

DANCE and the BODY LANGUAGE



India is preoccupied with time; the West, with space. Music and dance are time arts to India. They are space arts to the West.

To India, dance is sublime. At its highest form, it is said to be attuned to the cosmic rhythm. The artist enjoys bliss. The great Sufi mystic poet Rumi says dancing is the "nearest way to God."

Shiva is the patron of both music and dance. He taught music to Narada, the celestial messenger, and dance to Bharata, the author of *Natyashastra*, a treatise on drama.

The ancient Greeks, like the Indians, had a composite form of drama with music and dance. While they used the chorus to tell the tale, India has its songs. The *vidushaka* (compeer for want of a better expression) explained the nuances.

Dance is a coordinated movement of the whole body and mind. *Abhinaya Darpana* explains that a dancer must sustain the song in the throat, depict meaning by hands, the mood (*bhava*) through eyes and keep time with feet. Again, "where the hands go, there the eyes must follow; where the eyes go, there the mind; where the mind goes, there the feelings; where the feelings go, there the mood." Gesture is said to be the soul of Indian dance.

Drama (*natya*) was created by Brahma (one of the Indian Trinity) for the education and entertainment of all people. It was "mimicry of the ways of the world." The four elements of *Natya-II* recitation, singing, acting and *rasa* - were taken from the four Vedas. Hence it is called *Natyaveda*. The *Rig Veda* provided the recitation, *Sama* the method of singing, *Yajur* gave *abhinaya* (acting including gestures) and *Atharva* gave *rasa* (aesthetics).

Gestures are among the oldest forms of communication. There is a powerful instinct in man to imitate. And many of these sign languages are common to mankind. But dance gestures can mean many things. This is why the song became important. The *vachika* (spoken) *abhinaya* supplements the *angika abhinaya* (body language). And, let us not forget, gestures add grace and beauty to the dance.



How do words find their equivalent *mudras* (postures)? It is said that words inhere in the limbs. This expresses the principle underlying the language based on natural and expressive movements, says Ananda Coomaraswami, the great authority on Indian art.

To give a few of such "natural" expressions: eyeball going round expresses wrath; lingering glance expresses love; raising eyebrow, doubt; widening of nostrils expresses anger; drooping cheek, sadness; drooping lip, envy, and so on. The body can express itself in so many ways.

The dancer tries to achieve the perfect pose and convey a sense of the timeless. The dance technique is, therefore, integrated with sculpture. Beryl De Zoete, a European student of Indian dance, says about European dance: it is "very elementary" compared to the "expressive culture of the body" of Indian dance.

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Cultural Calendar for March 2009

March 9

Talk "Yoga in Today's Health Care" together with the Awards Ceremony of the Yoga "Train the Trainers" programme conducted by the Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana University, Bangalore
Organized by the Indo Lanka Forum in association with the India Sri Lanka Foundation
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

March 13

Film: Song of the Sanctuary
India Infrastructure - An opportunity (Documentaries in English)
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.
Duration: 55 mins (both)

March 18

Kathak Dance Recital
by Ms. M.Tharindi Dhanushka disciple of Ms. Duleeka Dharshanee Wickramasinghe
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

March 20

Dance Dialogues
By Niolufer Pieris, Nelung Dance Academy
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

March 27

An evening of classical music - Japanese classical and folk music in Shakuhachi & Raga and other performance on Koto by Mr.Tim Hoffman
Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

(Admission to all programmes is free and on first come first served basis except programmes)



There are three forms of dances: *Tandava* (male, vigorous), *Lasya* (feminine, gentle), and *Pindibandha* (a combination of both). *Tandava* (the cosmic dance) came from Shiva and *Lasya* from his consort Parvati. Dance was added to *Natya* by Shiva to give it "splendour and beauty", dear to the people. So there is pure dance without *abhinaya*, as also dance with acting.

Pure dance has evolved out of an alphabet of 108 perfect postures, upon which are based the techniques of movements known as *karanas*. Each *karana* consists of the movement of several limbs - in other words of much of the body. Similarly, a comprehensive system of language signs (hand gestures) has evolved out of an alphabet of basic hand poses (*hastas*) in the same manner as the spoken and written language has been established. Hands became the chief vehicle of expression. They translate words into signs. Adjectives, nouns, verbs, proper nouns, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, abstract nouns all these are expressed through gestures and facial expressions. Each school of dance (and there are six major schools *Bharatnatyam*, *Kathakali*, *Manipuri*, *Kuchipudi*, *Odissi* and *Kathak*) has used the basic gestures. And each gesture can mean many things - as many as 85 in the case of the *pathaka* (flag) gesture. Hence, the need for the explanatory song.

In Western ballet, reliance is on broad gestures and minimum expressions on the face. In fact, the face of a ballet dancer carries little expression. The Indian dancer, on the contrary, expresses a thousand fleeting emotions through his face. Ballet is a mere "spectacle", no doubt an attractive one. Aristotle says of drama that its purpose is to purge the soul of its passions. This is not served by Western ballet or dance. Dance in India evolved out of Vedic ritual dances. The ritual also contained the seeds of drama.

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SANDESH

The monthly newsletter of the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo



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March 2009

Maharashtrian Beauty by Raja Ravi Varma

Past Events

9th January

World Hindi Day Celebrations



The World Hindi Day was celebrated at the Indian Cultural Centre on 9th January 2009.

The students of the Indian Cultural Centre put up plays in Hindi, sang Hindi songs, gave speeches in Hindi and danced to Hindi songs. The show brought out their latent talent. The evening was very well enjoyed by the students, their parents and other Hindi lovers who attended the event.

12th January

Lecture - Ayurveda & Day-to-day life by Dr. Nalindra Wickramaratne



Dr. Nalindra Wickramaratne, Resident Ayurvedic Physicians, Neptune Ayurvedic Village, Beruwala, presented a lecture on Ayurveda at the Centre. The lecture was accompanied by a power point presentation. The

lecture was followed by an interactive session.

15th January

Lecture – Comparison between Indian & Sri Lankan Ayurvedic systems



As continuation of the lecture series on Ayurveda Dr. R. M. P. Ranawala, Consultant, Ayurvedic Physician, Neptune Ayurvedic Village, Beruwala, gave a lecture entitled "Comparison of Indian & Sri Lankan

Ayurvedic systems. The lecture was followed by an interactive session.

16th January

Odissi lecture cum demonstration By Nrityagram Dance Ensemble from Bangalore



Dancers of the Nrityagram dance ensemble presented an interesting and informative Odissi lecture cum demonstration at the Centre on 16th January. Ms. Bijayini Satpathy of the troupe explained about the origin of the Odissi dance and the two broad divisions Nritta is pure dance without symbolism of story, usually performed to music without words; and Nritya – the expressional dance in which the dancer through symbolic gestures, poses and facial expressions interprets the poem sung. Ms. Manasi Tripathy, Rasmii Raj & Pavithra Reddy assisted Ms. Satpathy in the demonstrations. The lecture cum demonstration was organized by The Indian Cultural Centre in collaboration with The Chitrasena Vajira Dance Foundation.

25th January

Bollywood through the ages, a dance & music performance by the Rangpuhar dance ensemble to celebrate the 60th Republic Day celebrations of India



Reputed dance troupe Rangpuhar from Mumbai captivated the audiences in Sri Lanka with their dance performances entitled Bollywood

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Past Events

25th January.... contd



Mahinda Yapa Abeyawardane graced the occasion as Chief Guest.

through the ages held at the Kularathne Hall, Ananda College on 25th January 2009. It was an experience of an hour and a half that took the audience on a journey of Bollywood from its beginning over 110 years ago till the present. Divided into three segments, the show brought the totality of the Indian cinematic experience through dance. The event was presided by the High Commissioner of Indian in Sri Lanka Shri Alok Prasad and the Minister of Cultural Affairs & National Heritage of Sri Lanka Hon.

The troupe's visit was sponsored by the ICC to celebrate the 60th Republic Day of India, and jointly organized by the High Commission of India and the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo and supported by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs & National Heritage Sri Lanka.

LIBRARY

Recent Library Accessions

Indian Classical Dance

Vatsyayan, Kapila
New Delhi : Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 2007, 95p.

The Penguin Dictionary of Indian Classical Music

Menon, Raghava R.
New Delhi : Penguin Books, 1995, 170p.

Welcome to India Chic

New Delhi : Bolding Books, 2006, 240p.

Chicago Addresses

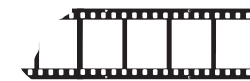
Swami Vivekananda
Calcutta, Nabajiban Press, 1992, 46p.

Swami Vivekananda : His Life and Legacy

By Swami Tapasyananda
Madras : Sriramakrishna Math, 2005, 199p.

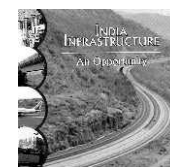


Films in March



Song of the Sanctuary

The film explores the pioneering initiatives of environmentalist and physicist Vanadana Shiva, Social activist Beena Sebastian and feminist writer and publisher Urvasi Butalia.



India Infrastructure- An opportunity

The film showcases the flurry of activity being witnessed by infrastructure all over the country and to explain the PPP Model for Public-Private Partnership to Prospective investors in the Private Sector.

DANCE and the BODY LANGUAGE .. contd

No other dance form has given so much thought to the body language as the Indian dance. Every gesture is thought out in great detail. From very early times, the "language of the hand" (*aksharamushtika*) became an important study. And some of the gestures became universal. For example, the gesture for "protection" (*abhaya mudra*). Similarly, the folded hands (*anjali*), with which every Indian greets, another Indian, reminds them of the divinity of man. (By the way, you raise your folded hands above head to greet the gods, hold them before your face to greet your guru (teacher) and against the chest to greet a brahmin or a respected person.)

Body Language

There are three forms of dances: *Tandava* (vigorous), *Lasya* (gentle) and *Pindibandha* (a combination of both).

There are 108 dance poses described in *Natyashastra*, called *Karanas*.

Natya are four-folded: *Angika* (limbs), *Vachika* (speech), *Aharya* (costume) and *Satvika* (aesthetic).

There are three forms of *Angika*; *Sarira* (body), *Mukhaja* (facial) and *Casta* (limb movement).

There are six *angas* (limbs) head, hand, hip, chest, sides, feet; six *upangas* (semi-limbs) – eyes, brows, nose, lips, cheeks, chin. And there are neck, shoulder, arms, belly, thighs, shanks, wrist, knees, which take part in dance.

There are two forms of *hasta mudras* (hand postures); *Asamyuta* (single hand) mudras (28 in number), and *Samyuta* (both hands together). There are 24 such gestures.

There are 30 *hasta* movements for pur dance.

Body movements are divided into four groups; *karanas*, *angaharas*, *rechakas* and *pindibandhas*.

There are four forms of *bhargas* (bending); *bhanga*, *samabhanga*, *atibhanga* and *tribhanga*. The first is serene, second like Buddha, third like *Nataraja*, fourth like *Parvati*.

Movements of feet are four types: *Mandala* (circular, 10 positions), *Utplavana* (jumping, five types), *Bhramari* (whirling, seven types) and *Padachari* (feet movement, seven types) and ten kinds of gaits.

There are four colours of face, reflecting personality types.

Eyes: Bharata mentions 36 forms of glances.

There are seven movements of the brow, seven of eye ball, six of nose, six of cheek, six of lips, six of face, nine of neck, thirteen of head, five positions of chest, five of sides, five movements of hips, five of thighs, five of shanks, five of feet, four of hands, etc.

Source: *India Perspectives*, M.S.N.Menon,
The author is a senior journalist and a noted writer.