid slides, and subtle twists, each executed with meticulous attention to detail. Through these nuanced steps, performers weave together a tapestry of movement that not only showcases their technical prowess but also conveys emotive narratives and evokes a sense of storytelling. With every rhythmic pattern and every graceful transition, Tandava breathes life into Odissi performances, infusing them with energy, vitality, and vibrancy. It serves as a testament to the dancers' dedication to their craft and their ability to synchronize movement with music, captivating audiences and transporting them into the mesmerizing world of Odissi dance.

Hand Gestures (Mudras): In Odissi dance, mudras hold profound significance as they serve as the language through which dancers communicate a plethora of emotions, characters, and stories. Through intricate hand movements, dancers skilfully portray various elements of nature, animals, and human sentiments, infusing their performances with depth and expression. Each mudra carries its own symbolism and conveys a specific meaning, allowing performers to evoke a rich tapestry of emotions ranging from love and devotion to sorrow and joy. With their hands gracefully weaving tales on the canvas of the air, dancers harness the power of mudras to captivate audiences and transport them into the enchanting world of Odissi.

Abhinaya: Abhinaya, an integral aspect of Odissi dance, serves as a captivating medium for expressive storytelling. Through nuanced facial expressions, eloquent eye movements, and graceful hand gestures, dancers immerse themselves in portraying characters, conveying emotions, and narrating intricate tales drawn from Hindu mythology, poetry, or folklore. With every subtle change in expression and every fluid movement of the hands, performers transport audiences into the vibrant world of the narrative, evoking a myriad of emotions ranging from love and devotion to longing and sorrow. Abhinaya allows dancers to embody the essence of the characters they portray, infusing their performances with authenticity and depth. It is through this art of emotive storytelling that Odissi dancers breathe life into age-old tales, forging a profound connection with the audience and leaving an indelible impression on their hearts and minds.

Bhava and Rasa: In Odissi dance, Bhava and Rasa are the very soul of expression, captivating audiences with their profound emotional resonance. Bhava, manifested through subtle facial expressions, eloquent body language, and graceful gestures, serves as the conduit for evoking a spectrum of rasas or emotions. From the fervent devotion of a devotee to the poignant sorrow of a lovelorn soul, dancers meticulously craft each movement to imbue their performances with authenticity and depth. Through Bhava and Rasa, Odissi dancers transcend the boundaries of language, communicating universal human experiences and leaving an indelible impression on the hearts of their audience members, forging a profound emotional connection that lingers long after the performance has ended.

Costumes and Ornaments: Odissi costumes are elaborate and traditional, typically featuring vibrant colours, intricate designs, and flowing fabrics. Female dancers wear sarees with pleats and odhnis (scarves), adorned with jewellery such as earrings, necklaces, bangles, and anklets. Male dancers wear dhotis, kurta, and ornaments like waistbands and headpieces, enhancing the visual appeal of the performance.

Music and Rhythm: Odissi performances are accompanied by live music, consisting of classical Odissi music with instruments like the Mardala (a percussion instrument), flute, violin, and vocals. Dancers and musicians work in harmony to create a seamless blend of music and movement, emphasizing rhythm, melody, and expression.

Kathakali

Kerala is home to the ancient dance style known as "kathakali" in southern India. Kathakali is a kind of classical dance that uses music and vocal performances to convey stories via intricate footwork and spectacular facial and hand movements. Makeup, masks, and costumes used by dancers in this genre are bright and distinctive, setting it apart from others. The technique and moves are reminiscent of the martial arts practiced in Kerala at the time. This kind of traditional Indian dance evolved in theatres and palaces rather than Hindu monasteries and temples. Temple and folk arts of Kerala, where this dance style is practiced, are said to have evolved in the first millennium CE.



Figure 3: Kathak

History & Evolution

Phillip Zarrilli claims that the ancient Sanskrit Hindu text "Natyashastra" contains the foundational principles and defining features of this kind of classical dance. The great Indian theatrologist and musicologist Bharata Muni wrote this treatise on the performing arts. Estimates place the completion of the work's form anywhere from 500 BCE to 500 CE, while most sources place it between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Over the course of its many chapters, this sacred text contains thousands of verses. According to Natyashastra, there are two main categories of dance: nrita and nritya. Dancing encompasses both of these genres. One is solo expressive dance, which showcases incredible emotions, while the other is pure dance, which mostly consists of hand movements and gestures. A Russian scholar named Natalia Lidova claims that the book elucidates several concepts related to Indian traditional dances. Among the many elements covered by these ideas are the following: Tandava dance, basic steps, standing postures, bhava, rasa, acting styles, and gestures. The classical dance form's name is a portmanteau of the terms "Katha" and "Kali." "Katha" is a classic story or narrative in Sanskrit, while "Kali," a derivative of "Kala," means art and performance. The term "Kathakali" has a fairly shaky past, thus many people have different ideas about where it came from. According to Mahinder Singh, the roots of this style of performance art go back to around 1500 years, which is far older than what Jones and Ryan claim—more than 500 years. Zarrilli claims that the southern coastal region of India in the 1600s and 1700s was the birthplace of Kathakali as a separate classical dance technique. People who speak Malayalam call this area home.

The Salient Features of Kathakali

- Kathakali draws on a wide range of historical social and religious theatrical traditions to create its own unique classical art form.
- We can see the dance form in temple sculptures of Kerala and the murals of the Mattancherry temple that date back to the 16th century.

- Kathakali's technique is also influenced by the martial arts that were common in ancient Kerala and other art forms like Chakyar Koothu, Koodiyattam, Krishnattam, and Ramanattam.
- The plays include dance, music, and acting, and they are based on Bharata Muni's 'Natyashastra', a treatise on the theatrical arts. Indian epics such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavata Purana.
- The art form is composed of four elements angika, acharya, vichika, and satvika of abhinaya, in addition to Nritya and Natya.
- The dance movements correspond to verses called 'padams,' which are singing lyrics.
- Manipravalam, a hybrid of Sanskrit and Malayalam, is the literary language of Kathakali.
- Balarama Bharatam and Hastalakshana Deepika are the descriptive sources from which Kathakali draws.
- Kathakali's narrative shifted to focus on secular topics as its religious undertones began to lose viewers.
- The performances are based on stories from the Mahabharata, such as Kalyana Sougandhikam, Duryodhana Vadham, and Nalacharitham.
- One of Unnayi Varrier's most well-known Attakatha works in Kathakali literature is Nalacharitham.
- The novel follows Nala and Damayanthi as they navigate the ups and downs of their love story, with a particular emphasis on the obstacles presented by Kali, who harboured feelings for Damayanthi as well and sought to possess her by eliminating Nala.

II. Related Reviews

Banerji, Anurima (2023), Classical dance is an important heritage practice that is often mobilized to articulate the cultural identity of the Indian state and diasporic communities. Based on the romantic association with Indian history, Banerji investigates the origins of the term "classical dance" in this chapter. She takes a performance studies stance in her investigation of the function, deployment, and politics of the discursive concept of "classical dance." In her analysis, she delves into the concept of Indian dance classicism, tracing its origins back to the modern colonial apparatus. She then examines how postcolonial Indian authorities codified it as an official artistic genre, joining others like "tribal," "folk," and "contemporary" in national cultural policy. Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Sattriya, Mohiniyattam, Odissi, Kathakali, Manipuri, and Kathak are the eight dance styles now recognised as classical by the government. Banerji, on the other hand, isn't concerned with any one kind of dance but rather with the dissemination of a system of knowledge associated with classicism inside the dance arena under the auspices of state power regimes.

Raghunandan, Manasi (2021), The classical dance traditions of India include Bharata Natyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Mohini Attam, Manipuri, Kuchipudi, Odissi, and Sattriya dancing styles. The creation, history, and evolution of it are documented in a lengthy chronology. Each classical dance style has its roots in the Natya Shastra and, later, the Abhinaya Darpana and other dance texts; however, the present format of these dances is shaped by a number of factors. Classical elements in

Indian classical dance never go out of style since Indians are so dedicated to their culture, mythology, and customs. Indian classical dance has expanded beyond its traditional religious connotations, yet it remains indefinably linked to Indian intellectual beliefs and infused with socio-spiritual elements.

Bhargava, Vinita, and Priya Srinivasan (2017), Bharata Natyam is a contemporary art form in India that requires artists to confront their own religious, geographical, socioeconomic, and sexual identities while they perform the dance. The aim is to draw attention to how the dancer and the dance itself are always navigating the line between the past and the present. A never-ending battle ensues between the two competing goals of preserving form integrity and embracing originality. This chapter will make an effort to follow the path of classical arts introduction, beginning with the carefree gyrations of Bollywood items and progressing to the rigorous rigours of a traditional Indian dance style. Dance training disputes and the transformation of a "modern" girl into a "tradition-bound" dancer show the context's resistance. Building one's identity as a dancer is more than simply a change in appearance; it's a philosophy of life. Bharata Natyam's historical path will also be briefly traced in this chapter. The dance form has been influenced on a local, national, and international scale, sparking debate on whether more recent styles are more classical or neoclassical. In their efforts to foster a sense of national pride and identity, post-colonial administrations have included dance in their nation-building programmes ever since independence.

Rayapureddy, Lavanya, and Ramesh Rayapureddy (2017), Symbolically expressing abstract religious notions was the most prominent role of dance in old Indian culture, which pervaded every aspect of daily life. Numerous references to dance in Hindu literature detail its performance in religious as well as secular settings, attesting to the long history of intimate association between the two in Hindu philosophy. One area where religious and secular elements coexist is in temple sculpture, where secular themes coexist with the rigorously iconographic portrayal of gods. In Indian culture, dancing is more than just a show; it's a way to portray tales of heroes and gods via movement, with the focus being on the topic rather than the dancer. The exoteric global equivalent of the esoteric Vedic knowledge was classical dance and theatre.

Sukhatankar, Ojasi (2016), Using the ancient Indian performing art doctrine of the Natyashastra and Abhinaya-Darpana, this article examines eight ICDs. The research demonstrates that all ICDs have the quality of "unity in diversity," or being similar in concept but different in reality. Our examination of the two qualities, "unity" and "diversity," is based on the three pillars upon which the dance art rests (nritya). The three aspects that are covered are technical (nritya), expressive (natya), and musical (geetam and vadyam). When necessary, the article provides visual representations in the form of pictures and diagrams. It sheds light on the vast, theoretically limitless potential for more research on this subject while also demonstrating the interconnectedness and inseparability of the three components and dance.

Putcha, Rumya S (2013), This research focuses on Kuchipudi, a traditional dance style from that region, and it reveals the significant linkages between identity politics and the construction of cultural icons. In this analysis, the dichotomy of Kuchipudi's historicization as a representation of masculine, Brahminical Telugu culture and the goals of Indian modernism, which revolve around the

ionization of female dancers, are dismantled. This article uses archival, discursive, and ethnographic methods to investigate how dominant Telugu historical narratives are constructed and maintained via the development of classicism in Kuchipudi dancing. This branch of Indian classical dance research builds on earlier work by continuing to ask what happens to the hereditary courtesan dancers when they are reified as dance bodies, how discursive strategies bring together Brahmin male history and female dance practice, and how this all affects the fate of these dancers.

Bose, Mandakranta (2012), The issue of the artist's relationship to their work is not easily answered. Within the constraints of "classical" art norms, it is hard to discern how much room there is for the artist's unique imagination to grow. Almost a century ago, T. S. Eliot pondered the question: How can tradition and individual skill influence one other? Based on Eliot's work from 1920 This has always been an intriguing question to me, and it has particularly pertained to Indian classical dancing. This is a tradition where the gendered structure of its practice, in addition to the historical authority of a codified tradition, puts pressure on the subjective creativity of the individual artist. Does the artist have the right to claim ownership of their work while working under such conditions? On the other hand, does the artist still serve as a tool for an immutable system of aesthetics? These considerations take on further significance in light of the fact that classical Indian dancers most of whom are women and have always been so are increasingly using their art to express themselves as it emerges from its long-sequestered confines inside India. If artists are expressing their subjective creativity and searching for personal idioms by questioning and reformulating the idea and practice of classical Indian dancing, does their art continue to be a local phenomenon accessible only to particular audiences? These questions are relevant for both the artist and the audience. On the other hand, does it become accessible to people all around the world as dancers strive to push the artistic and ethical limits of their traditional practices?

III. Conclusion

Indian classical dance is not merely a performing art—it is a spiritual and cultural legacy shaped by centuries of tradition, philosophy, and regional diversity. Each form—be it the devotional depth of Bharatanatyam, the narrative elegance of Kathak, or the lyrical beauty of Odissi—serves as a visual expression of India's mythological and religious ethos. These dances, rooted in texts like the *Natya Shastra*, use movement, music, and expression to convey stories and emotions that transcend time. Despite modern transformations, the core principles and spiritual significance remain intact. As these art forms continue to be practiced, taught, and adapted globally, they not only preserve the richness of Indian culture but also inspire cross-cultural appreciation and artistic innovation.

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