

bharatanatyam theory notes

Bharatanatyam theory notes are essential for understanding one of the oldest classical dance forms of India. Originating from Tamil Nadu, Bharatanatyam is not only a performance art but also a means of storytelling and expression, deeply intertwined with the cultural and spiritual traditions of India. This article aims to provide an in-depth overview of the theoretical aspects of Bharatanatyam, covering its history, components, styles, and significance.

1. Historical Background

Bharatanatyam has a rich history that dates back over 2,000 years. It was initially performed by Devadasis, women who dedicated their lives to temple service and dance. The dance form was historically associated with religious rituals and was performed in temples to narrate mythological stories.

1.1 Ancient Texts and References

The origins of Bharatanatyam can be traced to ancient texts, including:

- Natya Shastra: Written by Bharata Muni between 200 BCE and 200 CE, this treatise is the foundational text of Indian classical dance and drama. It elaborates on the concepts of gesture (mudras), facial expressions (abhinaya), and the emotional states (rasas).
- Silappadikaram: This ancient Tamil epic describes the dance of the legendary character Madhavi, providing insights into the cultural significance of dance in ancient Tamil society.

1.2 Revival in the 20th Century

In the early 20th century, Bharatanatyam underwent a revival due to efforts by prominent figures such as Rukmini Devi Arundale. She redefined the dance, elevating it from temple performance to a respected art form suitable for the stage. This revival also included reforms in the costumes, music, and presentation style.

2. Components of Bharatanatyam

Bharatanatyam is characterized by a unique combination of elements that contribute to its grace and storytelling ability. The three major components that make up this dance form are:

- Natyam (Dance): This involves the physical movements and gestures that convey the narrative.
- Bhava (Emotion): This refers to the expression of feelings and moods through facial expressions (abhinaya) and body language.
- Raga and Tala (Music): Bharatanatyam is set to intricate musical compositions that follow specific

ragas (melodic frameworks) and talas (rhythmic cycles).

2.1 Anga and Pratyanga

The body movements in Bharatanatyam are categorized into:

- Anga: The main body parts, including the head, torso, arms, and legs.
- Pratyanga: The supporting body parts, such as the neck, hands, and feet, that enhance the overall expression.

2.2 Mudras (Hand Gestures)

Mudras play a critical role in Bharatanatyam. They are symbolic hand gestures that convey specific meanings. There are two types of mudras:

1. Asamyukta (Single-hand gestures): Involves using one hand, with various positions representing different concepts.
2. Samyukta (Two-hand gestures): Involves using both hands, often to depict more complex ideas or narratives.

A few commonly used mudras include:

- Pataka: Represents a flag or a message.
- Tripataka: Symbolizes a crown, a woman, or a tree.
- Shikhara: Represents a mountain or a king.

3. Styles of Bharatanatyam

Bharatanatyam has evolved into several styles, each with its unique characteristics and interpretations. The main styles include:

- Tanjore Style: Known for its grace and fluid movements, this style emphasizes intricate footwork and elaborate expressions.
- Kalakshetra Style: Founded by Rukmini Devi Arundale, this style is characterized by its emphasis on spirituality and aesthetics, incorporating elements of classical music.
- Mysore Style: This style places a strong emphasis on storytelling and theatricality, often using elaborate costumes and dramatic expressions.

3.1 Differences Between Styles

The differences between the styles can be summarized as follows:

| Aspect | Tanjore Style | Kalakshetra Style | Mysore Style |

|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Focus | Grace and fluidity | Spirituality and aesthetics | Storytelling and drama |
| Footwork | Intricate and elaborate | Refined and controlled | Expressive and dynamic |
| Costumes | Traditional and ornate | Simple yet elegant | Colorful and dramatic |

4. The Role of Music

Music is integral to Bharatanatyam, as it sets the mood and tempo for the performance. The musical accompaniment typically includes:

- Vocalists: Singers who provide the lyrical narrative.
- Instrumentalists: Musicians who play traditional instruments such as the mridangam (drum), flute, and violin.

4.1 Ragas and Their Significance

Ragas are crucial in Bharatanatyam as they evoke specific emotions or moods. Some of the commonly used ragas include:

- Kharaharapriya: Evokes a feeling of devotion.
- Shankarabharanam: Represents auspiciousness and joy.
- Madhyamavati: Conveys a sense of peace and tranquility.

5. Abhinaya: The Art of Expression

Abhinaya is a vital component of Bharatanatyam, serving as the means through which the dancer conveys the story and emotions. It can be divided into four types:

1. Angika Abhinaya: Expressive movements of the body.
2. Vachika Abhinaya: Use of words, either sung or spoken.
3. Aharya Abhinaya: The use of costumes and makeup to enhance the performance.
4. Sattvika Abhinaya: The internal emotional state of the dancer, expressed through subtle facial expressions.

5.1 Techniques of Abhinaya

Effective abhinaya involves:

- Facial expressions: Conveying emotions through the face.
- Eye movements: Using the eyes to express feelings and connect with the audience.
- Body language: Utilizing posture and movements to reflect the narrative.

6. The Significance of Bharatanatyam

Bharatanatyam holds immense cultural, spiritual, and artistic significance.

6.1 Cultural Importance

- Preservation of Tradition: Bharatanatyam serves as a means of preserving ancient Indian culture and mythology.
- Community Engagement: It fosters a sense of community and belonging among practitioners and audiences.

6.2 Spiritual Significance

- Devotional Expression: Bharatanatyam is often performed as a form of devotion to deities, embodying spiritual narratives.
- Meditative Aspects: The practice of Bharatanatyam encourages mindfulness and self-discipline.

6.3 Artistic Value

Bharatanatyam is celebrated for its aesthetic beauty, precision, and intricate choreography, making it a respected art form within and outside India.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Bharatanatyam theory notes provide a comprehensive understanding of this beautiful dance form, emphasizing its historical roots, intricate components, various styles, and cultural significance. As a dynamic and evolving art form, Bharatanatyam continues to inspire dancers and audiences alike, bridging the past with the present and enriching the global cultural landscape. Whether for spiritual, cultural, or artistic pursuits, Bharatanatyam remains a testament to the richness of Indian heritage.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Bharatanatyam?

Bharatanatyam is one of the oldest classical dance forms of India, originating from Tamil Nadu. It combines expressive hand gestures, intricate footwork, and storytelling.

What are the main components of Bharatanatyam?

The main components of Bharatanatyam are Nritya (pure dance), Nritya (expressive dance), and Natya (dramatic dance).

What role does 'Abhinaya' play in Bharatanatyam?

Abhinaya refers to the expressive aspect of Bharatanatyam, where the dancer conveys emotions and stories through facial expressions and gestures.

How is Bharatanatyam structured in terms of performance?

A typical Bharatanatyam performance consists of several items including Alarippu, Jatiswaram, Varnam, and Tillana, concluding with a Shloka.

What is the significance of 'Mudras' in Bharatanatyam?

Mudras, or hand gestures, are essential in Bharatanatyam as they help convey specific meanings, emotions, and narratives within the dance.

What is the historical background of Bharatanatyam?

Bharatanatyam has roots in ancient temples and is traditionally performed by Devadasis as a form of worship. It has evolved over centuries, gaining recognition as a classical dance.

What are the different styles of Bharatanatyam?

There are several styles of Bharatanatyam, including the Kalakshetra style, Mysore style, and Pandanallur style, each with unique characteristics and techniques.

What type of music accompanies Bharatanatyam performances?

Bharatanatyam performances are typically accompanied by Carnatic music, which includes vocal singing, instrumental music, and traditional rhythms.

How can one learn Bharatanatyam effectively?

To learn Bharatanatyam effectively, one should seek guidance from a qualified teacher, practice regularly, and immerse oneself in the cultural context of the dance.

What are the physical benefits of practicing Bharatanatyam?

Practicing Bharatanatyam offers various physical benefits, including improved flexibility, strength, balance, and posture, as well as enhancing overall body awareness.

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