

## AESTHETICS OF ART AND THE ARTIST

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### Abstract

Indian culture is unique in its own way and its 'uniqueness' is accepted all over the world. A country or a nation has a specific culture of its own, its own customs, philosophy, social norms, etc. Ancient India has had uninterrupted history dating back to almost five thousand years ago. India has managed to preserve its culture and traditions through the ages and at the same time it represents a mode of thinking and human spirit which goes beyond geographical limitations. Indian art is an immediate expression of Indian civilization. Over the years, India has flourished in all directions, art, architecture, literature, music along with socio-economic development, many cultural practices, languages, customs, and dances are examples of a composite mixture of varying styles and influences. It represents beliefs and philosophies, ideals and outlook of the society and the spiritual endeavours. The more deeply one tries to understand Indian arts, the more it is obvious that what seems to be spontaneous, individualistic, impulsive, and natural, is in fact, long inherited, minutely studied, and symbolically momentous.

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Indian arts are spiritual ceremonies by themselves, and artists through their art forms invoke the Ultimate, all Indian arts strive towards this final aim of realisation. "The ancient seers understood the world to be structured arrangement of the five elements. Each element brought forth a distinct art-expression. This disposition encourages a natural interplay with the senses and furthers a movement that proceed from the gross to the subtle and from the outer to the inner realm. In their expression and art form, the five artistic manifestation remain linked to the constituent component. The element of sculpture is to be understood to be earth. The main factor of painting is fluidity or water. The principle of dance is transformative fire. Music flows through the air and poetry vibrates in ethereal space. The art thus conceived donated poetic form to the Vedic sacrificial ceremonies.(D.K. Chandra 4)"<sup>1</sup> Indian arts are known to be spiritual in the attitude, idealistic in appearance and uplifting in interpretation. They are supposed to lead an individual towards *moksha* and thus they are unique in nature. In India art is referred to as '*saadhanaa*' a discipline of the highest order. The artist is a metamorphosis of art, it is the inner awakening achieved through self transformation and self liberation. The artist while performing the art is in a state of trance or '*samaadhi*' - here a state of balance/equilibrium (*sama*) is brought about with intellect/knowledge (*dhi*). The best art is the one intelligently and scientifically executed. The principles of Indian arts are based on a study of inner experience and the outer manifestation of that experience. Through his art, the artist reveals the Unknowable (*Brahman*) and not his personal, subjective feelings, thus, making subjective perception becomes irrelevant for the artist. Bharata's concept of *Rasa*, and Kshemendra's *Auchitya* are considered as the fundamental concepts of measuring aesthetics in Indian arts.

Indian classical dances cater to a specific purpose, other than entertainment it has an essential a reasoning, wherein the non-initiated are educated, and the educated are further enlightened. It is apparent paradox of artistic creation that the amalgamation of religious, spiritual and philosophical alongwith aesthetic, technical and secular which gives Indian arts a different standing in the world of arts. Thus, the origin of the most revered treatise for Indian arts, the *Naatyashastra* written by Sage Bharata, the magnum opus, though cloaked in mythology, is indeed a work existing in reality! The pinnacle of the *Naatyashastra* lies in the concept wherein - there is nothing to communicate if it is not 'relishable'. The performer needs to understand this fundamental truth. Bharata devotes the sixth chapter to the famous '*Rasa Sutra*'. The emotions have to be provoked in the minds of the audience for them to relish it. The '*Rasa Sutra*' recapitulates the factors in performing arts construction that lead to relishing '*Rasa*'. The theory of *rasa* can be broadly applied to all Indian arts.

**'VIBHAAVA-ANUBHAAVA-VYABHICAARI-SAMYOGAAT RASA NISPATTIH'**

*Vibhaava* (cause), *anubhaava* (consequents) and *vyabhicaari* (transitory emotions) *bhaava* in perfect combination with one another evoke the highest delight which is called *rasa* (aesthetic experience) in the audience. It is how one utilizes these elements in the artistic production which is the deciding factor for the success of the piece of work. The performer must create and maintain the right proportion and harmonious expression of these construction factors for creating an emotion that will lead to aesthetic delight in his spectator. This is further compared to culinary skills stating that when many well mixed and well-cooked food bring joy of taste to a food connoisseur who relishes the prepared dish, in the required manner, the audience enjoys the taste of *rasa* which is appropriately mixed in the right manner.

Kshemendra, the disciple of Abhinava Gupta, on the other hand, propounded the theory of *Auchitya* in his *Auchityavichararcha* that deals with the concept of propriety. the categories can be broadly divided into ; propriety of diction (*Bhaashaauchitya*), appropriateness of aesthetics (*Saundaryaauchitya*), exactitude of grammar (*Vyakaranauchitya*), appropriateness of culture (*Sanskritiauchitya*), and suitability of creative genius (*Pratibhaauchitya*). *Auchitya* is described as harmony or a balanced proportion which marks the magnificence in the art and can be described as the secret to flawless creation of *rasa* for the art, artist and the spectator.

The *Naatyashastra* (Science of Dramaturgy) is an encyclopaedia which deals with allied subjects and arts for a successful stage presentation. The word '*abhinaya*' used by Bharata in the *Naatyashastra* is formed as *abhi*+ $\sqrt{n\bar{i}}$  (*na*) i.e. the  $\sqrt{n\bar{i}}$  means to carry preceded by the prefix '*abhi*' which means towards. Thus *abhinaya* means to take towards or forward - an essence symbolizing communication. It is through *abhinaya* that the *artha* or subject of presentation is brought into the consciousness of the spectator. According to the *Naatyashastra*, the performance of Indian *naatya*, in its totality, was presented by the means of varied components like -

<i>aangika</i> :	gestures and other bodily movements.
<i>vaachika</i> :	spoken words
<i>aahaarya</i> :	costumes and make-up
<i>saattvika</i> :	depiction of mental or psychological states.

As early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, Bharata in his *Naatyashastra* has clearly shown great knowledge and understanding of the Human Anatomy. The all engulfing set rules of Bharata are not only of value in performing arts viz. dancing, but also, hold importance in allied arts such as painting and sculpting where the art has to maintain the basic rules of alignment and body structures as per the subject undertaken by the artist. Indian sculpture and other visual arts in the later decades were also highly influenced by the analysis of the human body. For example, series of dance movements directly related to the *Naatyashastra* can be found in some medieval temple complexes in South India. The most famous of them are those carved on the towering 9th century gateways of the Nataraja temple in Chidambaram. They include 93 of the 108 *karanas* described in the *Naatyashastra*. The human body is the vehicle used by the artist to project her art form and the *angikaabhinaya* forms the main crux of the mode. Dance furthers a personal contact with the space around and establishes a new connection with the body movements. The artist performs keeping in mind the ambit in which the artist can explore the various emotions. The breath carries the mood to the nerves and cause action in the limbs, face, and body on a whole. These explorations can possess freedom but the framework within which they must fit in are solid and prefixed. These rules are followed by all Indian classical dance styles. '*Caturashra*' is the squarish posture of the limbs and the body and *Saushthava*' is the raised chest with the ear lobes and waist in the straight line. The body is in a pose of eagerness and readiness but the same is garbed with impression of peace and poise. These set rules of postures aid in having the artist perform with utmost grace and grandeur but within the sensibilities of the body alignment. Indian performing arts fit in various contemporary moulds of the society over ages while remaining true to the traditionality associated. The art forms in India create an imagery of the varied limbs of the body, but unified in soul.

The French dramatist Antonin Artaud is quoted to have said, 'The actor is an athlete of emotions', suggesting that it is necessary for actors to develop emotional endurance, flexibility, and skill through the daily rehearsals of being in sync with emotions, just as athletes are while they train for the marathon. "An education in the Indian classical performing arts involves the study of form and its technique; followed by practice. (Chandra Anand)"<sup>2</sup> While learning classical art, the student encounters the simple yet complex truths which are deeply rooted into Indian philosophies. The teacher taught tradition (*Guru Shishya Parampara*) forms the basis of dance academics or education in any performing art while improving the learner's aesthetic understanding and abilities to further educate others around them, thus, leading towards a complete upliftment in the society over generations. It is a pure amalgamation of such beliefs transformed into the classroom mode providing desired skillsets to the art students promoting them towards leading a rewarding life while developing greater awareness towards deeper realms of understanding life. Indian classical dances are highly stylised and aren't

merely performed purely for entertainment purpose. Indian classical dancers all over the world speak a similar language of basic technique since times immemorial, while the interpretations undergo continuous changes. Indian Classical dance has two definite components: the *nritta* (non-representative) and *abhinaya* (*nriya* - representative). The *nritta* aspect delves into the accompanied rhythm and musical notes whereas the *nriya* relies upon the lyrics of the prose or the poem which is recited. In a full-fledged performance the artist will demonstrate the *abhinaya* via the major limbs (head, chest, waist, sides, hands and feet) and minor limbs (eyes, eyebrows, nose, cheeks, chin, lips, etc) as defined in the *Naatyashastra*. From the texts such as *Naatyashastra* followed extensively by Kathak or Bharata Natyam, to the *Baalaraama Bharata* for Mohiniattam and Kathakali, from the *Abhinaya Chandrika* for Odissi to the *Govindasangeetaleela* *Vilaasa* for Manipuri, all the texts have played a crucial role in forwarding the dance styles. Even today, Indian classical dances are evolving due to their dynamic nature and constant improvisations. The development of the dance styles is based on the lines of the texts they exhaustively refer for their nuanced movements. The maturity of the artist is a constant process directly proportional to his exploring the physical and psychological intricacies, as well as understanding of the *shastra* of arts and laws of stage performance which are intermingled with the human behaviour making the performance competent to evoke *rasa* in the audience – *siddhi* (success) of the performance.

Unfortunately, the art is empty without the science, only knowing the art is not enough, the science is extremely important. Dancers remain subject to the same unyielding physical laws as athletes. However, although muscular strength has been part of the athlete's life since classical times, this physical fitness component has not been considered as a necessary ingredient for success in dance. Every dancer's body is different, and one has to try what form, training and life style works for her. Hence, it becomes extremely important to fuse together the science of today's times and the *shastras* for overall, holistic wellbeing of every artist, whether a dance teacher or a dance performer to safeguard his/her own art as an artist in his'/her own right.

Smt. Swapnokalpa Dasgupta, in the capacity of being an art curator for dance in the world famous National Centre of Performing Arts, Nariman Point, Mumbai states that "When talking about the first entrance itself, for the audience, the performer has to be spectacular. Dancers wobbling on stage cannot exist these days. Guruji Kelucharan Mohapatra used to say that the competition starts when 10 dancers are fantastic and are performing together and then you judge who is better. Till then it is not even competition! So quality is mandatory. Beauty and aesthetics are also important no doubt. In terms of fitness, we have reached a level where it is completely unacceptable to have a panting dancer explaining the next dance piece after a performance."<sup>3</sup> In the same manner, in Hindu mythology one comes across the portrayal of Gods as dancers, Krishna as the Natavara dancing on Kaliya's hood (serpent) with a perfectly composed yet firm body posture, or Nataraja, the Lord of dance who is portrayed in a sculpturesque manner with a sleek but muscular body. The celestial nymphs (gandharvas and apsaras) such as Chitrangada, Urvashi or Rambha are depicted with slender and well toned bodies marking a default imagery of artists for audiences and for artists themselves. The human body moves voluntary when in motion especially in a skilled art like professional dance, hence, it is extremely important for everyone and especially an artist to know the exact role and influence of 'movement' to the human body. Dance training for artists, or their rendezvous with the art from begins from the very first day of taking a class, every single time the artist performs on stage or takes a session as a teacher. The dance teacher should shoulder the responsibility to create a conscious environment for the students to understand possibilities of injuries, importance of body posture and mainly the need to have basic anatomical knowledge for students. The knowledge aids at improving technique of dancing as the artist is in complete sync with the body. As the body is the sole tool of trade, it is a huge advantage for an artist to be aware of the body systems for preventing possible injuries or proving critical for the rehabilitation process. Every system of the body is seamlessly dependent on one another. For example : the skeleton is skinny structure which moves due to the tendons and the ligaments at the joint region and the muscles which cover and connect the bones set the body in motion. By nature, the basis of belief of any artist attached to Indian classical dance is strongly grounded into belief, faith and the art is nothing less than worship to the Almighty, the effect of such mode of occupation consumes the artist completely even in day-to-day life leaving behind a lot of logical understanding to unworldliness. But as the art is also a professional career, the prime aim of every artist is to have a thriving, pain free journey to be able to enjoy the process and spread the awareness of the rich culture and traditions which run over millennia. The solution lies in listening and understanding one's body and allowing issues to resolve, promote preventive methods to avoid the injuries and encourage a healthier culture among artist-students. The need of the hour is to promote having a team of professionals working closely with artists to provide reasonable and appropriate treatments as required by each subjectively, in all roles, as a professional, as a teacher, or simply as a dance – student.

While Indian Classical Dance is historically connected with therapy and healing, a scientific interest in the applications of the same within rehabilitation, therapy, health care and well-being are more recent findings, exploring the efficacy and mechanisms of dance-based interventions through a range of progressive methods. The inherent complexity of dance as a holistic activity for maintaining the aesthetics in the art which is highly demanding with changing times in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is perhaps the precise reasons for ill – effects over artists causing mental and physical drain and burnout. This has caused an alarming need for the artist to focus on

dance beyond mere physical, entertaining, educating and spiritual activity, but also focus on the professional artist's capacity to dance keeping in mind the aesthetic requirements for a longer period of time and focus on the 'active ingredients' which would make an artist the most aesthetic version of himself/ herself.

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