



The Classical World of Nonverbal Communication - Indian Dance forms and the Portrayal of Folklores

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Abstract: Dance symbolizes evolution. Human beings have been expressing their complex and abstract feelings through non-verbal forms of communication. Dance is one of the ancient and special forms of non-verbal communication through which humans have portrayed stories and myths across cultures and generations. Facial expressions, body movements, gestures, eye contact are different types of non-verbal communication that are used in dance. This art form is not only a means of aesthetic performance but also a strong foundation of communication from vocal to voiceless with symbolic and didactic stories, emotions and so on. This paper describes why humans are able to communicate through dance. Humans have a connection with music and rhythms that allow them to dance. Humans have an innate need to dance as a form of communication. The soul, the driving force behind the need to dance, is quite powerful. More often, we communicate without words and the body speaks more. Also, there is an innate need in humans to communicate in order to work both independently and collectively. Collaboration allows humans to solve problems, to create, and to bond. Dance can play a pivotal role in the collaboration process.

Keywords: Non-verbal communication, Facial expression, Gestures, Eye contact, Indian art.

I. INTRODUCTION

We know dance plays an important role in communication. This paper aims to conduct a survey that involves examining the link between nonverbal communication and dance. Dance has been a part of our culture for many years. Culturally, dance is important because we use it as a way to socialize, flirt, and to attract others. Dancing instigates affective transformations, changing mental structures and spatial meanings. In other words, dancing may change moods, serve as a force of attraction, and influence perception, all through physical movements and nonverbal communication.

II. COMMUNICATION IN ART

Art teaches communication by providing another way of portraying feelings, ideas, and arguments to an audience besides words. Also, it asks viewers to relate symbols and other abstract connections together to interpret a meaning from imagery. In this process of establishing a communication between the stage and the audience, the performers in Indian classical dance exhibit 'mudras' and eye expressions thus engaging the audience's cognitive faculties for a complete understanding of the performance.

Non-verbal cues in communication: Gestures, movements, expressions transmit messages. Hands are the most expressive and communicative part of the body. It is the posture that gives us information about the status that a person has or wants to own. The posture is related to the fixed position of the body. Dance is a form of non-verbal communication between the dancer and his own body, between the dancer and the other people; rhythm, movement, and accompanying music. Dance tells of man and his life, of friendship and enmity, of joy and sadness, of love and hatred, all happening in the specific and essential contexts of human life. Through dance, communication barriers disappear or diminish and open to others. It is thought that the dance is about the human body and the movement; it plays an important role in the individual process of attaining authenticity. Being considered a way to connect with nature and what is beyond it, dance allows expression and emotional communication.

In Bharatanatyam one of the very famous classical dance forms of India, Nava means "Nine" and Rasa is often translated as "mood", "emotion", "expression" or "sentiment". The Navarasa, in the scriptures refer to the nine expressions that humans often show. These are love (shringaara), laughter (haasya), kind-heartedness or compassion (karuna), anger (roudra), courage (veera), fear (bhayaanaka), disgust (bheebhatsya), wonder or surprise (adbhutha) and peace or tranquility (shaantha). Apart from the nine moods, we find the mention of other emotions and feelings in The Natya Shastra written by Bharat Muni, which is a manual on Indian Dance forms. The 'rasas' are primarily expressed through movement of eyes and eyebrows, which forms the foundation of non verbal communication in the said genre.

Importance of non-verbal cues in Indian folklore: According to Farley Richmond and other scholars, Kathakali shares many elements such as story line, costumes with ancient Indian performance arts such as Kutiyattam (classical Sanskrit drama) and medieval era Krishnanattam. Kutiyattam, one of the oldest continuously performed theater forms in India, and it may well be the



oldest surviving art form of the ancient world.[22] Kutiyattam, traditionally, was performed in theaters specially designed and attached to Hindu temples, particularly dedicated to the Shiva and later to Krishna. Krishnanattam is likely the immediate precursor of Kathakali. Krishnanattam is dance-drama art form about the life and activities of Hindu god Krishna, that developed under the sponsorship of Sri Manavedan Raja, the ruler of Calicut. The traditional legend states that Kottarakkara Thampuran (also known as Vira Kerala Varma) requested the services of a Krishnanattam troupe, but his request was denied. So Kottarakkara Thampuran created another art form based on Krishnanattam, called Ramanattam because the early plays were based on the Hindu epic Ramayana, which over time diversified beyond Ramayana and became popular as 'Kathakali'. Kathakali is a blend of dance, music and acting and dramatizes stories, which are mostly adapted from the Indian epics. It is a stylised art form, the four aspects of abhinaya – angika, aharya, vachika, satvika and the nritta, nritya and natya aspects are combined perfectly. Like all other Indian dance forms, Kathakali also exhibits the Nava rasas or nine emotions. The action of Indian dance performance heavily depends on the expressions, the gestures that signify various phases through the trajectory of human life. The five elements combine to render the aesthetic charm of Kathakali. They are: natyam (expressions), nritham (dance), nrithyam (enactment), sangeetham (song) and vadhyam (instrumental accompaniment). The nine emotions are articulated distinctly with the help of hand gestures or 'mudras'. There are 24 mudras in Kathakali which express the nine rasas or emotions viz., serenity, wonder, kindness, love, valor, fear, contempt, loathing and anger. The communication among the characters and to the audience, is through an intricate language of hand gestures, used in combination with facial expression and body movements. Kathakali follows the language of Mudras, as described in "Hasthalakshana Deepika".

There are 'Asamyutha Mudras' (that are shown using a single hand) and 'Samyutha Mudras' (mudras shown in double hands) in each Basic Mudras, to show different symbols. Considering all these Mudras and their separations there are totally 470 symbols used in Kathakali.

1. Pathaaka (Flag): There are 36 double hand symbols and 10 single hand symbols using this Mudra. Totally 46.
2. Mudraakhyam: There are 13 double hand symbols and 12 single hand symbols using this Mudra. Totally 25.
3. Katakam (Golden Bangle): There are 20 double hand symbols and 9 single hand symbols using this Mudra. Totally 29.
4. Mushti: There are 25 double hand symbols and 15 single hand symbols using this Mudra. Totally 40.
5. Kartharee Mukham (Scissor's sharp point): There are 16 double hand symbols and 10 single hand symbols using this Mudra. Totally 26.
6. Sukathundam (Parrot's peek)
7. Kapidhakam (The fruit of a tree)
8. HamsaPaksha (Swan's wing)
9. Mukulam (Bud)
10. Mukuram (Mirror) : As we can understand from the few mudras mentioned above, the main element of a dance form is the body. And as the dancers progress through the performance, they start shattering the fourth wall and become one with the audience. This unification of the two sides happen through communication where the body becomes the medium of establishing the cognitive connection.

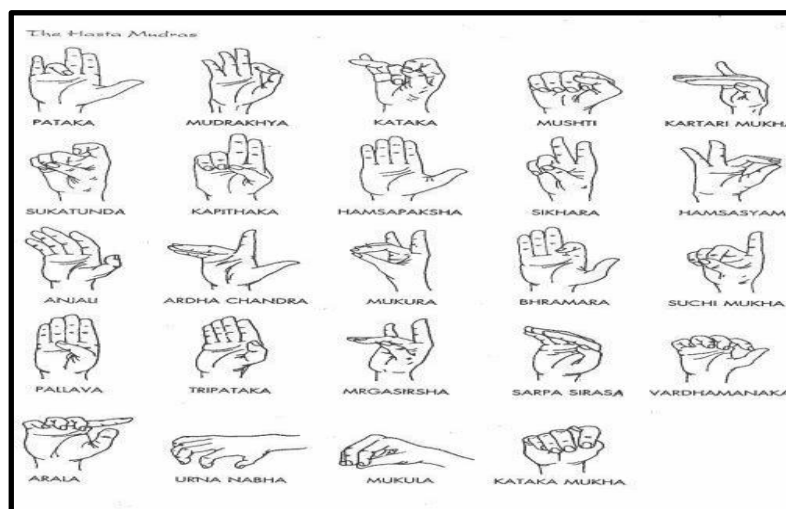


Fig. 1 The 24 mudras of Kathakali dance form.

Mudras in Indian dance forms: Mudra is a domain of movement, and it is considered to be a prominent mode of communication in dance and the dramatic arts in India. Mudra, primarily, is understood as an inscriptive form that follows the linguistic parameters,



expressing symbolic meaning through systematically codified patterns of the dancer's hands. Beyond the level of linguistic symbolism, mudra is kinetic energy. It is essentially a form of movement, and the deliverance of its meaning is embedded in the kinetic modalities of the hands. A mudra is a 'thing' composed of a number of spatiotemporal properties such as tempo, duration, rhythm, motion trajectories of the hands and eye movements. Mudra is the 'optical mechanism' of the hand, so it sees things, narrates events, interprets their meaning and experiences a range of emotions through movements. Mudra connects the subjective and objective worlds in a performance through kinetic properties of the hands. The body remembers and repeats through the embodied thinking of the gestural practice of the hands.

Expressions in Indian dance forms: Expression is an integral part of Indian dance forms, and it holds significant importance in conveying the emotions and feelings of the dance piece. The use of facial expressions, hand gestures, and body movements is essential to express the intended message of the dance form. In Indian dance forms, expression is considered to be the soul of the performance, and without it, the dance piece would lose its essence. The dancers use their facial expressions to convey different emotions, such as joy, anger, sorrow, and love. They also use their hand gestures, known as mudras, to represent various objects and concepts, such as nature, animals, and emotions. The importance of expression in Indian dance forms is also related to the storytelling aspect of these dances. Indian dance forms often tell a story through the movements, gestures, and expressions of the dancers. The expressions help the audience understand and connect with the storyline and the characters of the dance piece. In addition, the use of expression in Indian dance forms helps to establish a connection between the dancer and the audience. It creates a sense of emotional resonance, where the audience can feel the emotions and energy of the dancer, creating a deeper level of engagement and understanding of the dance piece. Overall, expression is a crucial element of Indian dance forms, as it helps to convey the intended message, tell the story, and establish a connection with the audience. It is an essential skill for any dancer to master in order to deliver a powerful and meaningful performance.

Body language in Indian dance forms: In Indian dance, the body is considered to be an instrument of expression. Every movement, every gesture, and every posture has a specific meaning and conveys a particular emotion or mood. The body language in Indian dance is used to express a wide range of emotions, from joy and happiness to sadness and grief. (Puri, 1985, p.117).

III. COMMUNICATION TRANSCENDING LANGUAGE BARRIER

Dance is a form of nonverbal communication that can transcend language barriers by conveying emotions and ideas through physical movement. Unlike spoken language, dance is a universal language that can be understood and appreciated by people of different cultures and backgrounds. Through dance, people can express a wide range of emotions, from joy and celebration to sadness and grief. By using their bodies to communicate, dancers can convey complex ideas and stories without ever uttering a word. For example, a ballet dancer can express the beauty and grace of a swan through movements that mimic the bird's wings and graceful neck, without ever saying the word "swan". In addition to expressing emotions and ideas, dance can also bring people together and create a sense of community. Whether it's a traditional folk dance or a modern hip-hop routine, dancing allows people to connect with one another and share a common experience. This shared experience can transcend language barriers and help to create a sense of unity and understanding. Overall, dance is a powerful tool for communication that can bridge the gap between different cultures and languages. By using movement and expression, dancers can convey complex emotions and ideas, and bring people together in a shared experience of joy, celebration, and connection. Based on a survey conducted from the audience perspective, we found the following inferences that will help facilitate a conclusion to our paper.

The questionnaire had the following unique point of interrogation.

1. Do you believe that Indian dance can effectively convey emotions and messages?

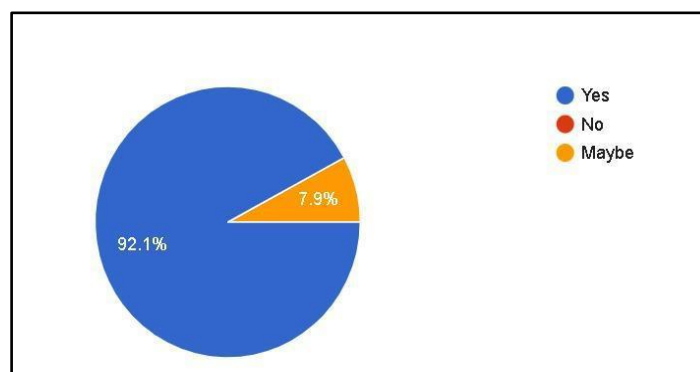


Fig. 2 Response from survey Questionnaire.



We can clearly see that 92.1 percent of people think that it's possible.

As we know dance is a powerful and expressive form of art that can effectively convey emotions, messages, and stories without the need for spoken or written language.

Dance has been used for centuries as a means of cultural expression, storytelling, and emotional release. Different styles of dance can evoke different emotions and convey various messages. For example, a ballet performance might convey elegance and grace, while a contemporary dance piece could explore complex emotions or social issues. Folk dances often reflect the traditions and cultural values of a specific community.

In essence, dance is a non-verbal language that allows individuals to express themselves, connect with others, and share their innermost thoughts and feelings in a unique and captivating way. It's a testament to the power of human creativity and communication beyond words.

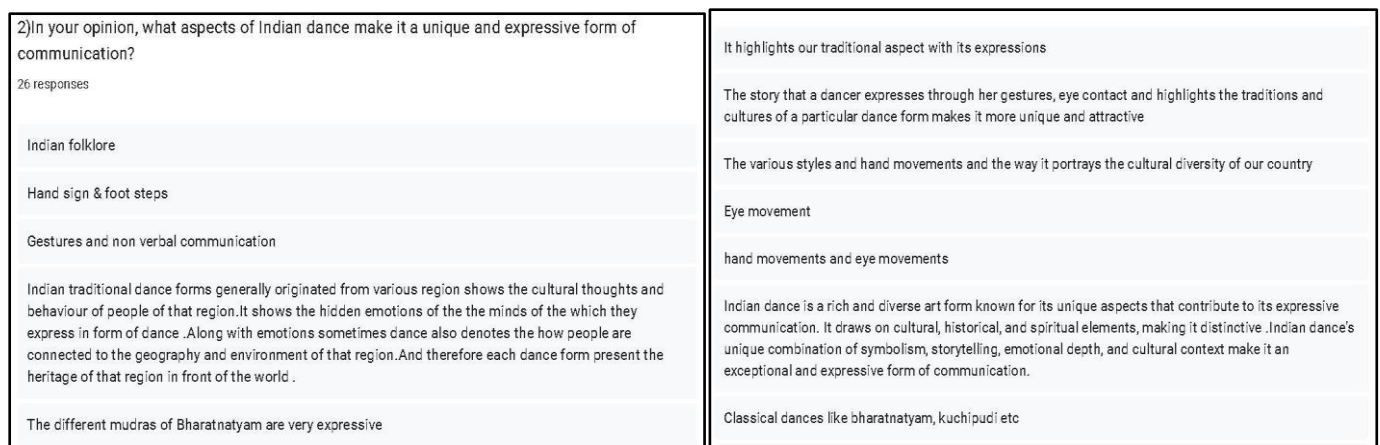


Fig. 3.1 and 3.2 Responses gathered from survey

3. Do you think Indian dances can bridge cultural gaps and foster better understanding among people from different backgrounds?

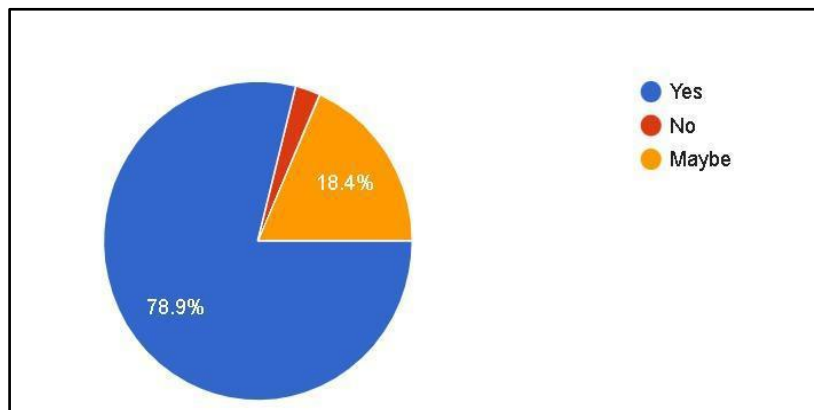


Fig. 4 Reference pie chart for questionnaire.

Indian dances have the potential to bridge cultural gaps and foster better understanding among people from different backgrounds. Indian dances, with their rich diversity and history, are not just artistic performances but also carriers of cultural heritage and values with the help of:

Cultural Exchange, Visual Expression, Unity in Diversity, Educational Opportunities, Cultural Sensitivity, Performance and Festivals.

4. Do you think Indian dances can adapt and envelope while still retaining its traditional communication aspects?

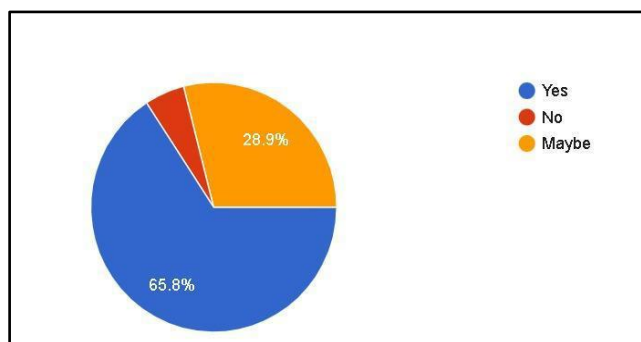


Fig. 5 Questionnaire inference

Yes, Indian dances have a remarkable capacity to adapt and evolve while still retaining their traditional communication aspects. This ability to evolve is what has allowed Indian dance forms to remain vibrant and relevant over centuries.

Indian dance forms can integrate contemporary themes and issues into their narratives without compromising their traditional essence. By addressing modern topics while using traditional techniques, these dances can stay relevant and relatable.

Collaborations with artists from different disciplines and cultural backgrounds can infuse new ideas into Indian dance forms while respecting their core communication aspects. This cross-pollination can lead to innovative performances. As audiences become more educated about Indian dance, they can appreciate the balance between tradition and innovation.

In summary, Indian dances have a unique capacity to evolve while retaining their traditional communication aspects. By blending innovation with a deep respect for tradition, these dance forms can continue to captivate audiences and convey their cultural messages in dynamic ways.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined the significance of the nonverbal messages sent and received through dance. Scientific portrayal on body language, kinesics and nonverbal communication, proves that Indian classical dance forms are really great not only to watch but also to understand the great influence of nonverbal communication in our life. Most people might attribute these dance forms to antiquity and specific to a culture and tradition of a certain geographical area or civilization. However, these dance forms also portray a broad spectrum of emotions and feelings that any individual on this earth will probably harbor at an unconscious level. It can be a base to help others research dance in different contexts, especially as an interpersonal study on attraction, flirting, and using dance for these goals. This research provides a springboard for future studies in communication, especially in the areas of interpersonal, nonverbal, and socialization. One cannot actually understand what Indian dancers non-verbally communicate, if there is no knowledge of their special «language». However, music as an integral and indispensable part of any dance together with motional and emotional aspects of Indian dance makes it truly universal. Taking into consideration that all those symbols may be intuitively deciphered by any human being, since most of them are archetypal, Indian Dance as a form of communication can be understood by almost every human being in many parts of the world. As Indian classical dance moves further away from its land of origin, it will undoubtedly reflect a transformed understanding of “nature” in keeping with humanity’s own relationship to inner and outer realities». Discovering that nonverbal messages are exchanged while dancing allows for further research to be done on this topic and other related topics.

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