Classical Dance Forms In India

Classical Dances of India – UPSC IAS Prelims Exam

Dancing is one of the most ancient art in Indian culture. Classical dance established its roots from as early as the Vedic time. It is mainly associated deeply with the religious rites, the performance of gods and goddesses and maintaining the divine and spiritual concept of race.

All these dances are mainly governed by the guidelines laid down in the Natyashastra written by Bharatamuni. The principal rule is that the knowledge is transferred through gurus. Gurus pass the knowledge of different traditions called sampradayas to the disciples. This guru-shishya parampara is the core of classical art form in India.

Presently there are eight classical dance forms in India.
1. Bharatnatyam

- It is the oldest classical dance form of all dance forms. Bharatnatyam derives its name from Bharatamuni and Natyam which means dance in Tamil.

- The origin of this dance is traced to the solo dance performance of Devadasis (Temple dancers) in Tamil Nadu.

- The art became nearly extinct after the decline of devadasi system. The efforts of prominent freedom fighter E. Krishna Iyer revived this dance form.

**Classification of Bharatnatyam**

**Alarippu**: It is the beginning of dance with simple posses and movements. It seeks to get the blessing from the God. It helps the dancer to get ready for the performance.
**Jatishwara**: It is the pure form of dance in which body movements are synchronized with the Swara of Raga and Tala.

**Shabda**: It includes abhinaya in the song which generally praises the glory of God.

**Varnam**: Dance and emotions synchronized with **Raga** and **Tala**.

**Padam**: It is a mastery over abhinaya expressed by the performer.

**Jawali**: Short love-lyrics performed at a faster tempo.

**Thillana**: It is the last stage of performance which comprise of pure dance, high spirited body movements and complicated variation in rhythm.

- Movements of Bharatnatyam resemble that of the dancing flame.
- **Rukmini Devi Arundale**, a famous proponent Bharatnatyam bought global recognition for this dance form. She bought radical changes in the costumes of dancers.
2. Kuchipudi

- Kuchipudi was originally performed by the group of actors going from village to village known as ‘Kusselavas’. Kuchipudi derives its name from the Andhra village called Kusselavapuri.

- The advent of Bhagavatism made the dance a monopoly of male brahmins and began to be performed at the temple. The recital is based on Bhagavata
Purana but has a secular theme and dancers came to be known as Bhagathalus.

- Kuchipudi became prominent under the patronage of Vijayanagara and Golconda rulers.

- Kuchipudi consists of divisions such as Adavus, Jatis, Jatiswara, Tirmanas, and Thillanas. The dance also expresses through Padas, Varnas, Shabdas, and slokas. These features are also found in Bharatnatyam also.

- Lasya and tandava elements are important in kuchipudi dance form.

- The dance style is a manifestation of earthly elements in the human body.

- The dancer may undertake the role of the singer as well becoming a dance-drama performance.

- The music of dance is Carnatic.

- Lakshmi Narayana Shastri bought renown to Kuchipudi dance form. In the present century, Kuchipudi is changing its character greatly to solo items.
3. Kathakali

- Kathakali is a classical dance form of Kerala. It derives its name from ‘Katha’ means story and ‘kali’ means drama. The fold traditions, Ramanattam and Krishnanattam performed in temples under the patronage of feudal lords became the source of Kathakali.

- Kathakali declined after the breakdown of the feudal lords. Later renowned Malayali poet Vallathol Narayana Menon revived it under the patronage of Mukunda Raja. He established Kerala Kala Mandalam for the progress of Kathakali.

- Kathakali is a dance-drama where the actor does not speak their lines.

- It is performed in open air theatre or in temple premises. Brass lamp is used for lighting.

- Kathakali depicts the eternal conflict between God and Evil in most of its presentations.

- Representation of Rasa through movement of Eye and Eyebrows is the most remarkable feature of Kathakali. This needs strenuous training to perform.

- Malayalam with many Sanskrit word is the language used in Kathakali songs.
The Mask like elaborate facial makeup is governed by the complex symbolism of colour, line, and design.

- **Reddening white portion of the eye** is a peculiar feature of Kathakali.

- Each character like Heroes, Anti-heroes, Villains, Demons, Snags, and King have a prescribed makeup and costume.

- Combination of colour determines the type and mood of character in the play. These are **Pacha, Katti, Thaadi (Velupu Thaadi, Chuvap Thaadi, Karup Thaadi)**. Green is associated with Good, red with valour and ferocity, black with evil and primitiveness, and white with purity.

- **Guru Kunchu Kurup, Gopi Nath, Rita Ganguly etc** are the famous proponents of Kathakali.

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4. Mohiniattam

- Mohiniyattam is a classical dance tradition of Kerala which gained prominence under the **rulers of Travancore**. After a period of decline, it was revived by famous poet **Vallathol Narayana Menon** along with **Kalyani Ammal**.

- ‘Mohini’ means beautiful and ‘Attam’ means dance. It is essentially a **solo dance performance** that incorporates **Lasya** and **Tandava** style.
- It generally narrates the story of the feminine dance of Vishnu.
- White and off-white is the principal colour used in costumes of Mohiniyattam.
- Mohiniyattam perform symbolizes the element of **air**.
- It includes a peculiar manner of dancing with feet and legs apart. Knees are greatly bent and rhythmic syllable words are used in recitation.
- The dancer’s feet are perfectly synchronized with the play of drum.
- **Sunanda Nair, Madhuri Amma, Jayaprabha Menon** etc are the main proponents of Mohiniyattam.

5. Odissi

- Odissi derives its name from ‘**Odra Nirtya**’ mentioned in Natya Shastra. **Khandariya-Udayagiri caves** provide some of the early examples of Odissi dance.
- It was patronized mainly by the **Jain King Kharvela** and primarily performed by Maharis.
- **Kabichanda Kallicharan Patnaik** revived this dance form after the independence. Later efforts of **Charles Fabri** and **Indrani Rehman** bought International acclaim to this dance form.
- Mudras and postures for expressing emotions are similar to that of Bharatanatyam.

- The three bent form of dance called **Tribangha posture** is an important feature of Odissi.

- Odissi dance performs Natya combined with an element of dancing and acting.

- It is a unique representation of gracefulness, beauty, and sensuality.

- Geometrical shapes and patterns are created with dancers body. Hence it is called '**Mobile Sculpture**'.

**Elements of Odissi includes**

**Mangalcharan**: It is the beginning of the dance.

**Batunirtya**: It comprises of dancing.

**Pallavi**: It includes the facial expression and representation of the song.

**Tarijham**: Pure dance before the conclusion.

- Odissi dance music is **Hindustani**.

- Water is symbolized in this dance form.

- **Guru Pankaj Charan Das**, **Guru Kelu Charan Mohapatra** etc are the main proponents of this dance form.
6. Manipuri

- The mythological origin of Manipuri dance is traced to the celestial dance of Siva and Parvati along with ‘Gandharva in the valley of Manipur.

- The dance gained prominence after the advent of Vaishnavism.

- Rabindra Nath Tagore introduced it in Shantiniketan thereby brought back the prominence of this dance form in modern times.

- Manipuri emphasis on devotion. It incorporates both Tandava and Lasya in which more emphasis is given to Lasya.

- The body connected through curves in the shape of ‘8’ called Nagabhanda Mudra is an important feature of this dance form.

- Ras Leela is a recurring theme of Manipuri dance recital.

- Drums, flute, horns, esraj, tamboura, cymbals, and mridang are some of the important instruments used in Manipuri dance.

- Jhaveri sisters, Guru Bipin Singh etc are the famous proponents of Manipuri dance form.
7. Kathak

- Kathak is the traditional dance form of **Uttar Pradesh**. Kathak derives its name from the ‘Kathika’ or storyteller who recites verses from the epics with music and gestures.

- During the Mughal times, it was influenced by **Islamic features**, especially in costume and dancing style.

- Later in the twentieth century, **Lady Leela Sokhey** revived the classical style of Kathak.

- It is commonly identified with the court tradition in North India.

- In the technique, Kathak follows Vertical lines with no breaks and deflection. Footwork is very important in training of dancers.

- Kathak is based on **Hindustani music**.

- It consists of different **kharanas** like Lucknow, Jaipur, Raigarh, and Banaras.

- **Jugalbandi** is one of the main features of Kathak recital. It shows a competitive play between dancer and tabla player.
• **Gatbhaar** is the dance without music or chanting. Mythological episodes are outlined by this.

• Kathak is accompanied by **dhrupad music**. During the Mughal period, Taranas, Thumris, and Gazals were introduced.

• **Lachha Maharaj, Shambu Maharaj** and **Birju Maharaj** etc are the main proponents of Kathak.

8. **Sattriya**

• In the 15th century AD, **Vaishnava saint of Assam, Shankaradeva** introduced the Sattriya form of dance.

• Sattriya derives its name from the Vaishnava Monastries Known as **Sattras**.

• It focuses more on the devotional aspect of dance, It narrates the mythological stories of Vishnu.

• The dance form is **performed in a group by male monks** known as **Bhokots** as part of their daily rituals.

• **Khol** and **Flute** are the main instruments played in Sattriya dance.
• Rhythmic syllables and dance postures along with footwork has given greater emphasis in Sattriya dance.

• It combines the elements of Lasya and Tandava.

• There is a strict guideline laid down for the hand gestures and footwork in Sattriya dance.

• **Gayan-Bhayanar Nach** and **Kharmanar Nach** are two streams evolved in the modern times.
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