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BHARATANATYAM: A MAGICAL CLASSICAL DANCE

CASE STUDY/INSIGHT

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Bharatanatyam is one of the most famous and widely practiced classical dances of India. It is indigenous to Tamil Nadu and popular in South India. It is said to be the oldest classical dance of India and regarded as mother of other classical dances. Initially Bharatanatyam was performed only by women in temples and now it is performed by men also. A program of Bharathanatiam is a team work of performing dancer and a set of orchestra which includes musical instruments and one or two singers. The repertoire of Bharatanatyam is categorized into three. They are 'Nritha', 'Nrithya' and 'Natya' as mentioned in 'Natya Shastra'. Nritha is a performance of pure Bharatanatyam movements with rhythm but without a theme. In Nrithya, the dancer performs interpretive dance which is based on a theme or message and it is expressed using facial expressions, hand gestures and body movements. Natya is the dramatic aspect of dance which is performed by a solo dancer or a group.

Bharatanatyam requires much effort and dedication to learn the art and flexibility in body. Bharathanatyam is learned from the young age of 5 and it is a continuous learning process. A student needs to dedicate minimum of 8 to 9 years of learning under the Guru prior to arangetram. Arangetram training requires almost a year of training and consistent hard work. Usually a Bharatanatyam is learned in Guru's place. But now there are many institutes and colleges offering courses in Bharatanatyam. Some of the famous dance schools for Bharatanatyam are Kalakshetra Foundation, Chennai; Kalai Kaveri College of Fine Arts, Tiruchirapalli; Kalarpana – Institute of Bharatanatyam, Chennai; Kalanritya Arts Academy, Chennai; Shivanjali's Temple of Fine Arts (International), Coimbatore, Chennai and in many places abroad. There are colleges offering diploma, undergraduate and post graduate courses in Bharatanatyam.

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Some of the colleges offering professional course in Bharatanatyam include Tamilnadu Government Music College, Avinashilingam University for Women, Dr.MGR Janaki College of Arts and Science for Women, Tamil University, VELS Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, SRM University, SASTRA Deemed University.

The movements of Bharatanatyam are unique & have variety of characteristics. There are rhythmic stamping of feet on the floor, jumps, legs bent in low squat, pirouettes, movements of neck, shoulder and arms. All these movements will be executed gracefully together by the dancer. Bharatanatyam dancers are accomplished in magnificent eye movements, which complement and highlight the dance. The costume of Bharatanatyam involves a specialized Indian saree in bright colours. An important part of Bharatanatyam costume is the anklets which complement the footsteps. Bharatanatyam costumes involves a wide variety of ornaments such as bangles, earrings, nose pin and special makeup highlighting eyes to emphasize eye movements.

Bharatanatyam is given great importance in our culture. Inaugural, government, award and other functions most likely begin with Bharatanatyam dance. It is because Bharatanatyam is considered as divine and auspicious and it is known for its grace, purity and sculptural poses.



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Some of the great qualities possessed by Bharatanatyam dancers are patience, creativity, spontaneity, dedication, passion, hard work, respect for guru (teacher) and steadiness. Also there are many positive effects on Bharatanatyam dancers. Those benefits include improved balance, flexibility, stamina, concentration, helps in controlling weight, boosts blood circulation and healthy heart, healthy and glowing skin. Bharatanatyam has overall benefits on health and mental wellbeing.

Some of the famous Bharatanatyam dancers are Rukmini Devi Arundale, Meenakshi Sundaram, Balasaraswati, Padma Subramaniam, Yamini Krishnamurthy, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Mallika Sarabhai, Chitra Visweswaran, Leela Samson, Alarmel Valli, C.V. Chandrasekhar, Rama Vaidhyathan, Savitha Sastry, Shobana Chandrakumar Pillai, Narthaki Nataraj, Sudharani Raghupathy, Shobana, Shovana Narayan, Sudha Chandran, etc. Their contribution and dedication towards this art has been enormous and more than what words could express.

