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Physical & Mental Health for Indian Classical Dance

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ABSTRACT

Dance provides an active, non-competitive form of exercise that has potential positive effects for physical health as well as mental and emotional wellbeing. Dance therapy is based on the idea that body and mind are co-relational. The therapeutic approaches with various forms of Indian dances are a new entrant to dance literature. Ayurveda held dance as a power of healing (therapy) and inner awareness (psychology). Indian philosophy also supports the facts of Sangeet (song, dance and music) for benefit of human health physically as well as mentally. The powerful dance form of Bhangra (Punjab), Karagam (Tamilnadu), Chou, Rayabese, Dhali (West Bengal) gives good health and strength. The fast footwork of Kathak dance helps to release anger and tension. Manipuri dancers make rounded movements and avoid any jerks, sharp edges or straight lines. It gives them undulating and soft appearance, proper body control and peace of mind. All these body movements, body balancing, expression, muscle movement, muscle constriction and relaxation have a strong effect on therapeutic movements. In India today the dance therapists are conscious about this matter and in therapeutic sessions they actually improvise different dance movements according to the need.

Keywords: Indian classical dances, Mental and physical illness

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Introduction

Dance is a performing of art; Dance is the movement of the body in a rhythmic way, usually to music and within a given space, for the purpose of expressing an idea or emotion, releasing energy, or simply taking delight in the movement itself. Dance is combine performance of Yoga, Mudras.

Dance Therapy: Indian Perspective

Dance therapy is specialized and psychotherapeutic use of dance for the improvement of cognitive, behavioral and physical conditions. Dance therapy is based on the idea that body and mind are co-relational, that the physical state of the body can affect the emotional and mental wellbeing both positively and negatively (Quin, Redding & Frazer, 2007). In western world dance has been used for long time as therapy for patients, whether alternate or complementary.

The relationship of health with various types of dances is of great interest now-a-days. Indeed, the approach of therapy is maintained in India knowingly or unknowingly from a very long time. Ayurveda held dance as a power of healing (therapy) and inner awareness (psychology). Indian philosophy also supports the facts of *Sangeet* (song, dance and music) for benefit of human health physically as well as mentally (Shastri, 1931). The *Natyashastra*, a millennium old Indian treatise, seems to be the first in recognizing the two-fold importance of psychology in connection with the production of a *natya* (drama), comprising of *geet* (song), *badya* (music) and *nritya* (dance). According to the *Natyashastra*, among the four techniques of representation (*abhinaya*), such as gestures (*angika*), words (*vacika*), make-up (*aharya*) and the *sattva* (*sattvika*), the *angika* consists of physical representation by using various gestures and postures (Ghosh, 1967). The eyes have different kinds of glances depending upon the expressions of psychological states (*bhava*) and sentiments (*rasa*). Eyeballs are also liable to similar changes to create

impressions of different feelings and emotions, and so are eyebrows, nose, cheek, chin, neck, head, limbs, etc. It also holds different body (torso) movements, hand gestures, movement of different body parts in its actual directions and their effects on dance as well as human body and mind (Shastri, 1931). In modern India such types of works are in a very nascent stage. Some organizations and Institutes are being involved to do some work for betterment of life by dance therapy.

Indian classical dance, or **Shastriya Nritya**, is an umbrella term for various performance arts rooted in religious Hindu musical theatrestyles, whose theory and practice can be traced to the Sanskrit text *Natya Shastra*. The Sangeet Natak Akademi recognizes eight – Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Kathakali, Sattriya, Manipuri and Mohiniyattam. so me dances are traditionally regional, all of them include music and recitation in local language or Sanskrit, and they represent a unity of core ideas in a diversity of styles, costumes and expression. Indian classical dance is made from India and classical dance is played by various actors.

Dance	State
Bharatanatyam	Tamil Nadu
Bihu	Assam
Bhangra	Punjab
Chhau	Bihar, Orissa, W. Bengal and Jharkhand
Garhwali	Uttaranchal
Garba	Gujarat
Hattari	Karnataka
Kathak	North India
Kathakali	Kerala
Kuchipudi	Andhra Pradesh
Khantumm	Mizoram
Karma	Madhya Pradesh
Laho	Meghalaya
Mohiniattam	Kerala
Mando	Goa
Manipuri	Manipur
Nati	Himachal Pradesh
Nat-Natin	Bihar
Odissi	Orissa
Laho	Jammu & Kashmir
Mohiniattam	Karnataka

The *Natya Shastra* is the foundational treatise for classical dances of India and this text is attributed to the ancient scholar Bharata Muni. 6000 BC The text, states Natalia Lidova, describes the theory of Tāṇḍava dance (Shiva), the theory of rasa, of bhāva, expression, gestures, acting techniques, basic steps, standing postures – all of which are part of Indian classical dances.

All classical dances of India used similar symbolism and rules of gestures in *abhinaya* (acting). The roots of *abhinaya* are found in the *Natyashastra* text which defines drama in verse 6.10 as that which aesthetically arouses joy in the spectator, through the medium of actor's art of communication, that helps connect and transport the individual into a super sensual inner state of being. A performance art, asserts *Natyashastra*, connects the artists and the audience through *abhinaya* (literally, "carrying to the spectators"), that is applying body-speech-mind and scene, wherein the actors communicate to the audience, through song and music. Drama in this ancient Sanskrit text, thus is an art to engage every aspect of life, in order to glorify and gift a state of joyful consciousness.

The communication through symbols is in the form of expressive gestures (mudras or hastas) and pantomime set to music. The gestures and facial expressions convey the *ras* (sentiment, emotional taste) and *bhava* (mood) of the underlying story. In Hindu classical dances, the artist successfully expresses the spiritual ideas by paying attention to four aspects of a performance:

- *Angika* (gestures and body language),
- *Vachika* (song, recitation, music and rhythm),
- *Aharya* (stage setting, costume, make up, jewelry),
- *Sattvika* (artist's mental disposition and emotional connection with the story and audience, wherein the artist's inner and outer state resonates).

- *Abhinaya* draws out the *bhava* (mood, psychological states)

Dance is an enjoyable health promoting physical activity. This physical activity appeals to some who may not be active and therefore may be another alternative of exercise. Dance for health has become an important factor in the prevention, treatment and management in several health circumstances. It is not only significant for your physical health but it also contributes to your mental health and subsidizes social communication. Dance is an art which is learned from many cultures. Types of dance can entail body movements, expression and collaboration.

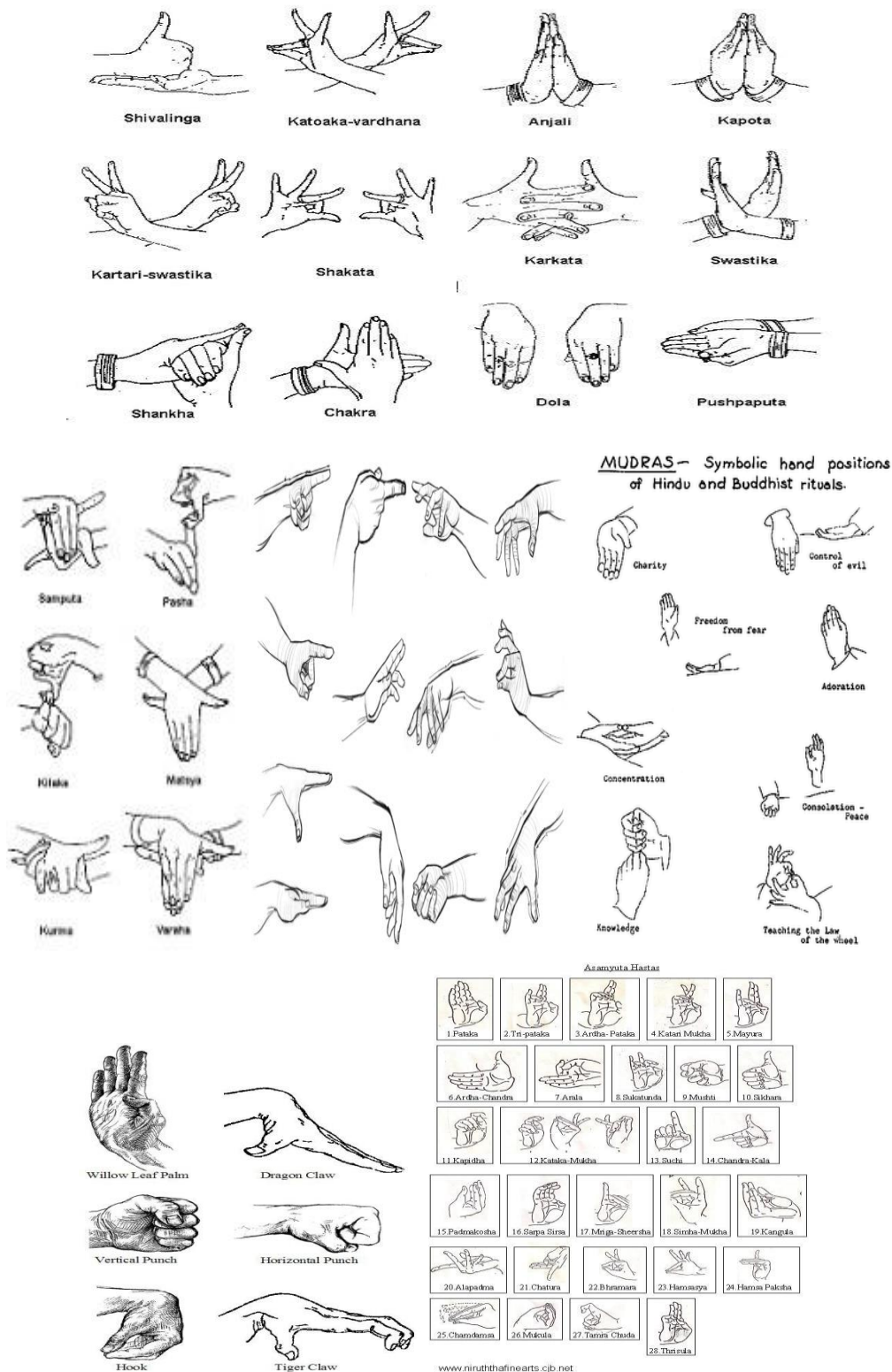
Health benefits of dancing

Dancing can be a way to stay fit for people of all ages, shapes and sizes. It has a wide range of physical and mental benefits including:

- improved condition of your heart and lungs
- increased muscular strength, endurance and motor fitness
- increased aerobic fitness
- improved muscle tone and strength
- weight management
- stronger bones and reduced risk of osteoporosis
- better coordination, agility and flexibility
- improved balance and spatial awareness
- increased physical confidence
- improved mental functioning
- improved general and psychological wellbeing
- greater self-confidence and self-esteem
- better social skills.

In Bharata Natyam, the Classical Dance of India, approximately fifty-five root **mudras** (hand/finger gestures), 24 types of Asamyuta Hastas in Kuchipudi, 28 types of mudras in Kathak, 470 mudras of kathakali, 24 of mohiniattam are used to clearly communicate specific ideas, events, actions, or creatures in which thirty-two require only one hand, and are classified as 'Asamyukta Hasta',

along with twenty-three other primary mudras ...



Therapeutic Value of Indian Classical Dances

A very little knowledge was available till date regarding the therapeutic value of Indian

classical dances. The development and evolution of Indian dance is intrinsically connected to Indian philosophy and spirituality. Indeed, the approach of therapy in this type of

dance is also maintained knowingly or unknowingly from a very long time. It is clearly understandable that prolonged practice of dance in its proper way not only gives physical fitness but also strengthens the mental power, self-esteem and helps to relate the body-mind relationship.

Kathak is a classical dance form originated from North India. It is a partially narrative dance form characterized by fast footwork (*tatkar*), spins (*chakkar*) and innovative use of *bhav*(expression) in *abhinaya* (acting). With time and history, it has developed into a highly refined system of rhythm and movement, capable of communicating complex human dynamics as well as abstract form and composition (Dutt, 2008). The *hastamudras* (hand gestures), the poses, and even the walk of the dancer further filter into this narrative and the whole feeling conveyed by the dancer. In light of dance therapy Kathak is a complete dynamic theatre. The dancer depends on their *ghungroos* (dancing bells) for balancing in *chakkars* (spins), facial muscle for *abhinaya* (expression), proper position of arms and feet and also *mudras*, etc. Kathak is a stimulus that affects the body in its entirety. The fast footwork helps to release anger and tension. The *thaat* performed in this dance form includes the therapeutic torso movements and it is now used for the treatment purpose also as a form of physical exercise. Kathak signifies the importance of dance and is the revolutionary new way to communicate.

Bharatnatyam is one of the most sublime of the Indian classical dances. It emerged in Tanjore of Tamil Nadu. Bharatnatyam encompasses all the traditional aspects of classical dance: the *mudras* (hand positions), *abhinaya* (facial expressions), and *padams* (narrative dances). In Bharatnatyam dance form the dancers make considerable use of hand-and-eye movements to express different emotions (Kilger, 1993). It is an amalgamation of emotion, music, rhythm and expression. Bharatanatyam

is *mudra* oriented and gives importance to *padartha abhinaya*, each word interpreted through *mudras*. In *navarasa* parts (nine sentiments) the dancers express their inner feelings and it helps to release their emotions. This practice can be well used for emotional wellbeing and psycho-therapy. This dance form strengthens the hamstring muscles including semitendinosus, semimembranosus, biceps femoris, etc.

Manipuri dance originates from Manipur, a state in north-eastern part of India. It was originally only performed in temples and continues to form an integral part of the religious and social fabric of Manipur. Manipuri dance is devotional in nature and is exclusively attached to the Hindu deities Radha and Krishna, who are often the main characters depicted in dance compositions like *Raslila*. It became better known outside the region through the efforts of Rabindranath Tagore. Movements of the body, feet and facial expressions in Manipuri dance are significant. Unlike other classical dances the Manipuri dancers never strike the ground hard during dancing. This saves them not to be injured during long practice of dance. The traditional Manipuri dance style embodies delicate, lyrical and graceful movements. Behind this outwardly soft impression a tough regime of body control is always present in this form of dance (Kashyap, 2005). Manipuri dancers make rounded movements and avoid any jerks, sharp edges or straight lines. It gives them undulating and soft appearance, proper body control and peace of mind.

Kathakali is a form of Indian classical dance originated in the Southern Indian state of Kerala. Kathakali dance style depends on the component with emphasis on facial expressions, rhythm and movement of hands, legs, body and the hand gestures. The therapeutic part of this dance forms mainly deals with the facial muscle. This dance form needs much more strength and mainly the male dancers perform the act. According to the philosophy of Kathakali, the human body is

divided into a number of minute anatomical units, which can either function individually or together in combinations. Kathakali dancers make geometric patterns which are either squares or rectangles and this is how they cover space. This dance form includes jumps, sweeps and leaps. The torso is used mostly as one entire unit although sometimes it is treated as two or three different units. With leg extensions the dancers shift their weight from one foot to another. During these movements they also perform elaborate facial gestures at the same time. Unlike the other classical dances, Kathakali places emphasis on muscles. The movement of the facial muscles, like the eye-brows, the eye-balls and the lower eyelids, form an important part of a dancer's training.

Odissi dance form is the temple dance tradition from Orissa state of India. Odissi dance is composed of a rich variety of *bhangi* (the basic poses or movements of *nritta*) found mostly in the Hindu sculptures. This dance style mainly follows the *tribhanga* (three dimensional body gesture). The movement of the hips is a unique feature in Odissi while such movements are prohibited in the other dance forms. One of the typical poses in Odissi is the *natavara bhangi* or *tribhanga*. In Odissi this is achieved by sharply deflecting the hips in one direction, deflecting the torso in another and finally deflecting the head in the same direction as the hip. In this dance human body is divided into two halves with equal distribution of weight. Odissi repertoire consists of 36 types of *padaved* (leg movement), seven types of *bhramari* (spins), and different types of expression. This dance form includes various forms of sitting, walking, leaping and elevations that reinforce some of the basic therapeutic movements of the dance. Prolonged practice of this dance forms give a very good body shape, with thin waist and tender look, to female dancers. During the present study it was noted that the Odissi dancers have great lung

function, and muscular control of waist, hip and thigh.

The movements in Kuchipudi are quicksilver and scintillating, rounded and fleet-footed. Kuchipudi dance is *vachika abhinaya* (based on dialogues) oriented. It also highlights the therapeutics as was followed in *Natyashastra* more than any other dance form in India. Each aspect of *abhinaya* or the expressive means is given a detailed description in this dance. This dance requires proper body balance. The therapeutic effects of this dance form are embedded in its grace and fluid movements. The survey conducted with the dancers showed strong effect of some muscles including rectus abdominis, abdominal external oblique, latissimus dorsi, gluteus maximus, etc.

Mohiniattam is another traditional South Indian dance form originated from Kerala. It is a very graceful dance form. Generally this dance form is performed by women dancer as a solo recital. The word Mohiniattam literally means *dance of the enchantress*. There are approximately 40 different basic movements, known as *atavukal* in Mohiniattam. The dance involves the swaying of broad hips and the gentle movements of erect torso from side to side (Dutt, 2008; Sudhakar, 1994). The dancers show a good strength and control over different muscles like adductor muscles, quadriceps femoris, soleus, tibialis posterior, peroneus longus and so on. All these body movements, body balancing, expression, muscle movement, muscle constriction and relaxation have a strong effect on therapeutic movements.

Therapeutic Value of Indian Folk Dances

Folk dances have a good deal with therapeutic approaches. Every dance form has its own style and is related to health problems. The overall physical well being and capacity of good health is the prime importance for all types of folk dances, though it is mainly related with mental enlistments. During long time practice in a particular type of dance form may cause changed physical effect to dancers. For

example, *Bihu* is the folk dance of Assam and it is an aggressive dance performed by both boys and girls. The powerful dance form of Punjab *Bhangra* also needs good health and proper body movements. *Gair* and *Geendad* are folk dance forms of Rajasthan with almost military precision. *Karagam* is a folk dance of Tamilnadu and it needs proper body balance. Bengali folk dance like *Chou*, *Rayabese*, *Dhali* also needs proper body movement and strength. Any unfit posture in these or other dances can cause hazards to the dancers. The practice of these powerful dance forms of *Bhangra* (Punjab), *Karagam* (Tamilnadu), *Chou*, *Rayabese*, *Dhali* (Bengal) gives good physical health, strength, power and mental support. The survey conducted with folk dancers revealed that these dancers are physically and mentally more fit than the non-dancers of their locality. With the popularity it helps them to gain self-esteem, self-confidence and interest to learn to the young dancers. Thus many parents of folk culture are interested to train their children to dance forms. It also indirectly or directly helps in their educational studies, too.

Therapeutic Value of Innovative Dances

Innovative dances have immense importance for establishment of dance therapy in its actual direction. As these kinds of dances are modern and new, the proponents of such kinds have knowledge on the developing science of dance including therapeutic value. Different schools of western world are now working in these directions. The therapeutic approach of innovative dance can be applicable in different diseases like irritable bowel syndrome, coronary atherosclerosis, hypertension, asthma, cardiac disease, anaemia, arthritis, gynaecological problems, muscular cramps, diabetes, stress etc. conduct regular dance therapy workshops to control diabetes, stress, obesity, healing tool for patients and to improve physical and mental fitness. The first of its kind in India. [Meekums B](#)(2015)suggested that

therawn regarding the effectiveness of DMT for depression. Larger trials of high methodological quality are needed to assess DMT for depression, with economic analyses and acceptability measures and for all age groups, Khandelwal H and Joshi U (2016)studied that the increase in the level of emotional intelligence after NAVRAS Dance Therapy and no specific changes seen in the level of emotional intelligence when no intervention conducted.

Conclusion

As dance is mainly dealing with physical movements, it has an immense role in health science as well as from the therapeutic point of view. Other cultural aspects like drama also have such type of effect on human health, but the exercise like dance needs much confidence, body control, regular practice and proper movements. Any types of negligence or improper body movements may cause the dancer to be injured or it can even become fatal to the dancer. But by modulation in movements it can make glorious future to the dancers as well as dance itself. The breathing time and muscular control are very important in these regards. The age bar, accidental trauma, pregnancy, psychology, health hazard have direct influence on the therapeutic value of dance. Dance therapy can prevent a person form some health hazards and may also help to avoid unwanted problems. But for a wide application this topic should be highlighted by Government Organizations, NGOs and public sectors in forms of seminars, symposium, workshops, news, etc. to attract general people's interest.

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