BHARATANĀṬYAM AND YOGA

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ABSTRACT

Yoga and Bharatanāṭyam are both spiritual and elevated art forms, whose simple and profound aim is to reach a union with the Divine. In Bharatanāṭyam however, there is much emphasis on communication, not solely between the dancer and the Divine, but also between the audience and the Divine. The article delves into all aspects of the dance, exposing the myriad qualities a dancer must aspire to acquire. The dancer is required to rightly and skillfully use everything at his/her disposal to properly guide the audience to the Divine. So a dancer may fulfill this high, important and difficult goal, he/she has scores of points to consider, to study, and to contemplate. These specific attributes are explained and presented in all three levels of existence: physical, emotional and mental. One of Yogānjali Nāṭyālayam’s aim is to restore the depiction of the integral Nāṭya Karaṇas to Bharatanāṭyam. We may here understand the benefits of studying Yoga to this end. In addition however, the mutual study of Yoga with Bharatanāṭyam offers many other gains. The dancer may cultivate and develop oneself through the study of Yoga, to acquire the necessary character traits and physical aptness the dance calls for, such as strength, flexibility, endurance, awareness, concentration and coordination of both the mind and the body, to name a few.

Keywords: mudrā, dance, mythology, bharatanāṭyam, nāṭya karaṇas, art, yoga, yogānjali nāṭyālayam, naṭarāja, nava rasas

Introduction

Bharatanāṭyam and Yoga are two ways that exist to help us understand the manifestation of the Divine in the human form. Both of these wonderful arts are products of Sanātan Dharm, which is the bedrock of Indian culture. The Nāṭya Śāstra of Bharata Muni lays emphasis on not merely the physical aspects of Bharatanāṭyam, but also on the spiritual and esoteric nature of this art form. Both of these arts are also evolutionary sciences for the spiritual evolution of the human being to the state of the super human and finally the Divine.

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The spiritual and Yogic nature of Bharatanātyam, is very well explained in the following comment by our Guru Yogamanī, Yogacharini, Puduvai Kalaimamani Smt Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani who is eminently qualified to talk on this subject being both an eminent world famous Yogi and a distinguished Bharatanātyam artist, rolled into one dynamic being.

"Bharatanātyam is Yoga, if Yoga means union. For surely this ancient art is one of the most beautiful and satisfying ways of expressing the human longing for union with the Divine. As an art form, Bharatanātyam demands conscious understanding of body, mind and emotions. The sincere dancer must understand the nature of Bhakti and Jñāna and the innate longing in all living creatures for Samadhi or cosmic consciousness. The ‘Divine dance of energy’ in the universe, so graphically and beautifully represented by Lord Naṭarāja, the lord of dance is the source of inspiration for all Bharatanātyam artists who understand the deeper aspects of their art. Especially for the youth, this Divine art is a boon for it shapes the body into graceful controlled beauty, the mind into alertness and sensitivity and the emotions into controlled and purified receptors for the deepest inner longings of humankind. Lord Shiva himself blesses those young people, who take to this art, offering their profound interest, their love and their discipline as Dakṣīṇa. Such true Sādhaks then find that Satyam, Śivam and Sundaram — truth, goodness and beauty do flower in their lives, boons granted gladly by the lord of dance to his ardent devotees."

In modern time, both of these elevating spiritual arts have been the victim of degeneration to such an extent that Bharatanātyam is only treated as a decorative performing art and Yoga as a ‘Keep fit’ exercise thus negating the very soul of these art forms. The depths of the spiritual concepts of these arts have been by far and large lost and they are being practised only at a very superficial and mundane level.

However, there exists a ray of hope at the end of this dark tunnel, as slowly and steadily many of the practitioners of these arts are awakening to their real inner meaning. Many of them are taking concrete steps to bring back the real meaning into the practice of these arts, which are actually ‘lifestyles’ in their true nature.

History and Mythology

Both Yoga and Bharatanātyam trace their roots to Sanātana Dharma and Lord Śiva is held to be the manifesting principle of both according to the South Indian Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. Dance, music and theatre are an enduring part of Indian culture. In India all forms of art have a sacred origin and the inner experience of the soul finds its highest expression in music and dance. The Hindu attitude towards art as an expression of the Inner beauty or Divine in man...
brought it into close connection with spirituality and religion. Using the body as a medium of communication, the expression of dance is perhaps the most intricate and developed, yet easily understood art form.

Ancient Indian Civilisation prospered on all fronts, leading to the compilation of epics like the four Vedas, Upaniṣadas, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Purāṇas etc., which serve as the basis for all streams of learning. The Vedas (Sāma, Yajur, Rg and Atharva) are said to be Divine spiritual knowledge derived from the supreme. Elaborate and eloquent references to the art of dancing abound in the Rig Veda, substantiating that dance was one of the oldest forms of art in India. The Nāṭya Śāstra is the earliest Indian text in the history of performing arts. Over time many classical dance forms emerged in India including Bharatanāṭyam, Kucipuḍi, Kathakali, Mohini Āttam, Kathak, Odissi and Maṇipuri, as well as numerous vigorous folk dances.

According to Nāṭya Śāstra and Abhinaya Darpana, Lord Brahmā created the art of dance upon the request of the Gods as a form of entertainment and it became known as the fifth Veda, and was open to all, irrespective of caste and creed. Prior to the creation of the Nāṭya Veda, Brahmā entered a Yogic trance in which he recalled the four Vedas. He drew literature from the Rg Veda, song from the Sāma Veda, Abhinaya or expression from the Yajur Veda and Rasa or aesthetic experience from the Atharva Veda. These aspects are the four main constituents of the Nāṭya Veda. Lord Brahmā passed on this Nāṭya Veda to his son, sage Bharata, who passed it on to his 100 sons. Thus this divine art descended from the heavens to Earth. Lord Śiva took up the Tāṇḍava (masculine form of dance), whereas Goddess Pārvatī, his consort, took up the Lāsya (feminine form). Bharata staged the first play with his hundred sons and Apsarās in the amphitheatre of the Himalayas. Lord Śiva, the ultimate dancer, was so enchanted that he sent his disciple Tandu to Bharata, to teach him the true elements of dance. These are depicted in the Nāṭya Śāstra, in its chapters collectively named the Tāṇḍava Laksṇa.

Lord Naṭarāja is considered to be the God of dance in Hindu mythology. His dancing image, in the Tāṇḍava form, is the starting point of all creation. To the dancer the four arms of the Naṭarāja are a depiction of dance movement in an immovable and static medium. The mystique of the arms and legs of the figure has a cosmological significance as the dance is taken as merely a human representation of a cosmic fact. In the Naṭarāja image the frontal palm of the right hand, which is, lifted and slightly bent, represents security (Abhaya) to devotees. The left hand, which is thrown across the body with the fingers pointing downwards, indicates the feet of the Lord as the refuge of devotees. The upraised left foot represents the blessing bestowed by the Lord. In the right upper hand Śiva carries a small drum representing the creative sound, which began the
universe, and in the other hand he has a fire, which is symbolic of light and therefore destruction of ignorance. Under the right foot is a dwarf, which signifies triumph over evil. Encapsulated in this figure of the Dancing Lord is the entire function of Shiva as the creator, preserver and destroyer. This dance is a metaphor for the belief that life is essentially a dynamic balancing of good and bad, where opposites are interdependent. The dance of Śiva is the dance of life.

Each Indian classical dance form draws inspiration from stories depicting the life, ethics and beliefs of the Indian people. The genesis of the contemporary styles of classical dances can be traced to a period around 1000-1500 years ago. India offers a number of classical dance forms, each of which can be traced to different parts of the country. Each form represents the culture and ethos of a particular region or a group of people. Bharatanātyam flourished in areas of Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Kucipudi is another famous classical dance of South India, from Andhra Pradesh. Kathakali is a theatrical dance form of Kerala. Mohini Attam is the feminine counterpart of Kathakali. Kathak is the classical dance form of North India and has two main Gharānas or schools - the Jaipur Gharāna and the Lucknow Gharāna. Odissi is the classical dance of Orissa and was mainly centered around Puri and Bhubaneswar. Manīpuri is the classical dance of the Northeastern state of Manipur. Besides these, there are several semi-classical dances that contribute to the plethora of Indian dances.

In India, classical dance and music pervade all aspects of life and bring color, joy and gaiety to a number of festivals and ceremonies. In fact, dance and music in India are tied inextricably to festivity of any kind.

**Key Aspects of Bharatanātyam**

Bharatanātyam is a seamless blend of Nūtta (rhythmic elements), Nūtya (combination of rhythm with expression) and Nātya (dramatic element). Nūtta is the rhythmic movement of the body in dance. It does not express any emotion. Nūtya is usually expressed through the eyes, hands and facial movements. Nūtya combined with Nūtta makes up the usual dance programs. Nūtya comprises Abhinaya, depicting Rasa (sentimental) and Bhāva (mood).

To appreciate Nātya or dance drama, one has to understand and appreciate Indian legends. Most Indian dances take their themes from India’s rich mythology and folk legends. Hindu Gods and Goddesses like Śiva and Pārvatī, Viṣṇu and Lakṣmi, Rāma and Sītā, Kūśa and Rādhā are all depicted in classical Indian dances.

Classical dance is a combination of Bhāva, Rāga and Tāla (mood, melody and rhythm). The
Gati or gait is stylized for each classical dance form. The Gati is also called Cāl in Kathak, Cāli in Odissi and Nadai in Bharatanātyam.

**Abhinaya:**

Abhinaya is the rhythmic expression of moods, emotions and a narrative through the use of Mudrā (hand gestures), Bhaṅga (postures of the body) and Rasa (facial expressions). Abhinaya has been vividly described in Abhinaya Darpana, a medieval work on histrionics that was codified by Nandikeśvara.

"Abhinaya" literally means the "representation or exposition of a certain theme". The basic root meaning is from the Sanskrit "Abhi" which means "to or towards" — with the root "Ni" — "to lead". Abhinaya thus means, "to lead (the audience and performer) towards a particular state of being or feeling." "Abhinaya" has four aspects namely: Aangika, Vācika, Aāhārya and Sātvika. Aāngika is the language of expression through the medium of the body (Śarīra), the face (Mukha) and movement (Ceṣṭā). Vācika Abhinaya is the expression through words, literature and drama; Aāhārya, the expression through decoration such as make-up, jewellery and costumes; Sātvika, the expression through acting out and manifesting the different state of the mind and feelings. Lord Śiva is praised as the embodiment of the above four types of Abhinaya in this following Śloka that is recited by all dancers in the initial part of their training in an effort to make them realize the divine nature of this art form.

āṅgikaṁ bhuvanaṁ yasya vācikāṁ sarva vāṁmayam
āhāryaṁ candra tārādi taṁ vande sātvikam śivam.

(We bow to Him the benevolent One, Whose limbs are the world, whose song and poetry are the essence of all language, whose costume is the moon and the stars.)

**Postures:**

The ideal postures of the body are depicted in the Shilpa Śāstra and there are four types of Bhaṅgas (postures), the deviations of the body from the central erect position. These four Bhangas are: Abhaṅga, Samabhaṅga, Atibhaṅga and Tribhaṅga. Abhaṅga signifies "off-center", an iconographic term for a slightly askew standing position. Samabhaṅga is the equal distribution of the body limbs on a central line, whether standing or sitting. Atibhaṅga is the great bend with the torso diagonally inclined and the knees bent. Tribhaṅga is the triple bend with one hip raised, the torso curved to the opposite side and the head tilted at an angle.
Mudrās:

Mudrās are found in both Yoga and dance and while they are used for communicating externally in dance there are used for internal communication in Yoga. In dance, the way a Hasta Mudrā is held, is divided into 12 Prāṇa Lakṣaṇas or 12 different ways of holding a hand.

1. Prakaraṇa Hasta - The fingers are stretched
2. Kuñcita Hasta - The fingers are folded
3. Recita Hasta - The fingers are given movement
4. Puñcita Hasta - The fingers are folded or moved or stretched
5. Apaveṣṭita Hasta - The fingers are bent down
6. Prerita Hasta - The fingers are bent back or moved or stretched
7. Udveṣṭita Hasta - Holding the hands UP while dancing
8. Vyavūṭta Hasta - Hands help UP in the sides
9. Parivūṭta Hasta - Hands are brought together from sides
10. Saṅketa Hasta - Hands used to convey Implied Meanings
11. Cinha Hasta - While dancing a dancer tries to show lot of things which are visible and invisible like a person's physical appearance, face, weapons, places of limbs and other parts of the body, his/her influence on others, their mannerisms etc. Hands used to show such things are called Cinhe
12. Padārthaṭike - Hands used to confirm the meanings of certain words

The Hasta Mudrās or hand gestures of Bharatanāṭyam are a very highly developed aspect of the art and are a science of communication with the Divine. They are used for a variety of reasons such as to mime the meaning of the song, convey deeper feelings, bring out inherent qualities, invoke the myriad forms of the Divine as in Navagraha and Daśāvatāra Hastas or in some cases they may be simple aesthetic ornamentation. Some have very limited meanings, and some are used as catch-alls for miming a variety of ideas.

The Nāṭya śāstra lists numerous Mudrās along with their meanings. Many others have been developed in the time since, whose histories are harder to trace. In the cases where an idea is being conveyed, it is more important to communicate clearly with hand gestures - adapting them if necessary - than it is to perform them with rigid correctness.

Hand gestures of Bharatanāṭyam are classified as
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1. Asaṁyuta Hasta - Single hand gestures
2. Saṁyuta Hasta - Double hand gestures

There are 28 Asaṁyuta Hasts and 24 Saṁyuta Hasts. Each Hasta has a defined usage called Viniyoga. These Viniyogas are again Sanskrit Ślokas codified in the Nātya Śāstra.

Asaṁyuta Hasta (Single Hand Gestures)
Patākā tripatākordhapatākā kartarīmukhah
mayūrakṛtyordhadṛascha arala śukatundakah
muṣṭīsta śīkārakṛasya kapitha kaṭakamukhah
śucī candrakalē padmakṣam sarpaśrastatah
mūgaśīrṣa śīṃhamukho lāṅgūlasoladmakah
caturā bhramarasācivyahaṃsāyohamṣapakṣakah
samdaṃśo mukulaściva tāmracūḍā trīśūlakah
aṣṭāväṃśhatatha namē evaṃ nāmānivikramāt.

Saṁyuta Hasta (Double Hand Gestures)
Anjaliśca kapotasca karkatā svastikastathā
dolahaśta puṣpapuṭaḥa utsaṅga śivaliṅgakah
kaṭakavardhanaściva kartarī svatikastathā
śakaṭa sāṅkha cakreca sampuṭa pāśa kīlakau
matsya koorma varahashcha garudongabandakāha
khatwa bherundakakhyashcha avahitastathivachā
chaturvīṃśatiṣaṅkhyaṅkaṅṣa saṁyuta katithakarah

Different schools and styles of dance use different hand gestures and different terms for the same hand gestures. Most have a fairly similar set of terms that largely overlap with this list, but many may be different in the details. It is largely a case of individual style, and the important thing is to communicate the ideas clearly.

Nava Rasa:

Nūṭya is that manifestation of dancing that includes both Rasa (aesthetic flavour) and Bhāva (human emotions), as in the dance with Abhinaya, the art of expression.

There are nine major classical categories of emotions or Rasa, called Nava Rasas that are depicted in the Abhinaya of Bharatanātyam. These are śūṅgāra (erotic love), hāsya (humour and laughter), karuṇa (compassion), raudra (anger), vīra (heroism), bhaya (fearful terror),
bhībatsa (disgust), adbhuta (wonder-awe) and śānta (peacefulness).

The Nava Rasas are a major form of emotional catharsis and Nāṭya (dance) helps cleanse the negative aspects of human emotions and sublimate them for higher emotions of Divine Bhakti. They are also a great means of psychological preventive therapy as most modern societies give little or no scope for expression of these emotions in the proper manner.

The Nava Rasas also help youngsters to learn about these emotions in a positive manner. They can then produce a balanced wholesome personality who embodies Sama Bhāva or equal mindedness.

According to one of the greatest exponents of Bharatanāṭyam, Bālasarasvati "Bharatanāṭyam, in its highest moment, is the embodiment of music in its visual form. For more than thousand years, the Śāstra s have confirmed that an individual dedicated to dance must be equally dedicated to music and must receive thorough training in both the arts. In demonstrating the art of Bharatanāṭyam abroad, I have made a special point of showing audiences how delicately linked is the realization of movement to Raga expression in Abhinaya, including the subtle expression of Gamakas, intonation of Śūuti, and the unfolding of improvisation in Niraval. In the same way that we look for perfect blending of Rāga and Tāla and of Rāga and Bhāva in Abhinaya, so also it is essential that the Raga and the Sāhitya be perfectly matched and in accordance with the necessities of expression in the dance."

She also points out, "Śūṅgāra stands supreme in this range of emotions. No other emotion is capable of better reflecting the mystic union of the human with the Divine. I say this with great personal experience of dancing to many great devotional songs, which have had no element of Śūṅgāra in them. Devotional songs are, of course, necessary. However, Śūṅgāra is the cardinal emotion, which gives the fullest scope for artistic improvisation, branching off continually, as it does, into the portrayal of innumerable moods full of newness and nuance".

She continues in the same vein by saying, "If we approach Bharatanāṭyam with humility, learn it with dedication and practice it with devotion to God, Śūṅgāra which brings out the great beauties of this dance can be portrayed with all the purity of the spirit. The flesh, which is considered to be an enemy of the spirit and the greatest obstacle to spiritual realization, has itself been made a vehicle of the Divine in the discipline of the dance. Śūṅgāra thus is an instrument for uniting the dancer with Divinity. Since the dancer has universalized her experience, all that she goes through is also felt and experienced by the spectator."
Nātya Karaṇas:

Acrobatic Nātya Karaṇas are very much a part of the traditional Bharatanātyam repertoire. 108 Nātya Karaṇas have been described in the Nātya Śāstra. Nātya Karaṇas are not only particular poses as is commonly believed, but also are cadences of movements. It is necessary for an understanding of the Karaṇas that the dancer masters the movements of the separate parts of the body like the neck, head, feet, thighs, wrist and hands, and understands how geometric shapes can be created with the Aṅgas (limbs), Evidence of Nātya Karaṇas is very clear in studying sculptures and paintings in Gopuram walls, ceilings and courtyards of our ancient Dravidian temples, especially in Cidambaram, Kumbakonam, Thanjavur and Tiruvannamalai, where dancers are depicted in acrobatic stances. These stances are very similar to Yoga Āsanas. On the Gopuram walls at Chidambaram there are many classical dance poses, which are also Yoga Āsanas.

Tāṇḍava, the classical dance, takes its name from Taṇḍu, the celestial attendant of Lord Śiva who instructed the sage Bharata in the use of the Aṅghararas and Karaṇas, the plastic modes of Tāṇḍava at Lord Śiva's behest. A Karaṇa is a unit of dance in which gesture, step and attitude are coordinated in a harmonious rhythmic movement. A sequence of six or more Karaṇas is called an Aṅghara. Aṅga refers to the body and Hara is a name of Lord Śiva, creator of the Taṇḍava, comprising 32 Aṅghararas composed of 108 Karaṇas. The Naṭarāja temple of Cidambaram is sculpted with these 108 Karaṇas on the inner walls of the 4 gateways leading to the temple. These lovely sculptures vividly depict the Tāṇḍava dance form.

While Śiva performed the Tāṇḍava, several Karaṇas were linked together as a garland of dance poses with the help of Rechakas or pauses. These became the Aṅghararas, garlands of dance poses for lord Hara. Each combination of Aṅghara contains six, seven, eight or nine Karaṇas. There are thirty-two Aṅghararas, according to Bharata. Later, learned experts in the field of dance created several additional Aṅghararas in their own style. These were in different combinations of Karaṇas and subsequently were different from those of Bharata.

According to experts of dance therapy, each of these 108 positions corresponds to one of the different human emotions. Holding a posture enhances the emotion it corresponds to. The length of time that the posture needs to be held will depend on how quickly you wish your energy sphere to become contented. You will need to perform the two or three postures for the counteracting emotion to the one you suffer from for a maximum total of 30 minutes per week for one year in order to get cured, and become contented in this respect. In practicing the opposing Karaṇa, only the body, leg and arm movements need to be considered - not the detailed head,
hand and foot gestures. Also, one does not need to be concerned with the movement into or out of the posture; nor with the actual emotion being represented - the mind needs to remain calm.

The Karanās in the Būhadeśvara Temple are sculpted on the walls of an inaccessible room on top of the Sanctum Sanctorum, and consist of about 87, four-armed, large figures of Shiva in Karanā poses, with one pair of hands holding various weapons. There are other stray Karanā figures, scattered all over Southern India in other temples. Strictly speaking, the Karanā is an entire dance movement whereas the Karanā-Sculpture is just one static pose taken from these. The beautiful bracket and wall figures of the Cennakeśava temple at Belur, and the Hoysaleswara temple at Halebid depict dancers in a variety of poses that can be easily identified with the Caris, the Sthānakas and the Karanās described in the Nāṭya Śāstra. After a deep study of the sculptures at Cidambaram, scholars have classified Karanās into nine types. According to Śārāṅgadeva in the Sangita Ratnakar, a beautiful classical pose, formed by changing the hands and legs in dance, conditioned by the mood or flavour, is known as a Karanā. Bharata, in the Nāṭya Śāstra, merely defines a Karanā as a combined movement of the feet and the hands that, though momentarily static, is a dynamic series of movements, which culminates in a specific pose. By themselves, the Karanās are beautiful aspects of dance, believed to have originated with Lord Naṭarāja’s Tāṇḍava. Pundits like Somanathkavi, Abhinavagupta and Śārāṅgadeva suggested their use along with Bhāva so as to expand their utility into the realm of Abhinaya. Over the years, Gurus interpreted Karanās with expressions in the Bhagavata Mela Nāṭakam style, thereby incorporating these Karanās into Javālis and Padams.

The Nāṭya Karanās give us a static element to offset the dynamic movements of the dance. This is important, for a pause is as important as a movement in classical dance. Nāṭya Karanās have not found prominence in the modern repertoire and one of the major reasons may be the physical inability of modern dancers to perform them. Most dancers today are overweight and inflexible due to the effects of modern lifestyle and diet. Unless a person has tremendous dedication and determination it will be very difficult to be able to perform most of the acrobatic Nāṭya Karanās. We often see dancers struggle to stand even on one leg in a feeble attempt to recreate the masterly Karanās.

Under the dynamic leadership of Kalaimamani Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, Yogānjali Nāṭyālayam, Pondicherry’s premier institute of Yoga, Bharatanāṭyam and Carnatic music has tried to restore the acrobatic Karanās to the Bharat Nāṭyam repertoire. According to Yogācharya Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani, Chairman Yogānjali Nāṭyālayam, acrobatic Nāṭya Karanās are very much a part of the traditional Bharat Nāṭyam repertoire, but have been practically
lost in today’s performances. He says that evidence of their presence in this art form is very clear in studying bas relief, sculptures and paintings in Gopurams, walls, ceilings and courtyards of our ancient Dravidian temples, especially in Chidambaram, Kumbakonam, Thanjavur and Tiruvannamalai, where dancers are depicted in acrobatic stances. He also points out that these stances are very similar to Yoga Asanas, and in the Gopuram walls at Chidambaram, at least twenty different classical Yoga Asanas are depicted by the dancers, including Dhanurāsana, Cakrāsana, Vrīkṣāsana, Naṭarājāsana, Trivikramāsana, Ānanda Tāṇḍavāsana, Padmāsana, Siddhāsana, Kāka Āsana, Vūścikāsana and others. Yogānjali Nāṭyālayam has as one of its aims the restoration of these acrobatic Karaṇas to the classical Bharatanātyam performance and this is possible only by combining sustained Yogic discipline with dance training from an early age. The sincere and regular practice of Yoga from early childhood helps to re-create the Karaṇas efficiently and many of the students of Yogānjali Nāṭyālayam have become experts in the artistic presentation of these Karaṇas.

Similarities Between the Approaches of Yoga and Bharatanātyam

There are a great many facets of Yoga and Bharatanātyam that are similar to each other. Some of these will be described in this section.

Discipline

This is an important quality required in both Yoga and Bharatanātyam. Yoga can be defined as discipline and one of the important aspects of Yoga is the emphasis on Tapa as discipline. Yoga also emphasizes that Abhyāsa or dedicated and determined practice is vital for success. No dancer can expect to master this art without a similar approach of dedicated, determined, sincere and regular Riyāz or Sādhanā. Sādhanā and Abhyāsa are vital for success.

Guru Bhakti:

Both arts stress the importance of Guru Bhakti and the role of Guru Kūpā in achieving success in all endeavors. The Guru is held even higher than God and this is explained in the following way. A hypothetical question is asked as follows. If God and Guru appear before you at the same time, to whom will you bow down first? The answer is that we will bow to the Guru first as he is the one who will show us God. Without the Guru we cannot recognize the Divine even if he is standing in front of us.

The traditional method of learning in both of these arts was the Guru-Celā relationship that was often in the Gurukula pattern where the student lived with the Guru as a family member.
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learning 24-hours-a-day for many years before mastering the art. This was a real trial by fire in many cases and only the true seeker would be able to pass such a test. Nowadays both these arts have become academic in nature and a lot has been lost in this transition from Gurukula to college method of imparting instruction.

Bhakti Rasa and Bhakti Yoga:

One of the important streams of Yoga is Bhakti Yoga and this is related to the Bhakti Rasa of Bharatanāṭyam. All great Bhakti Yogis of our ancient Indian history were deeply immersed in music and dance in their love for the divine. Mīrābai, Thiyagarāja, Caitanya Mahā Prabhu, Andal, Karaikal Ammaiyan, Nandanar and Avvaiyar are some of the few examples of such Bhakti Yogis. It is said that Lord Śiva danced the Ānanda Taṇḍava at Thilli (Chidambaram) following the request of his great Bhaktas, Sage Patañjali and Sage Vyagrapadha. Similarly he also is believed to have given the benevolent Darśan of his Cosmic Dance for the great woman saint, Karaikal Ammaiyan.

Vibrational Plane:

Mantra Yoga and Nāda Yoga are related to the Indian Classical Music that is an integral part of Bharatanāṭyam. The vibrations produced by the sounds of music and the use of the Bija Mantras of Laya Yoga and Mantra Yoga has a similar effect in arousing latent and potent energies of our inner being. Bharatanāṭyam utilises numerous shapes that are similar to the Maṇḍalas of Yoga and Yantra and these shapes also produce a bio-electro-magnetic field that energizes not only the dancer but also her audience too. All matter is vibration and the differences are only due to the different speeds of vibration that result in differing degrees of freedom. This is well understood by modern physicists, one of whom, Fritjov Capra even went to the extent of declaring the principle of Lord Naarāja as the most apt symbol of quantum physics itself in his book, “The Tao of Physics”.

Spiritual Plane:

The concept of unification of Jīvātmā and Paramātmā and the longing of the Jīvātmā for this union finds common manifestation in both dance and Yoga. Both aim to transcend the individualistic Ahaṅkāra and evolve into the ultimate universality. The legendary pioneer Rukmini Devi, founder of Kalakshetra rightly observed that dance is a form of Yoga. She said, "It needs true Bhakti or devotion. We have no more temple dancing today, but we can bring the spirit of the temple to the stage. This will change our entire attitude towards this art and then our physical
bodies will become transmuted and non-physical. Every performance becomes a means of not only making the dancer one with the higher Divine Self but the audience too. This oneness is Yoga."

Martha Graham, one of the greatest of modern dancers was able to transcend his individuality when he said, "I am interested only in the subtle being, the subtle body beneath the gross muscles." The roles of the Nāyakī pining for her lord are meant to portray the pining of the Jīva for the spiritual union with the Paramātmā. The Sakhi, the friend who brings about this union in dance is in reality the Guru who helps the Sādhaka reach that state Ultimate Universal Unification. The legendary Balasaraswathi who became synonymous with Bharatanātyam for many a Rasika said revealingly, "Bharatanātyam is an artistic Yoga (Nāṭya Yoga), for revealing the spiritual through the corporeal."

Concentration and Meditation:

The sixth step of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga is Dhāraṇa or concentration. This concentration when taken to its extreme leads us into the meditative state of Dhyāna. Many of the concentrative practices of Yoga are based on the Maṇḍalas that are assigned to the different elements of the manifest universe. The dancer requires a similar state of utmost concentration in order to bring about the union of Bhāva, Rāga and Tāla in her presentation. The different aspects of Bharatanātyam such as Nūtta, Nūtya and Nāṭya must be seamlessly unified with great concentrative ability for the performance to peak in its intensity. When the dancer achieves that peak of concentration in her performance she loses herself into the state of meditation. The Yogic state of Dhyāna and the trance like states experienced by the dancers while performing are quite similar in their universal nature. Shri Tiruvencatchari, an eminent dance historian (1887) compared Yoga with the dance and said that the secret is ‘forgetfulness of the individual self’. He also mentioned that dance is a means of attaining Mokṣa just as is Yoga.

Benefits of Yoga For Dancers:

According to the Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikesvara, the important inner qualities of the dancer (Antāḥ Praṇa) are as follows:

\[ \text{Javaḥ sthiratvam rekhā brahmarī dūṣṭi āśramaḥ medhā śraddhā vāco gītām} \]

\[ \text{Javaḥ} \quad \text{-swiftness or speed} \]

\[ \text{Sthiratvam} \quad \text{-composure or steadiness} \]
Rekhā -symmetry
Brahmarī -versatility and circular movements
Dūṣṭi -glances of the eyes
Aśramaḥ -ease and tirelessness
Medhā -intelligence
khraddhā -confidence and interest
Vāco -clear speech
Gītam-capacity of song

All of these inner qualities can be developed and maintained through the practice of Yoga and in addition to the above mentioned aspects of the personality, it is important for the dancer to have numerous physical and mental qualities that can be obtained through a dedicated practice of Yoga as a way of life.

Strength, Balance and Concentration:

These physical qualities are essential for the dancer at all stages of their artistic career. The standing poses such as Pādahastāsana, Pādāṅguṣṭhasana, Trikoṇāsana, Naṭarājāsana, Vīrāsana and its variations, Garuḍāsana, Padottānāsana are especially useful to develop strength in the legs and thighs. One legged poses such as the Naarājasana, Garudasana, Vrikshasana, Vatayanasana, Eka Padasana and Ardha Chandrasana help develop an excellent sense of balance as well as improve single minded concentration.

The hand balancing poses such as Mayūrāsana, Ķīṭṭbhāsana, Vūscikāsana, Dolāsana and Haṃsāsana develop strength in the shoulders, arms and wrists that is essential for holding the arms up in numerous Nūttā sequences such as in the Alarippu, Varnam and Tillana.

Carriage and Centre of Gravity:

Yogāsanas help develop proper carriage and back bending postures such as Uṣṭrāsana, Bhujaṅgāsana and Cakrāsana avoids the hunchbacks that are common in modern school going children from carrying heavy loads of books. Repeated practice of balancing poses on right and left sides as well as from different positions such as supine, prone, and the topsy turvy poses, the centre of gravity is improved and this leads to a perfect positioning of the body in performance of the various items.
Stamina and Endurance:

Practices such as the solar plexus-charging Agnisāra, the Hakāra Kriyā with the activating sound of HA and the Malla Kriyā with the Nasarga Muka Bhastrikā as well as the practice of Sūryanamaskārā help improve stamina and endurance. Padmashri Adyar K Lakshmanan, one of the most eminent Bharatanātyam masters of modern India, has often marveled at the stamina and endurance that is possessed by the students of Yogānjali Nātyālayam. He attributes it to their practice of Yoga and feels that Yoga gives them abundant energy to go through the most vigorous of items without requiring any rest at all in between lines or even in between items. The hand balancing poses such as Mayūrāsana, Titṭībhasana and Bakāsana as well as postures such as Paścimottānāsana, Navasana, Sarvāṅgāsana and Halāsana help greatly in this regard. Performance of Sūryanamaskārā slowly with emphasis on breathing and performance of various Prāṇāyāmas such as Vibhāga and Prāṇava Prāṇāyāmas helps to energize the entire system. We can balance the catabolic breakdown of the body by the anabolic activities of Yoga, thus retarding the aging process and also give the dancer the invaluable gift of a longer professional life.

Buoyancy and Agility:

Various Āsanas and Prāṇāyāmas are useful in developing a sense of buoyancy and improving the agility of the dancer. Practice of Prāṇāyāma helps to achieve a state of lightness of the body that can be compared to the Yogic Siddhi of Laghīmā or being as light as a feather. Agility is an important quality required by the dancer as there are numerous variations of gaits (Gati Bhedams) in Bharatanātyam and she needs to be extremely agile in order to execute them perfectly. The ten Gathi Bhedams are usually described as Hamsī (Swan like gait), Mayūrī (Peacock like gait), Mūgī (Deer like gait), Gajalīlā (Elephant like gait), Turāṅgī (jumping gait), Simhī (gait of the Lion), Bhujaṅgī (snake life gait), Māṇḍūkī (frog like gait), Vīra (heroic gait), Mānava (man like gait). Single leg balancing postures such as Vūkṣāsana, Naṭarājāsana, Rathacaryāsana, Eka Pāḍāsana, Vīra Bhadrāsana, Hastapāḍāṅguṣṭhāsana and Gaurḍāsana as well as the back bending poses such as Cakrāsana, Dhanurāsana and Uṣṭrāsana instill great agility in the dancer.

Flexibility:

One of the important physical attributes required by a dancer is flexibility of the body. Jattis and other practices of the Śītalī Karaṇa Vyāyāma, spinal twists such as Ardha Matsyendrāsana and Vakrāsana, back bending Āsanas like Laghu Vajrāsana, Rājakapotāsana, Cakrāsana and Dhanurāsana and forward bending Āsanas such as Pāḍahastāsana, Paścimottānāsana, and Halāsana ensure flexibility of the body. The body can then be a supple and well-tuned instrument
that allows her to perform any movement that she wishes effortlessly and gracefully while dancing. This effortlessness is essential for a dancer because, when she makes any movement with strain, not only does she suffer but the sensitive Rasikas are also jarred out of the smooth harmony that had been earlier effected in them by her easy and flowing movements.

Coordination:

Practice of Sūryanamaskārā, alternate nostril breathing Prāṇāyāmas such as Nādi Śuddhi and Loma Viloma as well as various Jattis help to develop right–left coordination and balance in the dancer. Āsanas wherein the hands are joined to the feet like Pādaḥastāsana, Jānuśirasana, Paścimottānāsana and Ākarṇa Dhanurāsana are very useful to develop hand-foot as well as right-left coordination, very essential for a smooth performance. Yoga is isometric and internal. It is a contest between our inherent inertia and the power of the will. Parts of the body are pitted against one another and a unique harmony of body, mind and breath is developed. This internal struggle when handled successfully deepens the consciousness of not only the working of the body but also of the mind and emotions.

Right-left brain function is improved by Prāṇāyāmas as right nostril breathing stimulates the left-brain and vice versa. This helps improve coordination between the two halves of the body and thus produce an artistic and perfect symmetry, essential for a good dancer.

Musculoskeletal Benefits:

A regular practice of Yoga helps the dancer avoid hip, back, shoulder, neck and knee related problems that are rampant in the modern dance world. Practices such as Baddha Koṇāsana, Jāṭhara Parivṛttānāsana, Hanumānāsana, Trikoṇāsana, Pādottānasana, Upaviṣṭa Koṇāsana, and Maṇḍūkāsana are good for the hips and legs. Vajrāsana and its variations as well as the Garuḍāsana are good for the feet while Catuṣpadāsana, Bhujaṅgāsana, Kāya Kriyā, Śalabhāsana and Uṣṭrāsana are excellent for the back. Even in dancers suffering from these musculoskeletal disorders, Yoga can help them recover faster and better as well as limit the morbidity and disability that may otherwise result from over use and misuse of these parts of the body. Brahma Mudrā, Kāya Kriyā, Tāla Kriyā and Dūḍha Kriyā are extremely beneficial for health of the entire musculoskeletal system.

Physiological Function:

Yoga helps develop all systems of the human body (cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive, eliminative, endocrine, nervous and musculoskeletal) thus strengthening, cleansing and purifying
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c the human body so that it is brought under our conscious will. This is vital for the dancers.

Yoga stimulates and strengthens the neuro-endocrine system and it counteracts the body stiffness, changes in skin tone and hair loss, which are common problems due to glandular imbalance. Youthfulness that is essential for a dancer is the byproduct of neuro-endocrine health and this can be attained by a regular Yoga practice.

All round health is developed which will stand the dancer in good stead even after retirement, saving them the 'post retirement blues and breakdowns.'

Energy:

In the science of Yoga, body movement and breath must be synchronized. The body is lifted on the incoming breath and lowered on the outgoing breath. Bhastrikā or the ‘bellows breath’ activate the solar plexus, which is an energy reservoir, as well as strengthens the diaphragm thus producing strength, vitality and endurance. Prāṇāyāmas such as Mukha Bhastrikā stimulate the internal cleansing of toxins. Breath is directly related to energy levels, life span, quality of emotions, state of mind and the clarity and subtlety of thoughts. This use of breath power with the body movements brings about revolutionary effects on the performance of the dancers. This synchronicity of breath and movement also improves their state of mind, control of emotions and all round physical and psychological health. Laya Yoga practices such as the Mantralaya as well as Prāṇāyāmas like the Kapālabhāti, Śūrya Prāṇāyāma and Śūrya Bhedana and other practices such as Śūrya Namaskārā, Paścimottānāsana, Nauli and Agnisāra help to create an energy reservoir that can be tapped into at will.

Awareness:

According to Yogamaharishi Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj, Yoga is four fold awareness. We become aware of the body through Āsanas. We become aware of the emotions through Prāṇāyāma and thorough the meditative practices we can become aware of the mind. When we transcend the individualistic ego, we become aware of awareness itself. A Yogi sits in a cave, but feels himself all pervading and eternal. Similarly in drama and dance, the limitation of time is dissolved. The experience of a dancer and a Yogi is the same - to go beyond worldliness and to transcend one's individual self.

Stress and Relaxation:

Yoga has a lot to offer in terms of stress reduction. Dancers face a lot of stress in terms of
preparation for performances and high expectations of the teachers, friends, relatives and the audience. Critics and other writers also tend to increase the pressures on the dancer.

Yogic Āsanas, Prānāyāmas and Jñāna Yoga Kriyās, work on the various Kośas of our body and clear up all the subconscious 'quirks' in our brain from the billions of years of evolution from animal to the human state. An understanding of these 'quirks' helps us to understand our reaction to various situations and helps to prevent our 'stress response' to them. 'Stress Relievers' from Hāṭha Yoga and Jñāna Yoga are of immense benefit in relieving pent up emotions and tempering our reactions to stressful situations.

Yoga has a lot to offer to dancers through the field of relaxation. In the dance world, all is PUSH, PUSH and PUSH. There is little room for relaxation in the arena. Yoga teaches us that there has to be balance.

The Yogic concept of ‘Spanda-Niśpanda’ or ‘exertion-relaxation-exertion-relaxation’ in an alternating rhythm is unique to the Yogic art of relaxation and provides a counterfoil to the extreme stress of competitive and performance related pressures, thus fostering mental, emotional and physical health.

Prānāyāmas such as Bhrāmarī, Praṇava, Śītalī and Śītkārī are excellent stress relievers. Śavasana with a great variety of relaxation practices as well as the Bhūjaṅgīnī Mudrā and Pavana Mukta Kriyās are an excellent foil against stress. Yoga Nidrā and the performance of Sāvitrī Prānāyāma in Śavasana can help produce total relaxation at all levels.

Providing Answers to Deeper Yearnings:

The philosophy of Yoga helps the dancer to come to grips with many questions that pop up in their life. Classical dance in ancient times was associated with high levels of moral and ethical codes of behavior. The modern day dance world has gone a long way astray from such ideals and the inculcation of Yogic values such as Yama and Niyama can go a long way in bringing back such ideals in to the world of dance. This will stimulate modern dancers to have a second look at their decadent life styles and try to change for the better. The Yamas when practiced provide much mental solace and ethical strength to the dancers while the Niyamas produce the stoic qualities necessary for high-tension situations. The whole philosophy of Yoga can constitute a ‘touch stone’ for those who find themselves lost when the spotlight dims or shifts its focus to another performer. A more conscious and aware outlook of the whole phenomenon of human life on earth will make the dancer a more valuable member of the human social unit.
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Right Attitude:

The regular practice of Yoga as a "Way of Life" helps reduce the levels of physical, mental and emotional stress. This Yogic ‘way of life’ lays emphasis on right thought, right action, right reaction and right attitude. 'To have the will to change that which can be changed, the strength to accept that which can not be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference' is the attitude that needs to the cultivated. An attitude of letting go of the worries, the problems and a greater understanding of our mental process helps to create a harmony in our body, mind whose disharmony is the main cause of 'Aadhi – Vyadhi' or the psychosomatic disorders.

The practice of Prānāyāma helps to regulate our emotions and stabilize the mind, which is said to be as restless as a ‘drunken monkey bitten by a scorpion’. Animals that breathe slowly are of less excitable nature than those that breathe rapidly and a similar observation holds true for humans. Even when we get angry, we can experience that our breathing becomes rapid and it is slower when we are cool and relaxed. Thus the slow, rhythmic and controlled breathing in Prānāyāmas leads to the emotional control seen in many Yoga Śādhaks.

Benefits of Dance For Yoga Śādhakas

A true Yogi is neither an introvert nor an extrovert. He or she is an ambivert, a person who is equally at home irrespective of whether he is introspecting within himself or whether he is interacting vibrantly with the external environment. Therefore to make sure that the natural introversion of Yoga is balanced with healthy extroversion, some form of extroverted activity such as sports, music or art and craft skill need to be deliberately cultivated.

Dance provides a dynamic activity to offset the static activity of Yoga and many modern Yoga practitioners can benefit from such associations.

Dance also provides a great source for emotional catharsis and this can help the Yoga Śādhaka to get over many of the emotional hang-ups that continue to bother them in his or her Śādhanā.

Conclusion:

The Upanishads say, "Devo Bhūtvā Devaṇa Yajet" meaning – "Become a God in order to worship God." India has always embodied this eternal principle in its culture and has spread it across the seas. Dancing was considered the religious ceremony most pleasing to the Gods and dedication of all activity to the Divine was the highest form of worship.

According to the Nāṭya Śāstra, "There is no wisdom, nor knowledge; no art nor craft; no
device, nor action that is not to be found in Nāṭya."

Brahma, created the fifth Scripture, Nāṭya Veda, the scripture of the Dance, presenting moral and spiritual truths in a form, which is easy to understand, even for the masses. Brahma then said to the people, "This art is not merely for your pleasure, but exhibits Bhāva (emotion) for all the three worlds. I made this art to reflect this world, whether in work or play, profit, peace, laughter, battle or slaughter. This art shall teach men that the fruit of righteousness will be given to those who follow Dharma, the Moral Law. The spirituality of this art shall be a restraint for the unruly, a discipline for the followers of rule. It will create wisdom in the ignorant, learning in scholars, afford sport to kings and endurance to the sorrow-stricken. Replete with the diverse moods, informed with varying passions of the soul, linked to the deeds of all mankind, the best, the middling and the low, affording excellent counsel, and all else, this great art shall console and elevate the world."

A distinctive feature of the Bharatanāṭyam is the fact that it conceives of movement is space mostly along either straight lines or in triangles or in circles, by which we gain a lot of energy. These movements are in actual act, moving lines, which come together in discernible patterns. These patterns reflect or mirror the Maṇḍalas (mystic shapes or forms), which are associated with the six Cakras of the human psychic energy body (Sūkṣma Śarīra, as it is termed in Yoga).

Bharatanāṭyam is no less a spiritual search than the Saṅyasi's way of renunciation. Yoga and Bharatanāṭyam are both a means by which "with body, mind and soul we may pray to the Divine." These great arts help us to divinize ourselves, to develop spiritual qualities of loyalty, fidelity, a sense of Dharma, discipline, awareness, sensitivity, strength, courage, skill, cooperation, diligence, health, happiness and well being, serenity and peacefulness of mind.

May the artistic community of this great nation of Bharat strive to keep the purity of its great cultural heritage intact, inspiring people in all times to follow the advice of the great Rishi Veda Vyāsa, who exclaimed at the end of his great epic, the Mahābhārata:

"Oh man know this! Do your Dharma (Ordained virtuous duty)! Then Artha (wealth) and Kāma (fulfillment of desire) shall automatically come to you. Having fulfilled yourself in Artha and Kāma, you will then seek and obtain Mokṣa! Hence I say, "Do your Dharma and all else shall come automatically to you."

The great art of Bharat Nāṭyam surely shows us how we may fulfill our Dharma in a most refined, pleasing, enjoyable, dignified, beautiful and joyful manner and attain that final union with the Supreme Self.
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