



# सांस्कृतिक स्रोत एवं प्रशिक्षण केन्द्र CENTRE FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES AND TRAINING

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## Bharatnatyam Dance

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Araimandi, Basic standing position

### Bharatnatyam Dance

Bharatnatyam Dance is considered to be over 2000 years old. Several texts beginning with Bharata Muni's *Natya Shastra* (200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.) provide information on this dance form. The *Abhinaya Darpana* by *Nandikesvara* is one of the main sources of textual material, for the study of the technique and grammar of body movement in Bharatnatyam Dance. There is also a great deal of visual evidence of this dance form in paintings and stone and metal sculptures of ancient times. On the gopurams of the Chidambaram temple, one can see a series of Bharatnatyam poses, frozen in stone as it were, by the sculptor. In many other temples, the *charis* and *karanas* of the dance are represented in sculpture and one can make a study of the dance form.

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Adavu, Basic dance unit

Bharatnatyam dance is known to be *ekaharya*, where one dancer takes on many roles in a single performance. In the early 19th century, the famous Tanjore Quartette, under the patronage of Raja Serfoji are said to have been responsible for the repertoire of Bharatnatyam dance as we see it today.

The style was kept alive by the *devadasis*, who were young girls 'gifted' by their parents to the temples and who were married to the gods. The *devadasis* performed music and dance as offerings to the deities, in the temple courtyards. Some of the renowned performers and gurus of the early part of the century belong to the *devadasi families*, a well-known name is Bala Saraswati.



Adavu, Basic dance unit

The repertoire of Bharatnatyam is extensive, however, a performance follows a regular pattern. At first there is an invocation song. The first dance item is the *alarippu*, literally meaning - to adorn with flowers. It is an abstract piece combining pure dance with the recitation of sound syllables.



Angika Abhinaya

The next item, the *jatiswaram* is a short pure dance piece performed to the accompaniment of musical notes of any *raga* of Carnatic music. Jatiswaram has no *sahitya* or words, but is composed of *adavus* which are pure dance sequences - *nritta*. They form the basis of training in Bharatnatyam dance.

As a solo dance, Bharatnatyam leans heavily on the *abhinaya* or mime aspect of dance - the *nritya*, where the dancer expresses the *sahitya* through movement and mime. *Shabdham* follows the *jatiswaram* in a Bharatnatyam dance performance. The accompanying song is generally in adoration of the Supreme Being.

After the *shabdham*, the dancer performs the *varnam*. The *varnam* which is the most important composition of the Bharatnatyam repertoire, encompasses both *nritta* and *nritya* and epitomises the essence of this classical dance form. The dancer here performs complicated well graded rhythmic patterns in two speeds showing the control over *rhythm*, and then goes on to depict in a variety of ways, through *abhinaya* the lines of the *sahitya*. This portrays the dancer's excellence in abhinaya and also reflects the endless creativity of the choreographer.

The *varnam* is by far one of the most beautiful compositions in Indian dance.



Shringar-rasa



Karuna-rasa



Veer-rasa

After the strenuous **varnam**, the dancer performs a number of **abhinaya** items expressing a variety of moods. The **bhava** or **rasa** is woven into the **sahitya** and then expressed by the dancer. The common pieces are **keertanam**, **kritis**, **padams** and **javalis**. In the **keertanam**, the text is important whereas **kriti** is a composition in which the musical aspect is highlighted. Both are usually devotional in character and represent episodes from the lives of **Rama**, **Siva**, **Vishnu**, etc. **Padams** and **javalis**, are on the theme of love, often divine.

A Bharatnatyam performance ends with a **tillana** which has its origin in the **tarana** of Hindustani music. It is a vibrant dance performed to the accompaniment of musical syllables with a few lines of **sahitya**. The finale of the piece is a series of well designed rhythmic lines reaching a climax. The performance ends with a **mangalam** invoking the blessings of the Gods.

The accompanying orchestra consists of a vocalist, a mridangam player, violinist or veena player, a flautist and a cymbal player. The person who conducts the dance recitation is the **Nattuvanar**.



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